

The Book of 1 Corinthians

Lesson 9: Worship, Roles, and the Lord's Supper -- 1 Corinthians 11:1-34

When the Corinthians gathered for worship, something had gone badly wrong, and Paul cannot praise them for it. Picture the scene. The church meets, as the early Christians did, on the first day of the week. They have come together for the most sacred meal in the world, the Lord's Supper, the bread and the cup that proclaim the death of Jesus. But instead of a family gathered as one around the table of their Lord, there are cliques. The wealthy arrive early and eat their fill, even getting drunk, while the working poor and the slaves arrive late to find nothing left. At the very table that should make them one body, they are putting their divisions on display.

Paul is stunned. "When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat," he says. They have taken the holiest act of Christian worship and turned it into one more occasion for showing off and looking down. So Paul takes them back to that upper room, to the night Jesus was betrayed, and he repeats the words we still say over the bread and the cup: "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." The Supper is not a snack and not a social club. It is a proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes, and it is meant to be eaten worthily, with hearts that examine themselves and discern the body.

Wrapped around this teaching on the Supper is another, more delicate subject: the way men and women are to conduct themselves in worship, and the order God has built into his creation. Paul speaks of headship, that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. This is not a statement about worth, for men and women are equally made in God's image and equally heirs of grace. It is a statement about the good and beautiful order God designed, distinct roles that, lived out with love and humility, put the wisdom of the Creator on display.

These are weighty matters, and our age finds some of them hard to hear. But Paul handles them not to crush anyone but to call the church back to reverent, ordered, unified worship that honors God. Read this chapter slowly. Let it deepen your awe at the Lord's table, where the bread and the cup carry the memory of a Savior's death. And let it open your heart to the goodness of God's design, where every member, in their God-given place, brings glory to him.

Group Discussion: Paul rebukes the Corinthians because their gatherings for the Lord's Supper had become occasions for division, with some humiliating those who had less (11:17-22). How can the very things meant to unite us in worship sometimes expose our divisions instead, and what would it look like for our gatherings around the Lord's table to truly reflect that we are one body in Christ?

Personal Reflection: Paul calls each person to "examine himself" before eating the bread and drinking the cup (11:28). When you come to the Lord's table, do you come thoughtfully and self-

examined, or has it become routine? What would help you approach the Supper each week with a heart that truly remembers and discerns the Lord's body?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1–34

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 20:7, the disciples gathering on the first day of the week to break bread; Acts 2:42, devotion to the apostles’ teaching, the breaking of bread, and prayer; Luke 22:14–20, Jesus instituting the Supper in the upper room; Genesis 2:18–24, the creation order and the man and woman as one; Philippians 2:1–11, the humble, self-giving mind of Christ in our relationships