

Gospel Doctrine

Lesson: 1 Cor 11-16

Reading: 1 Cor 11-16

[PDF version of the lesson notes.](#)

I. Worship and Head Coverings

Read 1 Cor 11:2-16:

2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. 3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. 4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. 5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. 6 For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.

7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. 8 For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. 9 Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. 10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. 12 For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of god.

13 Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? 14 Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? 15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. 16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

- These verses outline one aspect of appropriate behavior during worship. Paul's argument about the appropriate behavior of men and women when they worship seems firmly rooted in a cultural context that, as near as I can tell, we don't understand well.
- So how should we approach pericopes like this one? Should we punt? Should we be more careful in the types of inferences we draw? Does this mean we should be careful, for example, about using any of these verses to create model for the correct relationship between husband's and wives?
- What do see Paul's main point in this pericope?
- Is Paul's advice about short and long hair or head coverings?

- Why might Paul care about whether Men's heads were uncovered and women's heads were covered? Do the verses provided any clues?
- Paul mentions that these actions can lead to honor and shame. How do you think honor/shame fits into this situation?
- Can you explain how verse 10 and the reference to angels fits into Paul's argument?
- Is the most important element of the verses that Paul doesn't prohibit women from praying or prophesying during worship?

A. Maintaining Social Conventions

NT Wright makes the following comment about these verses:[1]

In Paul's day (as, in many ways, in ours), gender was marked by hair and clothing styles. We can tell from statues, vase paintings and other artwork of the period how this worked out in practice. There was social pressure to maintain appropriate distinctions. But did not Paul himself teach that there was 'no male and female, because you are all one in the Messiah' (Galatians 3.28)? Perhaps, indeed, that was one of the 'traditions' that he had taught the Corinthian church, who needed to know that Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female were all equally welcome, equally valued, in the renewed people of God. Perhaps that had actually created the situation he is addressing here; perhaps some of the Corinthian women had been taking him literally, so that when they prayed or prophesied aloud in church meetings (which Paul assumes they will do regularly; this tells us something about how to understand 14.34-35) they had decided to remove their normal headcovering, perhaps also unbraiding their hair, to show that in the Messiah they were free from the normal social conventions by which men and women were distinguished.

That's a lot of 'perhaps'es. We can only guess at the dynamics of the situation -- which is of course what historians always do. It's just that here we are feeling our way in the dark more than usual. But, perhaps to the Corinthians' surprise, Paul doesn't congratulate the women on this new expression of freedom. He insists on maintaining gender differentiation during worship.

- What do you think of Wright's commentary?
- Suppose Wright is basically right about the situation. How does that affect your understanding of this pericope?
- Why might it be important to enforce or behave consistently with social conventions when we worship? Do you think this idea is important today? Is it irrelevant? Is it problematic?

B. Public and Private Behavior

Malina and Pilch, cultural anthropologists, argue for the following cultural context:[2]

This sections deals with the behavior of wives and husbands at Jesus-group gatherings. The situation describes women acting as they would in private. This makes sense if the gatherings were in a domestic setting among brothers and sisters. But Paul's advice indicates that while Jesus-group members are one in Christ, their gathers are of a public nature. Hence wives and husbands at Jesus-group gatherings must act according to the social norms of public behavior.

and they also add:

The word translated "uncovered" may also mean "unbraided." Mediterranean married women of antiquity were to have their hair braided, signifying their marital status. A married woman in public with unbraided hair surely shamed her husband. It was as shameful as having her head shaved.

- What to you think of the preceding as the cultural backdrop of the Paul's advice? Is it consistent with the text?
- If Malina and Pilch are basically right, how should we understand Paul's argument?

C. Gender

Ben Witherington III makes the following argument with regard to these verses:[3]

But gender distinction is not something human beings created. Paul sees it as a good gift of God, and wishes it is manifested and so celebrated in Christian worship. He does not believe that there is some neutral core of personhood that has nothing to do with sexual identity. Nor does he believe that sexual distinctions are or will be obliterated in the order of redemption. His theology of redemption of the body points to belief that Christians are both initially and finally redeemed as men and women of God.

- What do you think of Witherington's argument? Do you think it is consistent with other parts of this epistle? Does, for example, chapter 15 support Witherington?
- suppose Witherington is basically right. How does that affect your understanding these verses?

II. Trouble and Humiliation at the Lord's Supper

In 11:17-34 Paul addresses specific problems and divisions with regard to the Lord's Supper.

A. I Do Not Commend You

Read 1 Cor 11:17-22:

(17) Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. (18) For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. (20) When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. (21) For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. (22) What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

- Do you find the condemnation in verse 17 to be particularly strong? What is Paul suggesting about the Corinthian churches current practice of the Lord's supper?
- How did early Christian practice of the Lord's supper differ from current modern practice? How was it similar? Can we make any useful inferences from these verses?
- How would you describe the nature of the divisions? What insights do verses 20-22 give us?
- What is verse 22 about? Is Paul suggesting that the Lord's supper shouldn't be a complete or full meal? That communal meals shouldn't be part of their worship and are not the Lord's supper? Or is it a condemnation of how they are eating the meal? What does it suggest about the proper way to eat the meal?
- John Barklay points out the following cultural backdrop to the eating of communal meals or dinner parties in the Greco-Roman world:

It was common at dinner-parties in the Greco-Roman world for the host to give more and better food to his most distinguished guests.[4]

Jerome Murphy O'Conner gives further insight on why Paul mentions the fact that some were arriving and eating earlier than others:

Only the wealthier members of the community could afford to arrive early and were concerned exclusively with the gratification of their own desires. Poorer members of the community might have worked all day without eating.[5]

- Do you think the divisions were related to social status? Do you think the rich were bringing better food and wine and not sharing it? Why would this be a problem in Paul's view? Why would it be a problem at the Lord's supper?
- Do you see a link with Paul's discussion here and last week's lesson. Specifically, do you

see a link with Paul's reminder that the congregation (collectively as a group) is God's temple:

(16) Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (17) If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. -- 1 Cor 3:16

- How are these verses related to the earlier verses in chapter 11? Do they shed light on each other?
- What is the link between the heresies and the divisions? Can we tell in these verses what Paul is referring to when he talks about heresies? Is heresies really the right word (take a look at footnote 19a)?
- I think the use of the word heresy may be misleading in this situation (but really only because I think heresy as a pretty theologically or doctrinally loaded backdrop). As footnote 19a points out the underlying Greek refers to sects or factions. Thus, the NRSV translates verse 19 as,

(19) Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine.

or the NIV,

(19) No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

- Still I am left wonder exactly what Paul is talking about in verse 19. How exactly do the differences or factions reveal who is genuine (a real or true Christian)?
- IS it possible that Paul is being sarcastic in verse 19?
- Given that Paul believes that these differences reveal who is genuine, might it make sense to think of these things in terms of heresy?

B. You Proclaim the Lord's Death Until He Comes

Read 1 Cor 11:23-26:

(23) For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: (24) And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. (25) After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. (26) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

- Remember, this is the earliest surviving record that mentions the establishment of the Lord's supper. What does Paul emphasize? What does he remind the Corinthian church of? Are there any difference in the way Paul talks about the Lord's supper and the way the gospels do?
- What do you think Paul means when he writes that "I received from the Lord" in verse 23? Do you think Paul is saying that this was revealed to him or something else? Why emphasize that he received it from the Lord? Why not say something like, Cephas (or whomever) told me about the last supper?
- What do you think Paul is talking about in verse 26? How is participating in the Lord's supper about proclaiming "the Lord's death until he comes?" Do you think 2 Cor 4:10-11 sheds any light on this idea?

(10) Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. (11) For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

or the NRSV translation of these verses::

(10) always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. (11) For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

- Why would Paul emphasize or remind the Corinthians that they are proclaiming "the Lord's death until he comes" when they participate in the Lord's supper given the backdrop of the divisions or factions mentioned earlier.

C. Without Discerning The Body

- Read 1 Cor 11:27-34:

(27) Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. (28) But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. (29) For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (30) For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (31) For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. (32) But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (33) Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. (34) And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

- When Paul writes about eating and drinking unworthily, does the specific context matter?
- In this context, what does it mean to examine yourself? Does the specific context have application to us when we partake of the Lord's supper?
- Does verse 29 and the phrase, "not discerning the Lord's body", help us understand what Paul specifically wants the members of the Corinthian church to examine before participating in the Lord's Supper? A Modern translation may be helpful for this verse:

(29) For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. --NRSV

- Does 1 Cor 10:15-17 affect how you understand the phrase, "without discerning the body?"

(15) I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. (16) The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (17) For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

- What is verse 30 about? Is Paul suggesting that the division and improper approach to the Lord's supper has led to sickness and death? Is he suggesting the Lord has punished members of the Corinthian church with sickness and death or that negligence led to sickness and death?
- I think verse 33 is a very important verse in some ways. What does verse 33 do?

III. Gifts of the Spirit

- Read 1 Cor 12:1-12:

(1) Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. (2) Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. (3) Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. (4) Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. (7) But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. (8) For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; (9) To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; (10) To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the

interpretation of tongues: (11) But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. (12) For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

- Why does Paul say he doesn't want the Corinthians to be ignorant about spiritual gifts?
- Why does Paul mention other religions in verse 2? What is his point? What is he trying to contrast?
- How does Paul develop or weave the theme of unity into his discussion about spiritual gifts?
- How does verse 3 remind the congregation of what they have in common? Why remind them that proclaiming that Jesus is Lord is a spiritual gift?
- Why does Paul mention (at least briefly) a wide variety of different spiritual gifts? What is he trying to teach the Corinthians? Is it simply to create a list of the possible gifts? Does it suggest that no gift (besides maybe the one in verse 3) should be regarded as uniquely important?

Endnotes

1. Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, 139-140.
2. Mailina, Bruce J., and John J. Pilch, *Social Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul*, 106-17.
3. Witherington, Ben , *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 139-140.
4. *Oxford Bible Commentary*, 1136.
5. *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, 809.