

Core Study #5

Truly Worshipping Together

Passage: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:34

Themes: Worshipping as a community, honoring God and honoring each other.

Summary:

This passage deals with the consequences of the Corinthian believers abusing the freedom of Christ talked about in chapter 10. In the first part of chapter 11 we see that there were major division within worship services because cultural differences within the body were causing offense and taking peoples eyes off of communicating the gospel. Paul was addressing the lack of respect for the whole of the church in regards to the issue of understanding of who should wear head coverings. In the second part of chapter 11 we see that there have been some severe abuses of the Lord's supper with the rich eating and drinking excessively and the poor leaving hungry. Paul gives an understanding of what this celebration is for and how damaging it can be to the church when this practice is abused.

Leaders Preparation:

Read through 1 Corinthians 11 a few times in different translations – especially from the Message translation. Pray and ask God to reveal His Truth to you, taking note of repeated phrases and major themes. Write down any questions you may have about the passage, any words or sentences that you don't understand. You may want to look at a good study Bible or Bible commentary such as Gordon Fee's "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" to find the answers to your questions.

Some examples of questions you may want to ask yourself as you prepare your study:

a) Why would it matter if women wore head coverings or not in worship? Why is Paul making such a big deal about this?

"In talking about head coverings and length of hair, Paul is saying that believers should look and behave in ways that are honorable within their own culture. In many cultures long hair on men is considered appropriate and masculine. In Corinth, it was thought to be a sign of male prostitution in the pagan temples. And women with short hair were labeled prostitutes. Paul was saying that in the Corinthian culture, Christian women should keep their hair long. If short hair on women was a sign of prostitution, then a Christian woman with short hair would find it even more difficult to be a believable witness for Jesus Christ. Paul wasn't saying we should adopt all the practices of our culture, but that we should avoid appearances and behavior that detract from our ultimate goal of being believable witnesses for Jesus Christ while demonstrating our Christian faith."¹

¹ NASB Life Application Study Bible, pg 2021.

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b) Is Paul advocating the superiority of men over women in this passage?

Against the background of Genesis 1:26-27 (In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them), Paul cannot mean that only males reflect God. He carefully does not say that woman is man's 'image and likeness.' But he does say that a woman will be the 'glory' of her husband when she stands in right relationship to him, which is Paul's concern in Corinth.²

You will notice that there are an assortment of questions given below. You do not need to include them all in your core study, and should try to focus your study on particular ideas or portions of the passage. As you decide which questions to use, ask yourself what you think your core would benefit from most.

Introduction Question (selection to choose from):

- What are some examples of a community worshipping together?
- When you enter into a worship service are you only conscious of yourself in relationship to God or as a community in relation to God?

Discussion Questions (selection to choose from):

First read 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:16

1. What appears to be Paul's major concern for the church in this passage?

Allow people to share the many possible answers to this question: the relationship between the sexes, authority, order and freedom and the marriage relationship. All these answers will give some clue to the passage and help a common interpretation to emerge later.³ He addresses many issues such as how to give glory to God, disunity in the church and how to be a witness to the outside world.

"Paul's main concern is irreverence in worship. We need to read this in the context of the Corinthians situation. The matter of wearing hats or head coverings, although seemingly insignificant, had become a big problem because two cultural backgrounds were colliding. Jewish woman always covered their heads in worship. For a woman to uncover her head in public was a sign of loose morals. On the other had, Greek women may have been used to worshipping without head coverings. In this letter Paul had already spoken about divisions and disorder in the church. Both are involved in this issue.

² 1 Corinthians: The challenges of Life Together. Paul Stevens and Dan Williams. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois.

³ 1 Corinthians: The challenges of Life Together. Paul Stevens and Dan Williams.

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*Paul's solution comes from his desire for unity among church members and for appropriateness in the worship service.*⁴

2. The word "head" in vs 3 can cause a lot of controversy in the modern church. It could be translated as either "chief" and "ruler" OR "source" and "origin". Repeat the verse with these words instead. Discuss which understanding of headship best fits Paul's concern here in light of vs. 11 and 12.

- Paul says that in vs 11 & 12 that men and women are equal so how does that affect our understanding of what headship looks like?
- In light of the relationship of headship between Christ and God. How does the relationship between man and woman look?

"Verse 3 is the center of a raging controversy in the modern church. Those who believe that men should be in authority over women (at least men acting as husbands in a marriage or as elders in a church) usually interpret head as "chief" or "ruler". Likewise, Christian feminists usually interpret it as "source" or "origin". Some interpreters see a straight hierarchy in verse 3: God is over Christ, who is over man, who is over woman. However, it may be better to see verse 3 as a series of comparisons. Paul is not emphasizing "God over Christ over man over woman" but rather is saying that the Christ-human relationship is like the man-woman relationship which is like the God-Christ relationship. Comparing husband and wife with God the Father and Christ helps us understand headship as a priority within a relationship of equals. It has nothing to do with greater and inferior. In the mysterious economy of the Trinity the Father has priority over the Son, but they are equal and one (Jn 10:30)"⁵

3. In the culture of Corinth a woman who had her hair covered or put up was signaling that she had a right relationship with her husband. If these women are equal and free in Christ why does Paul urge these women to continue these practices? Think of this issue in light of 1 Cor 10:31-33.

"This section focuses primarily on proper attitudes and conduct in worship, not on the marriage relationship or on the role of women in the church. While Paul's specific instructions may be cultural, the principles behind his specific instructions are timeless, principles like respect for spouse, reverence and appropriateness in worship, and focus of all of life on God. If anything you do can easily offend members and divide the church, then change your ways to promote church unity. Thus Paul told the women who were not wearing head coverings to wear them, not because it was a Scriptural command, but because

⁴ NASB Life Applications Study Bible. Pg 2020.

⁵ Stevens and Williams.

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*it kept the congregation from dividing over a petty issue that served only to take people's minds off Christ.'*⁶

4. How should this desire for unity of the church and honoring God above all else affect your own times of worship and interaction with the body of Christ? Within UCM? Within your own relationships with the opposite sex?
5. Discuss whether there are modern day cultural equivalents to the issue about head coverings in the church?

This could be issues such as aligning yourself with status symbols, promoting yourself instead of working towards the unity and well-being of the body of Christ. (ie.) wearing tons of expensive jewelry, wearing revealing and sexy clothing, car, nice guitar, etc..

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

6. For the New Testament church the Lord's Supper or Communion was a time for a feast, celebration and fellowship. In what ways was the Corinthian church abusing this celebration (vs 18-22)?

In the Corinthian church, this meal had become a time when some ate and drank excessively while others went hungry. There was little caring and sharing. This certainly did not demonstrate the unity and love that should characterize the church.

7. Why is it so important for the church to come together and celebrate the Lord's Supper? (vs 23-27) Why does Paul warn the church to not take this practice lightly? (vs 29-32)
8. How will you prepare yourself the next time you come to take communion with your community?

Response (selection to choose from):

9. What have you learned about worship through this chapter that is honoring or dishonoring to God?

Take time to pray through broken relationships that have intruded on your worship. Pray that God would show resentments and conflicts that disrupt the celebrations of the Lord's Supper in your community.

⁶ NASB Life Application Study Bible. Pg. 2020.

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For future reference:

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 & 40 also deals with similar issues as this passage does. The issue stems from the abuse of the freedom given in Christ and there was disruption of the worship services and caused division in the church. Paul was asking the women not to flaunt their Christian freedom during worship. The purpose was to promote unity, not to teach about women's role in the church.