

1/1/2023      **Communion: God's Passionate Pursuit of You**  
 NWCC                      1 Corinthians 11: 23-34  
 Guest Speaker: Charlie Laughlin

**Introduction:**

Good morning and Happy New Year! It is good to have you with us this morning to worship our Lord together whether you are viewing the service through our LiveStream or here in the Worship Center – WELCOME!

My name is Charlie Laughlin. My wife, Chris, and I have been blessed to be part of the Northwest family since late 1993.

When Pastor Dave invited me to speak on this Sunday, I immediately realized that New Year's Day and Communion Sunday coincided! So I am framing today's message around the Lord's Supper on this Sunday, this first day of 2023.

There are at least three titles given to what we observe here on the first Sunday of each month. The terms Communion, the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Table are all one and the same thing. You might know this observance better as the Eucharist or Holy Communion. I will use these terms interchangeably, but I am referring to the same thing.

Now, I'm guessing that some, if not most, of you have been reflecting on the year that just passed as well as contemplating the New Year before us. For some, 2022 was a great year – for others, it was exceptionally difficult.

But whether on the mountaintop of life or scarred by difficulties you faced; whether blessed with sufficient resources or just making ends meet, God's mercies are new every morning – EVERY MORNING and God's grace is sufficient and greater than your greatest need.

There is something in those promises of God's mercy and His grace echoing throughout Scripture's redemptive message that is inherent in the Lord's Supper.

That "something inherent" is this: God has, and is, passionately pursuing us! God wants to have fellowship with YOU! When we

observe the Lord's Supper, we remember what God was willing to do in His passionate pursuit to not only redeem us but to also have fellowship with us.

John the apostle records Jesus' simple yet profound description of His Father's passion that God SO loved YOU that He gave His only begotten Son so that by faith alone in Him, you would have everlasting life. That's just how passionate God is about you!

The Bible text we use most often when we observe the Lord's Supper is found in the New Testament in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers – 1 Corinthians, chapter 11.

If you have your Bible or Bible app with you, turn to that passage. Or you can read the verses as they are displayed on the video wall.

Let me suggest there is so much more going on here than just a history lesson for these believers. Perhaps you already knew that, so this message may simply refresh your spirit with a reminder of the depth of God's passionate pursuit of you and me.

On the other hand, perhaps you've only heard this passage used on a Sunday when Communion was served. You've not had the opportunity to explore the context in which Paul reminds the Corinthians of the importance of grasping the transformative truth which Communion represents and what it meant to them – and what it means to you – personally.

If we grasp this truth, even just a little, it can begin to transform how you and I think about our fellowship with God and with each other.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 11, starting in verse 23, the Apostle Paul writes...

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

***23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new***

***covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.***

You see why this is a favorite text to use when Communion is observed. Yet this passage is like a slice of pie taken from the whole and, in my opinion, if we overlook the rest of the pie, we miss the real lesson Paul is attempting to communicate.

For instance, in the previous verse Paul appears to blurt out, “I do not praise you.” Without understanding the context, we might ask, “What’s with the attitude Paul?”

So, to better grasp one of the important truths of observing the Lord’s Supper, let’s explore the larger context of what Paul has written.

This letter to the Corinthian church is fascinating in so many ways as it clearly depicts believers whom Paul refers to, more than a few times, as “saints.” And almost in the same breath, Paul then rebukes them for their carnal, self-centered, spiritually stunted lifestyle.

In fact, once you begin to realize just how carnal these believers were, you might think that such a lofty explanation of Communion is out of place here and might fit better in a letter written to the believers at Philippi or Ephesus. But Corinth – not so much!

Yet the Divine Author of the text directed Paul to pen these words to these believers even as they struggled with their spirituality in a world which had seduced them to live contrary to what Paul first taught them about God’s grace and life in the Body of Christ.

Part of what is fascinating to me about all of this is at no time does Paul question the eternal salvation of these men and women in the Corinthian church.

What he does question is their depth of love and devotion to the Lord and to His Body, the church.

What is lacking in their life of faith is a critical understanding of something God is passionate about. And that is why Paul exclaims at the end of verse 22, “I do not praise you!”

So, with the laser beam of God’s Word, Paul focuses on God’s passion for us to have intimate fellowship with Him and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And without using the term, “fellowship,” he expresses God’s passion by reminding them of what the Lord did at the first Communion, what we call, “The Last Supper.”

This passage in First Corinthians is surrounded with a multitude of verses describing different, tragic ways in which the believers at Corinth were destroying their fellowship with each other, and by extension, their fellowship with God.

Understand this, when our fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ is messed up, it says something about our fellowship with God.

John the apostle would later write, in a letter to believers, these words: *If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. [1 John 4:20-21]*

Love God, love one another . . . these two commands are inextricably linked. And the Corinthian believers were missing it.

Let me say this again, Paul writes to the Corinthians as believers. They have an eternal relationship with God through their faith alone in Christ alone. What they were missing, or to put it another way, what they were violating, was the fellowship that God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit passionately desire with us and for us as believers.

The Bible is clear that we come into a relationship with God through faith alone in Christ alone by trusting that His death on the cross totally satisfied the just demands of a Holy God regarding the penalty for our sin. And the moment a person believes in Christ alone, that person also enters into an eternal relationship with all other believers.

Jesus' resurrection from the grave provided evidence that He was indeed the Son of God (Romans 1:4) and as Paul would write later in this same letter, Christ's resurrection is at the very core of our faith for apart from it our faith would be in vain.

The moment you trust Christ as your Savior from sin and its certain, eternal penalty, you enter into an eternal relationship with God. And, you are placed by God's Spirit into the Body of Christ – the church. In addition to your eternal relationship with God, you now have an eternal relationship with your brothers and sisters in Christ as well.

**But relationship does not guarantee fellowship;** but it does make fellowship possible. Relationship will never change but fellowship with God and with His Church is an ongoing process of growth in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. So how does that happen?

Most of the New Testament – from Acts to Revelation – gives us guidance as those letters are written to the churches, believers in the first century. God provided for us, as His children, the presence of His Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit will take the Scripture on which you meditate and can guide you as to its application in your life to know your Heavenly Father better as well as how you should interact with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

So to move from relationship to fellowship requires knowing God better through meditation in His Word and the teaching, convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives as well as developing meaningful fellowship with our sisters and brothers in Christ.

When we live like that, God through His Spirit guides us in applying His Word with grace and truth, in a way that draws us closer to our Lord while benefiting and encouraging others. That is when fellowship flourishes.

One way the Bible describes the way we live our lives is to refer to it as a “walk.”

Isn't it interesting that during Jesus' earthly ministry, some of the best teaching times with His disciples came as they were walking? And while we can't physically walk with Jesus today, Jesus' interaction with His disciples then and now is relational because He is passionate about having fellowship, communion, with you.

And what God did in passionately pursuing us and, in turn, enabling us to passionately pursue our fellowship with Him, with other believers and to interact with the world around us, all of that is captured in this description of how we are to observe the Lord's Table.

Consider how God has passionately pursued you, how He cares for you, how He longs for fellowship with you because of His deep love and amazing grace.

### **The Bread & Cup**

One theme carried throughout the Bible is God's longing heart for communion and fellowship with you and me.

Dr. Luke, in his narrative of the Last Supper in the Upper Room, adds a detail not found in the other Gospels. Luke tells us when Jesus sat down with His disciples, He said:

*“With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer . . .”* Luke 22:15

One way to understand what Jesus meant by “fervent desire” is this: He was passionate about this particular Passover meal because up to this point of time, from the fall of Adam to this moment in the Upper Room, fellowship with God was not as accessible as it could be.

Because of the need for reconciliation and redemption, there were barriers to fellowship with God.

One reminder of this inaccessibility was right there in Jerusalem, in the Temple. The Holy of Holies, symbolic of God's presence, had its entrance covered by a large veil and only once a year was the high priest allowed to enter to offer sacrifice.

But that was about to change. That is why Jesus came into this world. This was His passion . . . in pursuing us, in loving us, He now would break down those barriers to having fellowship with His Father, with Himself, and with the Holy Spirit.

As Jesus spoke these words, He knew His time had come, and in less than 24 hours, He would be crucified, bearing God the Father's righteous judgement upon sin as our substitute – dying in your place and mine – once and for all.

And when He died, the most amazing thing happened: the veil of the Temple, the veil that was a physical reminder of the lack of access to fellowship with God, it was torn from top to bottom signifying the way into the Holy of Holies was now open! Direct fellowship with God now was available! No more barriers!

When we take this Bread and drink this Cup, we remember just how much God loved us in sending His Son to be the Savior of the world. As we have communion with our Lord it enables us to better grasp how important our communion with our sisters and brothers is, too.

Which is why Paul's concern about the Corinthian believers leads him to remind them what this meal was originally all about.

For their fellowship with each other to be what it could be, they needed a strong reminder of God's passionate pursuit of them through Jesus Christ.

So Paul takes them to the Lord's Table. He issues a stern warning and says that if they do not correct what is wrong with their lives as believers, there will be discipline. Yet the aim of that discipline is for their benefit, to guide them in the direction of serving one another as they engage in the communion their Heavenly Father designed for them.

Please understand that this Table, this Supper, is the Lord's to offer. He invites all believers to participate. We are to use this as a time to rejoice in what Christ has done as well as to reflect and correct what should be changed in anticipation of His coming again so that our fellowship with both God and fellow believers can grow into what our Heavenly Father intended.

However, if you've never received the gift of eternal life, I would encourage you to let the Bread and Cup pass. Speak to me afterwards so I can share with you from God's Word how you can know for certain how to have an eternal relationship with Jesus.

### **Closing**

What Paul wanted these Corinthian believers to remember, what we are to remember when we observe Communion, is God's passionate pursuit of you expressed through the gift of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ – and that remembrance is to energize you in being salt and light in the world in which you live as you await the Lord's return.

God's passionate pursuit of us was, and is, so we might have fellowship with Him and with each other, so that the issues we may personally confront in 2023 will be met with the assurance of God's promise that we are not alone, that He is faithful, and that you have brothers and sisters in Christ who will pray with you and support you.

**Happy New Year**