

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 42 OF 104

Worship on Whose Terms

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	1 Kings 11-17
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 32-33
Gospels	Mark 10:32-11:14
General New Testament	1 Corinthians 10:23-11:34

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to settle one question in the class's mind: who decides how God is worshiped? Jeroboam answered it himself and ruined a nation for two centuries. The Corinthians answered it by social habit and were told that what they were doing was not the Lord's Supper. David, who had tried to manage his own guilt in silence, finally let God set the terms and found mercy waiting. If your members leave understanding that worship is response to revelation rather than expression of preference, the hour has done something lasting.

Doctrinally, three matters deserve careful handling. First, the principle of divine authority in worship, taught positively from Colossians 3:17 and 2 John 9 rather than as a list of grievances. Second, Romans 4's use of Psalm 32, which excludes earned merit but never excludes obedient faith, since the same Scriptures command repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. Third, the Lord's Supper as a weekly memorial and communion observed on the first day of the week, with self-examination that invites the penitent rather than fencing them out.

Formationally, the thread is the difference between what pleases us and what pleases God. Jeroboam's worship was convenient. The Corinthians' meal was comfortable for the people who mattered in that city. The crowd's Hosanna was thrilling and lasted five days. Ask your class this before you dismiss: name one thing you do in worship or service because it is what you have always preferred, and tell us how you would know if God had ever asked for it.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 1 Kings 11-17 first, and give most of the hour to chapter 12. Jeroboam's calves are the clearest case study in Scripture of worship a man designed himself, and teaching it as narrative lets the principle land before anyone feels argued with. Close by noting that every king afterward is measured by him.

Second session: Take up 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:34 second. It brings the same question into the assembly and into the Lord's Supper. Budget your time deliberately: ten minutes on liberty, fifteen on headship taught calmly, and the rest on the Supper, ending with 11:28 rather than with 11:29.

The other two readings: Mark 10:32-11:14 and Psalm 32-33 carry the private reading well. Ask the class to read Mark 10:45 every day this week and to notice how differently it defines greatness than their workplace does. Suggest they read Psalm 32 out loud and stop at verse 5 long enough to do what it describes.

The Kingdom Torn in Two

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 11 is the saddest chapter in the Old Testament's account of Israel's glory. The man who asked for a listening heart and who prayed the great dedication prayer ends up building high places for Chemosh and Molech on a hill facing Jerusalem. Nothing in the text suggests he renounced the Lord. He simply added, accommodated, and drifted, and the writer's verdict is that his heart was not perfect with the Lord as the heart of David his father.

The division that follows is both God's judgment and men's folly, and the text is comfortable holding those together. God announced the tearing through Ahijah; Rehoboam brought it on with an arrogant speech he had rehearsed with his friends. Jeroboam then commits the sin that defines the northern kingdom for the next two centuries. Notice that he did not invent a new god. He said, "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." He meant to worship the true God in a way of his own design, closer to home, on a schedule he controlled.

From chapter 14 forward the writer moves quickly, and his method is to judge every king by one question: did he walk in the way of Jeroboam? Asa gets commended, Omri gets a paragraph and a bad grade, and Ahab gets the worst review of all, complete with a foreign wife and a temple to Baal. Then Elijah appears with no introduction, no genealogy, and no preamble, and the drought begins. Chapter 17 is a quiet chapter before a loud one: ravens, a widow's last meal, and a boy raised from the dead.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The kingdom divides about 930 B.C. The ten northern tribes are called Israel and their capital eventually settles at Samaria; the southern kingdom of Judah keeps Jerusalem, the temple, and the line of David.
- Bethel and Dan sat at the southern and northern ends of Jeroboam's territory, placed for convenience so no worshiper needed to travel to Jerusalem.
- The Law commanded worship at the place the Lord chose (Deuteronomy 12:5–14), assigned the priesthood to Levi, and fixed the feast days by month and day. Jeroboam violated all three.
- Ahab's marriage to Jezebel, daughter of the king of the Sidonians, brought official Baal worship into Israel with state sponsorship (16:31–33).
- Zarephath lay in Sidonian territory, Jezebel's home country. God sustained His prophet inside the enemy's homeland, a point Jesus makes in Luke 4:25–26.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Solomon's fall is described in 11:1–8 as a heart being turned, not as a single decision. Trace how it happened, and name the small permissions that make that kind of slow turn possible in us.*

The text is careful: Solomon loved many foreign women, he clung to them, they turned his heart after other gods, and this happened when he was old. It was gradual, it was relational, and it came through legitimate affections misdirected. He did not wake up one morning and decide to serve Molech. He made an alliance, then another, then accommodated a wife's religion, then built her a place to practice it.

Ask the class what their own version of that would look like, and keep it out of the abstract. A friendship that slowly reshapes what you find acceptable. An entertainment habit that files down a conviction. A business relationship that begins requiring small silences. Solomon had more wisdom than anyone in the room and it did not save him, which is worth saying plainly to the most mature member present.

Question 2. *Jeroboam changed the place of worship, the object, the priesthood, and even the month of the feast (12:26–33). Talk through his stated motive, and explain why the writer says he devised the feast “of his own heart.”*

Jeroboam’s motive is stated in his own words in 12:26–27: he feared that if the people went up to Jerusalem to sacrifice, their loyalty would return to the house of David and they would kill him. Everything that follows is political risk management dressed in religious clothing. The phrase in 12:33 is the writer’s judgment, and it is devastating. The feast came out of Jeroboam rather than out of God.

That phrase is the doorway to the New Testament principle of authority in worship. Jesus quoted Isaiah about worship that is vain because it teaches as doctrine the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9). Paul warns about will worship (Colossians 2:23), and John warns about going beyond the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). Colossians 3:17 sets the standard positively: whatever we do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, that is, by His authority.

Question 3. *Jeroboam’s calves were convenient, popular, and sincere in their way. Where are we tempted to shape worship around what keeps people comfortable, and how do you tell the difference between an expedient and an innovation?*

Make the class work at the distinction, because it is where most congregational conflict actually lives. An expedient is a way of carrying out what God has authorized: a building, a time, a songbook, a public address system, cups on a tray. An innovation adds an element God did not authorize or changes what He specified. The question is never whether something helps or whether people like it, but whether the Lord has authorized the act itself.

Then press the harder direction. Jeroboam’s reasoning was pastoral on its face: he was making worship accessible, keeping people from a long trip, meeting them where they were. Any generation can talk itself into a calf for reasons that sound like love for people. Ask the class who gets to decide what pleases God in worship, and how we would know if we had quietly started answering that question ourselves.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the reasons Jeroboam gives himself in 12:26–28 for making the calves. What single fear lies underneath every one of them?*

He tells himself the kingdom may return to the house of David, that the people going up to Jerusalem will turn their hearts to Rehoboam, and that they will kill him. The fear underneath all three is loss of control: of the nation, of loyalty, of his own life. Fear is the most common engine of religious innovation. A man who is afraid will eventually manage what he cannot trust God to hold, and worship is usually the first thing he starts managing.

2. *Read 1 Kings 13 carefully. The man of God obeyed at the altar and disobeyed on the road home. Trace what happened to him, then read Galatians 1:8 and consider why the source of a message matters so much.*

The man of God delivered God’s word boldly to Jeroboam at the altar, refused the king’s hospitality because God had forbidden him to eat, drink, or return by the same road, and then was talked into disobeying by an old prophet who claimed an angel had spoken to him. He was killed by a lion on the way home. Galatians 1:8 says that even if an angel from heaven preaches another gospel, let him be accursed. A new message does not become true because the messenger is impressive, sincere, or religious. The word already given is the standard.

3. *Compare the two pieces of advice Rehoboam received in 12:6–11 and note who gave each. Read Proverbs 13:20, then write down who is currently shaping your decisions.*

The old men who had served Solomon advised him to speak kindly and serve the people, and they would be his servants forever. The young men he had grown up with advised him to threaten them with heavier burdens and scorpions. He took the second, and ten tribes walked away within a day. Proverbs 13:20 says that he who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed. Answers about personal counselors will vary; the useful follow-up is whether anyone in a person’s life is old enough to disagree with him.

4. Trace the phrase about walking in the way of Jeroboam through chapters 15 and 16. Count how many kings are measured by that standard, and consider what the writer accomplishes by the repetition.

The formula recurs for Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Omri, Ahab, and others; depending on how you count the variations it appears for roughly six or seven kings in chapters 15 and 16 alone, and it continues throughout 2 Kings. By repeating it, the writer establishes that one man's convenient innovation became the permanent standard of apostasy for a whole nation. Sin that gets institutionalized outlives the sinner by centuries.

5. *Elijah is fed by ravens and then sent to a widow who has nothing left (17:8–16). Name one place where you are waiting on God to provide through a channel you would prefer, and describe what obedience would look like if He chose a different one.*

Answers will vary. Listen for people who have decided in advance what God's help must look like: a particular job, a particular person, a specific amount arriving by a specific date. Elijah was sent to a starving foreign widow, which is the least promising address in the story, and God fed him there for a long time. The application is a willingness to obey a direction that does not look like provision yet.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jeroboam's calves are the Old Testament's clearest case study in worship men invented, and they are worth real time. Teach the principle of divine authority positively from Colossians 3:17, 2 John 9, and Matthew 15:9, and be careful not to turn the hour into a list of personal grievances. Establish the principle and let it do its own work.
- First Kings 13 is a difficult narrative involving a lying prophet and a severe judgment. Teach what the text says, note that the man of God had an unmistakable word from God and set it aside for a claimed new revelation, and resist the urge to explain everything the text leaves unexplained.
- Solomon's many wives are recorded as the cause of his fall, not as an approved practice. The standard has never changed from Genesis 2:24.
- Elijah's miracles confirmed him as God's messenger in a nation officially given over to Baal (compare Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). Do not let the widow's jar of meal become a giving formula; it is an account of God sustaining a prophet and a household during a judgment.

Blessed Is the Forgiven Man

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 32 is labeled a maskil, an instruction, and David wrote it to teach. That matters, because the psalm is not merely a record of relief; it is a man who has been through something turning around to keep others from repeating it. Many students connect it with the year between David's sin with Bathsheba and Nathan's visit, and verses 3 and 4 read like exactly that year.

The description of silence is physical and specific. His bones grew old through his roaring all the day long. God's hand was heavy on him day and night, and his moisture turned into the drought of summer. Then verse 5, which is the hinge: I acknowledged my sin, I did not hide my iniquity, I said I will confess, and You forgave. Read the verse slowly in class and notice how fast the forgiveness comes. The delay was never on God's end.

Psalm 33 has no title and follows naturally, as though the forgiven man in Psalm 32 turned to the congregation and said, now sing. It praises God as Creator whose word does what it says, as sovereign over the plans of nations, and as the only real security. Its most quoted line, that the nation whose God is the Lord is blessed, sits in the middle of an argument about where safety actually comes from. Horses, armies, and strength are all named and all dismissed.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 32 is one of seven psalms traditionally grouped as penitential, and it carries the heading maskil, a psalm of instruction.
- The pairing with Psalm 51 is natural: Psalm 51 is the confession itself, Psalm 32 is the reflection afterward.
- Selah appears three times in Psalm 32, probably a musical or liturgical pause; the psalms were sung in public worship.
- Psalm 33 is a hymn of praise, and its structure moves from a call to worship, to God as Creator, to God as ruler of nations, to a closing confession of trust.
- Paul quotes Psalm 32:1–2 in Romans 4 as part of his argument that righteousness is credited rather than earned, by both Abraham and David.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 32:3–4 describes what unconfessed sin did to David's body. Read those verses aloud, and talk about why silence ends up costing so much more than confession ever would.*

Silence costs more because it requires constant maintenance. A hidden sin does not sit still; it has to be guarded, defended, and paid for in energy every day, and David describes the bill in physical terms. Proverbs 28:13 states the same principle in a sentence: he who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

Be careful here not to suggest that every illness traces to hidden sin, because that is not what the psalm teaches and someone in your class is sick. The point is narrower and truer: the human being is one piece, and a soul under the weight of concealment carries it in the body. Ask the class what they have observed about carrying a secret, and what changed when they finally told somebody.

Question 2. *Verse 9 warns against being like a horse or a mule that has to be steered with a bit and bridle. What is the alternative David has in mind, and which of the two describes how God has had to handle you lately?*

The alternative is stated in verses 8 and 9: God says He will instruct and teach and guide with His eye upon you. A horse must be forced because it has no understanding of where its rider wants to go. A son who is paying

attention can be directed with a look. David is inviting his readers to be the kind of people who can be led by a word rather than a crisis.

Ask the second half honestly, and answer it yourself first if the class is slow to start. Most of us can name a season when God had to use the bridle: a consequence, a loss, a humiliation that finally got our attention. Then ask what it would take to be led by the eye instead, and note that it begins with actually reading the word He speaks through.

Question 3. *Psalm 33:16–17 says no king is saved by a large army and a war horse is a false hope. Name the modern equivalents we actually lean on, and discuss what would have to happen to loosen that grip.*

Verses 16 and 17 are blunt. No king is saved by the size of his army, a mighty man is not delivered by great strength, and a horse, the most advanced military technology of the day, is a vain thing for safety. The alternative comes in verse 18: the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy. Israel was repeatedly tempted to trust in cavalry and alliances, and the prophets repeatedly said no.

Our horses are usually financial and medical. A retirement account, an insurance policy, a security system, a reputation, a network of the right people. None of those are wrong to have. The question is which one your peace actually rests on at two in the morning. Ask the class what they would still have if their particular horse died, and what Psalm 33:20 offers to a person in that position.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Psalm 32 uses several different words for sin and several for what God does with it. List them, and note the distinct shade of meaning each one carries.*

The words for sin include transgression, which is rebellion or crossing a boundary; sin, which is missing the mark; iniquity, which is crookedness or perversity; and guile, deceit in the spirit. The words for what God does include forgiven, literally lifted or carried away; covered, hidden from view; and not imputed, not charged to the account. Together they say that every kind of wrong is met by every kind of mercy. God does not partially clear a man.

2. *Paul quotes Psalm 32:1–2 in Romans 4:6–8. Read that passage and explain the point Paul is making about how a man comes to be counted righteous.*

Paul is showing that righteousness is credited to a man by God rather than earned as wages, and he calls David as his second witness after Abraham. The point is that Abraham was counted righteous before circumcision and that David speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. Paul is excluding a system of merit and law-keeping as a means of earning salvation. He is not excluding obedient faith; the same writer says obedience from the heart brings freedom from sin and that we are buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:3–4, 17–18).

3. *Trace the movement of Psalm 32 from silence, to confession, to instruction, to joy. Mark the verse where God Himself begins to speak.*

Verses 3 and 4 are the silence, verse 5 is the confession and the immediate forgiveness, verses 6 and 7 draw the lesson for every godly person, and verses 8 through 11 shift into instruction and end in shouting for joy. God Himself speaks beginning in verse 8: I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. The forgiven man ends up as a channel of God's teaching, which is what the word maskil in the title promised.

4. *Psalm 33:6 and 33:9 describe creation by the spoken word. Compare Genesis 1:3 and Hebrews 11:3, and state what all three affirm about how the world came to be.*

Psalm 33:6 says by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and 33:9 says He spoke and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast. Genesis 1:3 gives the pattern, "And God said," and Hebrews 11:3 says the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made of things which are visible. All three affirm creation by divine command rather than by process, struggle, or pre-existing material.

5. *Psalm 32 calls the forgiven man blessed and the silent man miserable. Name the one thing you have never actually said out loud to God, and set the hour this week when you will say it.*

Answers will vary and stay private. Listen for movement rather than a report. Some members have never named a specific sin to God, only apologized in general, and the psalm is precise: I acknowledged, I did not hide, I said I will confess. Encourage them to name it specifically and out loud, and remind them that for the Christian 1 John 1:9 stands with the same promptness David experienced.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Romans 4 quotes Psalm 32, and someone in your class has been taught that this proves salvation by faith only. Handle it plainly and kindly: Paul is excluding earned merit, not obedience. The same Bible that says a man is justified by faith says he is not justified by faith only (James 2:24) and commands baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).
- Do not let “not imputing iniquity” be read as unconditional security. David’s own history shows a man who sinned grievously, confessed, and was forgiven, and Scripture warns believers about falling away (Hebrews 3:12–14; 2 Peter 2:20–22).
- Guard against the inference that physical suffering is always the result of hidden sin. Psalm 32 describes David’s particular experience; John 9:1–3 and Job forbid the general rule.
- Psalm 33:12 is about covenant Israel, not about any modern nation. It states a principle that applies to any people who honor God, but it does not make any present-day country the heir of Israel’s promises.

The Road Up to Jerusalem

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Mark tells us that Jesus was walking ahead of them on the way up to Jerusalem, and they were amazed and afraid. That detail is worth pausing over. He knew exactly what was waiting and He set the pace anyway. Then comes the third and most detailed passion prediction: delivered to the chief priests, condemned, handed to the Gentiles, mocked, scourged, spat upon, killed, and after three days risen.

James and John hear all of that and ask for cabinet positions. Jesus does not shame them; He tells them they do not know what they are asking, and then offers the only thing He can promise, a share in His suffering. When the other ten become indignant, He gathers them and states the kingdom's permanent standard: whoever would be great must be servant, and whoever would be first must be slave of all. Then verse 45, the center of Mark's Gospel, the Son of Man came to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.

Bartimaeus is the last healing in Mark and the last person healed before the cross, and Mark keeps his name, which suggests the man was known to the church later. He is also the first person in Mark to call Jesus Son of David publicly without being silenced. Then the entry into Jerusalem, deliberately arranged, deliberately royal, deliberately humble. And at the end of the day, no cleansing yet, no speech, just a look around the temple and a walk back out to Bethany. The fig tree the next morning tells you what that look concluded.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is the third passion prediction (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34), and it is the most detailed, naming both the Jewish leaders and the Gentiles.
- The “cup” in 10:38 is Old Testament language for a portion assigned by God, often of suffering or wrath (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17), and Jesus uses it again in Gethsemane.
- Jericho lay about fifteen miles from Jerusalem; pilgrims traveled this road in crowds at Passover.
- The entry fulfills Zechariah 9:9, where the king comes lowly and riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey. A king on a donkey came in peace; a king on a war horse came for conquest.
- The fig tree in 11:12–14 had leaves, which normally signaled fruit. Mark deliberately wraps the temple cleansing inside the fig tree account, which tells the reader how to read both.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *James and John ask for the best seats immediately after Jesus describes His own torture and death (10:35–37). Instead of crushing them, He asks whether they can drink His cup. What is He offering them, and what does He say is not His to give?*

He offers them the cup and the baptism, which is to say a share in His suffering, and He tells them plainly they will indeed drink it. James was the first apostle martyred (Acts 12:2) and John outlived them all in exile. What He says is not His to give is the seating: those places belong to those for whom they are prepared by the Father. Jesus refuses to hand out status even to His closest friends.

The exchange is a mercy, not a rebuke. They asked for glory and He gave them what actually makes a disciple, which is fellowship in His sufferings (Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13). Ask the class what they have been asking God for lately, and whether they would still want it if it came with His cup attached.

Question 2. *Bartimaeus is told to be quiet and shouts louder, and then Jesus asks a blind beggar what he wants. The need was obvious. Why would the Lord make him say it out loud?*

Because saying it out loud is an act of faith, and because Jesus consistently deals with people as persons rather than as problems. Bartimaeus had to move from a general plea for mercy, which could have meant a coin, to a specific request that only God could grant. "Rabboni, that I might receive my sight" is a confession about who he believes Jesus is.

Bring it into the class's prayer life. Vague prayers protect us from the risk of a clear answer, and many members pray in generalities all their lives. Ask them what they would say if Jesus asked them that question this morning, and whether they have ever asked God for that particular thing in those particular words.

Question 3. *Jesus defines greatness as being servant and slave of all, and points at Himself as the ransom (10:45). Where would that definition change something specific in your home or at your job this week?*

Notice that Jesus does not merely recommend service; He grounds it in His own mission and in a ransom. A ransom is a price paid to free someone, and the word puts the cross at the center of the definition of greatness. Christian service is not a technique for personal fulfillment. It is imitation of a Lord who paid.

Get specific or the class will nod and leave unchanged. At home, greatness may mean the parent who takes the miserable shift, the spouse who does the unnoticed job, the adult child who makes the call. At work, it may mean handing credit to someone who needs it more than you do. Ask for one name and one act, and ask them to do it without mentioning it to anyone.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out Mark 10:45 and identify the two things Jesus says He came to do. Read Isaiah 53:10-12 and note every connection you can find.*

He came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Isaiah 53 says the same thing in older words: it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, He made His soul an offering for sin, He bore the sin of many, He poured out His soul unto death, and He made intercession for the transgressors. The Servant of Isaiah and the Son of Man of Mark are the same person doing the same work, and Jesus clearly read His own mission out of that chapter.

2. *Trace what Bartimaeus does the moment he receives his sight (10:52). Compare the instructions given to the leper in 1:44 and to the healed man in 5:18-20.*

Bartimaeus immediately received his sight and followed Jesus on the road, which is the road to Jerusalem and the cross. The contrast with earlier accounts is deliberate: the leper in 1:44 was told to say nothing and told everyone, and the healed man of 5:18-20 wanted to come along and was sent home to tell his family instead. Here, at the end of the ministry, the command to silence is gone and the healed man joins the procession.

3. *List the details Mark gives about the colt in 11:1-7, then read Zechariah 9:9. How much of this had Jesus arranged, and what was He deliberately announcing by riding in that way?*

Mark records the village opposite, the colt tied where two roads met, a colt never ridden, the specific words to say if anyone asked, and the owners' immediate permission. Zechariah 9:9 had promised a king coming to Zion, just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey's colt. Jesus had arranged this, and He was making a deliberate public claim to be the promised King, while choosing the animal that announced peace rather than war. This was the one time He accepted open acclamation, and He did it on His own terms.

4. *Jesus walked into the temple, looked around at everything, and left (11:11). Read what He does the following morning in 11:15-17, and consider what that overnight pause suggests about how He acts.*

That evening He surveyed the temple and did nothing. The next morning He returned and drove out the merchants, overturned the tables, and quoted Isaiah and Jeremiah. The pause tells you this was not a loss of temper. It was a considered, deliberate act by someone who had looked carefully, slept on it, and returned. The Lord's anger, unlike ours, is never impulsive.

5. *The crowd shouted Hosanna and within five days had gone silent or worse. Name the one place where your public enthusiasm for Christ runs ahead of your private obedience, and what you will do about it this week.*

Answers will vary. Listen for the honest gap: enthusiastic singing and a prayer life that has quietly stopped; a reputation for faithfulness at the building and a temper at home; strong opinions about the church and no personal evangelism. The remedy is almost always something small and unglamorous started this week rather than a resolution made for the year.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The cursing of the fig tree is not a temper tantrum. It is an acted parable: a tree in full leaf advertising fruit it did not have, framed by Mark around the temple, which was full of religious activity and empty of what God wanted. Teach it that way and the difficulty disappears.
- “A ransom for many” is substitutionary and must not be narrowed into limited atonement. Scripture also says He gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6) and tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).
- The triumphal entry is not evidence of a failed attempt to establish an earthly political kingdom. Jesus came to Jerusalem to die, said so three times on the way, and rode a donkey precisely to say what kind of King He is (John 18:36).
- Do not use James and John’s request as an excuse to make the apostles look foolish. Mark includes their failures to show that following Jesus is learned slowly, which is the same mercy every member of the class needs.

All to the Glory of God

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The meat question ends with a workable rule. All things are lawful but not all are helpful or constructive. Buy meat in the market without cross-examining the butcher, because the earth is the Lord's and everything in it. Accept a dinner invitation from an unbeliever and eat what is set before you. But if someone deliberately tells you the meat was sacrificed, stop, not for your own conscience but for his. Then Paul lifts the whole discussion: whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

The paragraph on headship and the covering is one of the more debated in the letter, and honest brethren differ about whether the covering itself is bound today. Teach what is not in doubt. God has arranged relationships in an order, and He grounded that order in creation rather than in culture (11:8–9), which means it did not expire with Corinth. Within that order Paul affirms that in the Lord neither is independent of the other (11:11–12). The covering was the recognized sign of that order in that city, and Paul closes by noting that the churches of God have no custom of being contentious about it.

The Lord's Supper section is straightforward and searching. The Corinthians were assembling in such a way that divisions showed: some went ahead with their own meal, one was hungry and another drunk, and the poor were humiliated. Paul says this is not eating the Lord's Supper. He then repeats the words he received from the Lord, the bread, the cup, the new covenant in His blood, the proclamation of His death until He comes. And he warns that taking it in an unworthy manner, carelessly and without discerning the body, brings judgment. The instruction is to examine yourself, not your neighbor, and to wait for one another.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The macellum, the public meat market at Corinth, has been excavated; much of its meat came from temple sacrifices, which is why this was a daily practical issue.
- In Roman Corinth, head coverings in public assemblies carried recognized social meaning, which is why Paul can appeal to what was considered proper and to nature's own teaching (11:13–15).
- First Corinthians 11:23–26 is the earliest written account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, predating the written Gospels.
- Wealthy Corinthian hosts customarily served better food to higher-status guests. That practice apparently followed them into the assembly, which is the offense Paul addresses.
- Acts 20:7 shows disciples coming together on the first day of the week to break bread, and 1 Corinthians 16:2 marks the first day as the day of the collection; this is the apostolic pattern.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The rule in 10:31 is to do everything to the glory of God, and Paul applies it to something as ordinary as dinner. How does that standard change decisions that do not look religious at all?*

It moves the question from what is permitted to what is profitable, and it puts another person in the frame. Paul asks three things of every decision: does it build up, does it seek my neighbor's good, and does it glorify God. Very few choices in a week are religious on their face, and almost all of them can be run through those three questions.

Work an example or two in class. A purchase, a job change, a Friday night, a conversation about someone who is not present, what a Christian posts publicly. Ask the class whether they have ever made a decision that was defensible and still not constructive. Then ask what changes if the standard for a Christian is not "is this allowed" but "does this glorify God and help someone."

Question 2. *In 11:3 Paul gives an order: the head of Christ is God, the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man. He puts Christ inside that order. How does the relationship between the Father and the Son keep headship from meaning that one is worth less than the other?*

Because the Father and the Son are equally God and have always been. John 1:1 says the Word was God; Philippians 2:6 says He was in the form of God and did not consider equality with God something to be grasped at; John 10:30 says the Father and the Son are one. And yet the Son submitted to the Father perfectly (John 6:38; 1 Corinthians 15:28). Order and equality of worth exist together in the Godhead itself.

That is the answer to the assumption underneath most modern objections, which is that submission implies inferiority. It does not, or else Christ is inferior to the Father. Teach this with warmth and without defensiveness. God assigns different roles in the home and in the church (Ephesians 5:22–33; 1 Timothy 2:11–12; 3:1–7), and the women in your class are not second-class members of the body; they are, as 11:11 says, not independent of the man, nor he of her, in the Lord.

Question 3. *Paul tells the Corinthians that what they were eating was not the Lord's Supper at all (11:20). Talk through what had gone wrong, and what 11:28–29 asks of each of us before we eat.*

What had gone wrong is that the assembly's divisions were being acted out at the table. Each went ahead with his own supper; one was hungry, another was drunk; those who had nothing were shamed. The Supper is a communion in the body and blood of Christ and a declaration that the many are one loaf and one body (10:16–17), and they were using it to display the opposite.

Paul's remedy is not more rules but more attention. Let a man examine himself, discern the Lord's body, and wait for one another. Ask the class what actually occupies their minds during the Supper on a normal Sunday, and be willing to answer honestly yourself. Then ask what would help: arriving earlier, reading a passage beforehand, choosing one aspect of the cross to consider each week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace Paul's instructions about meat in 10:25–30: what he permits, what causes him to stop, and whose conscience he says is the deciding factor.*

He permits buying whatever is sold in the market without asking questions, and accepting a dinner invitation from an unbeliever and eating what is served without interrogating the host. He stops if someone specifically says the meat was offered in sacrifice. And he states plainly in verse 29 that the conscience he has in view is the other man's, not his own. His liberty is real, and he restricts it voluntarily so that his freedom is not judged by another man's conscience.

2. *Read 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 slowly and list what Paul says the covering signified. Then read 1 Timothy 2:8–12 and separate the abiding principle from the first-century sign of it.*

Paul says the covering signified the order God established (11:3), that it was a sign of authority (11:10), and that it was appropriate to what was recognized as proper in that setting (11:13–15). The abiding principle is the order itself, which Paul grounds in creation: man was not made from woman but woman from man, and not for her sake but for his. First Timothy 2:11–12 applies that same principle to the assembly by restricting teaching and exercising authority over men. The sign, the piece of cloth, carried its meaning within a culture that recognized it; sincere brethren differ about whether it is bound today, and Paul closes the discussion by refusing to be contentious about it.

3. *Write out what Paul says Jesus did and said at the institution of the Supper (11:23–26). Read Acts 20:7 and note when the disciples came together to observe it.*

He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said, "This is My body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." Paul adds that as often as they eat and drink, they proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Acts 20:7 shows the disciples coming together on the first day of the week to break bread, which is the New Testament's pattern and the practice of the Lord's church.

4. *Paul says a person should examine himself and discern the Lord's body (11:28–29). List what that examination ought to include, and name what it should never be allowed to become.*

The examination should include whether I am coming with a divided or hostile heart toward a brother, whether I am actually thinking about the death of Christ or about my week, and whether my life during the week has matched the covenant I am proclaiming. It should never become a test of personal worthiness that keeps a penitent Christian from the table. Paul says to eat, having examined; he does not say to abstain. The adverb in verse 27 describes the manner of eating, not the merit of the eater. None of us is worthy; that is why there is a Supper.

5. *Name one habit you could change over the next three Sundays that would make your participation in the Lord's Supper more attentive, and begin it this week.*

Answers will vary. Practical answers include arriving early enough to be settled, reading one of the crucifixion accounts before leaving home, putting the phone away entirely, and choosing one specific thing about the cross to consider each week rather than letting the mind wander. Ask the class in three weeks whether the change held.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Teach headship from the text and from creation, calmly and without harshness. God assigns men the role of leading in the home and in the assembly, and only men serve as elders, deacons, preachers, or teachers over assemblies including men (1 Timothy 2:11–12; 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Make it equally clear that this is about role, not worth, and that the sisters in the congregation are indispensable (11:11–12).
- On the covering itself, be honest that faithful brethren have understood its present application differently. State what the passage says, teach the principle it signified, and refuse to let the class divide over the sign. Paul's own closing note in 11:16 is a warning against contentiousness.
- In 11:27, unworthily is an adverb describing how a person eats, not a verdict on the person. Do not let a struggling member conclude that he must stay away from the table until he feels good enough; that is precisely backward.
- The bread and the cup are a memorial and a communion. They do not become the literal body and blood, and the Supper is not a re-sacrifice of Christ, who offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 10:10–14). Observe it on the first day of the week according to the apostolic pattern (Acts 20:7).

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 1 Kings 18–22 · Psalm 34 · Mark 11:15–12:17 · 1 Corinthians 12–13

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