

Pastor,

Alone in that desert. Alone on that front row. The Almighty God and I.

What could be better than one sermon on a Sunday? Two sermons. I listened to former pastor's message from his visit to the PBBA annual meeting at Hillcrest, and it filled me with hope. Please extend my heartfelt thanks for his time with this church and the doors his departure opened—doors none of us could have foreseen.

I know you have a close pastoral relationship with him, and next time you see him, please share my gratitude for his role in these changes. His decision to leave the church allowed us to meet the new senior pastor and his family and to receive deep insights on the Holy scriptures. And through hard work in the church, you and your wife have made lifelong memories in Vermont.

To me, this is a testament to how God works. His purpose often unfolds in ways we don't immediately see, yet life becomes a tapestry of new discoveries, each revealed in His perfect time.

This faith journey has also led me closer to Christ and deeper into His Word. Through prayer and study, I've found the answers I need in scripture, resting in the assurance that my relationship with God is firm and deeply personal—between the Almighty God and me alone. My standing is before God, who knows my heart and welcomes me as His child.

I have learned through life's trials and experiences that my purpose is set by God alone. My relationship with Him does not require validation or approval from anyone else. I draw my strength and confidence from His presence in my life, and I rest in the assurance that His opinion is the only one that truly matters. **As Paul said, 'For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ' (Galatians 1:10).** I am free from the weight of others' opinions, embracing the purpose God has given me.

Reflecting on my experiences, I feel compelled to encourage a revisitation of

doctrine and protocols surrounding the sacred practice of communion within the Baptist Church. Communion isn't the responsibility of any one individual; it's an open table where all are invited to seek salvation and partake, no matter where they are in life. For many, communion represents a moment of renewal, connection, and grace—a divine invitation from God. To be denied participation in this experience, especially without clear explanation, can feel isolating and disheartening. Worthiness is not about personal perfection but rather reflects God's grace.

It's also important to remember that scripture has been translated and interpreted over centuries. Without a mastery of ancient languages and cultural context, we risk missing the nuances from the original texts.

There are many passages in scripture that affirm the inclusive, grace-filled nature of communion and the importance of welcoming those who seek God. Here are a few that resonate with me:

- 1. Luke 22:19-20:** When Jesus institutes the Last Supper, He says, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." He places no conditions on who may receive; His invitation is open to all who seek Him.
- 2. 1 Corinthians 11:28-29:** Paul instructs, "Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup," emphasizing personal reflection rather than judgment or exclusion by others.
- 3. Romans 14:1-4:** Paul reminds us to "accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters." God alone judges the heart; we are called to welcome people at all stages of faith.
- 4. Matthew 11:28:** Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Though not specifically about communion, it reflects Christ's open invitation to all who seek Him.
- 5. John 6:35, 37:** Jesus declares, "I am the bread of life... whoever comes to me I will never drive away," emphasizing God's welcoming nature toward all who seek Him.

These scriptures underscore grace, inclusion, and the personal nature of communion.

When I reached out to the former pastor to share my experience, he never responded. His abrupt departure from the church left me with many unanswered questions. But, like the unchanging truths of the Bible, my truth remains firm. I may never receive an apology, and I've made peace with that. The emotional pain the deacon caused me led me to a decision—I will never partake in communion at this church or any other church. When I meet God face to face, I won't need to say a word. He knows my heart.

**1 John 4:20-21**. It says:

“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.”

TRUE LOVE ❤️ for God must include love for others. It reminds us that our love for one another is a reflection of our relationship with God.

Spread the Gospel,

T. Van Tran  
(visitor on the front row)