

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF CORINTHIANS

First Corinthians – Chapter 11

Chapter 11

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” (v1)

Paul starts this chapter with a clear instruction to the church in Corinth. Imitate me just as I imitate Christ. This becomes the pattern. We follow our leaders in the family, Church, and the society if they follow Christ. Otherwise, following Christ overrules the following the leader who is not following Christ.

Honouring the Head

“In a marriage relationship, there is authority from Christ to husband, and from husband to wife. The authority of Christ is the authority of God. Any man who speaks with God or about God in a way that shows a lack of respect for the authority of Christ, dishonours Christ. In the same way, a wife who speaks with God in a way that shows a lack of respect for the authority of her husband, dishonours her husband. Worse, she dishonours herself—an ugly sight, like a woman with her head shaved. This is basically the origin of these customs we have of women wearing head coverings in worship, while men take their hats off. By these symbolic acts, men, and women, who far too often butt heads with each other, submit their “heads” to the Head: God.” (vv3-9 MSG)

Paul is addressing matters within a marriage relationship which at the time was a cultural matter and tried to give a general perspective which has been accepted at other churches in other areas as well.

I will highlight the point that Paul was making here:

- *In a marriage relationship, there is authority from Christ to husband, and from husband to wife. The authority of Christ is the authority of God. Therefore, it is God to Christ, Christ to the husband and husband to the wife. That is the pattern of flow of authority in God’s kingdom.*
- *Any man who speaks with God or about God in a way that shows a lack of respect for the authority of Christ, dishonours Christ. In the same way, a wife who speaks with God in a way that shows a lack of respect for the authority of her husband, dishonours her husband. Worse, she dishonours herself—an ugly sight, like a woman with her head shaved.*

This is self-explanatory. Any man (husband) who speaks to God in a way that shows lack of respect for the authority of Christ... dishonours Christ!

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.” (John 5:22-23)

Paul went on to say that a wife that speaks to God in a way that shows a lack of respect for the authority of her husband, dishonours her husband.

- *This is basically the origin of these customs we have of women wearing head coverings in worship, while men take their hats off. By these symbolic acts, men, and women, who far too often butt heads with each other, submit their “heads” to the Head: God.”*

The custom of that culture is that women will wear head-coverings and men take their hat off to show respect to their “Head” as a symbolic act. This was a cultural act at the time for that culture but not commanded by God.

Why did they have that culture? Because they butt head with each other (husband and wife) and this symbolic act brings the issue of honour to the fore-front.

“Don’t you agree there is something naturally powerful in the symbolism—a woman, her beautiful hair reminiscent of angels, praying in adoration; a man, his head bared in reverence, praying in submission? I hope you’re not going to be argumentative about this. All God’s churches see it this way; I don’t want you standing out as an exception.” (vv13-16)

Here, Paul was stating clearly that the woman’s hair is a source of beauty like that of angels that is used in the worship of our King while the man bowing in adoration and reverence, praying in submission is a beautiful thing. That is what praying within marriage should look like.

God’s Holy Communion

“Now, on this next matter, I wish I could commend you, but I cannot, because when you meet together as a church family it is doing more harm than good! I’ve been told many times that when you meet as a congregation, divisions and cliques emerge—and to some extent, this doesn’t surprise me.” (vv17-18 TPT)

This church’s attitude to their gatherings have been reported to Paul. When they meet as a congregation, there are divisions and cliques... and with their level of carnality, it did not surprise Paul.

Do we still have cliques and divisions today in the church?

Their Attitude Laid Out:

“Therefore, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry, and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” (vv20-22)

Their conduct does not resemble those coming to eat the Lord’s Supper. What do they do?

1. They make it a feast where people bring food and drink into the church,
2. Some will go ahead and grab the food and drink before the communion service starts,
3. Some are already drunk which connotes that they were bringing in alcoholic drinks to communion
4. They feed only their cliques and friends and leave the poor hungry.

Why Holy Communion?

“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; 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.” 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.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” (vv23-26)

- We take Holy Communion as a means of (personal) fellowship with the Lord (Matthew 26:26-30)
- We take Holy Communion as a channel of healing and wholeness. Today, when we partake of the bread, we are declaring that Jesus’ health and divine life flows in our mortal bodies. And when we partake of the cup, we are declaring that we are forgiven and have been made righteous. (Isaiah 53:4-5)
- We take Holy Communion to activate God’s blood covenant and all its blessing over our lives. The word “remember” or “remembrance” means “time to take action”. Therefore, as we do this in

remembrance of Him, we activate or stir up the new blood covenant over our lives (Hebrews 10:19-23)

- We take Holy Communion as an act of obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been instructed to do this in remembrance of Him.

Warning on Attitude to Holy Communion

“For this reason, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in the wrong spirit will be guilty of dishonouring the body and blood of the Lord. So, let each individual first evaluate his own attitude and only then eat the bread and drink the cup. For continually eating and drinking with a wrong spirit will bring judgment upon yourself by not recognizing the body. This insensitivity is why many of you are weak, chronically ill, and some even dying.” (vv27-29 TPT)

- Unworthily or Wrong Spirit

The word "unworthily" or “wrong spirit” means when they are eaten and drank by unworthy persons, in an unworthy manner, and to unworthy ends and purposes. The Lord's supper may be taken unworthily, when it is partaken of by unworthy persons.

- The Lord's Body

The Lord's Body in this context can be understood in at least two ways. It may refer to not recognizing the bread as Christ's body given in sacrifice, or not recognizing Christ's body on earth, the church. To properly discern the Lord's body, which was beaten and bruised for our healing, would mean we would not be weak or sick or die prematurely.

- Guilty of dishonouring the body and the blood of the Lord:

Whoever condemns the holy ordinances, that is, uses them incorrectly, are guilty not of the bread and wine, but of the thing itself, that is, of Christ, and will be grievously punished for it.

- Judgment on yourself by not recognising the body:

It must be approached with respect as something much more meaningful and important. If a person proclaims Jesus' death, but is disobedient to the gospel, that person is essentially daring God to judge them (Galatians 6:6-7). Whether by ignorance, arrogance, or simple error, insulting the sacrifice of Christ—even symbolically—is something God takes seriously.

- Insensitivity is why many are weak, chronically ill, and some dying:

Paul's sobering words in the previous verse raised a serious question for believers. He said that to participate in communion without "discerning the body" will bring judgment on the one who eats the bread and drinks the cup. That reference seems to refer to those who treat the bread and wine as just like any other meal or snack: to be careless or shallow about it. Or, it might refer to those who fail to recognize how commemorating the death of Christ expresses unity with other believers. Or, it might refer to some combination of both. But what judgment comes from not discerning the body?

Paul's answer only adds to the seriousness of this passage. He writes that many among the Corinthians were weak and ill for this very reason. Some had even died as a result of failing to participate in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. To be even more clear, it is God who has brought weakness, illness, and death to them as discipline for their failure to observe communion with proper respect for Christ's sacrifice and for each other.

Final Commendation on Discerning the Body

“If you do not sit in judgment of others, you will avoid judgment yourself. But when we are judged, it is the Lord’s training so that we will not be condemned along with the world. So then, my fellow believers, when you assemble as one to share a meal, show respect for one another and wait for all to be served. If you are that hungry, eat at home first, so that when you gather together you will not bring judgment upon yourself. When I come to you, I will answer the other questions you asked me in your letter.” (vv31-34)

Paul concludes this chapter by instructing that:

1. *We do not sit in judgment of others otherwise; we will be judged ourselves.*

If we are holding anyone in judgment either in unforgiveness or holding their debt against them etc., we should not partake of the Lord’s body and blood because God will judge us...and the judgment will be a training so we do not do that again.

2. *When we gather for Holy Communion or even, common sharing a meal, we should wait for one another to be served.*

Although this speaks about Holy Communion, but we can extend this to attitude to food at parties, events and gatherings where believers gather and fill plates not considering those coming after. This type of attitude should not be mentioned amongst us.

3. *If you are hungry, eat at home first! By this, you will not bring judgment on yourself.*

Let us make this a practice that you go to every event already eaten where possible and whatever is offered is a top-up. As for Holy Communion, this is crucial as it is the Lord that will execute judgment.

Paul concludes this letter by saying he will address other matters in their letter when he gets to them.