

The Book of 1 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Worship, Roles, and the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:1–34

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This chapter addresses two weighty and sensitive matters: the God-given roles of men and women in light of headship, and the right observance of the Lord's Supper. What is doctrinally at stake is the goodness of God's created order and the reverent, worthy observance of the Supper according to the apostolic pattern. The teacher should present headship (11:3) clearly and respectfully: it concerns distinct God-given roles, not greater or lesser worth, with men and women equally made in God's image and equally heirs of grace (note the mutuality of 11:11–12), and it is illustrated by the relationship of the Son to the Father, who are equal in deity yet ordered in role. This principle of order undergirds the New Testament teaching that the leading and teaching roles in the assembly belong to men, which the study will take up again in Lesson 12. Present the Lord's Supper as the early church practiced it: a true memorial and proclamation of Christ's death, observed on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7), to be approached worthily, with self-examination and discernment of the body.

At the same time, this chapter is profoundly formational. It exposes how selfishness and division corrupt even our worship, calls us to imitate Christ and those who follow him, and summons us to a reverent, self-examined participation in the Supper that remembers the cross and anticipates the Lord's return.

Aim, then, for reverence and unity. Send students home with a deepened awe at the Lord's table, a glad trust in God's good design, and a resolve to come together as one body that honors both the Lord and one another. Handle the role question respectfully and without harshness, and give the Lord's Supper its due weight; the heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11:1). What does it mean to follow godly examples who are themselves following Christ, and why is this pattern of imitation an important part of how disciples grow and learn to live the Christian life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Note that 11:1 belongs with the end of chapter 10, but it also opens this section as a banner over the whole discussion. Paul invites imitation, but only as he himself imitates Christ.

Explain the pattern of discipleship by imitation. We learn the Christian life not only from precepts but from examples, watching faithful believers and following their pattern as they follow the Lord.

Guard the qualification. Paul does not say imitate me absolutely, but imitate me as I imitate Christ. Human examples are to be followed only so far as they reflect the Lord. Christ remains the final standard.

Apply it to the church. God gives elders, teachers, parents, and mature believers as living examples. Honoring godly examples, and becoming one, is part of how the body grows up into Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discipleship learned through godly examples, not precepts alone (11:1)
- Imitation that follows others only as they follow Christ
- Christ as the final standard behind every human example
- Mature believers as living patterns within the church
- The responsibility of being an example worth following

Discussion Prompts

- Why is imitation an important part of how disciples grow?
- What is the limit Paul places on imitating him?
- How does Christ remain the final standard?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul could say “imitate me” because his own life was patterned after Christ. Who are the people you actually imitate, and are they leading you closer to Christ? And, soberingly, is your own life an example that would lead others toward him? Where do you need to follow better, or lead better?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns imitation two directions: who we follow, and who follows us.

Help students honestly assess their models. We are shaped by those we admire and watch, whether wise mentors or cultural voices. Some of our models lead us away from Christ.

Then turn it outward. Many of us influence others, children, younger believers, friends. Paul’s bold claim should make us ask whether our example points others to the Lord.

Aim for one step in each direction. Ask each student to name one godly example to follow more closely and one way to be a better example to someone watching them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discernment about whom we imitate
- The shaping power of our models, good and bad
- The responsibility of our own influence on others
- Leading others toward Christ by example

Discussion Prompts

- Who do you actually imitate, and where are they leading you?
- Is your own life an example that leads others to Christ?
- Where do you need to follow better or lead better?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul sets out a principle of order: “the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God,” while also affirming that “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman” (11:3, 11). How does this passage present the God-given roles of men and women, not as a matter of greater or lesser worth, but as part of the good order God designed, and how does the relationship between Christ and the Father help us understand it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a sensitive doctrinal question; handle it with clarity and respect. Paul sets out a principle of order in 11:3: the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

Stress first what headship does not mean. It is not a statement about value or ability. Men and women are equally made in God’s image, equally fallen, equally redeemed, and equal heirs of the grace of life. Paul underscores mutuality in 11:11–12: in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman, and all things come from God.

Then explain what it does mean. God has built order into his creation and into his church, with distinct, complementary roles. Headship speaks of a God-given responsibility to lead and to love, and a God-given calling to honor and support that leadership, lived out with humility on both sides.

Use the analogy Paul gives. The head of Christ is God. The Son is fully equal to the Father in deity, yet within the work of redemption the Son gladly submits to the Father. Order and

equality are not opposites; the Godhead itself shows that distinct roles can coexist with full equality of worth.

Apply it pastorally. Lived rightly, with the self-giving love of Christ on the part of those who lead and glad trust on the part of those who follow, God's design is not oppressive but beautiful, displaying the wisdom of the Creator. Acknowledge that our culture struggles with this, and commend it gently as God's good gift rather than a human power arrangement.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Headship as God-given order, not a statement of greater or lesser worth (11:3)
- The full equality of men and women as image-bearers and heirs of grace (11:11-12)
- Distinct, complementary roles in home and church
- The Son's equality with yet glad submission to the Father as the model of order with equality
- God's design as good and beautiful when lived in love and humility
- Respectful engagement with a culture that finds this hard

Discussion Prompts

- What does headship mean, and what does it not mean?
- How does the relationship of the Son and the Father help us understand order with equality?
- Why can distinct roles coexist with full equality of worth?

Question 4

Student Question:

God's design includes distinct roles, lived out with love and mutual honor rather than rivalry. Where do you find it hard to trust and submit to God's design for order, whether in the home, the church, or your own willingness to take or yield a role? What would humble, glad submission to God's wisdom look like for you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses God's design into the student's own willingness to trust and submit, wherever that applies to them.

Help students see that everyone, male and female, is called to submit somewhere: to Christ, to the order of the home, to the leadership of the church, to one another in love. Resistance to God's design often hides a deeper resistance to God himself.

Frame submission rightly. Biblical submission is not weakness, fear, or the silencing of one's gifts; it is the glad, strong choice to trust God's wisdom and to serve in one's God-given place.

Aim for one act of trust. Ask each student to name an area where submitting to God's design is hard and one way to embrace it gladly this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal call to submit somewhere, ultimately to God
- Submission as strength and trust, not weakness or fear
- Resistance to God's design as resistance to God himself
- Serving gladly in one's God-given place

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you find it hard to trust God's design for order?
- How is godly submission different from weakness?
- What would glad submission to God's wisdom look like for you?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul is grieved that when the Corinthians gather, "it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat," because their divisions and selfishness have corrupted it, with some going hungry and others humiliated (11:20-22). Why does Paul take so seriously the way the church treats one another at the Lord's table, and what does this teach about the connection between how we love each other and how we worship God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene of the abuse. The Corinthians' common meal, joined to the Lord's Supper, had become a display of class division. The wealthy ate well, even to drunkenness, while the poor and the slaves went hungry and humiliated.

Explain Paul's shocking verdict: when they come together this way, it is not really the Lord's Supper they eat (11:20). Their selfishness had emptied the act of its meaning.

Draw out the principle. How we treat one another is inseparable from how we worship God. A Supper that proclaims the self-giving death of Christ cannot be eaten in a spirit of selfishness and contempt without contradiction.

Apply it. The Lord's table is the great leveler, where rich and poor, and every kind of person, come as equals needing the same grace. To bring our divisions to that table is to deny what it means.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The corruption of the Supper by division and selfishness (11:20-22)

- The inseparable link between loving one another and worshiping God
- The Lord's table as the leveler where all come as equals
- Worship contradicted by contempt for fellow believers
- The self-giving death of Christ as the pattern for the table

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul say their gathering was not really the Lord's Supper?
- How is the way we treat one another connected to our worship?
- What does it mean that the table makes us equals?

Question 6

Student Question:

The Lord's Supper is meant to draw the whole family of God together as equals at one table. Are there ways you come to worship more concerned with yourself, your preferences, your circle, than with the whole body? How might you actively welcome and honor those who are different from you when the church gathers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the Corinthian failure onto our own approach to gathered worship. We can come consumed with self rather than mindful of the body.

Help students notice self-focus in worship: judging the service by our preferences, sticking to our circle, overlooking the stranger, the struggling, or the different.

Set the alternative before them. The body gathers as one; love actively welcomes and honors those unlike us, especially the overlooked.

Aim for one concrete act of welcome. Ask each student to name one person or group they could intentionally honor and include when the church gathers this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Self-focus versus body-mindedness in worship
- Judging worship by personal preference
- Actively welcoming the overlooked and the different
- Love expressed in concrete inclusion

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you come to worship more concerned with yourself than the body?
- Who tends to be overlooked when the church gathers?
- How could you welcome and honor someone different this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul hands on the words of institution: "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me," and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," so that as often as we eat and drink we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (11:23–26). What do the bread and the cup represent, what does it mean that the Supper proclaims the Lord's death, and why did the early church gather to observe it on the first day of every week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk slowly through the words of institution (11:23–25), which Paul received from the Lord and handed on. The bread represents Christ's body given for us; the cup is the new covenant in his blood. These are the appointed memorials of his death.

Explain the meaning of remembrance and proclamation. To eat and drink is to remember the Lord's death and to proclaim it, a visible sermon preached every time the church gathers at the table, until he comes (11:26). The Supper looks back to the cross and forward to his return.

Address the weekly pattern. The early church gathered on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7), devoting themselves to it along with the apostles' teaching, fellowship, and prayer (Acts 2:42). The Lord's Day, the first day, is the appointed time for the church to assemble and remember, following the apostolic pattern.

Note what the Supper is not. It is neither an empty ritual to rush through nor a mere social meal; it is a sacred memorial and proclamation, to be observed regularly, reverently, and as a united body.

Apply it. Familiarity can dull the Supper into routine. Recovering its meaning, the body and blood of the Lord, his death proclaimed, his coming awaited, restores its weight and wonder.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The bread and cup as memorials of Christ's body and the new covenant in his blood (11:23–25)
- The Supper as remembrance and proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes (11:26)
- The first day of every week as the apostolic pattern for observance (Acts 20:7; Acts 2:42)
- The Supper as sacred memorial, neither empty ritual nor social meal
- Guarding the Supper from dull routine by recovering its meaning

Discussion Prompts

- What do the bread and the cup represent?
- What does it mean that the Supper proclaims the Lord's death until he comes?
- Why did the early church gather to observe it on the first day of every week?

Question 8

Student Question:

Each Lord's Day the Supper calls us to remember the cost of our redemption and to look forward to Christ's return. How does deliberately remembering the Lord's death, and anticipating his coming again, shape the way you live the rest of the week? Where do you need the cross and the hope of his return to reorder your priorities?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the backward and forward look of the Supper into the rest of the week. Remembrance is meant to shape life, not stay at the table.

Help students connect the cross to daily living. Remembering the price of our redemption reorders our values, humbles our pride, and fuels our gratitude and obedience.

Connect the hope of Christ's return as well. Living in light of his coming keeps us watchful, loosens our grip on this passing world, and gives us courage and hope.

Aim for one reordered priority. Ask each student where the cross and the hope of Christ's return most need to reshape their week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Remembrance of the cross shaping daily life
- The hope of Christ's return as motive for watchfulness and courage
- Gratitude and obedience flowing from the Supper
- Worship that reorders the week's priorities

Discussion Prompts

- How does remembering the Lord's death shape the way you live?
- How does anticipating his return change your priorities?
- Where do you most need the cross and his coming to reorder your week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul warns that whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup "in an unworthy manner" is "guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord," and that each must "examine himself," "discerning the body," lest he eat and drink judgment on himself (11:27-32). What does it mean to partake worthily and to discern the body, why does Paul attach such seriousness and even divine discipline to careless participation, and how should this shape the reverence with which the church observes the Lord's Supper each week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson. Paul gives a solemn warning: whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner is guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord (11:27). The Supper is holy, and careless or contemptuous participation is a serious offense.

Explain what eating worthily means, and what it does not. It does not mean we must be sinless or feel good enough; if that were required, no one could ever partake. It means coming in the right manner, with reverence, self-examination, and love for the body, rather than the selfish contempt the Corinthians showed.

Open up the call to examine oneself (11:28) and to discern the body (11:29). Discerning the body means recognizing both the sacred meaning of the Supper, the Lord's body given for us, and the reality that we partake as one body, the church. The Corinthians failed on both counts, treating the Supper carelessly and despising fellow members.

Take seriously the divine discipline Paul describes (11:30–32). Some in Corinth were weak, ill, or had died, which Paul links to their abuse of the Supper. The Lord disciplines his people, even in such ways, so that they will not be condemned along with the world. This is sobering and shows how seriously God regards the Supper, yet it is the discipline of a loving Father, aimed at correction, not destruction.

Apply it to the church's practice. Because the Supper is this holy, the church should observe it each Lord's Day with reverence and order, giving people space to examine themselves and to focus on the Lord's death, rather than rushing through it or treating it lightly. Self-examination and discernment, not mere routine, are the proper preparation.

End with balance. The warning is not meant to frighten the humble away from the table, but to call all who come to come rightly, with reverence, repentance, and love. The table is for sinners saved by grace, approached with awe.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The seriousness of eating and drinking in an unworthy manner (11:27)
- Eating worthily as a matter of reverent manner, not sinless perfection
- Self-examination and discerning the body, both the Lord's and the church (11:28–29)
- The Lord's loving discipline showing how seriously God regards the Supper (11:30–32)
- Reverent, orderly weekly observance that allows for self-examination
- The table as for humble sinners saved by grace, approached with awe

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to partake worthily and to discern the body?
- Why does Paul attach such seriousness, even divine discipline, to careless participation?
- How should this shape the reverence with which we observe the Supper each week?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter. Paul calls the church to imitate Christ, to honor God's design, and to come to the Lord's table with reverence and love. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Corinthians 11 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone asks students to gather the chapter and name one way Christ is forming them. Let them speak first.

If needed, recall the movements: imitating Christ, honoring God's design and order, the corruption and the recovery of the Lord's Supper, and the call to worthy, discerning participation.

Watch the tone as students respond to the weighty topics. Aim for reverence and trust, not fear about the table or resentment about God's design. Both should land as good gifts.

Push toward the specific and close in prayer that students would worship reverently, love the body, and trust God's good order this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal formation through reverent worship and trust in God's design
- Coming to the Lord's table with self-examination and love
- Receiving God's order as a good gift
- Moving from general agreement to a specific, named response

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of this chapter pressed on you most, and why?
- What is the one truth from 1 Corinthians 11 you most need this week?
- What named step is God asking you to take in response?