

Men of TPC,

As your pastor, I wanted to follow up on Karl Petersen's invitation to TTT (Trinity Tavern Thursday). We will have our first monthly get together on March 10 at Tavern on the Summit. I hope you all can make it. If it turns out that this time is a regular problem for some who really want to attend, we'll consider alternative times. If you have questions about the details of our meeting, refer back to Karl's emails, or contact him at 621-2612. We should all be grateful to Karl for taking initiative to get this started and for helping to reverse those alarming social trends that reveal the breakdown of community (especially masculine community).

I wanted to sketch out for you some thoughts I have on TTT. This is a "church function" of sorts, and while fellowship among the saints needs no special justification, I think it might be helpful for us to all understand the purpose and policies the session has in view. This is not just "a bunch of guys getting together to drink." This is an opportunity for us to share the life of Christ in community, and to enjoy the rich bounty of God's creation in accord with his Word.

To that end, I'd like to offer a few thoughts on how TTT fits into our vision for TPC and what we'll be doing.

1.) **The church is God's new humanity.** As such, it is to be a counter-cultural community, demonstrating to the world what God intended genuine humanity to look like. What does it mean to be "counter-cultural" in a godly way in Birmingham in 2005 AD? We live in a highly "baptistic" culture that has a highly distorted, often dehumanizing, view of "holiness." The "good" person would never drink alcohol, listen to "worldly" music, befriend a non-Christian, etc. I think part of our distinctive calling as a church in this area and culture is to witness against those very things. It shouldn't be "in your face" as if we were flaunting our Christian liberty. But it should be very evident nevertheless that we believe in the intrinsic giftedness and goodness of God's creation. As a church, we are to show how to "do the world right" -- how to use music, wine, sex, money, power, the intellect, etc. in accord with their God-given purposes. One of the reasons our youth abuse alcohol is because it is so taboo. It becomes "forbidden fruit." Part of our discipleship is learning how to receive and enjoy the good gifts of God from his hand in faith and humility. This takes maturity, but that's precisely what we're aiming at: maturity in Christ. TTT is a way we can model eating and drinking to the glory of God. Yes, this starts with the weekly feast at the Lord's table when we share in Christ's body and blood. That meal sets the tone for all our other meals. In particular, it sets wine in its proper context -- a context of gratitude and sharing. But what we do at the Lord's table carries over to the rest of life. Thus, TTT is just the outflow of what we do every Lord's Day.

2.) That being the case, at TTT, **we will insist that alcohol be imbibed only in accord with God's intention and command** (which means *of age, in moderation, and in community*). The very fact that we will not countenance either under age drinking or overdrinking witnesses against those things in the wider culture. Young men under age 21 are certainly welcome to join us at TTT. In fact, we hope to model for you what it means to drink to the glory of Christ as men of God. But there will be absolutely no underage drinking tolerated at TTT. Let me say that again: No one under age 21 should attempt to consume alcohol in any form of fashion at TTT!! State law forbids it (apart from sacramental usage), and we want to uphold the law of the land. We live under authority and want to demonstrate obedience to that authority. To disobey the law of the land is to disobey God himself (Rom. 13). Moreover, no overdrinking will be tolerated. This is not a "drink limit" we are imposing on you. Instead, we're counting on you to know what you can handle and what is appropriate. But please remember the circumstances: you are representing Christ, you may have young men watching your example, you may have to drive yourself home, etc. We will drink in moderation, remembering that drunkenness is a dangerous and dehumanizing sin.

3.) **No one at TTT is required to drink.** It's there if you'd like to. Alcohol is one of God's good gifts and should not be forbidden. As Martin Luther said, "Do not suppose that abuses are eliminated by destroying the object which is abused. Men can go wrong with wine and women. Shall we prohibit and abolish women? The sun, moon, and stars have been worshipped. Shall we pluck them out of the sky?" But at the same time, no one is required or expected to drink. You're no less a man, and no less a part of our community, if you choose to abstain. Christian liberty is just that: freedom to use the gifts of creation or to forgo them. And we dare not pass judgment on one another in these areas (Rom. 14). If you don't enjoy drinking, we still hope you'll join us for conversation and fellowship. TTT is not an attempt to recover an 1950s version of manhood in which drinking is a sign of toughness or masculinity. Real masculine toughness is found in living sacrificially on behalf of our wives and children. The fact that we can drink in moderation together if we so desire says nothing about our masculinity as such. Indeed, a lot of men drink too much precisely because they lack masculinity and are afraid of taking responsibility. They do not have dominion over drink; drink has dominion over them. And that is the antithesis of true masculinity.

4.) You will hear develop over time a **twofold vision for our church: "Mission and Maturity."** I hope it will be evident how TTT fits in with both of those themes.

First, **TTT is a "missional" event.** This is a great opportunity to do some outreach with those who don't know Christ or don't have a church. There are many folks who may have no interest in going to a "church event" (such as Sunday morning worship) but they'd be happy to have an excuse to go to the local tavern with some guys. Thus,

TTT becomes a chance for us to model the quality of community together in Christ. More than anything else, modern people want to have a sense of "belonging." But that sense of "belonging" can only be found through the gospel and in the church. We can only be reconciled to one another when we have been reconciled to God at the deepest level. We can only understand human friendship in the light of friendship with God. This is a great opportunity to let "outsiders" witness first hand the joy we have as "insiders" to the covenant community. A lot of unchurched people in Birmingham are folks who grew up in the church, but usually in some form of fundamentalism. They knew intuitively the legalism of fundamentalist taboos was stripping them of their humanity and so they reacted against it by becoming "liberal." These kinds of folks have never witnessed genuine Christianity in action. They're perfect candidates for an event like TTT. They need to see that church is not necessarily a "killjoy." TTT does not exist just for our own pleasure; as in everything else we do as a church, this event is "for the life of the world." Let us use it accordingly.

5.) At the same time, **TTT is all about "maturity."** What does maturity in Christ look like? Interestingly, Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. Now, we know that those charges were slanders, aimed at making people think Jesus was worthy of death (Dt. 21:20-21). However, the charges are revealing. What was Jesus known for? He was always the life of the party. He knew how to eat and drink to the glory of God. He knew when to feast and when to fast. He knew how to live carefree, without becoming irresponsible. Jesus embodied both sides of almost every paradox you can think of. We need to ask: What would we like our church to be known for in the city? I would love for us to have a reputation as a church that lives in the shadow of the cross, manifesting Christ's sacrificial love in word and deed. I would long for our church to be known as a place where sinners find refuge and welcome, where the lonely find friendship and community, and where the poor are clothed and fed. I would desire us to be regarded as a hospitable church where the worship is reverent and joyful, the families obedient and happy, and the leadership always humble and service-oriented. All of these are aspects of a well rounded church culture. But along with all of that, it would not be an entirely bad thing if we became known as the church in town where folks like to feast together to God's glory. The early church was regarded by outsiders as an incestuous and cannibalistic community because the Christians called one another "brother" and "sister," and centered their worship around the Eucharistic feast, involving Christ's body and blood. Obviously the world will never interpret the church rightly because the world doesn't have the needed categories. But TTT is one way we show the world a paradoxical, counter-intuitive picture of what life in Christ looks like. We can manifest a way of life that is "outside the box." So: What does Christian maturity look like? One snapshot might be of a group of men sitting around, laughing, discussing, and drinking beer. That's not the

only snapshot we want to put on display, but it should certainly be one picture in our church's slide show.

6.) **TTT will evolve over time into whatever we make it.** There is no set agenda at this point. We could use the event as a time to discuss a book we've all chosen to read together. I've been part of similar groups in the past that did this sort of thing and the book was an excellent way of focusing the discussion on something profitable. At the same time, we want to avoid the notion that we're only doing something "holy" if there's some sort of theological discussion attached. If we choose to read books together, I'm sure that many will not be explicitly theological. And if we choose not to read something together, we can still have edifying conversation, as we seek to encourage one another to live out of the narrative of the gospel in our daily lives.

Blessings,  
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