

Amazing Grace II: Live It!
The Great Communion
Confusion
October 27, 2013

PRELUDE – Finding Who We Are
Worship Songs – Finding Who We Are /
Immortal Invisible

Drama – “Communion”

This morning, as Nathan said and the drama illustrated, we are going to talk about communion and how it fits into the big picture of God’s grace ... and we’ll also receive communion later ...

But, since we’re pretty far into this series (and actually coming to the end of part II of the series), I felt like it would be wise to take some time and go back through

some of the fundamental concepts we've learned so far in this series. Some of you haven't been here for each message, some of you are here for the first time today, and what we're talking about when it comes to grace is so radically different from how the world works and, in fact, so radically different from how most people believe God "works" that it's necessary, as the Great Reformer Martin Luther once put it, "to pound it into our heads over and over." He wrote:

"I myself have been preaching and cultivating it [the message of grace] ... for almost twenty years and still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to deal so with God that I may contribute something; so that He will have to give me His grace in exchange for my

holiness. Still I cannot get it into my head that I should surrender myself completely to sheer grace; yet this is what I should and must do.”ⁱ

Even though many of us in this room have been Christians for a long time, we still struggle with that same tendency. Yes, we know and believe that God has saved us by grace but we still have this nagging worry in the back of our head that there’s something else we need to do to ensure that we’ve won his acceptance and approval. So, we continually need to return to the Gospel – the good news – that the Kingdom of God is near and now and it can be entered only by the grace offered to us in Jesus of Nazareth ...

... of whom the Apostle John wrote in

his Gospel:

From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:16-17 (ESV)

A Gracious Review

So, what have we learned so far about this grace?

First thing we learned was a working definition: Grace means God saving us without us having to do anything whatsoever (or even *promise* to do anything whatsoever) to make up for any and all of our failings.

Grace means that God does it all and that

we do nothing at all other than to simply trust in what Jesus already did for us – that He died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day to bring us back to life – and to receive Him as our savior and lord. God does it all because only God *can* do *anything* at all ... which makes complete and total sense when you understand the problem that grace solves for us. It is far worse than we would ever imagine.

And I've tried to point this out in every message so far in some way or another, and I want to take another swing at this because I don't think it's possible to overstate the importance of clearly understanding the problem. If you minimize the problem that grace solves, you also minimize the solution that grace

provides and when you do that you create all kinds of confusion about what grace is.

When you don't understand the problem, grace, instead of being what it is – undeserved favor being freely bestowed upon us with no strings attached because of our faith in Jesus and nothing else – grace becomes *conditional in our minds* and/or *sacramental* (which we talked about last week). In other words, you start believing that you have to participate in these certain religious activities (sacraments) like communion to keep grace flowing your way and washing out your sin, kind of like we saw with the guy in the drama, and/or you think that you have to behave in such a way, now that you're a Christian, as to not cross some nebulous line out there

beyond which lies the area of “unpardonable sin” where you would “fall from grace.”

See, when you don’t understand the problem, things get terribly confusing because even though you still use the word “grace” when talking about salvation from sin, what you are describing is most definitely *not* grace.

So, one more time, just so we’re all clear, here is the problem that grace solves.

We’ve read it several times in this series:

God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave

*us life when he raised
Christ from the dead. It is
only by God's grace that you
have been saved!
Ephesians 2:4-5 (NLT)*

God's grace takes people who are spiritually dead because of their sins and their sinful nature – that inborn propensity that we all have to screw things up in every way possible: relationally, morally, ethically, financially, spiritually, physically, etcⁱⁱ – God takes those people, and through grace, he brings them back to life. When God's grace is received into a person's life, it results in that person being “born again from above” as Jesus once explained it to a Jewish theologian of his day.

This, as I've said several times in this

series, the fact that we're dead in our sin, is why it doesn't matter whether we're really big sinners or just little bitty sinners. The issue isn't how much sin we do or don't commit. It's about how dead we are because of sin. And dead is dead. There are no degrees of deadness.

And dead people can do absolutely nothing. Their only hope is a resurrection ... which is why the only hope spiritually dead sinners have is for *God* to do something ... which in his grace, the bible says, He *does*. In fact, God does it *all* because only God *can* do *anything* at all.

Bottom line: our problem is far worse than we would ever imagine – we're dead in sin and we can do nothing to make ourselves right before God. But God's

gracious solution is far better than we would ever dare to hope.

God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

It's amazing what God did.

And then, when we are declared righteous in his sight because of God doing that, God is then justified, keeping with the rules that He has set up, in raising us to new and eternal and permanent life in Christ.

If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here! 2 Corinthians 5:17

(NLT)

We are born again from above with a new nature that not only desires to please God; it has the power to do so.

... which is why the Apostle Peter wrote ...

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life. 2 Peter 1:3
(NIV)

However, as we saw last week in the message, in spite of that, our sinful nature will be with us until the day we die or the day Jesus returns. To quote Luther (and the title of last week's message), we are "simul iustus et peccator" – 100% justified, holy and righteous saint at the same exact time as we are 100%

rebellious, self-centered, sinner.

And that means (as Paul tells us in Romans 7) that there will be a struggle to live out the new life God has given us. Sometimes your new alive-in-Christ nature will lose. Sometimes your dead-in-sin opposed-to-God nature will prevail.

But even when that happens, Paul says ...

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1-2 (NET)

When you die, your sinful nature will also die and you will be free from it forever.

And all of this – forgiveness of sin, being credited with the righteousness of Jesus, a spiritual rebirth, a new nature that is alive to God, that wants to please God and is able to please God, and the certain end of your old sinful nature – all of this is freely given to us by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone. You cannot do one thing to earn it; you can only believe.

As Paul wrote to the Philippians (and to many other Christians):

*I become righteous through
faith in Christ. For God's
way of making us right with
himself depends on faith.
Philippians 3:9 (NLT)*

This is kind of the big picture of what we've talked about in the past several

weeks. And when you understand this, when you get this picture of what God is doing, it's hard to not be encouraged about your life and your future. It's hard to not bubble over with enthusiasm at how fortunate you are to have heard the Gospel.

You can understand why the prophet Isaiah once wrote:

*I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a **robe of righteousness**. I am like a bridegroom in his wedding suit or a bride with her jewels. Isaiah 61:10 (NLT)*

Friends, this is the gospel – the good news

- of grace.

Questions & Answers

When you understand this – when you look at salvation and grace from this perspective – specifically that a spiritually dead-in-sin person is literally being given a new life and a new nature because God spiritually raises them up with Christ, so much of the confusion about what grace is is cleared away. *Grace is not conditional. Grace is not sacramental.* It is a life-changing, eternity-changing gift that is freely received once and for all by coming to the place in our life where we cry out to God, “God, the truth about me is that I am a rightly condemned sinner and I need a savior. But I believe that Jesus died on a cross for my sin and rose on the third day

afterwards to forgive me and to make me into a new creation. And I say yes to that gift and to His presence in my life.”

And just to be clear, when I describe that, it doesn't have to be an overly emotional experience although for many people it is. Grace – when it finally hits some of us – can be an overwhelming experience as we just read. And it also doesn't have to involve a thorough introspection to identify every little sin in your life, though for some people (who are suffering from the consequences of sin and are desperate for deliverance) that's what happens, they can make a list, “these are all the terrible ways....” All that has to happen is a decision where you bow your knee before God and you say, “I'm done with trying to be my own God. Jesus I give it all

over to you. Put your Spirit in me and take control.” The experience is different for different people ...

... which, by the way, is why baptism – *after you make this decision* – is so valuable. A lot of people in our culture are baptized as infants (and that’s OK) but the NT pattern, if you read it closely, is that baptism comes after a person makes a personal decision to believe in Jesus. And what that does for you is to serve as your own personal declaration of faith. When one person accepts Christ, they’re in tears and they’re very emotional. For another person, they’re kind of logical and the light comes on and they simply get it and they understand what Jesus did. They believe it and they receive it (which is what happened to me when I was 15).

And sometimes people will have that experience and they'll go, "did I do it right? Was I emotional enough? Was I logical enough?" Look, for both of those people, what happens is, the water of baptism is what confirms their experience of coming to believe and – this is what is so valuable – that removes all the questions you might have of whether or not their "salvation experience" happened in "the right way." There is no right way. What matters is that you have come to faith and baptism is the symbolic way of marking that.

Now, the reason I'm telling you this is, at the end of almost every message in this series, I've prayed a prayer of a person who wants to receive Jesus and some of you have prayed that prayer along with

me and have received Jesus as your savior. And if you have, I want to strongly encourage you to be baptized when we do it again in a couple of months. Actually, it's going to be on the first Sunday in January. And I know you're going to be here because the next Monday you have to go back to work. The holidays are over and the kids have to go back to school and you're going to be here. So, as you hear us talking about this baptism that's coming up, I want you to make plans to be part of it. Right now, in your head, decide, "I've accepted Jesus so I'm going to seal this. I'm going to make this declaration for myself in January."

In any case ... my point was that understanding what problem is solved and how it is solved clears up so much

confusion about grace. And it also helps to answer many of the questions that some of you have asked of me during this series. For instance ...

- *If a person is truly saved, can they lose their salvation?*

No way. What is going to be saved in a person who comes to Jesus is not the old sinful nature. That's already condemned and will cease to exist when they die. What is going to be saved in a believer – all that's going to be left in a believer – is the new 100% righteous and holy nature that God has given them. That is eternal. That can't be lost. That's why a person who is truly saved cannot lose their salvation.

- *But what if a person never changes? They have this experience you've been talking about, whether it's emotional or logical or somewhere in the middle, and they "pray the prayer" but they keep on sinning. They show no change in their life, or very little change. They show no regard for God. What about those folks?*

Well, there are a couple of ways to answer that. The simple answer is to say maybe they were never really saved in the first place. Maybe they weren't sincere when they came to that point in their life. Or, you could say maybe they are not feeding their new nature that God has given them so it will grow and become stronger, kind of like what Ladell talked about several weeks ago.

Because the way this works is, when you say “yes” to Jesus and God puts a new heart and spirit in you, if that heart and spirit is fed properly, according to the scripture, it will seek God and begin to produce a life that brings glory to God and peace to your soul. If that’s not happening, maybe it’s because it’s not being fed.

The more complex answer is how much change does a person need to experience in their life to “prove” that they are saved? It’s hard to quantify that which means that we’re on thin ice when trying to judge whether or not someone else’s salvation experience was valid or not.

An even more complex answer is that

sometimes for reasons known only to God, God waits a long time to step in and bring about change in the life of a believer. If you read the New Testament, you see this example in people, and even the Apostle Peter struggled with that. I look at my own life and there are patterns of sin in my life that I've asked God to remove for many years. And I look at my track record and I see one step forward and two steps back. Sometimes I just don't see a whole lot of change. I don't know why it's that way. Maybe God has just not worked yet in that area.

- *But what if someone knows they are sinning and deliberately chooses to keep on doing it? What if they even plan to sin in advance because they*

know that all their sin is already forgiven?

It could be that they are deceived and their old sinful nature is still in control of their life. It could be they do not understand that grace is given so that we can live the life God wants us to live – not so that we can continue in sin. It could be that they are in some kind of pain, physically or emotionally, and they are not trusting God in that pain. They're listening to their old sin nature. As a pastor, I see that one a lot in people. However, whatever the reason, *there is still no condemnation for those who are in Christ.* Where sin abounds, Paul says, grace abounds even more. Now, that's not a license to go out and sin as much as you want. That's what

he clearly says when he describes that, but the truth is, where sin abounds, grace abounds. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That's why we call grace "amazing" ... and that's why it's a little scary, too.

- *This sounds way too easy. What about what Jesus' said about staying on the straight and narrow?*

Jesus did talk about that several times. In one case, near the end of the Sermon on the Mount he said ...

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But

small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV)

Now, unfortunately, when a lot of people hear this, they think Jesus is talking about people who are good versus people who are not good: people who try to obey God are on the narrow road while people who do not trying to obey God are on the broad road. But that’s a false dichotomy because, as we’ve seen, as we’ve learned from the teaching on grace, every human being is a sinner and every human is spiritually dead because of that. The issue here – as it is in many of Jesus’ parables – is not “who is good and bad” for no one is good. The issue is who will choose to receive grace and who will not? Jesus says

that only a few will choose to do so.

Why is that? Think about it, it's because most people by nature are convinced that they're "not that bad." They look around at the rest of the world and think, "I'm not an ax murderer; I'm not a child molester. I'm better than most of the people around me, so I can make myself good in front of God." And because that's the mindset of most people, most people have a hard time accepting that they actually need someone to die for them. And so they refuse to receive grace. They refuse to believe what God has done in Christ and they continue on that broad road, that so many are on, of denying God and denying their sinfulness and denying their need for a savior. That road, Jesus says, is the road that leads to destruction. The road

that leads to life is the one of faith in Him.

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One more question ...

- *We're totally forgiven – past, present and future. But is there ever a point where God gets frustrated? Surely there must be some consequence for believers who continually follow their sin nature and disobey God!*

Absolutely, there is. God does get frustrated with His children which is why Paul wrote to the Ephesians ...

Do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has put his seal on you, guaranteeing that you will

be saved on the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30
(NLT)

In other words, “God has done something amazing in your life – don’t make Him sorry that He did! Walk in the new life and new Christ-like nature He has given you.”

In addition, sometimes God does allow consequences – judgment – in this life (not the next) for believers who need it.

As the Apostle Paul wrote:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that

*nature will reap
destruction.*

Galatians 6:7-8 (NIV)

Bad things are going to happen. You keep listening to your sinful nature and obeying that instead of listening to the new nature that God has put in you, bad things are going to happen in your life. It's how it works. There's karma. And a perfect example of that is illustrated in a warning Paul gave concerning communion ... which, at last, finally, brings us to the topic for the day. (I'm sure you were wondering, "hey, I thought that's what we were going to talk about today, but you're chasing this huge rabbit!")

So, let's come back, focus for a little bit, and jump into communion. And we'll talk

about this warning issued in just a bit.

Clearing Up the Confusion

But, I want to address three questions related to communion, about which there seems to be a wide variety of opinion and, quite frankly, much confusion.

Here are the questions:

- What is actually happening in communion?
- Who can receive communion? Who's eligible?
- What does it mean to take communion in an unworthy manner (which is where the warning comes in)?

If you've been to more than one church in your life and, especially, if those churches were of different denominations, it's likely that you've heard different answers to all of them.

What Actually Happens

For instance, as to what actually happens during communion, at one end of the spectrum is the Catholic Church doctrine of transubstantiation – the idea that during the Mass, the elements of the Eucharist (bread and wine) are literally transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus. They are no longer bread and wine in their real substance, but they continue to appear that way. But in reality it is Jesus' body and blood.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who would say that nothing mystical or supernatural happens with the elements of communion but that it's simply a way to do what Jesus told his disciples to do on the night he was betrayed.

Paul tells us that ...

The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it,

in remembrance of me.”

Then Paul adds ...

*Whenever you eat this
bread and drink this cup,
you proclaim the Lord's
death until he comes. 1
Corinthians 11:23-26 (NIV)*

“That’s what communion is all about” those at the non-sacramental end of the spectrum would say. “It’s a way to proclaim to ourselves and others what Jesus did in his death and to look forward to what Jesus is going to do when He comes again.”

Who Can Receive Communion?

As to who can receive communion there are actually only two basic positions but

with dozens of nuances within those two positions so that, again, there is a wide variety of practices among churches and Christians. The two positions can be described as *closed* or *open* communion.

Closed communion limits who can participate in communion based on various types of qualifications that that particular church or denomination has set up. It might be that you have to be a formal member of the church. You might have had to sign a statement saying you agree with the doctrine and teaching of that church. You might have to have been baptized in a similar type of church or maybe even in that church before you can receive communion. In churches that practice closed communion, very often the pastors will do what is called defining

the “fence” around the communion table. Fencing the table - defining for people, before communion is served, here are the qualifications for communion here. They believe that if you’re not qualified to take communion, you will cause yourself spiritual harm. So, that’s what they’re doing as pastors.

Open communion, on the other hand, would seem to be simply the opposite of closed, i.e., there are no qualifications on who may participate as long as the one receiving the communion is a believer. However, since that is in itself a qualification, this position also includes the possibility for even those who have not yet received Christ as savior to participate.

Now, before I get to the third question of what it means to receive communion in an “unworthy manner,” I want to give you my own opinion on these first two questions. But before I give you my opinion on the two questions, I want to give you *my opinion about my opinion* concerning these first two questions ... which is by far more important than my opinion on the two questions.

I think you get what I mean.

My opinion about my opinion is that it is foolish for me to be dogmatic about my opinion on this issue.

Don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be

*kind to everyone, be able to
teach, and be patient with
difficult people. 2
Timothy 2:23-24 (NLT)*

I know what I believe and why, but honestly, there's just not a whole lot to go on in the New Testament concerning communion. That's why there are so many opinions. There's the account of the Last Supper in the Gospels in which Jesus tells his disciples to remember Him through the bread and wine, and there's Paul's note which we just read, and then there's this statement in the Gospel of John where Jesus talks to some people about the need for them to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life. Some people, theologians through the centuries, are convinced that it is meant to be taken literally and others

think it is meant to be taken symbolically. Unfortunately, Jesus himself didn't make it clear how he meant it.

And then there's the fact that in the first few centuries of Christianity, communion was not anything like the brief ceremony we experience in almost every Christian church all over the world these days. It was actually part of an entire meal where the whole church came together for fellowship and prayer and testimonies. Unfortunately, history tells us that many congregations did not do well with this practice and, eventually, by the middle of the fourth century, the leadership of the church at large decided to give it up altogether and opted for a ceremonial approach that we use today. Point being that what churches do today (and have

been doing for the last 400 years) *is nothing like what they did in the early church*, so for anyone, including me, to be dogmatic that “we’re doing it the right way, the biblical way” is skating on thin ice. It’s just not true. It’s foolish.

Now, as to what I believe about these issues (and because I’m not going to be dogmatic, you can feel free to disagree with me on this) ...

When it comes to what actually happens in communion:

- I don’t believe that the bread and juice we will offer at the end of this service will turn into Jesus’ literal body and blood. I think when Jesus was talking about eating his flesh and drinking his

blood he wasn't talking about communion at all. But that's a discussion for another day.

- I also don't believe that communion infuses our souls with grace. Kind of like what we saw in the drama with the crazy guy, the third guy, "I need to get grace into my soul because I've sinned so much." I don't think that's what happens. Grace comes when you put your faith in Jesus not when you receive communion.
- I *do* believe, however, that Jesus meets us in a special way in communion. I think something happens spiritually where His Spirit encourages the new spiritual nature that we receive when we become believers.

As to open vs. closed communion, I'll just throw this out here, and I know some people are not comfortable with this, I believe wholeheartedly in the broadest most liberal definition of open communion ("whosoever will may come") for several reasons:

1. Paul in his instructions to the Corinthians about how they're doing communion does not explicitly limit who can participate in communion and it's clear from his letter that he knows unbelievers are present in their meetings.
2. On the night Jesus instituted the communion, who was with him? His disciples – believers. But who else was

with him? ... Judas, who obviously did *not* believe, and yet, Jesus made a strong point of offering him the meal, as well.

3. In addition, what was one of the main criticisms of Jesus from the religious establishment? It happened over and over and over again, they kept saying, “this guy says he’s a prophet from God and yet he eats with tax collectors and prostitutes and other notorious sinners” – so much so that he was labeled the “Friend of Sinners.”

Now, again, even though this is what I believe – I believe in the widest version of open communion - and I have been given freedom by our pastors and Advisory Council to follow that (we don’t “fence the

table” here; we don’t lay out qualifications), I understand why many people see this differently. And I respect that and I don’t feel the need to be dogmatic with anyone about that.

Worthy vs. Unworthy

However, where I *will* become dogmatic (if necessary) is on the question of what it means to take communion in an unworthy manner because I believe that the common understanding that most Christians have concerning this issue is *completely and utterly wrong*.^{iv} It is totally out of sync with the message of grace.

And that misunderstanding causes communion to have the exact opposite

effect that it's designed to have. Instead of drawing us to God, it pushes us away from God. It makes us fearful that we're going to get in trouble or some bad thing is going to happen. That's because, as I mentioned earlier, there is a very strong warning against taking communion in an unworthy manner.

Let me show it to you – and if you've been in church for any length of time, I'm sure you've read or heard this at some point.

Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:27 (NIV)

[Therefore] everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

*1 Corinthians 11:28-29
(NIV)*

That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep [people actually died. God judged this church severely because of how they were doing this unworthy communion ceremony]. (Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the

world.) 1 Corinthians
11:30,32 (NIV)

Now, what most people think when they read or hear that is “oh my gosh, I’d better examine how I’m living before I take communion. And I’d better confess all the ways in which I am not living the way I should before I take communion, or God is going to do something bad in my life. I might get sick or die.”

And what happens for a lot of people is they sit there at the time of communion and they make a mental list of all their sins and they think “good, the list isn’t too long or too bad so I am worthy this time” and they participate. Or, they think, “there’s no way I am going anywhere *near* that table because my list is pretty

messed up. I'm not worthy right now so, I think I'll take a pass today.”

And that kind of thinking is completely and utterly wrong for two reasons.

- One, as I said, it's completely out of sync with what grace is all about.
- Two, it's not what Paul was intending to communicate at all in this letter.

If you read what Paul writes here, in this warning, in context – what comes before he made that statement and what comes after it, it's clear that making a list of sins to be evaluated and/or confessed before taking communion isn't the issue. Not that those are bad things to do. If that helps you remember what Jesus has done for you and appreciate what he has done,

that's fine. We should do them but they are not prerequisites for receiving communion.

The issue for Paul – the issue that was bringing God's judgment – is the hypocritical way people in that church were acting ... but not in the way you think. They weren't hypocritical because they were still sinning in some way. That's just part of life as follower of Jesus.

They were hypocrites because of how they were treating one another. Paul's letter shows that there were divisions in that congregation based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status and even spiritual giftedness. People who were of the right race or who had money or who were able to do the really flashy spiritual

stuff (like speaking in tongues) were looking down critically on people who didn't have or weren't able to do those things. They were hypocritically coming to the table of unconditional acceptance by God while *not* unconditionally accepting one another. Wow!

And Paul said not that *they* were unworthy of communion but that *their behavior* was unworthy of people who are new creations in Christ, who have received grace upon grace! That's what this is about.

Communion

So, before we receive communion this morning (I'm going to ask our band gets in place to help us) that's the issue that we need to think about.

- Is there division between us and others in this congregation, including our own families?
- Is there someone in this congregation or in my family I need to forgive? Is there someone in this congregation or in my family I've hurt or offended? If so, before we come to the table we need to make a commitment to take care of that today. And then we need to start the process when this service is over.
- Is there someone in this congregation that we're going to walk to the table with that we're looking down on for some reason? We need to repent of that.
- And if we're doing something to cause division in this church – gossip or being overly critical, running down the body

of Christ, then we need to make a commitment to stop. That's what Paul is talking about.

The issue that we *do not* need to think about is whether or not we are “worthy” from a perspective of “my sins are not that bad this time” or “my sins are really, really bad this time.” That issue is already dealt with by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In myself, in your own flesh, we will never be “worthy.” That's the truth. But, in Christ, you and I can never be less than worthy.

So, this morning I invite you to come and receive the bread and the juice as a reminder that it is Jesus – his body and blood – that makes us worthy before God. I invite you to come and rejoice in that.

This is not a somber, sad service. This is a time of rejoicing, “Oh God, thank you so much for the love and the grace and the mercy that You’ve given me!”

Let’s pray.

<PRAYER>

Feature – Communion Hymn (Behold the Lamb) / Communion

Worship Song – From the Inside Out (Hillsong)

The cry of the renewed in Christ redeemed heart cries out to bring praise and honor and glory to God. That’s what that song is saying.

CLOSING COMMENTS / Offering

1. Next week, we begin part III of this

series: Share It. How does receiving God's grace help us with what is probably the greatest challenge of all when it comes to human relationships – forgiving others?

2. Time change next Sunday

3. Offering on the way out

Endnotes

ⁱ As quoted in *Holiness by Grace* by Bryan Chapell

ⁱⁱ <http://www.mbird.com/2013/01/frank-miller-truffles-and-the-real-meaning-of-sin-hptftu/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Based on Robert Farrar Capon's interpretation @ <http://www.mbird.com/2012/06/robert-farrar-capon-on-trees-dead-lumber-and-the-carpenters-narrow-door/>

^{iv} <http://experimentaltheology.blogspot.com/2012/10/open-communion-warning.html>