

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

DRESS CODES AND COMMUNION CHAOS | CHURCH IN THE WILD

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Well I think that all of us probably have had this experience where maybe we're talking to somebody and then they misunderstand or misinterpret what we say so that the way that they receive it isn't how we intended it. And that can always feel like it leads to a little bit of hot water.

I heard about this guy who was trying to help out his friend not long ago. His friend had bought a couple of tickets to the Super Bowl. He was excited about it but had overlooked the fact that the Super Bowl was on the same day as his wedding.

His friend is trying to help him out. So he posts the thing on social media. And he's like, "Hey, a buddy of mine has tickets to the Super Bowl. They are really high-end tickets—\$4,500 apiece. It includes a limo ride, an open buffet, and a trip to the winner's locker room after the game.

My buddy didn't realize it was on his wedding day so he's looking for somebody to take his place. The ceremony is at 5:30 in St. Paul's Church. Her name is Ashley. She'll be the one wearing... My bro was in deep in that moment.

And I say that because I'm going to be in deep here in just a minute as we come to 1 Corinthians, chapter 11. And you're going to see why as we read the passage. So, if you have a Bible go ahead and make your way over to chapter 11.

This passage contains some of the most misunderstood, misinterpreted verses found, not only in 1 Corinthians, but I think in all of the New Testament. And you're going to see why as we read it here in a minute. I think, for that reason, a lot of times when churches preach through 1 Corinthians they conveniently skip over chapter 11. But we're not going to do that. I thought about it. I thought about assigning this to Ryan or Kyle like, "Hey you guys, good luck with that." But I didn't want to do that to them.

If you're just now joining us we've been in a series since summer where we are just working our way through 1 Corinthians allowing what Paul talks about next be what we talk about next. So, we're not going to skip chapter 11. I do want you to know that it is a bit of a complex passage.

We need to keep in mind the fact that Paul writes this letter to a group of first generation Christians living in a very corrupt, pagan environment. And many of them would have come to know Christ as young adults or adults—meaning that they didn't grow up in church. So, they would have come out of a very pagan lifestyle. And they are inundated



in it every day. So, Paul is trying to remind them of, not only their new identity in Christ, but he's trying to remind them of the mission that they are on in the midst of the wild.

So, if we could divide up the book or outline it we might say it this way:

Chapters 1-4: Divisions in the church

Chapters 5-7: Q&A about singleness, intimacy and marriage

Chapters 8-10: Cultural issues distracting from the mission

Chapters 11-14: Corporate worship wars

In chapters 1–4 Paul is talking about divisions in the church, chapters 5–7 is all Q&A about everything relationship, chapters 8–10—what we just wrapped up last week are cultural issues distracting them from mission.

If you've been here over the last few weeks, we've talked about the fact that we can come to church, as Christians we can view the church kind of like a cruise ship where everything centers around us, or we can see it as a battleship and we can man our stations because we're on mission. So, Paul is driving this down to them and saying, "Hey, here are all of the cultural issues around you that can distract you from being on mission—battleship mentality.

Today we're entering into the fourth part of this letter, chapters 11-14, which is what we might label corporate worship wars. Meaning, what are all of the things inside the church that can distract us from having a battleship mentality. There are two sections in chapter 11, both are equally complicated. And I'm probably a fool for trying to tackle both in the same sermon, but here we are in the third service, we're still alive. So, it's gone well up until this point.

Here's what I want to do. I basically just want to read all of section one without stopping. I'm just going to let God's word speak. So, no commentary, no explanation, I'm just going to let it speak and as I read there are probably going to be some questions and some emotions that come to mind as we read. And then I'll try to unpack it, clarify some things, and make application to it. Then we'll move on to the second section and do the same thing. And then we'll end in a time of communion together today across all of our locations.

So, let me just read the first section beginning in verse 2. Paul writes this:

"I am so glad that you always keep me in your thoughts, and that you are following the teachings I passed on to you. But there is one thing I want you to know: The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

"A man dishonors his head if he covers his head while praying or prophesying. But a woman dishonors her head if she prays or prophesies without a covering on her head,

for this is the same as shaving her head. Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering, she should cut off all her hair! But since it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or her head shaved, she should wear a covering.

“A man should not wear anything on his head when worshiping, for man is made in God’s image and reflects God’s glory. And woman reflects man’s glory. For the first man didn’t come from woman, but the first woman came from man. And man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man. For this reason, and because the angels are watching, a woman should wear a covering on her head to show she is under authority.

“But among the Lord’s people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. For although the first woman came from man, every other man was born from a woman, and everything comes from God.

“Judge for yourselves. Is it right for a woman to pray to God in public without covering her head? Isn’t it obvious that it’s disgraceful for a man to have long hair? And isn’t long hair a woman’s pride and joy? For it has been given to her as a covering. But if anyone wants to argue about this, I simply say that we have no other custom than this, and neither do God’s other churches.” 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (NLT)

As we finish that section I know what you’re likely thinking as we read that, “What’s so confusing about all of that? Seems pretty self-explanatory Pastor. Seems like you’ve got a pretty easy job ahead of you. Why don’t you just pray. We’ll be dismissed.”

Ah, I don’t think that thought went through your head at all. I’m sure that, as we were reading this, you were probably thinking, “What in the world? What do we do with this?”

I was talking to a young lady after the last service. She ran up to me and she said, “Pastor Aaron, I need to show you my Bible.” And she said, “When I knew we were reading or teaching through 1 Corinthians earlier this summer, I read through the whole thing multiple times.

She showed me her Bible and how she had highlighted a bunch of things, and made notes in the margins and all kinds of application questions. And then it came to chapter 11—nothing—no highlights, no notes. In fact, she had a big question mark over the whole section. And she was like, “Thank you for addressing this chapter today.”

As we come to this there is all kinds of really complicated, misunderstood, misinterpreted verses that are found in this chapter. What I want to point out is that there are two primary errors that we can make when we read a passage like this one.

The first error we can make is (and if you’re jotting down a few notes, and I encourage you to) that we can under apply it. What I mean by that is we read it and maybe we get irritated or angry or confused and we just say, “Man, this can’t be for us today. This had to be for them then. They lived in a different time and setting. This is archaic and we live in a modern day.”

So, we dismiss all of it. And that would be a big error because it's still God's word and we would be missing out on the timely and important things He still wants to say by His word through the Holy Spirit.

However, the other error that we can make is to go the other way and to over apply it and we take it quite literally and legalistically.

I'll give you an example of this. A few years ago there was a man in our church who asked to meet with me. He was very upset that many of our male worship leaders were wearing hats when they led worship. And he cited 1 Corinthians, chapter 11.

Now it's interesting that when I was talking to him about it, I said, "Well, do you feel upset that our females aren't wearing hats?" And he wasn't. So, he was kind of applying this to just the first half of it where he was like, "You know what? The men shouldn't be wearing hats." And I'm like, "Well, if you're going to apply that then every single woman that is leading worship on stage should actually have her head covered." He didn't know what to do with that.

That would be an example of taking it quite literally. So, what we have to do when we come to a passage like this is we've got to know, accurately, what the passage is saying and what it is not saying. Then we can move ahead to say, "What was the specific application for the Corinthians then and then what is the over arching principle or universal application for us today? It's very similar to what we did a few weeks ago as we came to chapter 8 and we talked about food sacrificed to idols.

So, when we look at this passage there are three questions we have to address. Number one:

1. What does Paul mean by saying man is the head of the woman?

What does Paul mean by saying man is the head of the woman, and maybe better yet, what does he not mean?

Number two:

2. What's the deal with head coverings?

And number three:

3. What does any of this mean for us today?

What does any of this mean for us today if anything?

headship: "source"

So, first of all when Paul says headship, that word can mean authority, in fact the word authority is even mentioned in the passage. But it also means more than that because the original word in the Greek means source.

So, really what he means is as simple as this. He's making reference to the Creation account back in Genesis and that God is the source of man—He created Adam. And then out of Adam's body was the source of a woman. She came next. It does not mean that Adam is superior, because we know, even in technology today, version 2.0 is always better.

And then if you are tempted to think that just because man came first that he's superior, Paul levels this all out in verse 12 by saying, "Yes, one time in history a woman came out of a man but every other man since has come out of a woman's body."

So, headship doesn't mean that women are inferior and men are superior. Because both are made equally in the image of God. It doesn't mean that she is subservient. It does mean that the man lays down his life, as Christ laid down His life for the church. Headship doesn't mean a greater sense of authority. It means, perhaps, a greater sense of responsibility.

It doesn't mean that he makes all of the decisions. Galatians, chapter 3 says both have equal value in God's sight. It doesn't mean that women can't teach or lead publicly in the church, because look at verse 5. Paul indicates that women can pray and prophesy publicly.

This isn't about superiority or decision making. What it is about is interdependence and design made in the image and glory of God. So, why is Paul bringing this up and leaving all of the head covering talk in it? Well, remember what is happening in this entire section of 1 Corinthians. He is helping them to remember that they need to be unified as a young baby church in the midst of the wild cultural environment of Corinth.

They were inundated in a society where men mistreated women and there were all kinds of gender wars going on. In fact, in the context in which Paul writes chapter 11 the battle between the genders was more contentious than what it is in our society today.

On the one side then, you had the Jews who were ultra traditional and patriarchal, and then on the other side you had the anything goes cultural climate of Corinth, which, by the way, remember, was the sex capital of the world. So much so, there was so much paganism and debauchery going on that the term to Corinthianize was short hand for sexual corruption.

So, as a result of all of this, what was happening is that anytime you have sexual corruption going on, then there is going to be tension between the genders. And the lines get blurred between men and women and who they are—made equally in the image of God.

In the Corinthian culture there were all kinds of cross dressing going on by both genders. That was common. There was even a division of the Gladiator games where

women would shave their heads (which is why I think Paul addresses that in chapter 11) and they would conceal their femininity and they would enter into the arena to fight like men.

What Paul is trying to do here is he is trying to draw clear lines of distinction between, if I could use this term, the redeemed—those who had given their lives to Jesus who now found themselves in the church in Corinth and then the cultural climate of Corinth. And he's saying this, "You are set apart. There should be a clear difference and distinction in the way that you appear, the way that you present yourselves, and the way that you treat one another from the Corinthian culture. That's the over arching theme of what is going on in this chapter.

You might be like, "Okay, great. Well, what do we do with this? Hats or no hats? What is cultural and what is universal?"

Now, here's just a little principle for Bible reading and interpretation. When you read something in the Scriptures you have to ask yourself, "Is this prescriptive or is it descriptive?" We do a lot of damage when the Bible is just describing something and we think that it is prescribing something. So, what is the practice and what is the principle?

Let me give you an example. A couple of chapters later in chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians Paul said this, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." Is that prescriptive or is it descriptive? Well, I don't know. I'm just guessing that if our campus pastors came out when it's teaching time and said, "Turn and greet one another with a holy kiss." You're probably not going to do it. You might try it. Go ahead. You'll get tazed by our security. Alright? You might end up in jail for the day.

There are some cultures around the world where that is a practice. I've been in some countries that they will greet us with a kiss. A little awkward. Not our culture. So what do we do with that? Well, it's not prescriptive. Paul is certainly saying something. Do we do away with the whole thing altogether? No. What we do is we contextualize it to our society today. And we would say, "What is the principle behind that?"

So, we would say, "As brothers and sisters in Christ we want to greet one another in affectionately appropriate ways: warm smile, eye contact, good handshake or fist bump, good male to female side hug. That's the principle.

In a very similar way we take that and we apply it to chapter 11 with the head coverings. We've got to know what's going on and is it prescriptive? Or is it descriptive? And then what is the principle out of that?

So, here's what was going on in the Corinthian culture. This is so important to understand. In the Grecko, Roman culture in Paul's day, as he writes this, head coverings communicated something very different than for us today.

The reason why Paul tells men not to wear anything on their heads or to have long hair when they are conducting worship services is because the pagan priests would cover their heads when they conducted religious ceremonies to false gods and idols. And so Paul said, “No, no. There needs to be a clear line of distinction, Christian men. Don’t sync up with that practice that is so familiar in pagan society. Set yourself apart when you are worshipping God. That was what was going on.

As it relates to the females, women covering their heads during that time socially indicated that she was married. It symbolized her modesty and her devotion to her husband. So, a married woman in Corinth who refused to cover her head publicly, especially in a church setting, would have been the equivalent of a married woman refusing to wear her wedding ring so that she could signal to other men, “I’m available.” That’s why he says that.

Now, what do we do with it in our day today? Well, as simply as I can state it, let me just pull out the principle from the practice for us today. It would simply be this for those of us with a battleship mentality, we’re on mission for Jesus in this society:

The way we present ourselves matters

What I mean is, we were made in the image of God so we reflect that—both in what we wear and in our body tone and language—in culturally appropriate ways. We’re just mindful of what we wear and if it’s representative of Jesus. And I realize I’m on thin ice here because clothing styles change with the times and generations see this differently.

Have you ever looked at a picture of yourself from a few years ago and you’re like, “What in the world was I thinking wearing that?” This is kind of representative on the screens behind me. This is me over the years. That is me, by the way. It takes a lot of security in yourself to be able to show you this. I think Paul would openly rebuke me for some of my clothing styles. Please take that off. That’s embarrassing.

So, obviously, we know clothing styles change and maybe people have different preferences and opinions. So, where do we land with this? I don’t want to spend a ton of time on this, but I do want to introduce it. I just boil it down to three words—the way we present ourselves. It can be found in these three words:

Modesty

Message

Mission

Modesty, message, and mission. Modesty is just appropriate. By the way that is both genders, we’re not just directing that toward one. Message—just simply this—what am I communicating by how I’m portraying myself. Who am I pointing to? Am I wearing something to make a point? Am I wearing something to draw attention to myself?



My very first ministry out of Bible College was in a small, little church of about 150 people. And there was a young man in that church who was really upset for some reason. I don't even remember why. And he was getting ready to leave the church and he made that known.

But he was scheduled to be on the worship team on his final Sunday. It probably wasn't the best move on our part. So, he shows up to church wearing a Scottish kilt. I wish I were making this up but I'm not. I was sitting on the front row. I had more of a view than I wanted to have. And basically, what he was doing is saying, "I want to make sure you notice me before I leave."

Now, obviously that is an extreme example. But really, we tell our team all of the time, "Hey, don't wear anything to make a point. Don't wear anything to draw attention to yourself. We are here to direct our attention to God and to Him alone."

The last word would just be mission and this is just the question: What message are we communicating, especially to those who have not crossed the line of faith about how they can by what we wear. This is really important.

It's not become as much of an issue now a days as what it used to be, I don't know, 15 or 20 years ago. But every now and then it pops up. Somebody who may be brand new to our church who may have come from a more traditional background will come up to me and say, "Why don't you wear a robe when you preach?"

And I'm like, "Well, because I'm not a Jedi knight. That's why."

"Well, why don't you wear a suit when you preach?" And I'm like, "I'm not against suits. I've got a really nice one at home. I use it to marry people and bury people. And a suit did come out of the New Testament. It was more of a modern thing. And I get the idea. Some of you say (it's got a beautiful concept behind it) "I'm going to dress up for God." But obviously as in Samuel 16, God looks not at the outward appearance but He looks at the condition of your heart.

And recognize too that we're not just here vertically with our relationship with God, but we're here horizontally in connection with other people. We are on mission. Battleship mentality. I began to realize that anytime I would wear a suit or dress too far up when I would preach I indirectly sent a message, "Hey, man. You better clean yourself up before you come here."

Like, "I'm not worthy to be here." And that was becoming a barrier to people. So, the reason why I wear what I wear is because this is what I wear on Tuesday afternoon. I'm just a man. I'm just a human being. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. And I want you to know that you can come to Jesus just as you are. That's why we wear what we wear.





Now, keep in mind. It goes both ways. I'm not dressing too far up and I'm also not dressing too far down. I'm not up here wearing flip flops and baggy shorts. So, it's this idea of I kind of want to disappear and I want you to see God: modesty, message, and mission.

Here's the last thing I will say before we move on to the second section. We can summarize what Paul talks about as men and women—we could just say this:

Men and women "image" God in different, complementary ways

And really this whole thing—you might read a sentence that maybe upset you a little bit in chapter 11, but read the entirety because he does take time to level it all out. And what he's essentially saying is that men and women are made equally in the image of God, we image God in distinct ways, we are not interchangeable. When you take men and women together, we come together and we complement each other and we glorify God in doing so.

Society would say, "Gender doesn't exist. It's interchangeable. It doesn't really matter." And we would say, "No, no. We're equal in value, distinct in roles and responsibilities that image and glorify God in unique ways. That we can actually celebrate.

Let me just give you an example of this. These are two pairs of my running shoes. They are identical. I love them so I kind of want to stick with what works. They are the exact same shoe, same size, and everything, but I've arbitrarily assigned one of them to be outside running shoes (that would be these) and inside running shoes (these are treadmill shoes).

It's not because one of them comes branded to be outside shoes. They are the exact same shoes, but I just arbitrarily assign them to a different role. You can see when I turn them over, these are being chewed up by the road, these are pristine. So, society would say, "Men and women are just interchangeable. They are no different. We just arbitrarily assign whatever."

Actually it would be a little bit more like this. These are a couple of pairs of my boots. These are my Chelsea boots that I wear when I'm going to take my wife out for a nice meal somewhere. These are my Goruck boots when I want to hike 26 miles with 30 pounds on my back. These are not interchangeable. These were designed for a nice meal out (Chelsea). These were designed for a hike (Goruck).

And if I got those confused and say, "Well, I'm just going to arbitrarily assign a role to these (Chelsea) then I'm going to kill myself because they are not designed for that. The same would be true for these (Goruck).

In a very similar way men and women are not interchangeable but uniquely made in the image of God and we represent God in distinct ways. And we need both. That's what Paul is saying.



So, now we move into the next section. (Appreciate the golf clap) We've got to understand that when we come into this next section that the church in Corinth was so divided that it makes the rift between Purdue and IU look minor. Alright? So, Paul is going to address something so nauseatingly divisive in this next section around communion or the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist—whatever tradition you came out of.

Look at what is going on in verse 17:

"But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have God's approval will be recognized!"

A little bit facetious. Verse 20:

"When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this!" 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 (NLT)

This is Paul at his most hacked off. He is livid with them. He's so upset—in fact so much so that actually if you read on in 2 Corinthians he kind of apologizes for his tone here, because he is so livid.

What is going on? What would cause this kind of emotional response from Paul? Well, in their time they didn't have church buildings like this, they met in homes. And it was typically the wealthy people's homes that they would meet in because they had the most space for it.

So, what was happening is they were gathering together for their time together as a church and the wealthy people would show up first and they would have a meal together. They were eating so much and enjoying themselves so much that Paul even says a few of them were getting drunk before church. And then the poor people start showing up and by the time they get there the casseroles are all gone as well as the best seats.

So, you've got the wealthy people sitting in the living room in first class, the poor people sitting on the back porch in coach and they didn't have any food left, and now they are observing the Lord's Supper, half of them drunk sitting in the living room, the other half separated. And Paul says, "This is a travesty. This is messed up." So, what he does, starting verse 23 is he addresses the relational division, but he also lays out a theology for communion. Look at what he says in verse 23.

“For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it. For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.”

“So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God’s judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.

“But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world. So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord’s Supper, wait for each other. If you are really hungry, eat at home so you won’t bring judgment upon yourselves when you meet together.” 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 (NLT)

So, as it relates to the theology of communion, three questions: what is communion and how should we observe communion, and what does it mean to do so in an unworthy manner? And then how often should we take it?

So, what is communion? Three words. The first word is:

#### Proclamation

Communion is proclamation. It is an announcement. Announcing what? That we need to be saved. It’s announcing that we can be saved. It’s announcing that we are saved through the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus. And every time we participate in this meal, that is what we are proclaiming.

#### Participation

The second word is participation, verses 27 through 29. Now, once again, as Christians, we can make two errors when it comes to the way that we observe communion. The first is when we read the passage and we over read it and we believe that the bread and the cup become the actual body and blood of Jesus as we eat it. Maybe you grew up in a church tradition that taught that.

The theological term is called transubstantiation. And what it means is that the bread and the cup literally transform into the flesh and blood of Jesus, His actual DNA, as you take them covering your sin and sort of securing or reupping your salvation. But I want to tell you, that is not what is happening here and that is not what the text is teaching.

See, the righteousness and presence of Christ are given to us through faith, not through eating. Romans 10:10 says this:

“For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.” (NLT)

Righteousness doesn't come to us by getting wet in the baptistry, by attending church on Sunday, by practicing the spiritual disciplines during the week, or by eating a cracker and drinking some juice in a service.

I think sometimes we have a tendency to see communion sort of like when we go to purchase a car. If you go to purchase a car, you go to a car lot and then you make a downpayment and then the car is yours. But then you've got to keep making a monthly payment to keep it yours. And I think sometimes that gets confused. In some branches of the church when we think conversion—we come we give our life to Jesus and we've become a Christian but we've got to keep making a payment through communion and the sacraments.

And that is not what communion is. Communion is not some sort of extra blessing that goes beyond the righteousness of Jesus that was given to you fully and completely on the day that you trusted yourself to Him. When you trusted your life to Jesus, you get the full righteousness of Christ, not just a downpayment that you supplement with communion and other sacraments. The sacraments, themselves, do not save. We are saved by grace through faith. We feast on Jesus, not the bread and the juice. Those simply remind us of Jesus.

That leads us to the second error a lot of Christians can make about communion. And that goes the other way. They see it purely as optional, purely as symbolic—just sort of walking through some ritual that helps illustrate the gospel. And Paul speaks to that overcorrection by saying that in communion we are actually participating in Christ—we experience His power and His presence in a really special way.

So, that leads us to the third thing that we need to do in communion and that's:

#### Examination

So, proclamation, participation, and examination—verse 28. And Paul warns that eating and drinking from the communion table in an unworthy way stirs God's anger and brings judgment upon on you. Those are really sobering words. And if you're anything like me, you're like, “I don't want to do that. How do I know that I'm doing it in an unworthy way?”

Well, let's answer that by talking about what unworthy doesn't mean. It can't mean that we only take communion when we feel worthy of God's presence because if we are being honest, the answer to, “Do I ever feel worthy?” is never. None of us ever feel worthy. None of us really are worthy. Jesus said, “On your absolute best day...” I'm



talking about you have had the longest righteousness streak of your life—31 days without a sin. And Jesus would go, “Congratulations, that’s not enough.”

And even though we’re forgiven, we have more corruption in our hearts than we can ever possibly comprehend. So, it doesn’t mean only partaking in communion when you’ve gone a whole year without sinning because that would be impossible.

So, what does it mean? Well, notice that unworthily is written as an adverb, which is how it is presented in Greek. So, he’s talking about the way you approach the table in communion. Your mindset, and maybe even more importantly, your heart set.

It doesn’t mean that you are not struggling with sin, because if we’re being honest, we all still do on a daily basis. What it means is that you examine yourself before you take it, you say, “God, examine me.” That’s a scary prayer, “Examine me and see if there is any way in me? Am I fooling myself? Am I lying to myself? Is there any sin in me that I need to confess and repent of and turn away from?”

And in that moment, if He brings something to mind and you say to yourself, “I don’t think that I’m ready or willing to change that,” but you go ahead and take communion anyway—that’s unworthy. It’s when your heart is still leaning into a posture of sin: choices, behaviors, and lifestyles that put Jesus on a cross.

He says, “Don’t just go through the motions. Don’t just do this on autopilot because you’re touching the symbols of Jesus’ broken body and blood, but your heart is in a posture of rejecting Him.”

It doesn’t mean that you have to be perfect. What it does mean is avoiding three things in communion:

A spirit of self-righteousness

A spirit of defiance

A spirit of division

A spirit of self-righteousness like you’re just forgetting your dependence upon Christ’s mercy. And number two: a spirit of defiance. Just deliberately living in this way that I know God has told me not to in the spirit of unrepentance. And the three: a spirit of division. I’m harboring some resentment, some anger, I’m stirring up division. I’m refusing to forgive to the point that I’ve become bitter.

Those are all things that God wants to surface in your heart and for you to simply examine yourself and to hand that over to Him and then, as you do, you partake.

That leads to the last questions:

How often should we take communion?

Well, you know. The Bible never specifies a frequency. Jesus gave no specific command and neither did Paul. He did say, "As often as you do it." Or, "Do it often." Why? Well because the things that we do in routine help us not to forget and it establishes patterns of understanding, thought, and behavior.

But I don't think that Jesus or Paul ever meant for communion to be treated legalistically because that would miss the point. The first and only time Jesus ever did communion was with His disciples in a small room in a house after a meal. When He taught the Sermon on the Mount, with the crowds, He didn't observe communion. So, it's about the condition of your heart, not legalistically how often you take it.

Here at our church, what we have done is we have made communion available every single week. And we just encourage you to understand what you are proclaiming, to participate, to examine your heart, and take that in your own time.

Sometimes during the service I see pods of people before, during, or after the service doing this with your family, your small group. You take the symbols with you and at take them at home just like the Corinthians did and just like Jesus did with His disciples. You are around the table, maybe taking communion as a family or with your small group. You do not need a priest or a pastor to administer those, because the Holy Spirit lives in you and you are the priesthood of believers. You take it intentionally.

And then on a regular, periodic basis, we will observe communion corporately as a church family together as we are today here in just a moment.

Now, let me tell you how we landed on that. A lot of that comes out of personal experience as well as just the theology that I've learned. When I was growing up in church, I grew up Southern Baptist. I don't know if any of you are Southern Baptists in the room today. You are afraid to make too much racket because you don't want to be labeled as Charismatic. I get it.

I grew up Southern Baptist and the way we did communion was quarterly—four times a year, four times a year only. Never on Sunday morning. Sunday night. I don't know why. No Scripture to back that up. And the whole service could be grouped around it; there was a little table down front. And I just remember coming in as a little kid and there would be these silver platinum trays in a column. One would be bread. One would be juice. And they were covered with white goat sheets. Don't know why we covered them in goat sheets, but we did.

And I remember thinking as a kid two things: It doesn't seem like we are doing it enough and it seems really, really formal. And I think we could do this more on a regular basis. I didn't really know what to do with that.

Then in high school I ended up getting invited by a friend to a non-denominational Christian church and I was in their youth group. What I noticed is that youth group would



meet in the gym and we'd be sitting on the bleachers and they would pass out communion in empty popcorn buckets—no white sheets and trays. And kids would just take it and just pop the bread like PEZ slam a little juice. And I remember thinking to myself, "This seems too flippant." So, what kind of balance are we striking? What's more Biblical?

Then I became a pastor and in the first church where I started preaching we took communion every single week and man, the Southern Baptists came out of the woodwork. They hammered me. They were like... They had two big problems: They were like, "We are taking this every single week. It's too frequent." And it was like, "What do you mean?"

"Well, we're doing it so often that it's losing it's meaning and people don't know what they are doing anymore." And I was like, "Eh, a little bit of faultiness in that logic because if I were to go home and say to my wife, 'I'm not going to say I love you every day because it's too frequent and it loses its meaning,' she would say, 'Sleep on the couch.'" That's what she would say. So, I don't know about that one.

But the other one did make sense where they were like 1 Corinthians, chapter 11 where it says we should take this in an unworthy manner, "We have a mixed room. We have people all over the board spiritually, how do you know where their hearts are with God? Are they just taking it because they are under pressure, it's right in front of them, they don't want to be left out. And the Bible says we're going to bring judgment upon themselves if in an unworthy manner. You're the pastor, you'll be held accountable for that." And that was enough to cause me to lose a little bit of sleep.

And when we got here we took communion every week. Same kind of thing. I would still have those two criticisms come out. And then, I noticed in ministering communion on this platform every single week, the way we used to do it—I could see people taking it in unworthy ways. You may not have been able to see it. But I could see it.

Here's what I mean. There were people who I knew hadn't yet given their lives to Jesus and they were taking it for whatever reason. Or, I would see people totally checked out, on their phones, communion would come by, they would set their phone down, take it really quickly and then go back to their phone. I was like, "How do we address both errors?"

And that's when we adjusted to do communion they way that we do. We have it available every week, and I want you to examine your heart, I want you to pursue it, I want you to be intentional about it. You can take it here; you can take it at home.

Then, periodically, we'll take it together, corporately, as a church family. And that's what we want to do together today. We want to create just a little bit of space for you to do so. And I want you to put into practice what we just learned. Recognize what we are proclaiming, I want you to participate by examining your heart.





And I just simply want you to ask this simple question of God, "God, would You search me right now? Is there anything in me that I need to let go of? Is there anything in me that I need to confess. Is there anything that I need to repent of? God, am I stirring up division in any area of my life? Do I need to offer forgiveness where I've refused? Have I become hard hearted?" If the Holy Spirit brings something to mind, you deal with that right there. If you're unwilling to, you just let the symbols pass for now until your heart can get into that place.

This is about maintaining our unity as a church so that we can be battle tested and battleship ready to be the church, the salt and light of Jesus to a world that desperately needs it. So, would you just spend a few moments reflecting? I'll pray. And give you some time to take communion when you are ready. And we'll end our time in worship.

Father, we come to You right now and I just thank You for this passage even though it's challenging. We know that You are still speaking. So, we want to listen and we want to handle Your word correctly.

So, Father, I just pray today that as we come before the table we would examine our hearts and we just simply ask, "Search us. Is there any offensive, sinful way in us that we need to confess and repent and turn from?"

And, God, we thank You for Your mercy and grace because without that none of us would stand a chance. And now we want to spend the rest of our days living and proclaiming that message to a world that desperately needs it. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

