

## Small Group Guide

### THE CROSS AND THE CHRISTIAN GATHERING

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

September 1, 2013

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

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Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

## GETTING STARTED

*Welcome* – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

*Looking Back* – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

*Looking Up* – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

### Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for His command to gather as His people for worship and fellowship. Pray our corporate gatherings will be free from distractions and selfish concerns. Praise God for His good design of men and women and for the differences between the genders He ordained. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance as we seek to understand Scripture that is often hotly debated. Thank God for instituting the Lord's Supper through which we continuously remember, celebrate, and proclaim the gospel. Pray our corporate gatherings will fuel our obedience to God's mission in the world.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are asking the church to pray for the advancement of the gospel through our college students as they return to fall classes on various campuses. We are also praying for Chelsea Community Church and Greg Davis, Pastor.*

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---

- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for God to raise up and call out individuals and families from our church to make disciples in other contexts around the world on a long-term basis. Join us this week as we pray for one another to be open and willing for God to use our lives however He pleases here in our homes, in Birmingham, and around the world. To learn more about unreached people groups and ways to pray visit [www.peoplegroups.org](http://www.peoplegroups.org).*

## MAIN TRUTH

### Message Outline

#### THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN GATHERING

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

#### Characteristics of Christian Gatherings...

- Glad submission to loving authority.
  - We are all submissive to the Word.
  - Men are specifically submissive to the Lord.
  - Women are specifically submissive to men.
    - Beginning at creation.
      - Look at God's order in creation.
      - Look at God's design in creation.
    - Based upon the nature of God.
      - The persons of the Trinity are equally divine.
      - The persons of the Trinity are positionally different.
      - This is loving authority and glad submission in beautiful relationship.
    - Because of the angels.
- Godly understanding of gender mutuality.
  - We complement one another.
    - Men and women have equal value.
    - Men and women have unique roles.
  - We celebrate our differences.
- Clear commitment to physical modesty.
- Profound sense of spiritual humility.
  - Drawing attention to the glory of God.
  - Deferential accountability to the churches of God.
- Selfless devotion to covenantal unity.
  - The Corinthian version of the Lord's Supper...
    - Neglected the needy in the church.
    - Deserved the discipline of Christ.
  - The Christian version of the Lord's Supper...
    - Who?
      - Christians (followers of Christ walking in repentance and faith) share in the work of Christ as they partake of the Lord's Supper.
      - Non-Christians see the work of Christ as they watch the Lord's Supper.
    - What?
      - A traditional misunderstanding: a change of substance that results in salvation.
      - A biblical understanding: a symbolic meal that reflects salvation.
    - When?

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- The only biblical expectation: observe it often.
- Where?
  - The only biblical requirement: gathering of the church.
- Why?
  - To remember the body and blood of Jesus.
  - To reflect upon our sin and His salvation.
  - To renew our commitment to Christ, the church, and the Great Commission.
  - To rejoice that Christ has set us free and is coming back.
- How?
  - Look within.
  - Look to others.
  - Look to Christ.

### *Message Summary*

In the previous two sermons, we discussed how believers can glorify God in all that they do, particularly with regard to sports and to work, and this week's sermon highlights how we can glorify God in the way that we gather together with other believers. Through Paul's attention to issues in the Corinthian church related to head coverings for women and to the Lord's Supper, we learn that Christian gatherings should be characterized by glad submission to loving authority, godly understanding of gender mutuality, clear commitment to physical modesty, a profound sense of spiritual humility, and a selfless devotion to covenantal unity.

## **WHY IT MATTERS**

### *Digging Deeper*

Because of Labor Day weekend, many people may not have heard this week's sermon, so take time at the beginning to review the passage and to summarize the sermon. With the sermon's focus on Christian gatherings, ask the group to identify what makes the gathering of Christians different from the gatherings of other groups of people. Identify a particular gathering (i.e., sporting event, book club, community organizations like the Junior League or Rotary Club, a school club, or sorority or fraternity) to which you can compare and contrast. Do we as Christians act differently, dress differently, eat differently, or talk differently than those in other gatherings? Does the cross of Christ uniquely affect what happens when Christians gather? In what ways? In your small group, are these distinctions evident? Use this time for evaluation as a small group. In what ways can your gathering as a small group better glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31)?

Since Paul jumps from food offered to idols to commentary on head coverings and the Lord's Supper, explain the context of 1 Corinthians to show how these topics fit together. In 1 Corinthians 8-10, Paul addresses the issue of food as related to questions and practices in the Corinthian church and concludes with the instruction to do all things to God's glory. He then addresses two more particular ways in which the Corinthian church was not honoring God when they gathered together, which is how head coverings and the Lord's Supper fit into the discussion. Their actions were not contributing to the unity and edification of the body and were insisting on their personal privileges to the detriment of the church's witness to outsiders.

Because people have different associations with the words "authority" and "submission," ask the group to explain their connotations of these two words, and as a group, define what these words mean in light of Scripture. How is glad submission to loving authority evident in the lives of the group members and in the

## Small Group Guide

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small group as a whole? In what ways are we submitted to the Word of God? In what ways do we need to grow with regard to glad submission to Scripture's teachings?

All believers are called to submit to the Lord, but as leaders in the home and in the church, men specifically are to submit to the Lord in these areas of calling (1 Cor. 11:3-4). In the Corinthian context, for men to wear head coverings dishonored Christ, their authority. We do not know why a man covering his head when praying or prophesying would dishonor Christ in the Corinthian culture, so while head coverings are not an issue in our time and culture, in what particular ways do men today dishonor Christ their authority? How can the men in the group walk alongside each other to combat these particular sins and to hold each other accountable in doing so?

In 1 Corinthians 11:3, 6, Paul states that the head of every wife is her husband, and by not wearing head coverings when praying or prophesying, she dishonors her husband and the Lord. Explain that verse three specifically talks about a *wife's* submission to *her* husband, and clarify that women are not called to submit to men in general, their boyfriends, other women's husbands, etc. The context of headship and submission is specifically the marriage relationship. While most women in this culture do not wear head coverings, what types of actions done by Christian women dishonor their husbands and disgrace Christ, particularly when believers gather?

Submission may be a taboo word to some in your group. If so, take time using 1 Corinthians 11:7-12 to explain God's design and Paul's supporting argument.

- **God's Creation Order**

- Why is it important for Paul to point out that woman was made from man, that man was made first?
  - God could have created man and woman at the same time and in the same way, but He didn't. He created man then woman. He made man out of the dirt, and He made woman out of man's rib.
  - By creating man first, man became the firstborn, which was significant in ancient culture. The firstborn male would receive the greater share of the father's estate, and he was regarded as the leader and the representative of his siblings. By creating man first, God set man as the leader of the family unit.
  - 1 Timothy 2:12-13 also roots its discussion of gender and male leadership in the church in the creation order established in Genesis 2.
- What does it mean for women to be created for men (v. 9)?
  - Look back at Genesis 2:18-25. God regarded man's solitary state as "not good." He knew the man needed a fitting complement, someone who was like him but different from him. The term used in Genesis 2:18 is helper, which is not a derogatory term in Scripture, especially since it is primarily used to describe God in the Old Testament. Being a helper is not inferior, it means that one has skills or abilities that another does not possess but needs. For example, if a water heater bursts or if a car breaks down, a helper – someone who is knowledgeable about the situation and able to assist - is needed to fix the problem.
  - The unique design of men and women contributes to their ability to more effectively shepherd families, support the body of Christ, and make disciples of all nations.
- Lest anyone read 1 Corinthians 11:7-10 and think that (a) women are not in the image of God or (b) women are inferior to men, Paul uses verses 11-12 to remind believers that men and women have equal value and dignity and unique roles. Both men and women are made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28).
  - In what ways do the men and women in this small group or in this church complement each other?

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### • God's Nature

- Read 1 Corinthians 11:3, for this verse establishes that glad submission to loving authority is rooted in the nature of God. Discuss how headship and submission is depicted in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.
- What example of loving authority does God the Father establish? What can men learn about their calling from the Father's example? What example of glad submission does Christ set forth? What can women learn about their calling from Christ's example?
- In the sermon, Pastor David issued the following quote. Discuss the implications of these words written by Wayne Grudem.
  - *"We can say then that a relationship of authority and submission between equals, with mutual giving of honor, is the most fundamental and most glorious interpersonal relationship in the universe. Such a relationship allows interpersonal differences without 'better' or 'worse,' without 'more important' and 'less important.' And when we begin to dislike the very idea of authority and submission—not distortions and abuses, but the very idea—we are tampering with something very deep. We are beginning to dislike God Himself."*

With regard to the Lord's Supper, the people in your group may come from a variety of different traditions. Identify common misconceptions about the Lord's Supper. Ask what they know and what questions they have about the Lord's Supper. Explain the situation that was occurring in the Corinthian church with the rich humiliating the poor when they participated in the Lord's Supper. What did this communicate to the nonbelievers around them? How do we express selfless devotion to covenantal unity?

Consider looking back at the Gospels and discussing the context of the Lord's Supper (see Matt. 26:26-30; Mk. 14:22-26; Lk. 22:14-23). Christ instituted this practice on the night He was arrested, and He did so as the disciples and He celebrated the Passover meal together (see Ex. 12-13). In the Passover meal, a lamb was slaughtered in order to protect the life of the firstborn, and the blood of the lamb on the house's doorpost meant that the angel would pass over that home, exempting the firstborn from judgment. By using the Passover meal to explain His impending sacrificial death, Christ instituted a new meal – the Lord's Supper – by which His people would remember how the shedding of His blood protects them from experiencing God's judgment for sin. In the Passover meal, the head of the family or group would explain the symbolism of the dishes served at the meal (the bitter herbs, roasted lamb, the unleavened bread, etc.), and at the Last Supper, Christ followed the structure of the Passover meal but provided His own words of interpretation for the bread and the wine. During the meal, four cups of wine were passed around for those at the table to drink. The fourth cup was called "the cup of consummation," and this was the cup that Christ did not drink with the disciples because He would wait to drink that cup with them at the real consummation. We not only eat this meal to remember Christ's sacrifice but to anticipate the meal we will eat as we celebrate our eternal communion with Christ in the heavenly sanctuary (Matt. 26:29).

For Christ-followers, baptism and the Lord's Supper serve as signs of our covenant relationship with God, which is why this meal is only for those who are part of the covenant community. The Lord's Supper is not merely an addition to our worship gatherings; it is an integral part of how we worship God, which is why Paul focuses attention on the importance of examining our hearts before we take part in this meal (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Encourage the group to share what they do or think about as they prepare to participate in the Lord's Supper or as they engage in this meal. Ask the group to evaluate what changes need to occur in the way they prepare to participate in the Lord's Supper.

If the group consists of parents, take time to discuss how to explain the meaning and the purpose of the Lord's Supper to children.

For more information about the Lord's Supper, listen to the sermon "The Lord's Supper: Celebration of the New Covenant" (March 29, 2009) on radical.net.

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## NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

### Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- Whether in church services, small groups, or times of fellowship, what makes the gathering of Christians different from the gatherings of any other group of people?
- Why is glad submission to loving authority an important characteristic of the gathering of God's people? Describe what glad submission looks like for the believer, specifically with regard to the church body. How is submission to the Word evident in each person's life? How is it evident in the small group?
- Why is it important that the design of male headship and female submission is based on the nature of God? How has sin distorted our understanding of these two concepts? Men, in what ways do you need to grow in practicing loving headship? Wives, in what ways can you practice glad submission towards authority this week?
- Why is it important to have a godly understanding of gender mutuality? In what ways can
- How do we celebrate our differences as men and women and honor each other in our relationships with and attitudes toward believers of the opposite gender? In our culture and context, how can your small group, particularly if it is a co-ed group, best reflect glad submission to loving authority and godly understanding of gender mutuality?
- Define modesty. In what ways can men and women demonstrate a clear commitment to modesty? For women in particular, discuss specifics when describing what constitutes modest dress. Why is modesty important? What motivates your decisions to dress the way that you do? Do your motivations honor Christ?
- Describe humility. Why is humility important? In what ways should humility manifest itself in our lives? What hinders us from practicing humility? Discuss what it looks like for humility to be a characteristic of Christian gatherings. How are we drawing attention to God's glory when we interact with each other and when we gather together?
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 describes the rich neglecting the needy in the body. In what ways can you as an individual and the small group as a whole better care for the needy within our faith family or address needs within the small group?
- What is the significance of the Lord's Supper? Why is important for Christ-followers to participate in this meal? Why are unbelievers invited to watch but not partake of this meal?
- What should be our mindset as we take part in the Lord's Supper?
- Why is it important to confess sin, forgive others, and ask forgiveness before we partake of this meal? What sin in your life needs to be confessed to God and turned from? Are there barriers between you and any other Christ-follower that need to be addressed? Are there any brothers or sisters in need whom you have neglected? How can you selflessly love them as you celebrate the sacrificial love of Christ?
- Why should this meal renew our commitment to Christ, to the church, and to the Great Commission?