

When Together...

Week 11 in Our Weekly Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Orchard Park Wesleyan Church

Week of November 18, 2018

Introduction

For the past four weeks, we have been studying Paul's response to specific questions or protests that the Corinthian church had addressed to him in their previous letter. Chapter 11 marks a departure from a fairly conversational response and returns us to a more pointed rebuke like we read at the beginning of the letter. Paul had either noticed (through some of what the church mentioned in its letter to him) or heard about (as he did from Chloe's people earlier) two issues that necessitated correction: appropriateness in corporate worship and certain abuses of the Lord's Supper. Where the offense is minor but still in need of correction, Paul's tone remains somewhat conversational and appeals to the intelligence of his readers; where the offense is most grievous, Paul hits this church with a forceful rebuke.

We'll notice that the deeper issues of arrogance, selfishness, permissiveness, worldliness, and a misapplication of freedom are again at the core of the two problems Paul addresses in this chapter. We'll do well to notice that these deeper issues affected nearly every outward behavior of the church. Like we studied last week concerning ancient Israel's idolatry, "these things happened as a warning to us." Not one of us is above such transgression, so let's study with soft hearts this week and pray for God's voice to speak clearly even when the details in the text may seem hard to relate to our own lives.

Day 1

Holding on to What is Important

“But if anyone wants to argue about this, I simply say that we have no other custom than this, and neither do God’s other churches.”

1 Corinthians 11:16

We’ve spent some time throughout our study of 1 Corinthians discussing how we, as followers of Jesus, are to be different from the rest of the world. This is so important, and it’s one of the major lessons we can learn from 1 Corinthians. If we’re going to be serious about God, we have to loosen our tight grip on this world. But as we study over the next few days, we’ll find that although we want to come out from the world and keep God in His rightful place at the center of our lives, God doesn’t call us to be unaware of the culture around us; nor does He find it irrelevant. Some of what we encounter culturally has its roots in God’s design as He intended it at the beginning (some certainly does not!), and therefore, our respectful handling of such serves to honor and glorify God.

Please read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

- For what did Paul commend the Corinthian church in verse 2?
- What is the first word in verse 3?
- What is the physical/cultural issue that is being discussed in these verses?

How I love Paul’s method of confrontation! It is displayed here in perfect form as he compliments the Corinthian believers for following the teachings he handed down to them, then immediately serves his recipients a “but” and dives head-first into a correction that closely relates to the commendation.

This correction that Paul writes may sound confusing at first because the word “head” is repeated so often. We’ll handle that topic in tomorrow’s discussion of headship. Today, let’s focus on the spiritual

implications of the cultural practice that Paul addresses: the act of covering the head. It's important to note that scholars are divided on what type of "covering" is in question here. Many agree that Paul was likely talking about a piece of clothing worn on the head to signify marriage, but others assert that Paul was referring to how a woman wore her hair. A hairstyle could have been considered shameful because it was "uncovered" in the sense that it hung loose as in mourning or because it left the woman's head less covered by being somehow less feminine (cut short) and therefore blurred gender differences. Our goal today is not to discuss the covering itself but rather to understand that cultural appropriateness can honor our families, church, and God; similarly, by ignoring standards of appropriate dress or behavior, we can bring dishonor.

Considering all the arguments the Corinthian church raised in defense of their freedom in Christ, I don't think we're too far off-base to wonder whether that freedom influenced this particular choice to leave tradition by the wayside in favor of a more "liberated" expression of public worship. Based on our study of chapters 8-10 especially, such thinking would not be out of character for this church. However, as we also learned, our freedom in Christ does not entitle us to make selfish choices. Many decisions directly affect the conscience of others and therefore should be made with every effort to build up and encourage the faith of our brothers and sisters in Christ—and as a witness to unbelievers. The same applies to cultural traditions that serve a godly purpose or that, by being neglected, may somehow offend another person. That is the issue at hand in the Corinthian church as it pertained to head coverings.

By rejecting what was appropriate culturally—especially as they gathered to serve and worship in Christ's name—some Corinthian women were dishonoring their husbands and ultimately God Himself. The same can still be true for us. While we don't have to worry about head coverings or even hairstyles these days, we still make choices concerning our appearance or behavior that can be considered either appropriate or inappropriate in a church setting.

- What choices do we have today that present opportunity for showing appropriateness and bringing honor in our worship or inappropriateness and bringing shame?

Not one of us wants to bring dishonor in our worship. So how do we honor God in a world with ever-changing values and culture? How do we balance our freedom in Christ with honoring tradition? To what do we hold on, and of what can we let go? I think the key is to remember Who we most want to honor: the Unchanging One. This doesn't mean that we can never change, but it does cause us to reflect on how the values around us stack up against God's unchanging nature. To approach this, let's consider Paul's charge to Timothy and his letter to the Colossians.

Please read 1 Timothy 1:3-11, 2 Timothy 1:13-14 and Colossians 1:9-14.

Paul began 1 Corinthians 11:2 by commending the Corinthian church for holding to his teachings. In some other translations, the word for "teachings" is rendered "traditions." Regardless what word is used,

Paul is commending the Corinthians for keeping what he passed on to them. In a sense, they're keeping his teachings by holding onto them as tradition.

This isn't unlike what Paul says in 1 and 2 Timothy. Even the Law was good when it was used correctly—to support the “wholesome teaching” that comes from the Gospel. The Gospel is the “precious truth” to which we cling and with which we have been entrusted. We keep it close to our heart and guard its truth; we pass it down to our children and grandchildren; we proclaim it to a lost world. There is no compromising and no changing the message and truth of the Gospel of Christ. That is our first responsibility.

Now let's hone in on 1 Timothy 1:5 as it relates to our reading in Colossians. Paul mentions that the purpose of his teaching is “love that comes from a pure heart, *a clear conscience*, and genuine faith.” Our second responsibility as we navigate our world and culture, being sensitive to others but clinging to Christ's truth, is to uphold and teach the qualities that God wants to see in His people. How? As we keep finding in our studies, we seek to know Him more. We pray for knowledge of His will, spiritual wisdom, and understanding. Then the choices we make become less confused by the changing world around us because we are rooted in the Unchanging One.

Furthermore, our lives become characterized as those that “always honor and please the Lord.” We're not just proclaiming the truth of Christ's Gospel with our words. We're living with clear consciences, teaching the Good News by example, and upholding God's truth in action. In so doing, we bear fruit and continue to grow in the Lord. We know Him better and better, and our lives reflect His love.

Consider: Our culture and the world around us are not unimportant to God. He understands the challenges of a changing world but calls us to plant ourselves firmly in the soil of His unchanging Truth. The more we know Him and seek to live lives that please Him in everything, the easier some decisions concerning cultural change will be.

Pray: Ask God to give you a heart that seeks to honor Him even in everything; ask Him to guide you into decisions and behaviors that will do so.

Day 2

Headship and Authority

“But there is one thing I want you to know: The head of every man in Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

1 Corinthians 11:3

Most of us can easily accept that there is a hierarchical authority in society; it's when authority infringes on our view of our own independence and freedom that we tend to take issue with it. But God has clearly established such a hierarchy, and it even affects the Trinity. Christ is no less God than the Father; He shares completely in all attributes of deity and the fullness of glory. He *is* God. However, even Christ recognizes the authoritative role of the Father.

Please read John 17:1-5.

- What evidence do you see that Christ is equal with the Father in deity?

- What evidence do you see that indicates that the Father holds a role of authority, even over the Son?

If Christ—the One who spoke the world into creation—can acknowledge the authority of His Father, then we certainly can acknowledge His—and whatever other authoritative roles God institutes.

1 Corinthians 11 has sparked a good deal of argument from believers and unbelievers alike because it broaches the subject of women's rights with the mention of a wife being under her husbands' authority. We talked about this a few weeks ago when we studied the marriage relationship, but today's discussion is still relevant. Many have taken the position that Paul had a low estimation of women because he required some sort

of head covering in public worship and reminded them that they were under their husbands' authority. While he certainly said those things, any interpretation that suggests a low esteem of women in Christianity is simply not true.

First, it's important to note that this conversation seems to specifically apply to the married women of the church by reason of the use of head coverings and by Paul's mention of woman being the "glory" of man. Not every woman is the glory of every man, but God created one wife (Eve) to be the perfect compliment and completion of one husband (Adam). At the sight of his wife, Adam joyfully praised God, and in a sense "gloried" in his wife (Genesis 2:18-24). So the issue of a woman being under her husband's authority is not a blanket statement indicating that all women are to be under every man's authority but rather a reminder that God instituted a hierarchy of authority within the family. (Ephesians 5:22 supports that viewpoint.). Just as a husband is responsible to Christ and should seek to honor Him, so should a wife seek to honor her husband.

I want to look at one or two more things in these verses that reinforce Paul's high estimation of women within the church before we move on to consider why a topic such as headship is so critical to us today.

- Please look at 1 Corinthians 11:5 again. In what ways were the women Paul addressed serving their church?

- Now fill in the blanks for 1 Corinthians 14:1, 5.

“Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the _____ special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to _____.” (14:1)

“I wish you could all speak in tongues, but even _____ I wish you could all _____. For prophecy is _____ than speaking in _____ tongues, unless someone interprets what you are saying so that the whole church will be strengthened.” (14:5)

We’ll be studying spiritual gifts in a few weeks, but it’s worth noting today that Paul had a very high regard for the gift of prophesy, even acknowledging it as one of the greater gifts of the Spirit. In chapter 11 then, by addressing the women in the church who indeed were prophesying and praying, Paul is acknowledging that women are full recipients of the greater gifts and are valuable members of and contributors to the Body of Christ.

We don’t have time to discuss it in much detail today, but Paul also takes great care to point out the interdependence of men and women in verses 11:11-12. While a husband is the head of his wife, there is still an interdependence in the relationship that reinforces the equal value of each partner. Though the *roles* are different just as we see in the Trinity, the *value* is equal.

Why am I making such effort to defend Paul’s estimation of women in light of his reminder to uphold and honor authority as God established it? Because we live in a culture that is bleeding from abuses in headship, and if we don’t understand God’s intended design, we can’t function healthily ourselves—much less provide comfort to others who may be suffering from some of these abuses.

Our world—and the United States in particular—is in a state of upheaval because of tragedies like those that inspired the #MeToo movement. Sadly, such grievous abuse has been occurring for years, decades, even centuries. We’re making strides to identify abuse and correct some injustices, but the repercussions from abuse are intense and long-lasting. Most extend far beyond the individual victims to affect families and society as a whole. How our God must grieve! When Christ returns, He will bring everlasting justice to the oppressed and abused. Until then, we are His hands and feet and the reflection of His glory. Our responsibility is to uphold His truth, protect the weak, and comfort the hurting. Those who are in positions of headship must lead as Christ did.

Please read Ephesians 5:25-27.

- How did Christ love His church (v.25)?

- For what purpose (vv. 26-27)?

Christ's headship is one marked by the beautiful scars of sacrifice. The Great I Am willingly laid down His life so that His beloved could be made pure and holy. He had all glory and authority with the Father in Heaven, yet He gave it up in order to serve and to save the ones He loved. Christ used His authority to save and purify—for the benefit and building up of the ones He rules over.

Please read Luke 22:39-45.

- Write verse 42 in your own words.

We included this passage in Luke in our devotional last week as we studied the importance of prayer in resisting temptation. I include it again today to draw attention to Christ's surrender to the authority of His Father. As the Savior prayed, he sweat blood at the thought of what lay ahead, yet the Son submitted to His Father's plan. It wasn't easy, but Christ lovingly and willingly accepted the authority of His Father.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul clearly lays out the order of headship as God designed it. Though our world suffers from abuses of such, a godly approach to authority and headship are meant to *enhance* relationship and community. It's our job to show this by example, whether in leadership or humble submission.

Consider: How difficult is it for you to submit to those God places in authority? How difficult is it for you to exercise your own authority by serving others rather than affirming your position over them? How might you better emulate Christ in both areas?

Pray: Thank God that He designed roles of authority and headship for our building up. Ask Him to heal any wounds you have from mishandled authority. Ask Him to help you as you lead and as you submit to leadership. Finally, ask God to show you how you can shine the light of His love, compassion, and healing into this world that has suffered from abuses of authority.

Day 3

As Received from the Lord

“For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.””

1 Corinthians 11:23-24 NLT

In this second half of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul swiftly shifts his focus to what he heard reported about the Corinthian church in relation to the Lord’s Supper. He has no commendation for them here, for they have erred seriously. Let’s start with our reading in 1 Corinthians so that we grasp the basic problem Paul needed to correct; then, we’ll research God’s Word for a better understanding of the Lord’s Supper and why Paul was so outraged at the Corinthian church’s handling of it.

Please read 1 Corinthians 11:17-26.

- What was the Corinthian church’s basic error as it pertained to the Lord’s Supper (v. 20)?
- How was this manifested (v. 21)?
- What was the result (v. 22)?

At the outset of our study in 1 Corinthians, we learned that the church suffered from divisions among its people. While the divisions Paul mentioned early-on seemed to derive from preferring one leader over another, the divisions in chapter 11 seem to result more from differences in social or economic status. Some gathered together and partook of the Lord’s Supper selfishly—eating and drinking to excess—leaving some to go hungry and ignoring the poor. No wonder Paul is outraged! This is in direct opposition to the character of Christ and what He instituted at the Last Supper.

Please read Luke 22:14-20.

- Fill in the blanks:

17—"Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, 'Take this and _____ it among yourselves.'"

19—"He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he _____ broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'This is my _____ body, which is _____ for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"

20—"After supper he took another cup of wine and said, 'This cup _____ is the new _____ between _____ and his people—an _____ agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a _____ for you.'"

I know the exercise above is a little basic, but it helps us recognize just how much Jesus emphasized sharing, giving, and self-sacrifice as He brought forth the New Covenant. We celebrate this covenant as He told His disciples to do it: in *remembrance* of Him. We cannot honor the remembrance of Christ by trampling others and indulging self, but that is exactly what the Corinthian church was doing—and that is why Paul saw the need for a strong rebuke.

In verse 23, Paul says that he passed on to the Corinthians what he "received from the Lord himself." Paul then goes on to quote what Christ said to His disciples at the Last Supper. This does two things for the Corinthian church and for us:

It gives authority to the institution of the Lord's Supper as Paul passed it down to the Corinthians. Let me first state the obvious as a reminder: what we celebrate now as Communion is not a man-made ritual. Christ, our Savior and the Son of God, commanded His disciples to eat and drink in order to remember what He was about to do for them. So we also do now, proclaiming Christ's death—His marvelous sacrifice on our behalf—until He returns. By His death, we are forgiven of our sins and made holy before the throne of God. By proclaiming Christ's death, we remind ourselves of the Hope that is to come, and we proclaim God's unfathomable love and mercy to the world that watches us closely. "He *will* come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him" (Hebrews 9:28b, emphasis mine). So we proclaim His death as we wait in the hope of His return.

It makes us consider the significance of what Christ passed down. We can't overstate the significance of what Christ did when He instituted the New Covenant. I'm struggling to convey this with words. It's a spiritual truth so deep and profound that the Spirit swells my heart, and I'm left speechless. Let's consider, though, how unbelievable it was (and is) that Christ instituted the New Covenant with His close group of disciples at Passover the evening before His betrayal and death.

Please read Deuteronomy 4:9-14 and Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Most of us are not Jewish by birth, and as such, I wonder if we can quite grasp the significance of Christ did when He ushered in the New Covenant at His Last Supper. His apostles should have understood, but I wonder if they even grasped it that night. Most of them were likely raised with an acute awareness of

their Covenantal relationship with God; their parents would have diligently passed down history and tradition by telling the story of the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness and the origin of the Mosaic Covenant. These men who served Christ and shared His last Passover meal with Him anticipated the day when God would bring about the new covenant He promised through the prophet Jeremiah. Can you imagine what they thought when Jesus proclaimed that He was doing so that very night? That the New Covenant was guaranteed by *His* blood?

The promised New Covenant was to be a complete change in the way God related to His people. God said He would redeem His people and write His laws on their hearts; they would know their God personally. Christ told His disciples that night that He was the beginning of exactly that. And as we know now, He fulfilled it perfectly. He—the Word of God—is in our hearts; through Him, our wickedness is forgiven, and our sins are forgotten. Praise God.

Paul confronted the Corinthian church because they were abusing the sacred privilege and reminder given to him, to them, and to us by Christ Himself. In their selfish handling of the Lord's Supper, the Corinthians undermined the death of Christ and "treat[ed] the blood of the covenant...as if it were common and unholy." Thus, their error was great, and as we'll study tomorrow, it came with severe consequences.

Consider: When Christ sacrificed Himself on the cross, He completely changed the way humanity related to God. He fulfilled every requirement of the Old Covenant and ushered in the New. He restored peace and relationship between God and His people. When we take Communion, this is what we celebrate. Take a moment and really let that sink in.

Pray: Thank God that Jesus was always the plan. Thank Him that in His life, Christ was perfect and completely fulfilled every requirement of the Law; that in His death, He "was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people" (Heb. 9:28).

Day 4

Judgment and the Lord's Intervention with His Own

"Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world."

1 Corinthians 11:32 NLT

Yesterday, we examined how the Corinthian church was abusing the Lord's Supper and why that was such a serious offense that required swift correction. Today, we'll continue our discussion by focusing on God's reaction to such an offense. God's judgment is never a pleasant subject, but because He is just, His judgment is necessary. We cannot, however, separate God's judgment from His love for us.

Before we continue on the subject of God's judgment, please read Psalm 103:8-18.

God is righteous. His judgment is just, and sometimes He necessarily exercises it with His own

people. But God is indeed also “compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love” (Psalm 103:8). God will never exercise judgment on His people apart from His unfailing love for us. Though we were made perfect at salvation, God continues His sanctifying work in us to make us *holy*—and sometimes, as we’ll see today, He judges and disciplines His own people for that purpose.

Please read 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 and 1 Peter 4:17.

- According to 1 Peter 4:17, where must God’s judgment begin?
- 1 Corinthians 11:31 suggests that God’s judgment is necessary when we fail to do what?
- Based on 1 Corinthians 11:32, why do you think this is?

Although Paul acted swiftly and strongly to correct the Corinthian church, our reading today tells us that they were already under the judgment of God because, by abusing the Lord’s Supper as they did, the Corinthian believers sinned against the very body and blood of Jesus. Shall we take a moment to consider how precious Christ’s body and blood are to His Father?

Please read Hebrews 10:29-31.

The language in this passage is severe, and rightly so. Jesus is God’s Beloved—His Only Son—and Christ offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice to ransom back what He and the Father loved—us. God takes any sin that dishonors His Son’s body and blood personally, and He will quickly and severely judge that transgression.

Such was the case in the Corinthian church when Paul sent them this letter. People were sick and dying, and that, Paul says, was the direct result of their failure to examine themselves and handle the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner. (We discussed the unworthy manner with which they handled it yesterday.) We are rightly reminded to examine ourselves before we share in Christ’s body and blood, too. Such a privilege is one we enter into with reverence.

While Paul’s primary focus in this passage is on the proper handling of the Lord’s Supper, we can also draw additional applications for ourselves:

God judges His own differently from how He will judge the world. God’s judgment on His own people is given to discipline us now so that we are spared from the condemnation that awaits the world. I’ll

never forget what my college friend told me her father used to say regarding discipline: he'd sooner break her legs than let her run into traffic. It's a crude analogy, but the point hit home to me. Discipline is never pleasant, and a parent doesn't want to do it—but he or she will do whatever it takes to protect a child from a greater evil. So it is with our Heavenly Father, too.

Even God's harsh judgment is driven by His love.

Please read Deuteronomy 4:25-31.

- What discipline would the Lord bring upon the Israelites when they broke covenant with Him? List what they would suffer.
- What would that discipline cause the Israelites to do (v. 29)?
- What would be the result of their seeking?

God promised no easy consequences for breaking His covenant, but even His harsh judgment was done with mercy and love. God's intention in disciplining His people was to get their attention and cause them to turn back to Him. As in the parable of the Prodigal Son, God sometimes hands us over to our own stubbornness and sinfulness so that we can come to the point where we realize that He is indeed the One in authority over us. He loves us, and His rules are for our good. God's intention in disciplining His own people is always to bring us to repentance so that we can be restored to a right relationship with Him—because He loves us.

Consider: How do you view God and His judgment? Do you consider that He is just waiting for you to slip up? Do you think His judgment is cruel or too harsh? As we read in Psalm 103, God's judgment is a last resort; it is temporary; and it is less than we deserve. God wants you to stay in the boundaries He sets for you because of "His unfailing love toward [you] who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth" (Psalm 103:11).

Pray: Thank God that He disciplines because He loves. Thank Him that He loves *you* with an everlasting, unfailing, great-than-you-can-imagine love. Ask Him to make your heart sensitive to His correction.

Day 5

For Each Other

“So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord’s Supper, wait for each other.”
1 Corinthians 11:33 NLT

Maybe it’s because we’ve just come from talking about the fatherly nature of God’s judgment and discipline of His people, but I am particularly affected by the tender closure Paul gives this rebuke of the Corinthian church. His tone softens, and he wraps up some scathing criticism with a simple and loving call to care about each other when celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

Please read 1 Corinthians 11:33-34.

If you’re on pace with these devotionals as they’re being written, you’ll be celebrating Thanksgiving this week. I hope you’re blessed with a day of love, family, and togetherness. Because of the busyness of this week and because Paul’s closing to the Corinthians is brief, our devotional today will be brief, too.

Let’s focus on how Paul addresses the church: as “dear brothers and sisters.” After harsh rebuke, Paul gathers the family of God together once again in unity and tenderness. Though we sin, we are forgiven; though we stray, we are gathered again. God is always interested in the loving restoration of His wayward people, and our aim should be the same.

Let’s remember this as we celebrate with our own families this week and as we enter into a season filled with more “togetherness” than some of us would like! God calls us to love, forgiveness, and restoration. He calls us to unity within His family. Let’s make every effort to honor Him in the way we honor those He’s placed in our lives.

Consider all that God has blessed you with this week—especially His amazing grace given through His Son. Consider that God always cares about bringing you back into His goodness and grace, even when you have strayed away. How might you extend the same as we approach a season that reminds us that even the darkest places can be touched by the light of Christ?

Pray: Thank God for His abundance and blessing. Thank Him for Jesus.

By Jennifer Skinner