

Team Harmony



Topic

Worship

Theme

True worship involves obedience to God and harmony with fellow believers.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will desire to follow God's prescribed order of worship, including sincerely and thoughtfully participating in the communion service.

Materials Needed

- Resources 1 and 12
- Various items to put in a pile

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 11

Summary

Paul instructed the Corinthian church to honor the principle of male headship in worship and to observe the Lord's Supper reverently and in harmony, declaring *the Lord's death till he come*.

Outline

I. Order in Worship (11:1–16)

- A. Commendation (11:1, 2)
- B. Correction (11:3–16)

II. Order at the Lord's Table (11:17–34)

- A. Prevailing disorders (11:17–22)
- B. Prescribed order (11:23–26)
- C. Prerequisite preparation (11:27–34)

Memory Verses

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body"
(1 Corinthians 11:28, 29).

GETTING STARTED

Order, Please

Put several items (e.g., pencils, newspaper, book, sunglasses, tape, used envelope) in a disheveled pile on a table at the front of the room.

ASK: What is your response to this untidy pile of things at the front of the room?

ASK: Describe your desire to come to the front of the room and tidy up the pile. (If you wish, allow a learner or two to come to the front and tidy up the pile.)

Some of us can't stand clutter. Others of us could live in a trash heap and not mind it one bit. The apostle Paul wrote to Corinth about their disheveled worship and Communion services, commanding them to conduct them in a way that honored God. But his directions were not based on a personality that wanted everything neat and in place. He communicated that *God* said that doing things in order was important. In fact, some of the Corinthian believers were getting sick and dying because of their disrespectful, selfish worship. This lesson covers Paul's instruction concerning conducting honorable worship and Communion services.

Neatness Is Next to Godliness

ASK: Describe a time, if ever, when you went on an organization rampage that left everything in your world a lot tidier. (Q1)

ASK: What is the latest you have ever stayed up organizing something in your home? (Q2)

A need for neatness is a personality trait that not everyone has. To some people, neatness is having the kitchen counter completely clear and sterilized. To others, neatness is having a small opening on the kitchen counter for making a sandwich.

God doesn't command us to be neat with our houses, but He does care about order in the church, especially when it comes to worshiping Him. Paul wrote to Corinth to instruct them about God's desire for order in their worship and Communion services.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Worshiping God in the company of fellow believers in a Bible-believing church should be a highlight in a believer's week. If God is worshiped *in spirit and in truth* (John 4:24), He is glorified and His people are blessed. These positive factors did not characterize worship in the church at Corinth. Harmful attitudes and practices had invaded the church's worship. Paul wrote to them to restore order.

I. Order in Worship (11:1–16)

A. Commendation (11:1, 2)

Paul concluded his comments on the limits of Christian liberty by encouraging

the Corinthians to follow his example (11:1). He praised them for remembering him and for holding the teachings he had given them verbally (11:2). The Corinthian church had a good doctrinal foundation, but its deportment left much to be desired. Its beliefs were intact, but its behavior obviously needed correction.

B. Correction (11:3–16)

First Corinthians 11:3–16 is a difficult section of Scripture. Bible students are divided on whether Paul's words, especially regarding head coverings on women, deal with a local *custom* (11:16) in Corinth or whether they are to be taken as binding upon *the churches of God* (11:16) throughout this age.

In favor of taking this passage as treating a localized custom is the fact that it stands alone in the New Testament in discussing the obscure subject of head coverings. In support of seeing it as binding throughout the church age is the fact that the text does not appear to make local customs a limitation of Paul's commands.

If Paul intended his counsel to apply both then and now, his words have been mostly forgotten over the centuries. Yet even if one takes the view that Paul is commenting on the local situation in Corinth, there are still important points about gender roles in the church that we must learn and apply.

Gender roles have been increasingly blurred. Some in society have even claimed that gender is defined by one's feelings rather than one's anatomy. But the Bible is clear that gender is part of God's design and order. And God's Word, not public opinion, sets the standard for behavior in the church. Paul's instructions are rooted in the character of God as expressed in His plan for Creation. They are not to be dismissed as bigoted ramblings.

In the larger context of Paul's writings, we know that his teachings barred women from positions of authority over men in church worship and instruction (cf. 1 Cor. 14:34, 35; 1 Tim. 2:12). Some claim that cultural considerations in the first century were the only grounds for Paul's prohibition. Those who make that claim argue that women then were apparently uneducated and unskilled while women today are as well-educated and as highly skilled as men. They therefore conclude that women can even be ordained for ministry if the women so desire. But Paul's reasoning in this section dispels such logic.

God is a God of order. Within the Godhead, God the Father is *the head of Christ* (1 Cor. 11:3). In His earthly ministry, Jesus willingly subordinated Himself to the Father, although He and the Father are co-equal, co-eternal, and co-essential. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share one divine essence yet have distinct roles.

In the marriage relationship, *the husband is the head of the wife* (Eph. 5:23; cf. 1 Cor. 11:3). This does not give him dictatorial power but rather a responsibility to provide loving leadership in his marriage to a woman who is of equal value in her person and equal standing before God as a believer (cf. Gal. 3:28).

Woman is not inferior to man in terms of her nature or character or even in terms of her abilities. Certainly Christ, who ranks under the Father in terms of his role in the Godhead, is not inferior to the Father. The teaching of subordination in 1 Corinthians 11:3 relates to order; it is not a statement about anyone's worth as an individual, nor does it imply a lack of capability.

First Corinthians 11:3 teaches specifically that the man is the head of his wife but not of all women in general, even in the church. A misunderstanding in this regard could lead to extreme and unbiblical views of male headship that women would rightly resist.

Christ is not subordinate to His Father and the Holy Spirit is not subordinate to Christ because of anything related to their nature, essence, or abilities as members of the Godhead. Rather, this is the functioning relationship that God has ordained for Himself from eternity past (cf. John 5:26; 15:26).

ASK: How do the differences between men and women demonstrate the glory and wisdom of God? (Q3) *They show how God has designed the male and female to complement one another, giving insight into His creativity and His grace.*

ASK: Is an army sergeant necessarily a better person than a private? Is a company president necessarily a better person than a shipping clerk? Is a husband necessarily a better person than his wife? Why, then, are there levels of authority in the military, in business, and in the home? (Q4) *The obvious answers to the rhetorical questions are all no. These institutions could not function properly without structure and order.*

A professional woman may wonder why she would need to be under the authority of less-qualified men in the church. The issue is not her worth as a person or her level of knowledge and skill. The issue is God's created order. God, not culture, originated the male and female distinction in the church. And God intends His standards for worship and service to be for His glory (cf. Eph. 3:21; Isa. 55:8, 9).

In his leadership role in the Corinthian church, a man was supposed to pray or prophesy (declare a revelation from God) with his head uncovered. Otherwise, he dishonored his head (11:4). In Corinth, men did not wear veils over their heads, but women did. If a man wore such a covering, it suggested he was abdicating his role as a man and a leader and would disclaim his God-appointed headship of both the woman and earthly creation. It would also be a denial of Christ's authority over him.

Women, on the other hand, wore veils. If a Christian woman prayed or prophesied with her head uncovered, she dishonored her head just *as if she were shaven* (11:5, 6). Her uncovered head would signify she was unwilling to accept her husband's headship (11:7–9). This lack of cooperation with God's order would offend the angels, who were observing the Corinthian assembly with keen interest (11:10; cf. Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:12). The veil was also a token of modesty. Any woman who chose not to wear a veil was likely to be considered immoral.

ASK: What principles can we draw from this section regarding the relationship between attire and worship? (Q5) *Paul is teaching that attire is significant in the context of worship and that various types of attire convey specific attitudes to others.*

Whether a culture distinguishes between men and women in attire, women have an obligation to submit to authority. To put it another way, it is unacceptable for a woman to wear a head covering but maintain a rebellious attitude.

Paul felt some in Corinth might regard the woman as inferior to the man, or that some man might use his teaching about headship to lord it over the woman. Therefore, he reminded his readers that the well-being of both man and woman is reliant upon the other. The Lord so ordered His plan for humanity that the Christian man cannot degrade woman without degrading himself, nor is the woman to be detached from the man (11:11, 12).

Paul asked the Corinthians to evaluate this whole matter from two perspectives. First, did it seem proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered? After all, even by nature it is normal and respectable for a woman to have long hair and a man to have short hair (11:14, 15a). Since God gave woman the natural covering of long hair (11:15b), should she not understand the importance of covering her

head when she prayed and prophesied?

Second, Paul did not want to debate this teaching; he simply concluded the matter by stating that neither the apostles nor the churches accommodated any custom that violated this principle of the headship of the man (11:16).

God created the male and female as distinct genders with distinct roles. As the world blurs these distinctions, the church should seek to highlight them even more to the glory of God. This is the time when bold but gracious men and meek but courageous women should step forward in the church and proclaim the Lord's plan loudly and clearly.

ASK: Based on 1 Corinthians 11:1–16, how would the apostle Paul respond to the changes we see in our culture today regarding blurring or even eliminating gender identification? (Q6) *He probably would not be shocked, as he saw many of the same trends in the first century. He would remind us of the truths revealed in both Scripture and nature regarding the roles of men and women.*

II. Order at the Lord's Table (11:17–34)

Another area in which Paul had to correct his Corinthian friends was their observance of the Lord's Supper, or Communion.

ASK: How seriously do you approach Communion? (Q7)

The Corinthian church was guilty of poor manners and poor attitudes at the Lord's Table. They miserably failed to take Communion seriously. One by one, Paul identified and corrected their failures.

A. Prevailing disorders (11:17–22)

According to verse 17, observance of the Lord's Supper had become a negative experience for the Corinthian believers. Instead of participating as a united body of believers, they were divided (11:18). Paul recognized that schisms are unfortunately expected, but he never ignored or condoned them. He did teach, however, that divisions in a church reveal the loyal members, making them look better than those causing the divisions (11:19).

Although the whole church met together in one place for Communion (11:20), the church was not together in one spirit. Their disunity became particularly obvious as they met for a feast before observing the Lord's Supper.

The Corinthian believers were supposed to bring food to share at the feast, but the well-to-do believers placed their food on the table and indulged in it without sharing it with the poorer believers. They ate and drank until they were overstuffed and intoxicated (11:21). They essentially turned their fellowship feasts into replicas of pagan feasts. Such selfish indulgence showed a total disregard for church unity and for fellow believers who lacked the money to contribute any food to the feast (11:22).

ASK: How should the Lord's Supper relate to social differences that exist in a local church? (Q8) *It should cause everyone to recognize that every church member is equal before God in Christ. No one is privileged or elevated when Communion is administered as God prescribes.*

Roman Catholics and liturgical Protestant denominations call Communion a *sacrament*. Baptists generally refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper as the two *ordinances*. This word helps us convey more clearly that the Lord's Supper is a memorial rather than a means by which we may receive the grace of God

Various Christian groups have taken three basic approaches in determining who is qualified to take part in the Communion service. In closed communion, only the members of a single congregation can partake of the elements. In close Communion, this is broadened to include those who are of similar doctrinal understanding or denominational background. In open communion, all true believers may receive the bread and the cup upon their own self-examination. Most Baptist churches practice some variation of either open or close communion. Some Baptists emphasize that the reception of Communion should logically follow obedience in baptism and membership of in a local church.

ASK: Imagine our church people selfishly gorged themselves and became intoxicated before partaking in Communion. How would that change the dynamics of our Communion service? (Q9)

B. Prescribed order (11:23–26)

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as an ordinance to be observed by the local church. He did this *the same night in which he was betrayed* (11:23). How inappropriate it was for the Corinthians to turn the occasion of the Lord's Supper into a drunken, gluttonous festival.

In the Lord's Supper, the bread symbolizes the body of our Lord that was nailed to the cross and subjected to excruciating pain (11:24). The cup symbolizes His shed blood, the price of our redemption (11:25). Christians are to partake of both the bread and the cup in remembrance of Christ. Communion declares Christ's death until He comes to take the church to Heaven (11:26).

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:26. **ASK:** Why is it important to have a regular means of declaring the Lord's death until His return? (Q10) *Because the death of Christ is central to the gospel and the purpose for meeting together as believers in local churches.*

The Biblical view of Communion is not transubstantiation or consubstantiation, but commemoration. Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic doctrine that the bread and juice are turned into the body and blood of Christ. Consubstantiation is the Lutheran doctrine that Christ's body and blood are with the bread and juice and are received in Communion. Commemoration is the Biblical teaching—namely, that the bread and cup represent the body and blood of Christ. The physical body of Christ is not being multiplied through the observance of Communion (cf. Acts 3:21). Nevertheless, Communion should be regarded as a solemn ceremony, and our eating and drinking in this context should be taken as no light matter (11:29).

C. Prerequisite preparation (11:27–34)

Paul warned of discipline from the hand of God if a Christian partook of the Lord's Supper *unworthily* (11:27). This relates to the disorderly way the Corinthians approached the ordinance. In all candor, no Christian is worthy in himself to partake; he is simply a sinner saved by grace.

Every participant in the Lord's Supper ought to *examine himself* (11:28). He ought to discern the way he approaches the ordinance and confess his sins to the Lord (cf. 1 John 1:9). Having done so, the believer is commanded to eat.

ASK: Why would a regular observance of the Lord's Supper help a believer in his Christian walk with God? (Q11) *Regularly observing the Lord's Supper should remind a believer of the price of his redemption and the need to maintain fellowship with God through confession of his sins.*

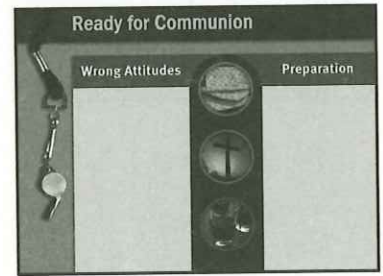
ASK: How has regularly observing the Lord's Supper affected your walk with God? (Q12)

The Corinthians who abused the ordinance as an opportunity to feast voraciously were inviting God's chastening (11:29). Many abusers of the ordinance in the Corinthian church had already been chastened with sickness. In fact, many had died for their profane attitude (11:30).

RESOURCE: Display resource 12. **ASK:** What are some inappropriate attitudes to have at the Lord's Supper? (Q13) (Reveal or record answers.) *Pride, envy, covetousness, insincerity, and an unrepentant spirit.*

ASK: How could we prepare our hearts and minds for the ordinance? (Q14) (Reveal or record answers.) *Reading Scripture, praying, meditating upon the truths of God's Word, and sincerely examining our hearts.*

To avoid such judgment, there must be self-examination (11:31, 32). The Corinthians needed to be considerate of one another at the fellowship meal preceding the Lord's Supper (11:33). If they could not act responsibly and lovingly, they were well-advised to *eat at home* (11:34).



MAKING IT PERSONAL

Examining Roles

All of us have equal value in Christ, but we do not all have equal roles. What a boring church we would be if we were all designed to do the same thing! God wants us to be fulfilled, not frustrated, with the differences in our roles. He may move you to aspire to a greater role later, but be sure to enjoy and make the most of the role you have today.

ASK: How has your fulfillment of your role (support/leadership) affected your worship of God? (Q15)

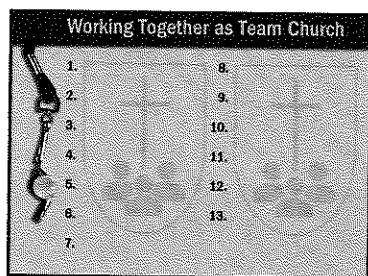
ASK: How can you honor God in the role (support/leadership) He has given you? (Q16)

Attitude Check

Paul commands us to exercise self-examination before participating in Communion. This follows his earlier discussion of the distinct roles that we have—especially as men and women—and of the *divisions* (11:18) that were present in the assembly. The people in Corinth struggled to live in submissive harmony with one another.

ASK: What do you find when you examine your attitude toward fellow believers? (Q17)

If you harbor any ill will, confess it and forsake it. Do all you can to restore your relationships with your fellow believers. Then join them to worship the Lord as He deserves!



Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Worship God in harmony with fellow believers.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 11:28 and 29. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.