

Session 7 – Questions

1 Corinthians 11:2-12:31 • True Worship

FIRST
CORINTHIANS
*The Church and the
Christain Community*

A. Review the Context

In chapters 5-7, Paul tackled the issue of sexual immorality and in chapters 8-9 he argued against eating meat offered to idols. In chapter 10 he combined these themes, admonishing the Corinthians against idolatrous worship, which he says is actually a worship of demons. Now in chapter 11, Paul turns and looks at the Christian alternative, the Eucharistic table, where the Christian community eats, drinks, and worships, and deepens their unity as a body. This is not just a separate chapter to be read in a vacuum; it flows from chapters 5-10. Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to celebrate the Christian liturgy and Eucharist in the same way that they previously celebrated their pagan feasts. The various pagan temples in Corinth may have been built to particular gods, but the same feasting, eating, getting drunk, and sexual immorality went on in each.

Given this cultural background, it isn't surprising that some of the Christians have returned to old ways and are treating the Christian liturgy as just another religious option. In fact, in chapter 11 Paul will say that when the Corinthians gather for the Eucharist, some get drunk and feast while others go hungry. They are treating the Christian liturgy as a pagan feast. It's no wonder that Paul emphasizes the need for modesty, order, and sobriety in Christian worship, a marked contrast to the wild, drunken orgies often a part of the pagan liturgies. Paul stresses that they must discern Christ's body when they receive the Eucharist. Not only are they to know that they are receiving his Body and Blood, they should also discern the presence of the Body of Christ in one another.

After his reminder that the Eucharist is the Body of Christ, Paul goes on in chapter 12 to speak about the Body of Christ as the community of believers. Chapter 12 must be read in the wider context of chapters 10 and 11. It is only in Christ, through Baptism and the Eucharist, that we have true unity. Paul rebukes the Corinthians for their obsession with their own particular spiritual gifts. These gifts are important, but they must be used in their proper context: not for private glory, but for building up the Body of Christ.

B. Read the Story

Now carefully read **1 Corinthians 11:2–12:31**. Ask yourself the questions: *Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?*

As always, pray before you read.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will draw you into the heart of the story. If you don't understand something, make a note to bring it up in the discussion.

True Presence (1 Corinthians 11)**Unveiling the Use of “Veil” in 11:3-16**

Scholars debate over the meaning of this passage, partly because the original is hard to translate. There are no Greek equivalents for “husband” or “wife” so the generic words for “man” and “woman” are used and the context helps determine the intention. Additionally, the Greek word translated “head” may also mean “ruler” or “source.” And while the RSV and other versions of the Bible use the words “veil” and “unveiled,” the Greek word for “veil” does not appear in the original. In other words, Paul never speaks about a veil—he doesn’t even use the word! Where “veil”/“unveiled” appears in the English, a more literal translation would be “cover”/“uncovered” or “bound”/“unbound.” The one exception is in 11:10, “That is why a woman ought to have a *veil* on her head, because of the angels,” where the more literal translation would be “authority.” In Corinth, Greek and Roman women did not typically wear veils. They did, however, bind up their hair in pins or braids as a form of modesty, as a sign that a woman was married and respectable. Prostitutes let their hair down to show their availability. Understanding such details in the text can help us make better sense of what Paul is trying to communicate.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

We have learned that it was common for pagan worship to include sexual immorality. Given the cultural mores regarding women’s hair noted above, what is Paul’s primary concern in 11:2-16? Can you think of a sense in which this concern still applies today?

Public Meals in Corinth

In the Corinthian society, the most wealthy and socially advanced guests at a dinner party would get the best wine and food. Pliny, a 1st century Roman historian and natural philosopher, tells us there were three different pitchers of wine. The best wine was for the elite, the second best for the middle class, and a third for the servants and free men. Those of lesser stations would also be given smaller portions and the worst food.¹

2. a. What is at the heart of Paul’s complaint in verses 17-21? Read also James 2:1-4,8.

1 Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), p. 196.

- b. How do we, like the Corinthians in this passage, conform ourselves to our culture more than to the teaching of Christ and his Church? Do we make an effort to treat everyone, regardless of social class, as a brother or sister in Christ?
3. Paul chastises the Corinthians for letting the poor go hungry. Read Proverbs 21:13. How do we close our ears to the poor, and what does Proverbs warn will be the result?
4. What critical point does Paul make in verses 2 and 23 regarding the teaching he is about to give?
5. Read 11:23-24. Before Paul repeats Christ's words of institution from the Last Supper, he clearly sets the origin for the Christian liturgy in a historical event "on the night when he was betrayed," recounting that the Lord "took bread," "broke it" and had "given thanks." By connecting the Christian liturgy to the events of Jesus' Last Supper, how does Paul differentiate it from pagan worship?
6.
 - a. Read 11:27-30. What is Paul saying here?
 - b. What is the consequence for not "discerning the body"? How does this make it clear that the Eucharist is not a mere symbol, but truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?

Varieties of Gifts, But the Same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-13)

7. In chapter 11, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians were misunderstanding and treating Christian worship in pagan terms. How does 12:1-3 reveal that Paul is also concerned that they are misunderstanding and mistreating the spiritual gifts?

8. In verses 4-6, Paul mentions each person of the Trinity: “same Spirit”, “same Lord,” and “same God.” (Paul usually uses the term “God” for God the Father and “Lord” for Jesus Christ.) While calling out the three Divine Persons, Paul repeats the word “same” before each Person, emphasizing that there is one God in three Persons. Now note in verses 4-11 how with each use of the word “same” or “one,” Paul also mentions various gifts. What analogy is Paul drawing between the Trinity (three Persons in one God) and the spiritual gifts (various gifts by the same Spirit)?

The One Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:14-31)

Paul’s Conversion and Teaching on the Body of Christ

Acts 9 tells the story of St. Paul’s conversion. Paul, then named Saul, was heading to Damascus to bind any Christians there and bring them back to Jerusalem when he was struck by lightning and blinded. The Lord spoke to him, saying: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” At first hearing, the Lord’s use of the singular pronoun “me” may have confused Saul. Saul had never met Jesus! He was persecuting Christians, yet Jesus spoke to him as if he was persecuting Jesus Himself. Saul was struck blind for three days and during that time, he must have pondered Jesus’ question over and over. With God’s grace, it became clear that what he was doing to Christians, he was doing to Jesus. The Christian community, the Church, was truly the Body of Christ. This must have seared deeply into Paul’s consciousness. Paul had to look back on his life and realize, “I did that to Jesus.” From the time of his conversion, St. Paul profoundly understood the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ.

9. What point does Paul make in verses 12-26 by using the analogy of the Church as a human body?
10. By using the phrase “body of Christ” (vs. 27), Paul weaves his teaching in chapters 10 and 11 on the Eucharist as the Body of Christ together with the teaching in chapter 12 on the Church as the Body of Christ. What is Paul challenging the Corinthians to do in verses 25-27?

D. Application

This question will help you apply one of the key themes of the lesson to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

- Every Sunday at Mass we profess in the Nicene Creed that “we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.” “Unity is the essence of the Church,” as the *Catechism* states in No. 813. The *Catechism* goes on to ask: “What are these bonds of unity? Above all, charity ‘binds everything together in perfect harmony’” (No. 815).

Why do you think the *Catechism* says that love is the foundation for unity? How can we live out such love and unity in a more concrete way?

Dear Lord...

Session 7 – Responses

1 Corinthians 11:2-12:31 • True Worship

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A. Review the Context

Discussion Leaders: Take some time to review the context and what was learned last week. If you like, have someone read the introduction to this lesson (“Review the Context” in the Questions). Place yourself in the overall story by finding the reading in the chart on page 2 of the Introduction.

B. Read the Story

Discussion Leaders: Ask someone to summarize **1 Corinthians 11:2 – 12:31**. Begin your group discussion time with a brief prayer.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Discussion Leaders: Take your group through the questions, encouraging participation. Try to make sure the points covered in the Responses are brought up, even though discussion will often go beyond them. It may help the process to have someone read each passage before it is discussed.

True Presence (1 Corinthians 11)

1. Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

We have learned that it was common for pagan worship to include sexual immorality. Given the cultural mores regarding women’s hair noted above, what is Paul’s primary concern in 11:2-16?

In the pagan temples, when a woman had her hair down it meant that she was sexually available. This is the context in which Paul is writing. He is primarily concerned with chastity and modesty within Christian gatherings. So he teaches that when Christians gather for the liturgy, there should be modesty—a woman should not uncover her hair as if she were in Aphrodite’s temple.

While bound hair no longer expresses modesty, the principle of modesty still applies today both for women and men. There should be modesty of dress, *especially* in the Christian liturgy. Modesty is *humility of the body*. The focus of liturgy, and the focus of our attention during worship, should be the glory of God, not the beauty of individual worshipers.

2. a. What is at the heart of Paul’s complaint in verses 17-21? Read also James 2:1-4,8.

At the heart of Paul’s complaint is that the Corinthians are treating the Christian liturgy like pagan worship and public meals, where social status determined one’s worth and members of high social status feasted while those of lower status went hungry. Paul says that there is *no place* for this in the Christian Church. In Christ, all are equal.

Paul is not alone in chastising partiality based on wealth and status. James writes “My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ ... For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘Have a seat here, please,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” For both Paul and James, the Christian community, the Church, is to be marked by unity and love, not divisions and factions.

- b. *How do we, like the Corinthians in this passage, conform ourselves to our culture more than to the teaching of Christ and His Church? Do we make an effort to treat everyone, regardless of social class, as a brother or sister in Christ?*

It is easy to judge others by how well they dress, by the car they drive, or the neighborhood they live in, instead of looking to a person's character. As God said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature ... for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). We need to look beyond the exterior and judge by the heart.

3. *Paul chastises the Corinthians for letting the poor go hungry. Read Proverbs 21:13. How do we close our ears to the poor, and what does Proverbs warn will be the result?*

Proverbs 21:13 says "He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard." We can "close our ear" not only by failing to help others in need, but also by being so consumed in our own pleasure that we don't even notice another's need. When we do this, we run the risk of being ignored ourselves when we are in need.

4. *What critical point does Paul make in verses 2 and 23 regarding the teaching he is about to give?*

In these verses Paul speaks of "tradition" which he "delivered" to the Corinthians. These traditions and instructions were not something that found their origin in Paul. Similarly, in chapter 7 regarding whether to marry, Paul was clear to say "I say, not the Lord" (vs. 12) or "I give my opinion" (vs. 25). Here in chapter 11, Paul is clear that what he is about to teach on the Eucharist and the Christian liturgy was "received from the Lord."

5. *Read 11:23-24. Before Paul repeats Christ's words of institution from the Last Supper, he clearly sets the origin for the Christian liturgy in a historical event "on the night when he was betrayed," recounting that the Lord "took bread," "broke it" and had "given thanks." By connecting the Christian liturgy to the events of Jesus' Last Supper, how does Paul differentiate it from pagan worship?*

In contrast to pagan worship, the Christian liturgy finds its locus in Christ, who even though he was betrayed, gave himself up for us. At the heart of the Christian liturgy is a historical event and person, Jesus Christ, who Himself instituted the first Eucharist, giving thanks and offering His very self for our salvation. Paul wants to remind the Corinthians that the liturgy they celebrate is a participation in that very first Eucharistic offering of Christ. Recall 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" The Christian Eucharist cannot be practiced like a pagan feast because it is a participation in Christ's self-gift.

6. a. *Read 11:27-30. What is Paul saying here?*

Paul is saying that when we consume the Eucharist, it is truly the Body and Blood of Christ. While the Eucharistic meal begins with bread and wine, their substance changes completely so that Christ truly becomes present under the appearances of bread and wine. Paul continues saying that we must recognize this true presence and not receive the Eucharist in an "unworthy manner" (i.e., in a state of grave sin).

- b. *What is the consequence for not "discerning the body"? How does this make it clear that the Eucharist is not a mere symbol, but truly the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?*

Those who receive Christ's Body and Blood in an unworthy manner (i.e., in a state of grave sin) bring God's judgment upon themselves; they bring what is unholy into God's holy presence. Thankfully God desires to make us holy and gives us the sacrament of Reconciliation. For this reason we should examine our conscience and when conscious of a grave sin, receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before going to Holy Communion (See *Catechism* No. 1385). Paul makes it clear

that some in the Corinthian community were experiencing sickness and even death as a result of not recognizing the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist and receiving the Eucharist in such an unworthy state.

Just prior to these verses, Paul repeated Christ's reference to "my body" and "my blood." Thus when Paul speaks of "profaning the body and blood of the Lord" and of "discerning the body" it is clearly the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist to which he refers. Additionally, Paul's exhortations must assume the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist, as a mere metaphor or symbol cannot be profaned and it is not possible to condemn oneself for not taking a metaphor seriously.

Varieties of Gifts, But the Same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-13)

7. *In chapter 11, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians were misunderstanding and treating Christian worship in pagan terms. How does 12:1-3 reveal that Paul is also concerned that they are misunderstanding and mistreating the spiritual gifts?*

Having directed the Corinthians to not treat Christian worship like the worship of the "dumb idols" they once followed, Paul begins chapter 12 with his concern that the Corinthians are also "uninformed" about the spiritual gifts. The errors which let them astray after "dumb idols" will likewise lead them to incorrectly view spiritual gifts as produced by human means and as occasions for human pride; such pride has already been demonstrated by the Corinthians. Paul quickly clarifies that the spiritual gifts are given and directed by the Spirit of God. Both Christian worship and spiritual gifts must be understood according to the Spirit, an understanding of which the pagans have no knowledge.

8. *In verses 4-6, Paul mentions each person of the Trinity: "same Spirit", "same Lord," and "same God." (Paul usually uses the term "God" for God the Father and "Lord" for Jesus Christ.) While calling out the three Divine Persons, Paul repeats the word "same" before each Person, emphasizing that there is one God in three Persons. Now note in verses 4-11 how with each use of the word "same" or "one," Paul also mentions various gifts. What analogy is Paul drawing between the Trinity (three Persons in one God) and the spiritual gifts (various gifts by the same Spirit)?*

Paul begins his analogy by recalling the One Triune God. In the Trinity there are three Divine Persons yet one and the same God. The three persons do not bring division or disunity into the Godhead. In a similar way, when the Spirit works among the members of the Church, dispensing various gifts to individuals, these gifts are not to bring division but are to be used for the "common good." Paul is trying to get them to see that there are different gifts given by the same Spirit for the good of the community. God gives all of these spiritual gifts for the building up of the community.

The One Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:14-31)

9. *What point does Paul make in verses 12-26 by using the analogy of the Church as a human body?*

Once again, Paul invokes a powerful analogy to drive home a theological point. (Recall how he earlier used such images as a field/vineyard and building/temple to represent the Church.) With the image of the body, Paul is saying "Yes, we are individuals, but individuals who are also like parts of the body—organically connected to it and to one another." In the Christian view, the gifts of each member are necessary to build up the whole body and community. Our modern culture tends to substitute the image of a body with that of a machine whose separate mechanical parts are often interchangeable or replaceable, focusing on the individual rather than also seeing the whole.

10. By using the phrase “body of Christ” (vs. 27), Paul weaves his teaching in chapters 10 and 11 on the Eucharist as the Body of Christ together with the teaching in chapter 12 on the Church as the Body of Christ. What is Paul challenging the Corinthians to do in verses 25-27?

Having set forth a detailed description of the Church community as the Body of Christ, Paul now personalizes his teaching by saying “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (vs. 27, emphasis added). Paul’s teaching on the Church as the Body of Christ is not mere metaphor, but rather a metaphysical reality that Paul is challenging the Corinthians to wake up to and live out in their own lives. Baptism incorporates us into the Body of Christ and our participation in the Eucharist deepens this union both to Christ and to one another. Because we all partake of the Eucharist together, we are a family, a fellowship (a point Paul reminded the Corinthians of in 1:9); we are brothers and sisters in the one Body of Christ. To neglect the needy in the community and to let them go hungry while others are full and getting drunk right in front of them is to fail to discern two bodies—1) the Body of Christ consumed in the Eucharist who they are called to imitate, and 2) the body of the brother who is a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. The gifts and blessings received in the Eucharist and manifested in the various spiritual gifts are to be used for the care of fellow members of the body, regardless of whether they are weak or strong, suffering or rejoicing. If we live out this care for our fellow members, there will be unity in the Body of Christ.

D. Application

Discussion Leaders: If time allows, have group members share their response to the following application questions:

- Every Sunday at Mass, we profess in the Nicene Creed that “we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.” “Unity is the essence of the Church,” as the *Catechism* states in No. 813. The *Catechism* goes on to ask: “What are these bonds of unity? Above all, charity ‘binds everything together in perfect harmony’” (No. 815).

Why do you think the *Catechism* says that love is the foundation for unity? How can we live out such love and unity in a more concrete way?

As a follow-up to this discussion, listen to or watch Tim Gray’s talk on Session 7: 1 Corinthians 11:2-12:31, *True Worship*.