

## 1 Corinthians 11 – Chapter Study

### INTRODUCTION

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The first part of ch. 11 takes us into dangerous territory.

Dangerous because it challenges modern culture regarding the relationship between the sexes.

What we'll look at tonight is considered by many to be politically incorrect.

Some of us may be tempted to relegate what we find here to an out-dated & old-fashioned morality from an unsophisticated era of history

If that's your reaction to what we're about to examine, I hope to disabuse you of that conclusion.

You see, while this deals with a specific custom in ancient Corinth, the *principles* we can glean from these verses are timeless.

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As we begin, let me say that God calls us to be a *holy people*.

To be separate distinct, pure; unstained by the world's moral pollution.

And though we're called to be holy, throughout the ages, the Church has often shown a tendency to ape the fallen fashions of the world than to be a holy people.

The adage, "You have to go along to get along," has oft been used to justify accommodation to the world.

An Arabic Proverb says, "If you allow the camel's nose into your tent, he will soon be in bed with you."

Accommodating the world in even the smallest ways, opens a door that becomes difficult to shut.

##### F. *The Conduct of Public Worship 11:2- Ch. 14*

##### 1. *Head-Coverings 11:2-16*

##### 2 **Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.**

Because the NT as we think of it didn't arrive on the scene until 4<sup>th</sup> Century, most of the teaching done in the early church was based on the oral traditions passed down by the original disciples of Jesus.

Along with this teaching on the Work & Words of Jesus was a set of truths & some accepted practices local churches would follow as they met for worship.

All of that is what Paul means here by "traditions."

The Corinthians continued to follow the oral teaching & practices he'd passed on to them when he planted the church there.

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But there was one practice that had come under fire from some in the church = Head coverings.

Throughout the Middle East, from ancient to modern times, women have worn a veil that covers their head & face.

The veil serves 2 purposes –

- 1) It's a *mark of modesty*, in that it hides her beauty from the eyes of strangers who would be enticed by her – thus protecting her from unwanted attention.
- 2) It's a *sign of submission* to her father, or when married, to her husband.

The covering of her head represents her being “under” him; thus enjoying his protection.

The situation in Corinth was this – Modest women, moral ladies of good character, wore the veil when they went out in public.

The only women who *didn't* were the thousand employed as ritual prostitutes by the temple of Aphrodite.

Each afternoon they'd gather at the temple to conduct a brief service, then go out into the streets & marketplace of Corinth, peddling their wares.

People knew who they were because of their *lack* of a veil.

They *wanted* others to see them & be enticed.

The absence of a veil also meant they weren't under anyone's authority, so “available.”

Some of them had even shaved their heads so their gender would be in question because some of their patrons were homosexuals.

The problem that had risen in the church at Corinth was one of Christian liberty – the same subject we've been dealing with in chs. 8-10.

You see, the gospel had *elevated* women dramatically in both the Greco-Roman & Jewish cultures.

As Paul makes clear in Galatians 3:28 – in Christ, all are equal, including male & female.

This was a revolutionary idea & one of the reasons why the Church faced persecution.

Its critics said Christians were threatening social order by such radical ideas.

You see, in both the Jewish & Roman cultures, women were only slightly higher than slaves.

They were virtual property to be bargained with like chattel.

They had only those rights their husbands or fathers bestowed on them.

Then along came Rabbi Jesus who allowed women to follow Him for the first time.

Women played an integral role in the early church.

And where ever the Gospel took root in planting new churches, women were elevated as daughters of God, and joint-heirs of salvation, on a equal footing with men.

Indeed, as we look at the writings of the Apostles on the roles of husbands & wives, we see a differentiation of duties but an equality of persons that's nothing less than revolutionary to the times.

Remember in ch. 7 how Paul even said the husband's body belongs to his wife & has a duty to bring her sexual satisfaction.

Sorry – but there is NOTHING in all of ancient literature that comes anywhere close to that idea.

This equality of men & women in Christ was a radically new concept; one that some had taken it *too far*. Some women in the church, had removed their veils in public & during worship thinking by doing so they were affirming their equality to men.

What they were in fact doing was *violating* an important cultural symbol of modesty & submission.

So Paul writes to correct this breach of etiquette.

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**3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.**

Before he gets in to the specifics of head-coverings, he lays down the principle that underlies relationship between men & women.

And with this we jump into the troubled waters of our own culture with its confusion about gender.

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By “head” Paul is referring to authority & submission – or *subordination*.

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Subordination is a good word because it gives us a good understanding of what we're talking about here.

Sub – under / Ordination – to place, set, establish in order.

When we count, we use “ordinals” = 1,2,3,4,5. = That's the correct “order”

3 comes AFTER 2 which is AFTER 1.

If we arranged the ordinals vertically, 2 is *subordinate* to 1. It's not “less” or inferior; it's just after, under, 1.

That's its *order*, where it *belongs*. 2's relationship **TO** 1 is *under* it.

In terms of relationships in the Godhead & between God & man, then between humans, it goes like this:

God the Father – God the Son – Man – Woman.

Woman is subordinate to man, who's subordinate to Christ, who's subordinate to the Father.

It's clear from the context we'll see in a moment that Paul is referring specifically to the family here, and how it's manifested within the Church.

He's not speaking generally about society at large.

He's not calling for the general subordination of all women to all men.

He has a specific set of relationships in mind here – the family.

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Now, before we move on – let's make sure we're clear on what Paul is & is NOT saying here.

No one ought to take umbrage with his saying the woman is subordinate to the man because it's linked directly to Christ's being subordinate to God.

Christ IS God, but in terms with of the Son's relationship to the Father, He's subordinate.

No one balks at that. No one questions it. On the contrary, we see harmony, purpose & the utmost love & perfection in that relationship.

THAT'S the template we ought to lay over our view of woman's subordination to man.

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Now that Paul's given the general principle of subordination, he applies it to the sitch in Corinth.

**4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. 5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.**

In the culture of Corinth, men did NOT wear a veil, while polite, moral women did.

If a man wore a veil, it would've been equivalent in today's parlance if he wore a cocktail dress, panty hose, & high-heels! It was just NOT done.

Now – none of the men of the church of Corinth dressed as a drag queen because that's absurd.

For a woman to shun the veil ought to be seen as just as absurd.

So absurd in fact that to shun the veil was equivalent to being one of the temple prostitutes who shaved their heads in the ultimate form of gender-bending.

**6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.**

This makes it clear. Paul reasons with the women who wanted to do away with their veils.

If so, why not go all the way & shave your head?

If the women said, “No way! That would be shameful.”

He says, “Exactly! So leave the veil on. Because while it's true men & women are equal in Christ, we're called to different roles & there are practical customs of propriety we ought not cast aside.”

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A question often arises at this point. How come Paul says men are NOT to cover their heads when they pray while orthodox Jewish men wear a *Yarmulke*, or *kippah*, as they call it?

Turns out, didn't become a practice among the Jews till 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD.

It symbolizes devotion to all 613 of the commandments of the Mosaic Law.

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**7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man. 9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.**

Paul bases the subordination of woman to man on the *order of creation*.

Man came first, then woman.

**10 For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.**

What???? What do angels have to do with all this? Well, it's all about this thing called "authority & subordination."

You see, long ago, the highest of all God's creation, a creature of incredible beauty, wisdom, and skill rebelled against God.

He was a cherub named Lucifer. He was second only to God in rank but sought to usurp the Lord. His rebellion was put down, & he & the fallen angels who joined his revolt were removed from their lofty positions.

In the creation of the human race, the devil's complaint against God is being answered.

God gave to men & women free will; then honors their choice.

When we chose to submit ourselves to God, of our own volition, we're *proving* the revolt of Satan was wrong & contrary to the love God so richly bestowed on him.

Even more – It was God's intent in the creation of man to provide Himself an eternal companion who would one day rise to become second- replacing Lucifer in that role.

Ancient Jewish tradition says this was the ultimate cause of Lucifer's fall.

He refused to subordinate himself to a creature that had it's origin in dust.

So when a woman actively & joyfully embraces her submission to her father, then her husband, it even MORE proves the error of the devil's rebellion – because she IS a human, submitting to another human.

How much more ought Lucifer to have subordinated himself to a creature that bears the image of God?

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Think of it: Angels are watching us as we go about our relationships in marriage & family.

As Ephesians 5 says – the wife is the church and the husband Christ.

We are to pattern our relationship after that relationship!

**11 Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. 12 For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.**

Coupled to the principle of subordination is the reality of dependence.

While woman did come from man in the order of creation – men cannot forget the reason the woman was created was because he was incomplete and NEEDED the woman.

And the fact is – it's the woman who gives birth to man since.

**13 Judge among yourselves.**

This is an appeal to common sense & the consensus of the entire church.

**Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? 15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.**

Paul was a sharp guy who was well grounded in both history & philosophy.

He appeals to them on the ground of long-held custom that God intends for men & women to maintain distinctions between themselves & not blur the lines of gender.

By "nature" in v. 14, Paul means "the way things are." He was speaking not of wild-nature but society.

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Throughout the history of the world, & specially throughout both Jewish & Greek society, men wore their hair short while women wore it long.

There were always short periods of time when fashion might allow men to wear their hair longer, or they were specific groups who donned longer hair – but they were notable precisely BECAUSE they did so.

The Nazarite vow among the Jews was even a part of the law – but a man’s long hair was a distinctive mark identifying him precisely as someone who’d made a special vow.

Paul’s point is that such an entrenched custom differentiating men & women as veils ought not be cast aside because it creates confusion which can only harm the Gospel.

**16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.**

Since this is another issue of scruples, of the application of our liberty in Christ Paul returns to the bottom line – don’t get into a brouhaha about all this.

The word contentious refers to someone whose habit is to engender strife.

Don’t play their game! Don’t get sucked into endless disputes.

Rather – stand your ground.!

The way this is translated it sounds like Paul is giving in and saying to agree with the person who wants to ditch the veil.

Actually - it’s the *opposite*.

He’s saying not a single church follows the idea of being immodest or rejecting the God-ordained roles of men & women.

So, if someone wants to argue, just say, “No! We’re keeping things as they are.”

“It’s important we not blur the distinctions between male & female or re-engineer the roles of husbands & wives.”

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## **2. The Lord’s Table 11:17-34**

**17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.**

While the Corinthians had been pretty good about following the traditions he’d imparted to them, there was one area in particular they’d really fallen down on – the agape, or love feast that was the center of their gathering for worship.

**18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.**

He’s already addressed the problem of their disunity in the first 4 chapters of the letter.

But they weren’t just at odds with one another generally.

They carried it right into their meetings. Instead of *fellowship* it was *adversaryship*.

Picture a church meeting where people sat in sections according to their group, then argued with each other. That’s Corinth!

**19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.**

While factions in & of themselves are a problem, that doesn’t mean a faction itself is wrong.

The reason for a faction may be because it’s standing for truth while others are in error.

There comes a time when a person who’s part of a group headed in the wrong direction has to withdraw.

When the Spirit or conscience tells you it’s time to remove yourself, you have to.

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While the church at Corinth had a lot of problems, there was probably at least one group that was faithfully following the Lord a7 was deeply grieved by what was going on.

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You get the impression the people who brought the letter to Paul at Ephesus were at least *some* from that right-on group.

**20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.**

As it ought to have been.

**21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.**

Here's the sitch –

When the church gathered, each would bring something to contribute to a common meal called the Agape – Love feast.

Those who had more, brought more.

Everyone would eat a full meal, they'd hold their worship service, then dessert was Communion.

What was happening in Corinth is that some were coming early, setting their food out, then without waiting for the poorer members who had to work later, some of them even being slaves, who's only good meal was the Agape, they'd dig in and eat everything, leaving nothing but scraps for those who came later.

Some were even getting toasted on too much vino!

This was despicable – after all – it was called the AGAPE!

By the end of the service, some were stuffed & tipsy while others were hungry – then they'd all partake of the Lord's Table.

Yet the gluttons felt not a single pang of remorse. SHAMEFUL!

**23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.**

Paul reminds them of the meaning of Communion. It was the body & blood of Jesus Christ Who died to save us from sin & death.

But the selfishness demonstrated at the Corinthians Love Feast called into question if they really understood.

How can such wanton selfishness be squared with a faith that holds to the cross?

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I did not see it but I heard about it later.

Last year at our men's retreat on Saturday night they made us tri-tip.

Now, we have a standing rule; the first time you go through the line, take a moderate amount to make sure everyone gets some then after all have been fed, go back for seconds or thirds if you want.

But that night, some guys piled the meat up as high as they could and one guy grabbed a plastic bag and shoveled it full of meat.

The result was about a dozen guys got no meat at all, including our guest speaker who graciously stayed back to minister to some guys & ended up at the end of the line for it.

That kind of selfish thoughtlessness is exactly what was going on at Corinth.

**27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.**

Listen, we're all unworthy! None of us is righteous in ourselves.

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Paul cannot be saying we're to make ourselves worthy before we can partake of Communion.

Communion is a commemoration of Christ's work on behalf of the unworthy.

What Paul means is made clear by the phrase "unworthy **manner**."

He's calling the Corinthians to consider their attitude when they partake of the Lord's Table.

For if they partake of it without regard for what it means and what Christ has done and what change that ought to effect in them, then they stand in danger of treating something holy as profane.

**28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**

Be careful to note that Paul prohibits NO ONE from partaking of communion.

He just says to do so with a prepared & right heart.

**29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner**

That is – without examining him/herself & making sure doing so with a keen awareness of what it all means.

**eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.**

Christ took the judgment for our sins on His cross.

That is applied to us when we believe in Him.

But if someone partakes of communion which commemorates the judgment of sin without faith, they'll come under judgment.

**30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.**

Physical illness had come upon several at Corinth as a form of God's corrective judgment.

Some had even died because of their gross neglect of the change that ought to mark the follower of Christ.

What Paul says here ought to be considered by all those who suffer some kind of physical affliction.

Illness is not necessarily linked to selfishness & a gross lack of love, but it may be.

**31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.**

A little honest self-examination & repentance is a healthy thing.

**32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.**

Paul makes a distinction between the *corrective judgment* God uses on His people & the judgment of condemnation that comes to those who reject Christ.

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Picture a judge at the County Government Center.

He hears criminal cases.

On Thursday from 8 to 5 he hears a case & renders a sentence on a guy convicted of armed robbery.

He's a 3 time loser so the judge sentences him to 25 years of hard time.

The judge feels sad but knows he's rendered justice & that it's best for society the guy be put away where he can't do any more harm to the innocent.

He goes home that night & his wife tells him their 9 year old son cheated on a test at school.

He's got to discipline the boy, but he does so with his son's good in mind.

His goal as a father is to drive out of his boy the moral weakness that allowed the cheating.

So the chastening he employs is aimed at his son's good, not harm.

This is how God *chastens* His people.

**33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.**

No more diving in before everyone's arrived at the Agape.

If you're starved, grab something to eat before you arrive.

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There was more to say about their gathering for worship, but Paul would deal with it on his next visit.

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