



1. Welcome
2. Worship w/Prayer Board
3. Annc
4. Conscience H.O.

This we know:

There was a letter sent previous to 1 Corinthians reply (Could it be 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?).

At the end of 2nd Corinthians, Paul mentions wanting to pay the Corinthians a THIRD visit...when did the 2nd visit happen? (1st = Acts 18).

Another very stern letter that Paul wishes he never sent (could it be 2 Corinthians 10-13?).

If it is, we can operate by this time frame:

- i. The 'Previous Letter', which *may* be contained in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1 (N.B. 6:13 runs very smoothly into 7:2).
- ii. 'Chloe's people' (1 Cor. 1:11_ bring Paul at Ephesus news of divisions at Corinth.
- iii. 1 Corinthians chapters 1-4 were written in reply and Timothy is about to take it to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17).
- iv. Three men (Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus: 1 Cor. 16:17) arrive with more news and a letter from Corinth: Paul immediately writes chapters 5 and 6 and pens chapters 7-16 in reply to this letter. Timothy then takes the whole of 1 Corinthians to Corinth.
- v. The situation gets worse and Paul makes a disastrous visit to Corinth after which things get even more painful for Paul (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1).
- vi. He then sends the 'Severe Letter' (2 Cor. 10-13) by the hands of Titus (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13).
- vii. Paul is so worried that he cannot wait for Titus to return; he sets out to meet him in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5-13), and then writes 2 Corinthians 1-9, the 'Letter of Reconciliation'.

("Message of 1 Corinthians", David Prior, pg. 18. The Bible Speaks Today, IVP 1985)

Begins to answer the letter that was written to him (Chloe):

Chpt 7 – Marriage

Chpt 8 – Idols (your freedom causing another to stumble)

Chpt 9 – Give Up your rights, run the race

Chpt 10 – ²³ You say, "I am allowed to do anything"^[d]—but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is beneficial. ²⁴ Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others.

Chpt 11 – Public Worship/Lord's Supper

Chpt 12 – Spiritual Gifts

Chpt 13 – Love

Chpt 14 – Tongues, Prophecy, Worship

Chpt 15 – Resurrection of Christ, The Dead, The Body [Teach on Last Things?]

Chpt 16 – Final Greetings

RECAP: Last Week A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE:

Living Scripture with the Corinthians
Chapter 8 – 10: A Matter of Conscience

*We know what real love is
because Jesus gave up his life for us.
So we also ought to give up
our lives for our brothers and sisters*

1 John 3:16

Food sacrificed to idols. Our being careful with our freedom that we don't damage a brother or sister. More examples of putting others first.



Christians loving an argument. Maybe trying to figure out a way to live this new freedom in Jesus, pendulum swing? Again we're called to freely surrender our rights.

Intro:

Paul was asked a specific question and he's addressing a specific situation of contention in their church. (Not discussing the LORD's Supper.)

Read chapter 11:

1 And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.

2 I am so glad that you always keep me in your thoughts, and that you are following the teachings I passed on to you.

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

DIVINE ORDER-many commentators say head means source not authority.

4 A man dishonors his head if he covers his head while praying or prophesying.

SO HE IS HONORABLE IF HE KEEPS IT UNCOVERED.

5 But a woman dishonors her head if she prays or prophesies without a covering on her head, for this is the same as shaving her head.

SO SHE IS HONORABLE IF SHE COVERS HER HEAD.

6 Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering, she should cut off all her hair! But since it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or her head shaved, she should wear a covering.

PAUL USING THE ANCIENT DEBATE TECHNIQUE: REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM

7 A man should not wear anything on his head when worshiping,

WHY? SEE THE REASON FOR THE WOMAN, IT'S THE SAME FOR BOTH

for man is made in God's image and reflects God's glory. And woman reflects man's glory.

8 For the first man didn't come from woman, but the first woman came from man.

9 And man was not made for woman, but woman was made for man.

10 For this reason, and because the angels are watching, a woman should wear a covering on her head
WHY?

to show she is under authority.

(TO THOSE AROUND HER AND ALSO THE ANGELS.)

- Could be the angels who lusted after women & so fell Gen 6:1-3
- The angels present in divine worship who would be offended by a breach of propriety
- The angels who rule the nations but we will ultimately be subordinate to all believers including these women, i.e. as a future ruler a Christian woman or man should exercise wise choices in the present, even regarding apparel.

11 But among the Lord's people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women.

12 For although the first woman came from man, every other man was born from a woman, and everything comes from God.

HEALTHY INTERDEPENDENCE, both being under appropriate authority and rightly related.

13 Judge for yourselves. Is it right for a woman to pray to God in public without covering her head? 14 Isn't it obvious that it's disgraceful for a man to have long hair?

(CULTURAL NORM)

15 And isn't long hair a woman's pride and joy? For it has been given to her as a covering.



16 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.

PAUL final argument, SAYS THIS IS ALL I GOT, this is just the way its done AND ALL THE OTHER CHURCHES FUNCTION THIS WAY.

Note that the discussion is about what is appropriate for worship, no limitation on women being free to minister, prophesy, etc.

A class of culture between upper-class fashion and lower-class concern that sexual propriety

He was not giving a directive to all women, for all time, all over the world.

Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 11: For The Sake of Others

Cultural Context: What's the big deal about hair being covered?

- ▶ The have's vs the have nots
- ▶ Gender distinction
- ▶ Sexual propriety
 - ▶ Mistresses
 - ▶ Prostitutes
 - ▶ Shaved heads:
 - ▶ Cult prostitutes
 - ▶ Convicted Adulteresses

- Women's hair.
 - Judging Success: Upper class women eager to show off their fashionable hairstyles didn't want to practice this.
 - Gender distinction: blurring the lines of what is feminine & masculine.

Living Scripture with the Corinthians Chapter 11: For The Sake of Others

- ▶ Behavior associated with Idolatrous Cults at the time:
 - ▶ Dionysos
 - ▶ Cybele
 - ▶ Pythia at Delphi
 - ▶ The Sibyl
 - ▶ Isis cult
- ▶ Disheveled, uncovered, flowing, unbound hair
"necessary for a woman to produce an effective magical incantation."

- Sexual Propriety: Women's hair—a common object of lust in antiquity.
 - Much of eastern Mediterranean women were expected to cover their hair. This applied to both the Jews and the Gentiles at Corinth regardless of whether a believer in Jesus or not.



“the unveiled woman was shockingly inappropriate, undignified, and suggestive of deficient character. Paul uses this cultural symbol to affirm the spiritual issue of submission to authority, which is necessary for the proper exercise of spiritual gifts in the congregation.”

READ THIS:

In first-century Greece dress for men and women was apparently very similar, except for the women’s ‘head-covering’ (here called *kalumma*, or ‘veil’). This, incidentally, was not the equivalent of the Arab veil, but a covering for her hair alone. The normal, everyday dress of all Greek women included this *kalumma*. The only women who did not wear them were the *hetairai*, who were the ‘high-class’ mistresses of influential Corinthians. Also, slaves had their heads shaved, and the same practice was enacted as punishment for convicted adulteresses. It has further been suggested that the sacred prostitutes from the local temple of Aphrodite did not wear veils.

Now there was no special ‘dressing-up’ for attending the fellowship-meetings of the church at worship: the men came without any head-coverings; the women came with them, as in normal everyday life. Apparently, in the ‘excitement’ of the worship, certain women were tempted to throw back their head-dresses and allow their hair (which they always wore long) to fall loose. Bruce⁴ thinks that Paul knew that pagan prophetesses in the Graeco-Roman world prophesied with uncovered and dishevelled heads. This naturally caused severe distraction to the men at worship and was, in addition, a denial of the submission in the Lord of married women to their husbands. In Jewish temple-worship, the women were kept on their own, out of sight behind a screen; the men always prayed with their heads covered. Paul was thus bringing Jewish Christians, both men and women, one significant step further; he tells the men to pray with their heads uncovered (11:4), and he expects the women to take an active part both in prayer and in prophecy (but under submission, 11:5).

Christian women at Corinth (and theirs was equally a ministry in prayer and prophecy) were to keep their heads covered, because otherwise there was not freedom to worship, but instead a substantial degree of distraction. It was a sign, therefore, of the woman’s submission for her to cover her head. The man’s submission was to Christ alone; the woman’s ‘veil’ indicated her submission to others present. That was true in the secular community in the city outside; there was no reason, affirms Paul, to drop that convention inside the church. If she did, the woman was behaving as though either a slave or an adulteress (5).

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE TODAY? 10 MINUTES?

Small Group Question #1:

In the frame of our current CULTURE,

- ▶ Our distinctions:
 - ▶ What does ultra successful look like?
 - ▶ What does ordinary or normal success look like?
 - ▶ What does unsuccessful look like?

Small Group Question #2: 15 MINUTES?

In the frame of our current CULTURE,

- ▶ What might be provocative or improper in the church/worship setting?
 - ▶ For MEN
 - ▶ No shirt, low shirt
 - ▶ vulgarity
 - ▶ For WOMEN
 - ▶ Yoga pants/leggings
 - ▶ No bra, cleavage



- ▶ Everyone: cleanliness, smell, chewing, chipping your nails
- ▶ Loudly or jarringly praying in tongues
- ▶ Down South: women's hats, men's hats
- ▶ Hawaii: sundress, shorts
- ▶ Panama: red pants for men

Paul's argument:

Christian worship reflecting:

1. The divinely ordained order of relationships-mutually respectful so as to not be or have distractions from focusing on God. (He begins with a theological focus.)
2. Our worship together is intended to give God the glory due His name. Thus both men and women present themselves & function in ways to keep attention on god, on using their new authority in Christ to be attention seeking.
3. Complete interdependence of husband and wife.
4. Respecting "nature"

11:2–16

Women's Head Coverings

Paul returns to the topic of food in 11:17–34 (cf. chaps. 8–10), but here he digresses briefly to address another issue in the Corinthian church that involves those who are free surrendering their rights (11:10). Digressions were standard in ancient literature.

Women's hair was a common object of lust in antiquity, and in much of the eastern Mediterranean women were expected to cover their hair. To fail to cover their hair was thought to provoke male lust as a bathing suit is thought to provoke it in some cultures today. Head covering prevailed in Jewish Palestine (where it extended even to a face veil) and elsewhere, but upper-class women eager to show off their fashionable hairstyles did not practice it. Thus Paul must address a clash of culture in the church between upper-class fashion and lower-class concern that sexual propriety is being violated. (That Greeks bared their heads for worship and Romans covered them might also be significant, given the dual affiliation of Corinth as a Greek and Roman city. But because this custom was not divided along gender lines, it is probably irrelevant here.)

Thus Paul provides a series of brief arguments, each of which relates directly to the culture he addresses. His arguments do not work well in every culture (he is not completely satisfied with all of them himself—11:11–12), but it is the Corinthian women, not modern women, whom he wishes to persuade to cover their heads.

11:2. Letters were often written to "praise" or "blame" the recipients; sometimes these points characterized the entire letter in which they occurred. "Traditions" (NASB, NRSV) were accounts or regulations passed on orally; for instance, Pharisees in Palestine transmitted their special traditions in this way.

11:3–4. Ancient writers often based arguments on wordplays, as Paul does here. He uses "head" literally (for that which is to be covered) and figuratively (for the authority figure in the ancient household). (Some commentators have argued, perhaps rightly, that "head" means not "authority" but "source"—see 11:12—but the matter is vigorously debated and cannot be decided here.) On head coverings for women, see the synagogues, and Jewish tradition tended to play down Old Testament prophetesses; Paul's churches allow considerably more freedom for women's ministry.

11:5–6. Paul uses the ancient debate principle of *reductio ad absurdum*: If they are so concerned to bare their heads, why not also remove the natural covering, their hair? Paul thereby reduces their insistence to the absurd: the greatest physical shame for a woman was to be shaved or have her hair cut like a man's.



11:7. Paul here begins an argument from the order of creation. He cannot be denying that women are also the image of God (Gen 1:27 plainly states that both male and female were created in God’s image). Perhaps he means that women’s uncovered heads are drawing men’s attention to humanity instead of to God; as one would say today, they were turning men’s heads.

11:8–9. According to Genesis 2:18 God created woman distinct from man partly so that man would no longer be alone; the phrase there translated “helper suitable” praises woman’s strength rather than subordinates her. (“Helper” is used more often of God than of anyone else in the Old Testament; “suitable” means “corresponding” or “appropriate to,” as an equal in contrast to the animals.) Woman was thus created because man needed her strength, not (as some have wrongly interpreted this verse) to be his servant.

11:10. Here Paul says literally, “she ought to have authority over her own head because of the angels”; Paul means that she should exercise wisely her right to decide whether to cover her head in a way that will honor her husband (11:8–9), given the situation with “the angels.” The “angels” have been interpreted as (1) the angels who (according to ancient Jewish interpretations of Gen 6:1–3) lusted after women and so fell; (2) the angels present in divine worship, who would be offended by a breach of propriety or affront to the husbands (cf. the Dead Sea Scrolls); and (3) the angels who rule the nations but who will ultimately be subordinate to all believers, including these women (6:3; i.e., as a future ruler a Christian woman or man should exercise wise choices in the present, even regarding apparel).

11:11–12. Paul qualifies his preceding argument from creation (11:7–10); he wants to prove his case about head coverings, but nothing more. Women and men are mutually interdependent (cf. also 7:2–5).

11:13–15. Ancient writers, especially Stoic philosophers, liked to make arguments from nature. Nature taught them, they said, that only men could grow beards; women’s hair naturally seemed to grow longer than men’s. Like all urban dwellers, Paul is well aware of exceptions to the rule (barbarians, philosophers and heroes of the epic past, as well as biblical Nazirites); but the “nature” argument could appeal to the general order of creation as it was experienced by his readers.

11:16. Paul reserves one final argument for those unpersuaded by his former points. One philosophical group called the Sceptics rejected all arguments except an almost universally accepted one: the argument from custom—“that’s just not the way it’s done.”

11:17–34

Factionalized Fellowship

The churches in Corinth met in well-to-do patrons’ homes (see comment on Acts 18:6–7). In Greco-Roman society, patrons often seated members of their own high social class in the special *triclinium* (the best room), while others were served, in plain view of this room, in the *atrium* (the couches in which might seat as many as forty persons). The guests in the larger room, the *atrium*, were served inferior food and inferior wine, and often complained about the situation. This societal problem spilled over into the church.

The background for the meal itself is the Jewish Passover, a sacred meal and celebration; see comment on Matthew 26:17–30. But the Corinthians seem to have lost sight of this background; they treat the meal as a festal banquet such as they knew from Greek festivals or meetings of Greek religious associations.

11:17–19. Paul could praise the Corinthians on some points (see comment on 11:2) but not on this one; like division by racism or cultural bias (see introduction to Romans), division by social class is contrary to the gospel.

11:20. On the “Lord’s Supper” see the “Lord’s table” in 10:21. Paul intends an ironic contrast between the *Lord’s Supper* (11:20) and their own (11:21).



11:21–22. Some are treated more honorably than others at the meal, and this treatment reflects the status values of the world. See the introduction to this section.

11:23. “Received” and “delivered” (KJV, NASB) were used especially for passing on traditions (11:2; 15:3). Some later rabbis spoke of traditions received “from Moses”; although they believed they received them by means of their own predecessors, they meant that the tradition ultimately went back to Moses. Paul probably means that earlier disciples told him about the Last Supper. It took place at “night,” as the Passover meal always did.

11:24–25. The unleavened Passover bread was normally interpreted figuratively as “the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate” in Moses’ time; Jesus had applied it to himself (see comment on Mk 14:22–24). Pagans sometimes ate funerary meals “in remembrance of” a dead person, but the sense here is as in the Old Testament, where the Passover commemorated God’s redemptive acts in history (e.g., Ex 12:14). As in the Passover ritual (cf. the principle in Deut 26:5), the “you” applied to all future generations.

11:26. “Until he comes” is the temporal limitation on the Lord’s Supper that goes back to Jesus as well (Mk 14:25). Passover celebrations looked forward to the future redemption of Israel as well as backward to how God had redeemed them in the exodus of Moses’ day.

11:27–29. “Eating in an unworthy manner” here refers to the status-conscious eating that is dividing the church (11:21–22). By rejecting other members of Christ’s body, the church (10:17), they also reject the saving gift of his body represented by the bread (11:24).

11:30–34. Jewish teachers stressed that in this world God punished the righteous for their few sins, but in the world to come he would punish the wicked for their many sins; thus Jewish teachers believed that suffering could free one from later punishment. Paul agrees at least that suffering *can* be the Lord’s discipline; the idea here may be that those who do not embrace other members of the church no longer receive healing through the church (12:9).¹

C. The application of the principle in attitude and action (10:1–11:1). Paul warns the church to “flee from idolatry” and to not “have fellowship with demons” (10:14, 20). There is no way in our Christian freedom (see Liberty) to have a continued relationship with the past: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons” (10:21; see Blood, The).

VII. THE PROBLEM OF THE ROLE OF THE SEXES IN LIGHT OF THE REMOVAL OF THE VEIL 11:2–16. Paul now turns his attention to the conduct of public worship services. The first issue concerns women in the church and their proper relationship to authority (v. 10). In that culture, it was a custom for a woman to cover her head in order to honor her husband and show submissiveness to his authority in the home (see Family Life; Manhood). Conversely, the unveiled woman was shockingly inappropriate, undignified, and suggestive of deficient character. Paul uses this cultural symbol to affirm the spiritual issue of submission to authority, which is necessary for the proper exercise of spiritual gifts in the congregation.

VIII. THE PROBLEM OF DESECRATING THE LORD’S SUPPER 11:17–34. The Corinthians also misunderstood the purpose of the Lord’s Table. The indulgence of the love feast had led to drunkenness and selfishness, completely contrary to the concept of Christ’s sacrifice. Therefore, Paul offers a pattern for their partaking of the Lord’s Supper. (see Faith’s Confession; Recognized.)

¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (1 Co 10:24–11:34). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

**“Let a man examine himself”**

(11:28). This passage has been misapplied in much of the church. The purpose is not to deny participation, but to assess the spiritual needs of the believer in order to receive the dynamic release, potential for healing, and spiritual renewal available through partaking at the table. It is not a matter of the Lord's visitation of wrath upon an unworthy individual, but that those who are “not discerning the Lord's body” (v. 29) do not receive the intended benefits. As a result there is weakness, sickness, and even death.

2

11. The Christian community at worship

11:2–34

We now move into the next major area of controversy between different groups at Corinth. *i.e.* the Christian community at worship. There are two major themes in chapter 11, the behaviour of women and attitudes to the Lord's Supper.

1. Introduction (11:2)

It is a pleasant surprise to discover that Paul is able to commend the Christians at Corinth, *because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions, even as I have delivered them to you*. He refers to these *traditions* explicitly both in 11:23, in recalling the institution of the Lord's Supper, and in 15:1 and 3, in passing on the fundamentals of the gospel. The word denotes the twin process of hearing and of passing on, and is normally used to refer to those essential Christian truths which are at the heart of the gospel.

These *traditions* (the English word actually enshrines the same process from a Latin, not a Greek, root) were passed on orally from evangelists and teachers to new believers. This body of tradition became authoritative reproduction of apostolic truth. Considerable mention is made of them and great store is laid by them in the Pastoral Epistles, where Paul underlines the need to follow the pattern of sound teaching passed on from older men to able successors.

In a culture that was basically non-literary, the fundamental importance of reliable oral tradition takes on added emphasis. In fact, oral tradition is very reliable, as the elementary example of nursery rhymes indicates. Once something is embedded in the culture of a community, it remains a firm part of it. In thinking of the Corinthian church at worship, we need to remember that Paul had spent 18 months teaching the church, and this teaching had a strong inner consistency. He was thus able to write of a similar, if not identical, pattern ‘in all the churches’. It is today suggested with some conviction that there was in the early church a body of Christian

² Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). [Hayford's Bible handbook](#). Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.



catechesis, which dealt with ordinary discipleship and basic doctrine: the scholars call this body of teaching ‘house-tables’, *i.e.* what we might call Christian ground rules.

In terms of such traditions affecting the worship of the Corinthian church, Paul had little to bother him. Yet it is clear from 11:3–16 that there was a ‘contentious’ element at Corinth, who were spoiling for a fight and made the particular issue of head-coverings for women a major bone of such contention.

2. The behaviour of the women (11:3–16)

In first-century Greece dress for men and women was apparently very similar, except for the women’s ‘head-covering’ (here called *kalumma*, or ‘veil’). This, incidentally, was not the equivalent of the Arab veil, but a covering for her hair alone. The normal, everyday dress of all Greek women included this *kalumma*. The only women who did not wear them were the *hetairai*, who were the ‘high-class’ mistresses of influential Corinthians. Also, slaves had their heads shaved, and the same practice was enacted as punishment for convicted adulteresses. It has further been suggested that the sacred prostitutes from the local temple of Aphrodite did not wear veils.

Now there was no special ‘dressing-up’ for attending the fellowship-meetings of the church at worship: the men came without any head-coverings; the women came with them, as in normal everyday life. Apparently, in the ‘excitement’ of the worship, certain women were tempted to throw back their head-dresses and allow their hair (which they always wore long) to fall loose. Bruce⁴ thinks that Paul knew that pagan prophetesses in the Graeco-Roman world prophesied with uncovered and dishevelled heads. This naturally caused severe distraction to the men at worship and was, in addition, a denial of the submission in the Lord of married women to their husbands. In Jewish temple-worship, the women were kept on their own, out of sight behind a screen; the men always prayed with their heads covered. Paul was thus bringing Jewish Christians, both men and women, one significant step further; he tells the men to pray with their heads uncovered (11:4), and he expects the women to take an active part both in prayer and in prophecy (but under submission, 11:5).

One factor undergirds Paul’s arguments in this paragraph: he starts from the doctrine of creation, not from the doctrine of redemption. This simple rhetorical technique immediately undercuts the objections of those who claim that Paul was in inner conflict with his own teaching in, for example, Galatians 3:28: ‘There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’ In fact, verse 11 of this chapter enshrines precisely the same truth, *Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man of woman*. Whatever he may have just said about subordination (a matter we shall examine later), the phrase *in the Lord* (which carries all the special emphasis in the Greek) clearly indicates that the man and the woman are completely interdependent in Christ—and *only* in Christ. Paul’s four themes in this paragraph are submission, glory, interdependence and nature.

i. Submission (3–6)

Paul stresses first of all the pattern of relationships which God has written into the Christian community: The head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (3). In other words, the divine order is: God ... Christ ... husband ... wife. The husband is no more superior to his wife than God is superior to Christ. But as Christ chose to submit himself to his Father, so the wife should choose to submit herself to her husband. The word for head is *kephalē*, which on rare occasions means the ruler of a community, but normally carries the sense of source or origin. It is used of the source of a river. So God is the source of Christ, Christ (as creator) is the source of man, and man (‘out of his side’—Gn. 2:21ff.) is the source of woman



(so 11:8). A third sense of *kephalē* (apart from its literal meaning) is the determinative and directive sense, which is far closer to what we mean now by headship or leadership.

Now this fundamental order of relationships, writes Paul, is to be clearly reflected in Christian worship. It is important what people look like in public worship. There must be no distractions. In Christian worship we are demonstrating openly the essence of what God has done in Christ: he has set us free to serve him and to worship him. This freedom must be visibly demonstrated; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:14–18, where we read that Moses (by contrast) had to cover his head in the presence of God. Christian men do not have to cover their heads; they have been set free and the glory of Christ is to be made plain through the ministry of prayer and prophecy led by the men with bare heads: ‘we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit’.

Christian women at Corinth (and theirs was equally a ministry in prayer and prophecy) were to keep their heads covered, because otherwise there was not freedom to worship, but instead a substantial degree of distraction. It was a sign, therefore, of the woman’s submission for her to cover her head. The man’s submission was to Christ alone; the woman’s ‘veil’ indicated her submission to others present. That was true in the secular community in the city outside; there was no reason, affirms Paul, to drop that convention inside the church. If she did, the woman was behaving as though either a slave or an adulteress (5).

Bruce has some words worth weighing on the whole subject of the dictates of convention. ‘There is nothing frivolous about such an appeal to public conventions of seemliness. To be followers of the crucified Jesus was in itself unconventional enough, but needless breaches of convention were to be discouraged.’

If a Christian woman became so uninhibited in public worship that she dispensed with the outward symbol of her submissiveness, then she ought (following the logic of her lack of submission) to have cut off her hair and thus removed at a stroke the distracting impact of her ‘crowning glory’. But that was obviously not the Christian way to behave (and certainly would have flouted the norms of Corinthian society); therefore she ought to accept the discipline of keeping a veil on her head, especially when so moved by the Spirit in prayer or in prophecy that she was tempted to fling all her inhibitions to the wind. The force of Paul’s argument from creation in verse 3 is that God did not make one principle of divine action at one point in time, only to turn it upside down later. He is a God of order, of consistency, of non-contradictoriness: he cannot deny himself.

ii. *Glory (7–10)*

Just as Christian worship should visibly reflect the divinely-ordained pattern of relationships, so it should also reflect the fact that we have been created to bring glory to God (cf. 10:31). Our worship together is intended to give God the glory due to his name. Man (used generically, ‘Adam’) was created directly by God alone, for his pleasure, his joy and his glory. In the same sense the woman was created to be the glory of man, deriving her being from man and finding her fulfilment in being his helper. In this sense the woman is the man’s ‘better half’, being in fact his glory (7). In Genesis we read of God saying, ‘Let us make man in our image ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.’ The image of God is, therefore, to be seen only in the full complementarity of male and female.

It is the theme of the glory of God which exercises Paul in this passage: *man is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man*. If God alone is to be glorified in the worship of the church, then it is the joint responsibility of both the man and the woman to do all within their ability to make this happen. So long as the woman remained properly covered on her head, she was free to bring a prophecy or to lead in prayer. In herself, in her created being, she is the glory of man; in covering her hair (her supreme glory, 15: *doxa*, the same Greek word as in the rest of the discussion), she was acknowledging that God alone must be glorified in Christian worship—not her husband. Thus, the veil (or *kalumma*) represents her ‘authority’ (10: *exousia*) to pray or to



prophesy during a time of worship—the authority given to her within the ordered life of the worshipping congregation, given in recognition of the fact she has been clearly gifted by the Lord to bring such a ministry.

Bruce stresses that, ‘in a letter in which *exousia* (= authority) is a key-word’, its presence here is a sign of the Christian woman’s authority. ‘In Christ she received equality of status with man: she might pray or prophesy at meetings of the church, and her veil was a sign of this new authority.’ Barrett agrees: ‘Her veil represents the new authority given to the woman under the new dispensation to do things which formerly had not been permitted her.’ It is very possible, on the other hand, that Paul’s reference to a woman ‘wearing authority on her head’ (10) applies to her submission in Christ to the authority of her husband. Only in such a submissive spirit would she have been free to minister in the worshipping life of the church. It is not unlikely that Paul was thinking of *both* aspects of authority. Morris suggests as much: ‘By covering her head the woman secures her own place of dignity and authority. At the same time she recognizes her subordination.’¹¹

Throughout this exegetical maze the golden thread seems to be the desire in Paul’s heart to ensure that the worship of the church at Corinth is ‘done decently and in order’. There were all kinds of disorder, and perhaps even of indecency, although some commentators represent these malpractices in the most bizarre ways, *e.g.* that the real problem in the worship-services at Corinth was presiding bishops (*i.e.* ‘angels’) with roving eyes and impure hearts. It is impossible to know what Paul means by asserting that a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head *because of the angels* (10). Was it in deference to the acknowledged presence of angels at the worship of the church? But if we are concerned as Paul for the glory of God to dominate our worship as his people, we shall not go far wrong.

iii. Interdependence (11–12)

This parenthesis is a necessary corrective to Paul’s strong teaching on the distinctiveness of the man and the woman as created in God’s image. In the Lord, *i.e.* in Christ, the man and the woman (husband and wife) are completely interdependent. He has been arguing strongly for the wife to be submissive to her husband, and for that attitude to be publicly spelt out whenever God’s people gather for worship. Here he argues with equal strength that the two are one in Christ, totally bound up with each other, inseparable and interdependent. It is true physically (12), but it is even more true in the Lord. Both the man and the woman owe their existence to God: all things are from God. Christian worship is expressed best when together such married couples visibly give the Lord the glory of their interdependent lives.

iv. Nature (13–15)

Paul brings this, somewhat complex and at times (to us) remote, discussion to an end by an argument drawn neither from the distinctiveness of men and women, nor from their mutuality; neither from their independence of each other nor from their interdependence upon each other. He simply goes back to nature: Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering (14–15). Precisely how culturally universal this actually is may be difficult to answer, but Paul’s major point is undeniable: God has made men and women different, so *vive la différence!*

No doubt there are many cultural conventions when it comes to masculine and feminine roles, jobs and rights which need to be revised or rejected. As Creator, however, God intends that men and women should have different, but complementary, functions.

Each human being is to give glory to God by being what God intends him or her to be. The man is to be truly masculine and the woman truly feminine, without allowing stereotypes of either to dictate our perceptions, but



rather basing our understanding of what it is to be fully human on the perfect model of Jesus. This principle will make us chary of going overboard on the modern theme of 'unisex'. The fullness of Christian worship can be experienced only as each man and each woman, created for God and redeemed by God, allow their humanness to be expressed according to God's pattern.

v. *Conclusion (16)*

What does all this add up to? Paul wants the women to dress normally and naturally in Christian worship. He wants such worship to give glory to God and to make it obvious that Christians have been set free to worship and to glorify God. So he urges the Corinthians: 'Do not ignore the obvious pointers of creation or of nature. God made us like this. Do not flout all the dictates of common sense and decency in your worship. Let it be Christ-centred and God-glorifying.' There will always be Christians who love an argument, and there seem to have been plenty such at Corinth (16). Paul concludes the matter by saying that every other Christian congregation accepted these guide-lines: why should the Corinthians be different?

3. Attitudes to the Lord's Supper (11:17–34)

The next aspect of corporate worship to absorb Paul's attention clearly touched him on the raw. The Corinthians were making a mockery of the Eucharist and of the Agapē. So incensed was he by reports of what was going on that he wrote bluntly: *When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat (20)*. We need to investigate the reasons behind such a direct statement, in order to appreciate the situation at Corinth, the significance of the fellowship-meal, and the seriousness of any abuse.

i. *The situation at Corinth (17–22)*

Although he had been free to 'commend' them for their observation of certain traditions he had passed on to them about public worship (11:2), he cannot commend them now (17, 22). The divisions (*schismata*) in the church at Corinth had reached schismatic proportions: there were now not merely personality-cults around certain figure-heads (1:12), nor were there differences of emphasis over food offered to idols; there were hints of a rather obnoxious kind of snobbishness (11:21) between the rich and the not-so-rich. The church was badly splintered, and these schisms made their times of worship and fellowship so negative, that Christians went away in a worse state spiritually than when they arrived (17).

Now Paul was not naive; he expected any church to be full of different emphases on this or that matter. To that extent he was not surprised by the situation at Corinth: *there must be factions (haireseis) among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized (19)*. Such selectivity in Christian convictions amongst those submitted to the Lordship of Jesus is inevitable. But there is absolutely no need, let alone any propriety, for Christians to sunder fellowship on the basis of such distinctives. When such schism actually penetrates the public worship of the congregation, the situation is scandalous.

Paul expected schism, because he was a realist, but he deplored it and sought to remove it. One of the incidental results of heresy (selectivity) in a local Christian community is that it provides an acid test of genuine commitment to Christ and to the body of Christ, as distinct from religious bigotry or simply love of theological debate. Paul had constantly to warn young church leaders like Timothy and Titus about such professing Christians. When those who claim to be Christians love nothing better than empty and profitless arguments about theological niceties, that indicates their real spiritual condition. Such folk are not *genuine (dokimoi)*, they



have not passed the test, and their loud claims about theological ‘soundness’ will not impress the Lord on that crucial day when our Christian service is scrutinized.¹⁶

It is no wonder that Paul could not call the gatherings of the church at Corinth ‘the Lord’s Supper’: they were not under the Lord’s authority; there was hardly any awareness of the Lord’s presence; the purpose behind them seemed to be scarcely directed towards remembering the Lord’s death. How could such an occasion be ‘the Lord’s Supper’? Each person was far more concerned with satisfying his own hunger and thirst (21). If the purpose of coming together was to satisfy physical appetites, why not stay at home? *Do you not have houses to eat and to drink in?* (22).

There seems to have been a peculiarly callous insensitivity to the physical needs of those with very little, almost to the point of humiliating them. When they came together, there was no sense of being one family in the Lord. Each group kept to itself. The food brought was not shared in a common pool, but each enjoyed his/her own provisions. Some managed even to get drunk. The arrangements, in brief, emphasized the divisions in the church at Corinth, not their fellowship.

ii. *The significance of the meal (23–26)*

Paul then reminded the Corinthians what the Eucharist-plus-Agape was originally meant to be. He recalled the actual institution by the Lord Jesus himself on the night when he was betrayed. Paul’s anonymous reference to Judas may have been an incidental challenge to the Corinthians in their own behaviour.

He passed on to the Corinthians what he personally *received from the Lord* himself. We cannot be sure precisely how Paul received this revelation. He did not receive the gospel itself ‘from man, nor was I taught it; but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ’. He could have been claiming the same direct revelation concerning these words of instituting the Lord’s Supper. However, the word translated *received (parelabon)* is the technical word for oral transmission down the generations and across different groups. Perhaps the facts came from oral transmission, but their interpretation and application came directly from the Lord. Whatever the nature of their source, these words are to determine the whole meaning, atmosphere and behaviour in any celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It is pre-eminently the death of the Lord which must dominate the proceedings, and this was clearly not the case at Corinth.

The head of any Jewish home would have performed such actions with bread and wine at any meal, and with special solemnity at the Passover-meal. It is, thus, the *words* which give the *actions* their unique significance, as well as the identity of the Person who uttered the words. He *took bread ... He gave thanks ... He broke it ... He said, ‘This is my body which is for you’* (23–24). And then he added the world-shaking statement/command: *‘Do this in remembrance of me.’* He followed these actions with similar ones with the cup, after supper, saying, *‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’* (25).

The words over the cup would have evoked memories of key Old Testament passages, but Paul’s own stress is on the way every such celebration is a public proclamation of the Lord’s death, *until he comes* (26). There is an anticipatory element in every celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It looks back to his death; it looks forward to his return.

The main word Paul uses to describe what has happened is *covenant*. Through the shedding of the blood of Jesus, the paschal lamb (5:7), it is now possible for Jews and Greeks, rich and poor, libertine and rigorist, men and women to know the glorious freedom of forgiveness and to have personal knowledge of God. Those who enter into this personal relationship, this covenant-relationship, with the Lord naturally enter at the same time into a covenant-relationship with one another. Thus, the covenant community is established—and that is precisely what the Corinthians were undermining by their behaviour. For them the death of Christ was not



central; the return of Christ was not dominant; the love of Christ was not in control. It was, in a word, not 'the Lord's Supper'.

iii. The seriousness of abuse (27–32)

The whole of this paragraph has a specially solemn ring about it. Paul is insistent that the Corinthians must stamp out of their worship around the Lord's table anything which is unworthy. The privilege and the high calling involved in sharing in the Lord's Supper demand the strictest form of self-examination. To take part in the sacrament 'unworthily' is to become guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord (27).

The Greek word for *guilty* (*enochos*) has a forensic application, and this atmosphere is maintained throughout the paragraph with the root word for *judgment* (*krinō*) coming five times in verses 29–32. We may be involved in another of Paul's personal word-games with the Corinthians over their love of litigation and spirit of judgmentalism. Here, he may well be saying explicitly, is an area where they truly ought to be exercising a strict discipline of judgment. When Paul talks of anyone who eats the bread and drinks the cup unworthily as guilty of *profaning the body and blood of Christ*, the word *profaning* is gratuitous and actually reduces the gravity of the offence. Essentially you become guilty of *shedding* the blood of Christ: *i.e.* you place yourself, not in the company of those who are sharing in the benefits of his passion, but in the company of those who are responsible for his crucifixion.

How, then, should we approach the inestimable privilege of taking part in the Lord's Supper? This is, in fact, one of the most frequent pastoral dilemmas in a local church. There are many who hold back from partaking because they do not feel worthy. There are also those (probably fewer in number) who presume to take part without beginning to exercise even the slightest self-examination. So Paul's instructions here are topical and essential: *Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup* (28). Bruce interprets as follows: 'The context implies that his self-examination will be specially directed to ascertaining whether or not he is living and acting "in love and charity" with his neighbours.'²¹

The process of self-examination is, etymologically, again linked with the root word *dokimos*. Each Christian is obliged, not to reach some moral or spiritual standard of perfection (imaginary or otherwise), but to pursue rigorous and honest self-scrutiny.

The danger comes from eating and drinking *without discerning the body* (29): such a person *eats and drinks judgment upon himself*. What, then, does it mean not to discern the body? There are two possibilities. First, not giving due weight to the church as being the body of Christ: this was clearly where the Corinthians, with all their divisions, were actually placing themselves in considerable peril. Secondly, we fail to 'discern the body' when we do not recognize the special presence of the risen Lord in his worshipping community and, more particularly, in this sacrament of his body and blood. For the Corinthians there was the added danger of sharing in this particular meal as though it was no different from any other common meal. This is a frequent occurrence for us today, when we catch ourselves proceeding through the liturgy of the Lord's Supper by rote, without properly feeding 'on Christ by faith with thanksgiving'.

Paul was clear enough about the seriousness of such abuse to attribute sickness, weakness and even death in the Christian fellowship at Corinth to such unworthy reception of the bread and the wine in their public worship. Such events, he asserts, would not have been at all necessary, if they had judged themselves truly (31). For the children of God there is no judgment on sin, because that has already been paid once and for all by Jesus himself. Any way in which God does thus preserve the purity of his table is part of the Father's disciplining of his children.²⁵

All Christians should ask themselves a leading question along the lines suggested by Paul's teaching in verses 30–31: how much weakness and illness is, in fact, part of the wise, loving, painful but productive, discipline of a



perfect Father? It is, according to Paul, of that order rather than divine punishment: *when we are judged by the Lord we are chastened [disciplined], so that we may not be condemned along with the world (32).*

iv. Conclusion (33–34)

So Paul concludes his heartfelt plea to the Corinthians about two aspects of their life as a worshipping community. He was so perturbed about the way they were exposing themselves to the judgment of God in their approach to the Lord's Supper, that he underlines its nature as a love-feast: wait for one another ... if any one is hungry, let him eat at home (33–34). It is conceivable, according to Schlatter, that this marks the beginning of a separation between the love-feast and the eucharist. This may not be correct, but it is a timely reminder that Christian worship in Corinth was of a more informal nature, took place (in all probability) in private homes, incorporated both liturgical and spontaneous elements, and was not confined to one hour's devotions in a specially-constructed building which remained virtually unused for the rest of the week. Some further implications of this kind of worship Paul proceeds to tackle in chapters 12–14.

V. DIRECTIONS FOR WORSHIP 11:3–33

A. Propriety In Prayer And Prophecy 11:3–16

³ Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Traditionally, this passage is interpreted by taking "head" to mean authority, or ruler. Others interpret it "to refer primarily to the concept of honor, in that one's physical head is the seat of his honor (cf. vv. 4–5). Thus as Christ honored God, man is to honor Christ and woman is to honor her husband." It is more likely that "head" means "source of life."² Paul begins by drawing attention to a sequence where God the Father is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every individual man, and the man is the head of the woman. This is explained further in verse 8, which directs our attention to creation.

God the Father and Christ are both fully divine. They are "coeternal, coequal, and coexistent," but Jesus receives from the Father (John 14:24) and comes from the Father (John 16:28). Thus, there is a voluntary "economic subordination," or functional subordination, of the Son to the Father where the Son works in unity with the Father. Since Paul draws a distinction between Christ as "the head of every man," but the man being "the head of the woman," it cannot mean that every man is the head of all women: The reference is again to the order of creation, the man, Adam, being created first. However, Adam said Eve was both "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23), sharing the same essence. Since "man" and "woman" can mean husband and wife, there is an application to the situation in Corinth as well.

Those who take it that headship means authority say disobedience is insubordination. However, Christ is not inferior to the Father who is His Head. Neither is the wife inferior to the husband. "The word 'helper' (Gen. 2:18) is often used of God (Exod. 18:4) and does not indicate a lower status. Moreover, when the New Testament places wives in a role of functional subordination to their husbands (Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1), it does not necessarily follow that females are inferior to males, or even that females should be



functionally subordinate to males generally (the NT pattern is that wives are subordinate to their own husbands).”

The relationship of the husband and wife is not comparable to that of master and servant or army officer and soldier, for reference to it follows a command for mutual submission out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21–33 compares it to the relationship of Christ and the Church. The husband’s part is to love his wife: give himself up for her in order to encourage her to be holy (dedicated to the worship and service of the Lord), feed and care for her, recognize her worth, love her as his own body (as he loves himself), and be united to her. The wife’s part is in love to submit voluntarily to his love and encouragement and to respect him. Thus, the wife works in unity with the husband. His leadership must be servant leadership (Matt. 20:25–28). When there is fundamental submission to Christ servant leadership will follow easily.

⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. ⁶ If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.

Though both men and women are equally free to pray and prophesy publicly in the congregation, they do need to consider the customs of the time in order not to disgrace themselves, implying that it would also disgrace the cause of Christ. In the society of Corinth a man who prayed or prophesied in the assembly with his head covered (with a cloth covering) disgraced his own head. A woman who prayed or prophesied in the assembly with her head uncovered⁹ disgraced her own head to the point that if it were shaved it would be no greater disgrace. Obviously Paul is talking about her own physical head here, not her husband.

The principle behind covering the head is still important today. As Don Stamps wrote, “When dressing modestly and properly for the glory of God, a woman enhances her own God-given place of dignity and worth.”

⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

Something more than human custom is involved in the relationship of the husband and wife. Paul goes back to God’s creation of the first man and woman to give scriptural grounds.

The man is the image and glory of God; that is, God created Adam to be holy as He is holy (cf. Eph. 4:24) and to bring praise, honor, and glory to Him. Then the woman was created as Adam’s glory, because it was not good for him to be alone. He needed her as his counterpart and partner. This is explained by saying that the woman came out of the man: He was her “head”—her source. “She is not therefore subordinate to him, but necessary for him ... so that he might be complete.”

Because the wife is the husband’s glory, she ought to have authority (Gk. *exousia*) over her head. Some take this to mean that she ought to wear a veil as a sign that she is under authority; however, the Greek grammar indicates it means she has authority over her own head to do what she wishes or chooses to do. But what she does should also be “because of the angels.” What this means is not explained. It may refer back to 6:3: Since women will also take part in judging angels, they should be able to judge what to do in the matter of praying and prophesying with their heads covered. Or it may mean they were thinking of themselves as being spiritually like angels, so they didn’t need to pay attention to the distinction between sexes. Another



possibility is that it may mean that because angels are concerned with honoring God they are “shocked at conduct not according to God’s will.”

¹¹ In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

“In the Lord,” that is, among believers who are in right relation to the Lord, neither the husband nor the wife is to operate independently of each other. That is, neither is self-sufficient, neither has any right to look down on the other. God did take the first woman from the first man. But ever since then, every man is born of a woman. So the woman is not inferior to the man. As husband and wife, they need each other. But God is the Creator, the source of all human life, male and female. Both were created in His image. We are all dependent on Him. He is the true source of both physical and spiritual life for us all.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

Now Paul clarifies the basis of his argument. They surely have the good sense to realize that it is not “proper” (fitting, pleasing, right) for a woman to pray to God in public with her head uncovered. If they looked around they would see in the natural order of things in their society that long hair was considered a disgrace for men¹⁷ while long hair was considered a glory for women. This points also to her need in their society to have her head covered by a shawl or cloth covering.

To conclude this argument Paul suggests that those who were “contentious about this” and not covering their heads needed to pay attention to the customs in the local assemblies of God in every other place. So we need to be careful that our dress and actions are not contrary to what our assemblies today consider appropriate, lest we bring shame on our Head, Christ.

B. Propriety In The Lord’s Supper 11:17–34

1. DIVISIONS EXPRESSED 11:17–22

¹⁷ In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.

Paul started out this chapter with praise (v. 2), for he knew the majority were already following the directions about head coverings. But he has no praise for the way the Corinthians were coming together “as a church,” an assembly of believers, because of the reported divisions among them. Note the irony of verse 19. Instead of praising them he sarcastically said they needed the divisions so they could show which groups among them had “God’s approval.”

The Book of Acts keeps emphasizing that the believers came together “in one accord” (2:1, KJV). They were one in genuine fellowship, one in purpose, one in their praises to God, one in their devotion to the apostles’ teaching (which is now recorded in the New Testament), united in prayer, and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:42; 4:24, 31; 5:12; cf. Phil. 2:2). Without this kind of fellowship it is not a New Testament church;



it is not the kind of assembly of believers the New Testament calls an *ekklēsia*. Without this kind of fellowship it is no different than the crowd assembled in a theater or at a ball game. Without this real fellowship their observance of the Lord's Supper was a mere performance. Without this fellowship their meetings were doing "more harm than good": They were harming each other. They were harming the world outside who saw their divisions and were repelled by the lack of love.

²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. ²² Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

What they were observing was really "not the Lord's Supper." He contrasts this with their suppers in their own homes where they would not show a lack of hospitality or consideration for others.

Because Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in connection with the Passover meal, the Corinthian believers continued to observe it in connection with a meal, which Jude 12 and some later writers refer to as a "love feast." Each one brought his or her own meal. The rich went ahead eating with their rich friends, without waiting for latecomers, people (especially slaves) who could not get away from their work early enough to join the others. Thus, the rich gorged themselves with food and wine in their own private supper while others did not have enough to satisfy their hunger.

It is possible, too, that the differences in their human loyalties spilled over into this time, a follower of Apollos, for example, not sharing with a follower of Cephas. The division here, however, seems to be between the rich and the poor. The rich had their own homes where they could eat their suppers. They did not need to despise God's assembled believers and destroy the unity of the assembly (cf. Gal. 3:28; 5:21; Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:11). Their conduct shows that the supper they are observing cannot be identified as the *Lord's* Supper.

2. THE LORD'S DIRECTIONS 11:23–26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Paul reminds them of what Jesus personally told him, possibly during his three years in Arabia (Gal. 1:11–12, 15–17). Mentioning "the night He was betrayed" reminds us Judas was present. Paul wants the Corinthian believers to remember that one of Jesus' own disciples betrayed Him, something we too must remember. But the presence of Judas did not detract from the love that filled the heart of Jesus (see John 13:1).

The giving of thanks also showed His love for God the Father and for the disciples as well. Then He broke the thin loaf of unleavened bread and, using metaphorical language, said, " 'This is my body, which is for you.' " Since Jesus was bodily present, He meant, "This represents my body." " 'Do this' " is a continuous present tense: "Keep on doing this" (until Jesus comes again; cf. Luke 22:19). Doing it " 'in remembrance' " of Christ also addresses the Corinthians' apparent failure to remember anything but their appetites when coming together supposedly for the Lord's Supper.

Those who have interpreted this to mean that the Lord's Supper involves a fresh sacrifice of Christ each time it is observed need to pay strict attention to Hebrews 9:26–28, which makes it clear that Christ was sacrificed "once for all," in contrast to the repeated sacrifices necessary under the Law. So we keep



celebrating the Lord's Supper in remembrance of His "once for all" sacrifice on the cross, a sacrifice which was both for us and in our place as well.

The term translated "remembrance" (Gk. *anamnesis*) may not mean quite what you think. Whereas today to remember something is to think back to some past occasion, the New Testament understanding of *anamnesis* is just the opposite. Such a remembrance was meant to "transport an action which is buried in the past in such a way that its original potency and vitality are not lost, but carried over into the present." Such a concept is even reflected in the Old Testament (cf. Deut. 16:3; 1 Kings 17:18).

Therefore, every time we celebrate The Lord's Supper, we should "remember" by claiming anew the benefits of His death and resurrection.

²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Passover meal came in between the distribution of the bread and the taking of the cup. " 'This cup' " refers to the contents of the cup which represented the new, fresh covenant put into effect by the shedding of Jesus' blood (see Heb. 9:11–12, 14–15, 24–25), thus making the old covenant obsolete. Doing this would be a means of calling to remembrance the shedding of His blood, the new covenant, and all the blessings it includes. In other words, the Lord's Supper not only looks back at Calvary, it looks ahead to the consummation when at the wedding supper of the Lamb people from every nation, tribe, people, and language will participate (Matt. 8:11; 22:10; Rev. 7:9; 19:7–9).

Jesus did not say how often to do this. The Law called for the Passover celebration only once a year. However, some suppose that the Lord's Supper should be observed every time believers come together. Others suppose it should be observed once a week or once a month. Jesus made no requirements about the frequency, except that it should be "until He comes," that is, until the time when He comes to snatch away the Church in the Rapture. The only requirement is that we focus our attention on Him and "proclaim" His death: Our very act of partaking announces to the world that we have identified with Christ in His death, received the benefits of His shed blood, and are a new people in Him.

3. PARTAKING IN AN UNWORTHY MANNER 11:27–34

²⁷ Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

The failure to wait for others and the failure to have genuine fellowship meant they were partaking of the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner." This meant they were "guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord"; that is, they were just as bad as the Jewish leaders and the Romans who crucified Christ. They were not recognizing what the Cross meant, nor were they showing the love that God showed in giving His Son (John 3:16).

Paul does not say that any believer should refrain from partaking of the Lord's Supper. That would be telling the world that you do not believe in the power and effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice and His shed



blood. But believers must examine themselves to see whether they are recognizing the body of the Lord. By the “body of the Lord,” Paul means the body of believers, the local assembly gathered together (see 1 Cor. 10:16–17).

In view of what is said before and after this passage, it is clear Paul is concerned about the unity of the body of Christ, by which he means the unity of the body of believers with Christ as their head. Those who were allowing divisions among the body were not recognizing other believers as part of the body of Christ. Therefore they were “sinning against the body” and were eating and drinking judgment on themselves, that is, calling down judgment (Gk. *krima*, “condemnation, punishment”) on themselves for their wrong attitudes and unloving behavior.

These attitudes and this lack of love were already bringing judgment on many of the Corinthian believers in the form of physical weakness, sickness, and even death. “It is not likely that any effort at gaining healing would have been fruitful until the cause was remedied.”

³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³² When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

If we examine and judge ourselves, including correcting our unloving attitudes and behavior, as well as our motives, we would not “come under judgment.” If we do not do this, the Lord will judge; nevertheless, His purpose is not to destroy us or send us to hell, but to discipline us as a loving father does his children (Heb. 12:7–11; cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). He wants us to repent, to live holy lives, to grow in grace and show His love.

He wants us to respond as obedient children and not reject His discipline. As Hebrews 12:4–6 says, “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.’ ” (Cf. 1 Pet. 4:12–19.) It would be a terrible thing to reject the Lord’s discipline and be judged as a rebel and be condemned to the lake of fire along with the rest of the world.

³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. ³⁴ If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

Paul concludes this exhortation by referring to the love feast which included the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. They must “wait for each other,” until they can eat together in true Christian love and unity of the body. “Wait for” includes the idea of receiving and welcoming with open anticipation. Then, to avoid the temptation to gorge oneself and disregard others in a way that will bring God’s judgment, Paul suggests that anyone who is hungry eat something first at home. This implies also that it is not wrong to eat a meal before partaking of the Lord’s Supper; Paul does not call for fasting in preparation for it.

From this it is easy to see that Jesus commanded the partaking of the elements of the bread and the wine (rather, grape juice, since He speaks of “the *fruit* of the vine,” Matt. 26:29; Luke 22:18), but He did not command the repetition of the Passover Feast, nor did He intend to institute a love feast. Thus, it is not necessary to partake of the elements of the Lord’s Supper in connection with a meal. However, the same receiving and welcoming each other, the same waiting for each other to come into a unity of the Spirit in the love of Jesus so that we can focus on His death and the benefits of His shed blood, is still very important.

Paul was aware of other questions and problems in Corinth; he promised to give further directions concerning them when he came. For the present he wanted to attend to something else that needed



correction—the overuse of tongues and an imbalance in the gifts of the Spirit—so the church might be built up.

Study questions for this section may be found in appendix B.³

V. DIRECTIONS FOR WORSHIP 11:3–33

1. Does the fact God is Christ’s Head mean that Christ is inferior or second-class? How does this apply to the relationship between husbands and wives?
2. How does Paul want male-female relationships to be reflected in public worship?
3. How should we apply today what Paul says about men’s and women’s hair?
4. What was the chief problem in the Corinthian believers’ observance of the Lord’s Supper and how did Paul want it corrected?
5. How does what Paul says about the Lord’s Supper compare with the accounts in the Gospels?
6. What is necessary if we are to observe the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner?
7. Should servers withhold the elements of the Lord’s Supper from unbelievers? From children?⁴

THE LORD’S SUPPER

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ on the occasion of His last Passover meal with the Disciples (often called the Last Supper), just hours before He died on the cross. For us it takes the place of the Passover of the Old Testament, “for Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). The Lord’s Supper, which Jesus commanded to be repeated at frequent intervals until His Second Coming, has several values in relation to the past, the present, and the future: It is commemorative, instructive, and inspirational; it promotes thanksgiving and fellowship; it proclaims the new covenant; and it carries a responsibility.

First, it is commemorative: “Do this in *remembrance* of me” (Luke 22:19). It is a solemn occasion for pondering deeply the significance of the atoning death of Christ, the focal point of all history. It confronts us again with the cost of our redemption from sin and its penalty. It is also instructive, symbolizing by means of a sacred object lesson the incarnation of Christ (the physical elements of bread and wine) and the Atonement (the consuming of the physical elements). When Jesus said, “This is my body” and “this cup is the new covenant in my blood,” He meant that the bread and wine represented His body given in death and His blood poured out as a sacrifice on the cross.⁹ The Lord’s Supper is also inspirational, since we are reminded that by faith we may enter into the benefits of His death and resurrection. By partaking on a regular basis, we are repeatedly identifying ourselves with Him in His death, reminded that He died and rose again so that we might have victory over sin and avoid every kind of evil (see 1 Thess 5:22).

³ Horton, S. M. (1999). [*I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary*](#) (pp. 98–109). Springfield, MO: Logion Press.

⁴ Horton, S. M. (1999). [*I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary*](#) (pp. 256–257). Springfield, MO: Logion Press.



The Lord's Supper calls for thanksgiving, which is *eucharistia* in the Greek (see 1 Cor 10:16) and thus the source of the term "Eucharist," used by some churches. It is an opportunity to thank God for all the blessings that are ours because Jesus died on the cross. It is an opportunity for fellowship (Gk. *koinonia*)—first of all, with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:3), and, second, with other believers who share the faith (see Titus 1:4; Jude 3), the grace of God (see Phil 1:7; Col 1:6), and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (see Rom 8:9, 11). Jesus was the host at the Last Supper. As our risen Lord, He is present, for He promised, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt 18:20). Therefore, He is the unseen host at every celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper recognizes and proclaims the new covenant (Gk. *hē kainē diathēkē*). By partaking of the Lord's Supper we declare our purpose to make Jesus Lord, do His will, take up our cross daily to follow Him, and fulfill His Great Commission. The Lord's Supper also looks forward to the future kingdom of God, where Jesus promised to "drink it [the fruit of the vine] anew" (Mark 14:25). This probably refers to "the Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (cf. Matt 8:11; 22:1–14; Luke 13:29; Rev 19:7).

Finally, the Lord's Supper carries a responsibility. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:27–34 that one must guard against participating "in an unworthy manner." What does it mean to participate in an unworthy manner? Surely it does not mean that one must be worthy as a person, since none of us is able to stand in this relationship to God apart from Christ. It refers, rather, to unworthiness of attitude and behavior. We are all sinners, but those who have been "made new in the attitude of your minds" and "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness," and who are "all members of one body" (Eph 4:23–25) are eligible for participation in the Lord's Table. Those who harbor sin, whether it be gross and carnal or subtle and personal, are in need first of cleansing (1 John 1:7, 9).

Since the warning is so strong, (1 Cor 11:27, 29–30), it is important that we examine ourselves before we eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Cor 11:28). As we eat and drink, we must recognize "the body of the Lord." The "body" we must recognize, or "discern" (KJV), is the spiritual body of Christ, the assembly of believers. "Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:16–17). The context shows that the Corinthians were allowing divisions and quarrels among themselves. "One ... says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ'" (1 Cor 1:12). This party spirit had spilled over into the celebration of the Lord's Supper (which was originally celebrated in connection with a meal). So they showed no love for each other, and they did not recognize each other as members of the body of Christ. Consequently, they did not recognize the Body in each other. (See 1 Cor 12:12–13). Instead, they partook in a self-centered spirit that was indifferent to each other.

Notice, however, the Bible does not tell those who were taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner to stop taking it. Rather, we are to "examine" ourselves, "judge ourselves," and "wait for each other" (1 Cor 11:28, 31, 33). That is, we are to wait until we can recognize the body of Christ in each other and partake of the Lord's Supper in unity of love and faith, honoring Christ and God's Word.

The warning of 1 Corinthians 11:29–31 is not intended to make people afraid of partaking of the Lord's Supper. Rather it is meant to encourage judging ourselves—which implies confessing any sin that might be a barrier between us and the Lord and cleansing our hearts and minds of any grudge, pride, or prejudice that would keep us from loving fellowship with the members of the local Body of Christ. This is why we need to "wait for each other."

Nor do we need to wait long. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from *all* sin" and "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from *all* unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7, 9). The moment we confess, the blood covers.



Because the Lord's Supper is a solemn time for remembering the focal point of Christ's work on our behalf, it can become a time for great spiritual blessing, provided the participants come in the proper frame of mind and allow it to be an opportunity for worship and fellowship with the risen Christ and with each other.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why do most Protestants accept only two ordinances instead of observing seven sacraments?
2. What does water baptism do and what does it not do?
3. What is the biblical evidence that water baptism is for believers only?
4. Why is it important that we be baptized by immersion?
5. In what sense does the Lord's Supper have a backward look, an upward look, and a forward look? Explain.
6. What attitudes does the Lord's Supper call for on our part?
7. What does it mean to partake in a worthy manner?

7th FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH⁵

Gender Distinctions and the Unity of the Church (11:2–16)

One area where (at least some of) the Corinthians are exercising their freedom has to do with gender distinctions. When one reads between the lines, it appears that Christian women prophets—perhaps the women “holy in body and spirit” of 7:34 (so MacDonald 1990)—are expressing their new authority by disregarding conventional symbols of female identity and subordination. As people who have been remade by

⁵ Menzies, W. W. (1993). [*Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*](#). (S. M. Horton, Ed.) (pp. 115–121). Springfield, MO: Logion Press.



baptism as God's new creation where "in Christ" there is "no male and female" (Gal 3:27–28; cf. Meeks 1974), they are praying and prophesying with their heads "uncovered." Once again, therefore, the question Paul is addressing has to do with the appropriate *embodiment* (both individual and social) of Christian identity (cf. 1 Corinthians 7). In this case, the women's sense of new identity expresses itself in innovation relating to the head: specifically, letting their hair down and/or removing their veils (the matter is debated; cf. Wire 1990: 220–23), and so "uncovering" their heads (11:3–5). Because the head is a symbolic location of authority, and hairstyle is emblematic of status and group affiliation, such innovation seems to be causing contention in the church and perhaps also in the wider society. It represents a challenge to conventional patterns of authority which assume a hierarchical and patriarchal order of "headship."

But the anxiety may be related to other factors as well. Fiorenza (1983: 227), for example, points to a range of evidence showing Greek women in the mystery cults engaging in acts of worship with their heads uncovered or their hair hanging loose or both: "Such a sight of disheveled hair would be quite common in the ecstatic worship of oriental divinities.... Disheveled hair and head thrown back were typical for the maenads in the cult of Dionysos, in that of Cybele, the Pythia at Delphi, the Sibyl, and unbound hair was necessary for a woman to produce an effective magical incantation.... Flowing and unbound hair was also found in the Isis cult, which had a major center in Corinth." Against this background, Paul may be concerned that the gatherings of the Corinthians are becoming indistinguishable from those of pagan idolaters. Whatever the precise details (cf. Fee 1987: 491–530), it is clear that Paul resists this innovation and seeks to reimpose the conventional symbols of gender differentiation for the sake of good order, while at the same time providing arguments that will not detract from women's legitimate authority and, more positively still, will encourage the Corinthians as a whole in their worship, in the company of the angelic hosts, of the one true God.

What Paul says overall invites a number of comments. (a) Paul punctuates his argument with theological and christological reflection. There is the characteristic monotheism at the outset ("... the head of Christ is God," 11:3), the appeal to the scriptural idea of the "image of God" (v. 7), the important christological and ecclesiological point of reference "in the Lord" (v. 11), and the confession that "all things come from God" toward the end (v. 12). However we judge individual points, Paul's determination to argue from theological first principles merits note.

(b) In a section comparable to his earlier treatment of gender relations in ch. 7, Paul addresses his argument to both men and women reciprocally: "Any man who prays or prophesies.... Any woman who prays or prophesies ..." (11:4–5a, cf. vv. 7–12). Thus, although it is the women prophets who are the cause of anxiety (cf. vv. 13–15), Paul's response is to seek to bring both women and men within the same moral and ecclesial orbit. Why? Because the mutual interdependence of women and men is a basic building block of the unity of church members as a whole. Note, too, that Paul's argument is not just about how wives and husbands should pray and prophesy. If the main focus in ch. 7 is on wives and husbands, here it is more widely on women and men. Paul's clear assumption is that peace and good order in the *ekklēsia* depend not just on peace between wives and husbands but on peace between the female and male members in general.

(c) Paul is not objecting to women praying and prophesying. This, together with the fact that women (as well as men?) are praying and prophesying with such abandon, is important testimony to the liberating impact of Spirit-possession in the Pauline churches and in early Christianity generally (cf. Dunn 1975). Indeed, from a social-psychological point of view, one of the reasons why women were attracted to membership in the churches may have been the new identity, authority, and social participation it made possible. Given the high priority Paul attached to the gift of prophecy (cf. 12:28; 14:1–5), it is very significant that underlying what Paul says is the assumption that women as well as men are empowered by God's Spirit to pray and prophesy. Paul's basic concern is not with women's authority to prophesy but with the way they embody that authority.



(d) Specifically, Paul resists ways of embodying spiritual (or “religious”) authority which blur gender distinctions. For Paul—as he goes on to argue in ch. 12—true Christian unity is not a matter of obliterating distinctions but of acknowledging them and making space for them in ways that enable the enrichment of the whole. Just as he refuses to allow those with “knowledge” to act in ways which fail to make space for the “weak” (chs. 8–10), so now he resists ways of embodying spiritual authority which fail to respect conventional ways of symbolizing the difference between women and men.

(e) Related to the preceding, the overall thrust of Paul’s argument is not to require the subordination of women; nor, however, does he require women’s equality. That is why some of what he says sounds “subordinationist” (e.g., 11:7–9), while other parts of the same argument sound “egalitarian” (e.g., vv. 11–12)! Paul’s agenda is different: to promote conciliation in a volatile situation. For Paul, the matter does not have to do with the equality of the sexes or “women’s rights” but with how believers (women and men) are to embody their eschatological identity in everyday life in ways which are historically responsible and socially constructive. In relation to the Christian gathering, this means a practice of worship which respects the differences between the sexes (and other differences as well) and allows such differences to be incorporated into a more profound unity.

The subject is a potentially explosive one, so he begins with a word of praise, presenting in the process a little cameo of early Christian formation and the passing on of authoritative tradition (11:2). But then comes the word of correction: first in the form of an argument from shame (vv. 3–6). The Corinthians do not *know* as fully as they think: “the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God” (v. 3, RSV). In other words, Christian freedom (including that of the women prophets) is grounded in a divine ordering of things: it is not a license to behave willfully. This divine ordering is hierarchical and is symbolized by the metaphor of “the head” (most likely meaning “ruler” rather than “source”; cf. Fitzmyer 1993 *contra* Fee 1987: 502–5). In ascending order it goes: woman, man, Christ, God. In relation to this order, the women prophets (and their supporters) are behaving shamefully (vv. 5–6). Shame language is language related to pivotal social values often deployed to induce conformity. In this case, values having to do with the basic order of being are under threat: a man who prophesies with his head covered “disgraces his head” (i.e., Christ), and a woman who prophesies with her head uncovered “disgraces her head” (i.e., the man). The shame arises out of the failure to maintain the distinctions—of status, gender, ethnicity, and so on—around which a society organizes its common life; and for Paul, such distinctions remain important for the Christian *ekklēsia* but in a way that is transformed by the gospel.

Then Paul appeals to an argument from Scripture (11:7–12). First, to support the view that the man should not cover his head (and that the woman should), he interprets Gen 1:27 (“So God created humankind in his image ... male and female he created them”) along the lines of a tradition which accords creation in God’s image to the male only and which therefore relegates the female to being the glory of the male (cf. Gen 2:18–23). The logic seems to be that the uncovered head of the man will reflect the glory of God (cf. 2 Cor 3:18) and that, since the uncovered head of the woman reflects the glory of the *man* and thus will deflect attention from the glory of *God*, the woman should go with her head covered (11:7). This is reinforced by further appeal to the creation narrative to justify the priority of male over female in the hierarchy of being: the man was created first and the woman was created from the man and, indeed, “for the sake of man” (vv. 8–9; cf. Gen 2:21–23). Then Paul makes the rather opaque statement: “For this reason a woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels” (11:10). In context, he probably means by this that, just as the man *ought not* to keep his head covered (v. 7), so the woman *ought* to keep hers covered (but now doing so freely, as a sign of her *exousia*; cf. 8:9), the resulting orderliness of the Christian meeting being such as will honor the divine presence represented by the angels worshiping with them and (perhaps) inspiring their prayer and prophecy (cf. Hays 1997: 187–88).



But now the argument takes a surprising new direction. The conservative thrust of the preceding instruction is qualified by instruction which sounds much more representative of the position of the women prophets and, according to D'Angelo (1988), represents an alternative, more egalitarian interpretation of the Genesis creation account. Thus, in terms strongly reminiscent of the teaching about reciprocal “rights” between wives and husbands in 7:4, he says: “Nevertheless, *in the Lord* woman is not independent of man *or man independent of woman*. For just as woman came from man [cf. Gen 2:21–23], *so man comes through woman* [i.e., in childbirth]; but *all things are from God*” (11:11–12). Here is Paul the conciliator. He brings both conservative (vv. 7–10) and radical (vv. 11–12) interpretations of Genesis into play so that the strengths of each position can be seen and the representatives of each position affirmed.

But this does not mean that Paul remains reticent about his own position: yes, “in the Lord” gender relations are transformed, in matters both of marriage rules (ch. 7) and of the corporate life of the Christian *ekklēsia* (11:2–12); no, the symbols of male-female differentiation are not to be dispensed with, even if they are no longer regarded in the way they were regarded once (cf. the famous *hōs mē* [“as though not”] in 7:29–31). To reinforce the latter, Paul ends with a battery of arguments of different kinds—from propriety (11:13), from nature (vv. 14–15), and from custom (v. 16)—all designed to constrain the women prophets from causing discord, while respecting their *exousia* to pray and prophesy. The conclusion is emphatic and shows Paul’s concern as apostle and pastor to maintain church order and discipline: “But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (v. 16).⁶

Table Fellowship and the Unity of the Church (11:17–34)

Paul now turns to a second aspect of the practice of the Corinthians when they “come together” in assembly (*en ekklēsia*): their table fellowship (cf. Theissen 1982: 145–72). We have seen already that the Corinthians’ table fellowship with *outsiders* concerns Paul on account of the threats it poses to the stability of the church (chs. 8–10). Here his concern surfaces again in an equally acute form, this time in relation to table fellowship *within* the Christian meeting itself (cf. 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34). Significantly, both in the case of table fellowship with idols and in the present case of disordered table fellowship *en ekklēsia*, Paul appeals to the tradition of the Lord’s Supper as a corrective and a control (10:14–22; 11:23–26). Appeal to the tradition of the Lord’s Supper (*deipnon*) is significant not only because of its direct relevance to the way each of the Corinthians is eating his or her own meal (*to idion deipnon*) but also because it is part of the larger tradition concerning the death of Christ, which is Paul’s constant point of reference for transforming the church’s life (cf. 1:18–4:21).

At first sight, the shift Paul makes from the controversy over the women prophets’ headcoverings/hairstyles (11:2–16) to the disorderliness of the church’s meal practices (vv. 17–34) is hard to follow. But the links are threefold. First, there is a common concern with how to reconcile the freedom and authority of the individual believer and the imperative of “building up” the church as a single body. Second, there is a common concern with the role of memory in building a common life and the associated need for the right interpretation of authoritative tradition (cf. vv. 2, 23), a concern which surfaces again in ch. 15. Third, there is the social-anthropological point that, in both sections, concerns about identity and order in the church find a symbolic focus in rules governing the control of body surfaces and orifices: in the former case, the symbolic focus is the head and hair of the women prophets; in the latter, the focus is the ingestion of food and drink in the course of the common meal (cf. Neyrey 1990: 102–47).

⁶ Barton, S. C. (2003). [1 Corinthians](#). In J. D. G. Dunn & J. W. Rogerson (Eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (pp. 1337–1338). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



The section has three parts: 11:17–22, 23–26, and 27–34. In vv. 17–22, Paul expresses his strong disapproval of the Corinthians' table fellowship. What should have been a ritual of incorporation and group solidarity, with members of the one body sharing their food and drink in acts of reciprocal hospitality (cf. Neyrey 1996: 159–82), seems to have degenerated into a ritual of rivalry and competitive display threatening to split the fellowship (vv. 18–21). The common meal has become anything but "common." In particular, disparities of wealth and status between members are being dramatized every time they "come together" to eat. How could this be? What is causing the breakdown into "divisions" (*schismata*) and "factions" (*haireseis*)? Vv. 21–22a provide the clue: "For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper [*to idion deipnon*], and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?"

The practice presupposed here is something like a "potluck" supper. When the Christians gather they bring "their own" food and drink with them. However, whereas potluck suppers in the modern West are (ideally) democratic and egalitarian because reciprocity is fairly balanced, in antiquity they were an opportunity, via the practice of unequal reciprocity, to display social superiority and gain social advantage in a competition between rival patrons (cf. Chow 1992: 110–12). A good illustration of the way meals convey meanings of this kind comes from Pliny, describing (what he considers) the social ineptitude of a host at whose table he has dined recently: "Some very elegant dishes were served up to himself and a few more of the company; while those which were placed before the rest were cheap and paltry. He had apportioned in small flagons three different sorts of wine; but you are not to suppose it was that the guests might take their choice: on the contrary, that they might not choose at all. One was for himself and me; the next for his friends of a lower order (for, you must know, *he measures out his friendship according to the degrees of quality*); and the third for his own freedmen and mine ..." (*Letters* 2.6, quoted in Theissen 1982: 156–57). Against this background, we can see that what is the accepted (if not always approved) meal practice in the households of the society-at-large is being carried over into the meal practice of the church. And of course, this is a tendency which is understandable given that church meetings took place, not in special, purpose-built church buildings—a later development—but in the private houses of the (presumably more prominent and wealthy) members (cf. Barton 1986; for a different view of the social stratification implied in this text, see Meggitt 1998: 118–22).

Paul's response to this serious threat to the church's common life is to appeal to the normative (and, in principle, unifying) tradition of the Lord's Supper (11:23–26; cf. Luke 22:17–19; also Matt 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24). This tradition is not new to the Corinthians. It is authoritative tradition ("from the Lord") which Paul "handed on" to them in his original teaching (11:23) but which, by a kind of social amnesia induced by prevailing cultural norms, they seem to have forgotten. In reminding them of this Lord's Supper tradition, Paul is offering the Corinthians a framework for reordering both their common meal and the way they think about it: (a) it is "the Lord's meal" (*kyriakon deipnon*), not anyone's "own meal" (*idion deipnon*); (b) it is a meal of solemn remembrance (*anamnēsis*) and proclamation of the sacrificial ("for you") death of Christ; (c) participation in the meal signifies participation in the "new covenant" relationship with God which the death of Christ makes possible; (d) if it follows the (Passover) pattern of the Lord's Supper, it has a clear beginning (the bread) and ending (the cup); (e) it has an eschatological dimension ("until he comes") with the corollary that it symbolizes both salvation and judgment.

On this basis, Paul calls for a major transformation in the Corinthians' common meal (11:27–34). His goal is for the meal to function as it should, not as a ritual of social enmity but as a ritual of "new covenant" incorporation which, in effect, brings three "bodies" into proper relation with each other: the bodies of individual believers, the social body of the church, and the body of Christ risen and returning (cf. also 10:16–17). That is what is signified in the injunction not to "eat the bread or drink the cup"—which comes emphatically three times (11:27, 28, 29)—without proper "discerning" (*diakrinein*). The discernment required is more than



personal self-examination if that is taken in an individualistic, privatized sense. It is a discernment that tests whether or not the individual's practice of table fellowship accords with and contributes to the soteriological and covenantal nature of the meal itself. If it does not, then what is intended to be a material and symbolic instrument of salvation becomes an instrument of judgment, after the biblical pattern.

To put it another way, like holiness the meal has a dangerous quality: those who eat and drink "without discerning the body" invite divine judgment: "For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (11:30). However strange in relation to modern sentiments, Paul assumes that there is an intimate connection (the "mechanics" of which are left unspecified, but are elucidated in Martin 1995: 190–97) between the "material" and the "spiritual," between the well-being of individual bodies and the well-being of the social body. That is why individual and corporate judgment are required (vv. 31–32). As in earlier cases (cf. 5:1–12; 6:1–11), Paul wants the church members to take more responsibility for their common life in recognition of the Lordship of Christ and of the eschatological horizon of their existence. Thus, in a final admonition which, by beginning and ending with *synerchesthai* ("to come together"), shows Paul's overarching concern with the Corinthians' pattern of common life, he says: "when you come together (*synerchomenoi*) to eat, wait for one another. If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together (*synerchesthe*), it will not be for your condemnation" (11:33–34a). Just as eating and drinking can bring either life or death, so the larger context of "coming together" can bring either life or death. The significance of the Christian gathering *en ekklesiā* is no less profound, no less open to promise or perversion, than that.

11:3 of every man Refers only to believers.

head The Greek word used here, *kephalē*, may imply authority or source. The term could have either meaning in ancient Greek literature. Alternatively, the word may denote preeminence or a combination of these meanings.

11:4 having his head covered Paul may be referring to a head covering used in Roman religious practice. Socially elite believers may have continued to wear such head coverings when gathering for worship. If so, they brought attention to themselves and may have ostracized those who felt socially inferior, causing division in the church community.

11:5 who prays or prophesies Refers to public prayer and prophecy.

prophesies Refers to inspired speech to edify and encourage the church community. See note on 1 Cor 12:10.

with her head uncovered Paul's comment assumes the cultural practice of covering a women's hair and head during times of worship. Paul discouraged women from uncovering their heads in such contexts. See note on v. 4.

dishonors her head Indicates that a woman dishonors a man when she takes on the appearance of a man.

11:6 shorn or shaved In Paul's day, a woman with an uncovered head may have been considered sexually revealing and thus a distraction to men in the context of worship. Paul therefore recommends that women should wear head coverings to avoid such issues.

11:7 image and glory of God See note on Gen 1:27.

11:8 woman from man Eve literally came from Adam—from his rib (though she was still created by God). See Gen 2:18–23.



11:9 woman for the man Paul is referencing the order of creation (Gen 2:18). He is not suggesting that women are created for the purpose of pleasing men; rather, he is focusing on the created order and Eve's role as a partner in maintaining God's creation.

11:10 authority This suggestion both satisfied cultural norms and would help resolve problems within the Corinthian community. See note on 1 Cor 11:6.

because of the angels Paul's reasoning is not entirely clear within its immediate context. Since a woman's long hair was a symbol of her sexuality, Paul may be recommending for a woman to cover her hair to keep angels from being tempted—not just men. In this case, Paul may have in mind incidents like the story of Gen 6:1–4 (compare 2 Pet 2:4–7; Jude 6–7). Alternatively, he may be drawing on Jewish traditions that regarded angels as protectors of God's glory and honor.

11:11 independent of man Both men and women are created by God and are equally valued in the created order. See note on 1 Cor 11:9.

11:12 man also comes through woman Refers to Gen 2:21–23 and reinforces the idea that woman and man are mutually dependent. Although Eve was created from Adam's rib, this does not make her inferior to him because by the same logic—according to Paul—men are derived from women because they are born from women.

11:13 pray to God with her head uncovered Head coverings may have signified that a woman participated in public worship through prayer.

11:14 nature The Greek text here may refer to a general opinion about what is appropriate for men and women.

dishonor to him Men are able to grow their hair as long as women, but to do so would have been against social norms and thus problematic to the gospel message in Corinth.

11:15 a glory to her Paul is saying that it is permissible for a woman to have long hair. The sexual desire of men should not hinder this (see note on 1 Cor 11:6).

11:16 contentious Paul means that if his opinion will not be accepted by some in the community, then he lacks an alternative practice to offer them. The Corinthians need to decide on a resolution that will maintain unity within the church (see chs. 12–13). Paul maintains that if they continue to be divided over the issue after his solution has been implemented, they will need to find a peaceful alternative.

custom Some women were not covered with a veil when they prayed; this was practiced in the Corinthian church. See note on v. 6; note on v. 10. This entire discussion may have been unique to Corinth—Paul was aware that his letter may have been passed around to other churches, so he includes this disclaimer.

11:17–34 Paul gives instructions about the proper observance of the Lord's Supper. Apparently, the church was divided on socioeconomic grounds, with the wealthier members abusing their position and status by inhibiting fellowship with the poorer members of the church. Paul hinted at the solution to this division earlier by emphasizing the unity of the body of Christ (10:17). The abuse of the Lord's Supper within the Corinthian church was causing them to lose sight of its purpose: fellowship between believers and identification with Christ and His sacrifice.



The Lord's Supper in First Corinthians

11:17 instruction Refers to the instruction concerning the Lord's Supper (vv. 17–34).

I do not praise Paul uses this statement to assign blame to the Corinthians. Compare v. 2.

you come together Refers to worship gatherings.

11:18 there are divisions among you Refers to divisions between social classes. Paul may have heard about these divisions from Chloe's household (1:11).

11:19 factions Refers to division (see v. 18).

11:20 the Lord's Supper Refers to the meal that Jesus instituted, symbolizing His death (Luke 22:14–23). The Corinthians, however, did not eat the Lord's Supper together; the division between the rich and poor altered their practice. The Corinthian believers probably had a large meal, known as a love feast, that included the Lord's Supper.

11:21 each one Refers to the wealthy believers in Corinth.

his own supper Some of the wealthy believers may have had their own meals and did not share with (or invite) poor believers. See note on 1 Cor 11:18.

11:22 do you despise the church of God The actions of wealthy believers showed that they did not value poor believers in their church community (*ekklēsia* in Greek). Thus, they damaged the unity and fellowship of the church.

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shame those who have nothing Paul addresses the wealthy Corinthian believers who ruined the sanctity of the Lord's Supper for poor believers. See note on v. 18.

11:23 I received from the Lord May imply that Paul received this instruction by direct revelation, but most likely recognizes Jesus as the source of the instruction (compare 15:3). This instruction may have already become a well-established tradition among the Church in the first century by the time this letter was written.

11:24 This section refers to the events of Luke 22:19–20.

do this in remembrance of Me Jesus, His sacrifice, and its implications are the objects of remembrance for believers.

11:25 cup Refers to the cup of blessing used in the Passover meal, which symbolized the blood of the covenant (Exod 24:8; Luke 22:20).

new covenant Refers to the covenant that fulfilled and replaced the Mosaic covenant (see Jer 31:31–34; 32:40; compare Exod 24; 2 Cor 3:7–18). Through this covenant of Christ's death, God offers forgiveness, eternal life, and the Holy Spirit that empowers believers to live God's commandments. Compare Luke 22:20.

in My blood Refers to Christ's violent and sacrificial death. Blood functioned to seal a covenant (see Exod 24:8; compare Zech 9:11; Heb 9:18–20; 13:20).



11:26 till He comes Refers to the second coming of Christ.

11:27 in an unworthy manner Paul is referring to the Corinthian believers' misuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:18)—they were missing the point of the meal, hindering their relationships with other believers and thus hindering the spread of the gospel (especially among the poor). They had even been driving fellow believers away from gatherings that were meant to celebrate Jesus—who offered His life for all without qualification of wealth or status. See note on 1:27–28.

will be guilty of the body People who sin in this way are like those who originally crucified the Lord Jesus. They are not honoring Christ's death but are instead making a mockery of it.

11:28 examine Refers to testing or proving to be genuine. See v. 19; and note on v. 21.

11:29 not discerning All believers, despite their economic status, are a part of the Christian community and Christ's work in the world.

11:30 For this reason many are weak Represents God's judgment for their failure to recognize all believers as the body of Christ. Disobedience in the ancient world was often linked to disease and death (see Acts 5:1–11).

11:32 we may not be condemned Refers to the final judgment at His second coming (see 1 Cor 11:26; Rom 2:5 and note).

11:33 wait for one another See note on 1 Cor 11:18.

11:34 if anyone is hungry In the first century, food shortages were common disasters. The crisis that Paul mentions in 7:26 may have been a food shortage.