

Week 8: Discerning the Body - 1 Cor 11:2-34

Pre-Work

- The role of women in Church leadership is an extraordinarily controversial topic, and there are a lot of folks who disagree with how to interpret the various New Testament mentions of women in the Church. One of the most helpful 5 minute “wide lens” explanations of the New Testament role of women is an interview with N.T. Wright on the subject. Please watch this video for context as we explore this subject.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32PubAhacl8>

- Please read 1 Corinthians 11:2-34. Note how this passage makes you feel. What do you think might be exactly the same in the culture in which this section was read aloud? What might be completely different?

Class Notes

Read:

2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I handed them down to you. **3** But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. **4** Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. **5** But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for it is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. **6** For if a woman does not cover her head, have her also cut her hair off; however, if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, have her cover her head. **7** For a man should not have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. **8** For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; **9** for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. **10** Therefore the woman should have a *symbol of authority* on her head, because of the angels. **11** However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. **12** For as the woman *originated* from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things *originate* from God. **13** Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered? **14** Does even nature itself not 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 as a covering. **16** But if anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor have the churches of God.

- Humility in interpretation
 - This passage has been interpreted in many ways
 - We do not know what is being quoted from the Corinthians' letter to Paul
- With humility, we will approach this section in the context of the rest of Paul's letter: Paul is calling out the divisiveness of Corinth and their insistence on rights and freedoms that bring harm to the consciences of others and the mission of the church to spread the gospel in their community.
- Greek women of high standing were very much attracted to Paul's message of the gospel to the Gentiles (some examples: Chloe, Phoebe, Junia, Lydia, Priscilla)

2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I handed them down to you.

- What traditions? Likely the traditions informing the gender of the first evangelist, the first witnesses to the resurrection, the prophetic ministry of the daughters of

Philip, and apostle named Junia, and the fact that Corinth's star teacher was instructed by Priscilla along with her husband Aquila. As Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, in Christ there is neither "male nor female", "Jew or Gentile", "slave or free".

- The "freedom and right" of women in New Creation, according to the traditions Paul has taught, has led the Corinthians to take them to a level which could create a major stumbling block to both Jewish unbelievers and unbelievers in Greco-Roman culture.
 - In Judea at this time, women would not want to go in public with their hair uncovered, as covering hair was considered modest
 - In the Greco-Roman world, a woman's hair was viewed with a sexual lens, and an uncovered head was a cultural symbol of immodesty and even prostitution
 - For consideration: Michael Heiser "Naked Bible Podcast" episode 86
- Both men and women were publicly praying and prophesying (prophecy more like preaching than "thus saith the Lord"), already culturally scandalous.
- The Corinthian church may have been putting freedom above mission by encouraging women to undress (by this culture's standards) when they led the service.

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

- Head/kephalos - source; in Gr. literature
- **4** Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. **5** But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for it is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. **6** For if a woman does not cover her head, have her also cut her hair off; however, if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, have her cover her head. **7** For a man should not have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. **8** For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; **9** for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. **10** Therefore the woman should have *a symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels.
- **There is a possibility** that this entire section is a quote from the Corinthian letter to Paul

- Assuming it is from Paul, v 1-7 are likely a reminder of what is acceptable or not acceptable in the unbelieving world and why
- V8-10 would be a reminder why undressing (at that time) would be unacceptable to Jewish unbelievers
- V9 “dia” for or because? V10 because
- What’s up with the angels?

11 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. **12** For as the woman *originated* from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things *originate* from God.

- This is Paul’s own theology apart from cultural considerations. Men and women are dependent on each other and originate from one another - and all are from God.

13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered? **14** Does even nature itself not 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 as a covering.

- “Judge for yourself” an appeal to wisdom in their cultural setting

16 But if anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor have the churches of God.

- Likely means: all the churches at this time follow cultural conventions of modesty, so there is no need to be argumentative on the basis of freedom in Christ.
- Still, Paul considered their elevation of women praiseworthy, as it truly reflected the nature of God’s Kingdom turning things upside-down. However, they had taken that liberty to an extreme which endangered the mission.

"Let the men and the women continue to pray and prophesy—only ladies, please, be reasonable! Cover your heads as you do so! Don't send the wrong signal to the worshipers, male and female. Do not distract them with your beautiful hair. If you don't like my solution, I have an alternative. Cut it all off (cameo 2). Appearing bald will solve the problem. If you would rather not go that route, then why not give my suggestion a try? Covering your heads when you lead in worship is not a putdown. Eve helped Adam in his weakness and need. Male and female need each other. Let the head covering be a sign for female prophets of their authority to exercise their prophetic gifts in leadership along with the male prophets. Do it because of the angels. The angels praised God at the first creation. Let them praise the wondrous fact of your restored status in the new creation, and let the image of God in which you were created shine forth through your prophetic word. This way you will preserve your rightful leadership role and will not distract or upset the congregation in the process. You must know that a woman's hair, exposed in public, is seen as a come-on in sections of the society in which you live. I am not asking you to cover your heads every time you leave home. My suggestion only applies when you are **leading in worship** and all eyes are on you. I am asking for sensitivity in your cultural setting. Love for harmony in the church must be a key part of how you exercise your new freedom." ~Kenneth E. Bailey
Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes

Next, Paul is going to call the Corinthian believers out on something NOT praiseworthy:

17 Now in giving this *next* instruction I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better, but for the worse. **18** For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. **19** For there also have to be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

- They have divided themselves into “factions”, in this case not just by their favorite teachers as in Ch 1, but by social class

20 Therefore when you come together it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, **21** for when you eat, each one takes his own supper first; and one goes hungry while another gets drunk. **22** What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What am I to say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I do not praise you.

- In the last correction (women and men prophesying and publicly praying), Paul considered their hearts and instinct praiseworthy, even if it needed to be adjusted. Not this time.
- The love feast
- The working poor and slaves would have to come later in the day, so the higher class would make sure to eat the “best” food before they arrived.

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when 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.” **25** In the same way *He* also *took* 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.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

- The solid food of their love feasts is holy and not some delicacy to be hoarded; the drink is holy and not to be used to get drunk with your friends. This meal is a proclamation of the death of the King, His enthronement which inaugurated an upside-down Kingdom, one we are tasked with emulating and spreading until His return.

27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy way, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

- Unworthy: excluding people on the basis of social status, hoarding the meal, getting drunk on the cup, letting the latecomers go hungry

28 But a person must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For the one who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not *properly* recognize the body. **30** For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number are asleep. **31** But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. **32** But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

- “Does not properly recognize the body...” - the Body of Christ isn’t just my friend group or social peers
- Self-indulgence rather than love is being disciplined with sickness and death; but if we properly judge the body (a body made up of all social classes), we will not be judged by God. But even if we are, it is discipline and not condemnation.

33 So then, my brothers *and sisters*, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

- In the Lord's supper, do not hurry to eat before the "undesirables" arrive so you and your friends can grab the best food.

34 If anyone is hungry, have him eat at home, so that you do not come together for judgment. As to the remaining matters, I will give instructions when I come.

- If you are hungry, eat before arrival so you won't be judged
- The Corinthians wrote and Chloe's people discussed other matters not addressed in 1 Corinthians, and regarding those matters, Paul will instruct them face to face

Reflections