



# **1Corinthians (2013) - Lesson 11B**

## **Chapter 11:17-34**

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- Paul's discourse on liberty has lead him into offering correction to the Corinthians on how to conduct certain traditions and rituals within the bounds of Christian liberty
  - Specifically, there are two areas of beneficial Christian ritual that Paul expected the church to observe in keeping with the word of God
    - Last week we looked at the first of these rituals, that of rules for the wearing of head coverings
    - In the society of Paul's day, the choice to wear or not wear a head covering conveyed a certain meaning
  - For a man to wear a head covering in church meant he rejected the idea he was under the authority of Christ
    - The head covering was a symbolic barrier between the man and Christ
    - So if a man chose to wear a hat knowing the cultural stigma, then he was choosing to bring shame to Christ, Paul said
  - Likewise, for a woman NOT to wear a head covering, she was communicating she was not submitted to her husband's authority, for that's how the culture interpreted such behavior
    - Her head covering was a symbol that she recognized she DID have an authority between her and Christ, that is her husband
    - So if she gave up her head covering, she was claiming to have equal authority with her husband, which brought shame to him
  - You may have noticed last week in v.10, Paul says the woman must remember her place of submission because of the angels
    - He's reminding his readers of times in the past when a failure of a woman to be covered by the authority of her husband led her to be deceived by the angelic realm
    - Woman in the Garden, and the women on earth before the flood of Noah were victims of sinful angels who took advantage of women absent spiritual cover
    - Paul warns the church not to return to a state where women are without spiritual cover and vulnerable to the schemes of angels
  - The messages associated with head coverings were culturally determined, and therefore there was no way for the Corinthian church to avoid them or dispute them
    - Paul explained that since these rituals had their source in the Creation story itself, so their actions would either affirm or deny certain spiritual truths
    - The rituals declared that God created man as a reflection of His glory
    - That God created woman as a reflection of man's glory
    - And the cultural practice of head coverings and of certain hair length were testimonies to these truths
    - Therefore, Paul urged the church to respect these traditions so that they may be seen as standing with the truth rather than contradicting them
- As we ended last week, I wrapped up by stating that when a manmade ritual loses its intended message, then the ritual itself ceases to be important or necessary
  - Today, our society – including the church society itself – no longer associated the

Creation account with the wearing of hats and scarfs

- Generally, men and women don't wear head coverings much anymore (apart from a sports caps or cowboy hats)
- So when we see a man remove his hat walking into church, we interpret that as polite etiquette, rather than as a testimony to the order of Creation
- If we see a woman without a head covering in church, we don't gasp at her rude display
- Therefore, we do not need to re-institute the head covering practices Paul outlines in order to be in compliance with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11
  - Instead, we must respect and honor the spiritual message of these bygone rituals as the Bible expects
  - We don't resurrect the ritual; we look for the modern ways we can continue communicating the Biblical truth of headship
  - A wife can show respect for her husband's authority in many other ways today
  - While a husband can likewise demonstrate leadership in the home and submission to Christ
- When we do these things, we are obeying the intent of 1 Corinthians 11
  - Ironically, it's possible to reinstitute the behaviors of head coverings today without actually meeting the spirit of Paul's instructions
  - He is asking us to maintain the tradition of living under headship and testifying to all that it represents in God's plan for the family
  - God is not concerned with what we wear on our head if that tradition has lost its meaning
  - To do otherwise is to elevate ritual above message, which is always unhelpful and often dangerous

**A priest, a pastor and a rabbi decide to see who's best at his job. The test is to go into the woods, find a bear and try to convert it.**

**After they return from the woods, the priest says, "I read to the bear from the Catechism, sprinkled him with holy water and next week is his First Communion."**

**The minister said, "I found a bear by the stream, preached God's holy word and he let me baptize him in the river." The rabbi was bandaged from head to foot and said. "Looking back, maybe I shouldn't have started with the circumcision."**

- Moving on in the chapter, today we want to examine the second tradition Paul raises
  - Once again, the church is in danger of treating a certain tradition with too much liberty, which had the effect of damaging the spiritual message of the ritual
    - So Paul begins to introduce the problem in their practice in v.17

**1Cor. 11:17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.**

**1Cor. 11:18** 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.

**1Cor. 11:19** For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

**1Cor. 11:20** Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper,

**1Cor. 11:21** for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

**1Cor. 11:22** 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 shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

- As Paul moves into v.17, he switches gears from the first half of the chapter
  - You remember in v.1 Paul began with a praise for this church
    - In the case of head coverings, it appears they had largely held to the traditions
    - Perhaps some men or women were questioning the tradition, which lead Paul to reinforce it
    - Nevertheless, Paul's praise tells us that the church had largely held the line on the tradition of head coverings, which pleased the apostle
  - But now in v.17, Paul abruptly changes his tone to one of admonishing the church
    - He says in giving you this instruction, I do not praise you
      - He means in giving you the following instruction, I am not pleased with your behavior
    - So what follows to the end of the chapter is an admonishment for how they have approached perhaps the most significant Christian tradition: the Lord's Supper
  - In fact, Paul says in their practice of this ritual, the church is coming together for the worse, not the better
    - The way the church was engaging in the Lord's Supper was so contrary to the intentions of the Lord that they were actually making matters worse than if they never practiced it at all
    - Once again, Paul is referring to the meaning or message behind the ritual
    - Their behavior was sending a bad message rather than communicating the good message the Lord intended when He instituted the practice before His death
- In v.18 Paul begins to outline what they're doing wrong as they observe this meal
  - First some background...in ancient times, religious worship services usually included a lavish meal
    - The pagans and Jews incorporated a meal service into the worship meetings
    - So the practice of enjoying a meal together was already common in Jesus' day
    - The Lord's Supper was not unique in that respect
    - But of course, it communicates something very unique and important, so it

must be observed in a way that fits that purpose

- The religious meals could be quite elaborate and even excessive, especially in a pagan setting
  - The meal was the main event, and most worshippers attended the service primarily for the meal
    - Just as many of you come to church primarily for the donuts 😊
  - If it were not for the meal, the service would probably not even happen
- Furthermore, the worshippers were expected to contribute to the food of the meal, through the bringing of a sacrifice animal
  - Though the food was shared to a degree, it wasn't a perfectly fair system
  - If a rich family brought a choice animal, they might set themselves apart from the rest of the crowd to ensure they ate the better meat
  - While a poor family who contributed something less would have a lesser meal
  - So this resulted in divisions within the worshippers that reflected a class system in the society
- Paul's comments suggest that the Corinthian church had begun to follow these societal traditions when they practiced the Lord's Supper in the church
  - So in v.18 Paul says there are divisions reported among the people
    - This division is different than the one Paul mentioned in Chapters 1 & 2 of this letter
    - In the earlier case, the divisions were the result of a desire to gain status by association with various apostles
    - In this case, the division relates to the wealth and selfishness of the worshippers
  - The church had refashioned the Lord's Supper into a meal like the kind practiced in the pagan temples
    - First, Paul says in v.19 that the church was maintaining divisions during the meal in order to make clear who was "approved" among them
    - Paul means that divisions were instituted by the wealthy so that their superior socioeconomic status would be evident to everyone in the body
    - They were setting themselves apart so they could eat the superior food they brought for themselves
  - And they were refusing to share that food with the poorer members of the congregation
    - Notice in v.22 Paul says they despise and shame those who have nothing
    - Apparently, some of the poorest believers would come to the gathering without any food
    - And so they had nothing to eat when the Lord's Supper was practiced during the service
    - It was BYO bread and wine or have nothing
- Therefore, Paul says they are coming together for reasons other than to observe the

## true meaning of the Lord's Supper

- They are coming together to show off, to enjoy a big meal, to get drunk, to have a party
  - These purposes have nothing in common with the purposes of observing the Lord's Supper
  - The ritual Jesus gave the Church had a specific purpose and message, but when the ritual is distorted, then the message is distorted too
- That's why Paul said that the way they were practicing the ritual was doing more harm than good
  - It was sending a worldly message, not the message Jesus brought
  - It was testifying to ungodly, fleshly, sinful things
  - Imagine what an unbeliever living in Corinth might have taken away from watching the Christians practice the Lord's Supper in exactly the same way that pagans practiced their meals?
  - They couldn't have helped but think there was nothing new in the Christian message
- In v.22 Paul asks rhetorically don't they have homes where they can have their meals?
  - In other words, the church service is not intended as a restaurant experience
    - We are not supposed to take the ritual of the Lord's Supper and equate it with a normal everyday meal opportunity
    - A church is not free to take the tradition of the Lord's Supper and play with the form beyond what's given
  - Unlike the tradition of wearing hats, this tradition was prescribed by Jesus in a certain form with a certain message
    - In the earlier example, the form of hat wearing to testify to headship arose out of human culture, but the message was timeless
    - But in this case, both the form and the message were prescribed by the Lord, so we do not have the latitude to change it beyond a few details
  - So Paul says he can't praise the church in this case unlike in the example
    - No, in this case, he says he will not praise them
    - Which is to say, he is chastising them for their poor behavior
- You may remember from an earlier lesson that we learned the meaning of the word admonish
  - It means the combination of a rebuke with correction
    - So as Paul has now offered the rebuke for their bad behavior, it's time for him to offer a correction
    - Paul is now going to remind them of the proper observance of the Lord's Supper tradition

**1Cor. 11:23** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;

**1Cor. 11:24** 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.”

**1Cor. 11:25** In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

**1Cor. 11:26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

- First, Paul re-establishes that the model for this meal is prescribed both in form and in message
  - The Lord Himself gave Paul the form He expected His Church to observe as they obeyed His instructions
    - And Paul says he delivered that form to the church faithfully
    - It’s this statement that tells us we cannot change the form of this tradition
    - It makes no difference what happens in our culture over time
    - It makes no difference whether the culture understands what we’re doing
    - Since Jesus told us to do it this way, we must not change the form
    - So the Corinthians’ behavior amounted to sinning against the Lord Himself
  - And then Paul begins to relate what the Lord passed along to him
    - Remember this letter was written before any of the Gospel had been written to the Church
    - So this account preceded the writing of the Gospels’ accounts of the Last Supper moment
    - That makes this record so important to the early church, and it explains why Paul put these instructions in writing here
  - His account begins with the original setting where the ritual was established
    - It began on the night Jesus was betrayed, which means the night before He died
    - On that night, the Lord engaged in the Passover meal, and he did so for the benefit of those Who opposed Him, His enemies
    - We know this was a Passover meal
    - But Paul’s Greek audience probably didn’t give much attention to the Passover or even its significance
    - So Paul makes no attempt to explain that connection here
      - He’s more interested in outlining the reason the church is commanded to repeat this practice
- The setting of the meal is central to how and why we practice it today
  - Jesus was preparing to die on the cross
    - He knew He would die, He knew how He would die, and He knew why He had to die
    - The apostles were largely oblivious to all these things

- So Jesus used the occasion of the Passover meal, on the night before He became a sacrifice, to institute a ritual that would forever after explain His death
- Therefore, the meaning and purpose in the Lord's Supper is intimately connected to this moment, which means we can't approach the ritual in a casual or disrespectful manner
  - We can't honor the purpose and meaning of this ritual if we see it merely as an opportunity to eat dinner
  - The Corinthians' practice had stripped the seriousness and importance out of the ritual, rendering it meaningless
- Next, Paul relates the steps of the ritual, in keeping with the steps Jesus took on that first night
  - First, Jesus took the bread, blessed it and gave thanks
    - He took the bread from the Passover table
    - This step was not a step of the normal Passover
    - It marked a departure from the Jewish tradition
    - That tells us this was purposely an interruption of past things and the instituting of new things
  - Secondly, He announces the meaning of these symbols as they are used in this new ritual
    - The bread will forever after be a symbol of the body of the Messiah sacrificed on our behalf
    - And when we repeat this moment, we are doing it as a memorial of Christ's death and sacrifice on our behalf
    - Like any memorial, we practice the ritual to ensure we never lose sight of the meaning of past events
  - Thirdly, Jesus interrupted the meal again to take a cup of wine from the table
    - And he creates another symbol by equating the wine to the blood Jesus will spill to forge the New Covenant
    - Like the writer of Hebrews teaches us, every covenant of God is formed through blood
    - And this most important of all covenants will be formed through the spilling of God's own blood
    - We are commanded to drink of the fruit of the vine as a symbol of Jesus' blood poured out on our behalf
  - Fourthly, Paul explains Jesus' expectations for the frequency of this ritual
    - Unlike other rituals that are practiced only once, like water baptism, or practiced annually like the Passover, this ritual happens frequently and without a prescribed period
    - In vs.25-26 we are to conduct this ritual as often as we do
    - In other words, not by any set schedule
    - The church is free to establish for itself how often to observe this ritual



- But it's understood to be done routinely
- Finally, Paul sets forth the message that Jesus wanted communicated by the practice
  - The message we proclaim is two-fold
    - We proclaim that Jesus died to free us from sin
    - The elements of the meal stand as reminders of His sacrificial death
    - Every time we conduct the meal, we declare bread to be representative of body and wine to be representative of the blood to remind us that a death was required for sin
  - Secondly, we proclaim that death did not conquer Jesus; Jesus conquers death
    - We are conducting this ritual as a temporary ordinance
    - It will not carry forth into the Kingdom after Jesus returns
    - Jesus says in v.26 that we are to observe this tradition until He returns
    - And so the message we are to convey as part of our observance is that Jesus is returning and we're eagerly looking forward to that moment
  - In light of that message, we need to observe the meal with a balance of sober reflection and joy and anticipation
    - We should conduct the meal with a sour face and in a joyless mechanical fashion
    - That may be communicating death, but it certainly doesn't reflect the hope and joy of a Christian's anticipation for the Lord's return
    - The point is to reflect on the need for a sacrifice coupled with a joy that the one and only sacrifice has been made
    - Now we have a hope that God's grace makes possible
  - Let's not slip into the mindset that assumes we must remove all joy from the Lord's Supper
    - We just need to guard against letting our joy become indulgence as the Corinthians did
- To end his correction, Paul now addresses how he wants the Corinthians to correct their behavior in the observance of the meal

**1Cor. 11:27** Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

**1Cor. 11:28** But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

**1Cor. 11:29** For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

**1Cor. 11:30** For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

**1Cor. 11:31** But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

**1Cor. 11:32** But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

**1Cor. 11:33** So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one

another.

**1Cor. 11:34** If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.

- Paul says if someone persists in dishonoring the ritual by an improper observance, they are guilty of a sin
  - The sin in this case is of dishonoring the memory of Christ's death
    - Paul says we are guilty of the body and blood, which is a way of saying we are guilty of the very sin that Jesus died to save us from
    - He is not saying we bear some special guilt for putting Jesus to death
    - He's emphasizing the sad irony of the person who would choose to sin in the course of remembering the sacrifice made for their sins
    - Nevertheless, this is a serious matter, as that person is testing the Lord's patience as he or she sins against the specific instructions of the Lord
  - To prevent such a sin, Paul advises the church to consider their behavior, every person is to examine himself
    - The instruction to examine ourselves in conjunction with observing the Lord's Supper is often taken out of this context
    - Paul means that we should ask ourselves if we're keeping the right attitude regarding the meal itself
      - Do we hold the symbols in the proper perspective?
      - Do we maintain a respectful attitude throughout the meal?
      - Do we communicate a balanced message of remembering Christ's death for sin and our hope in a future resurrection?
  - Paul did not mean we were supposed to take a moment and reflect on our sins in general
    - Or that if we participated in the Lord's Supper with any unrepentant sin we were guilty of yet more sin
    - Jesus never instituted a step of confession of sin or even the step of us reflecting upon our sin
    - What sense would it make for us to reflect on our sins while observing a ritual that reminds us that the price has already been paid for our sins?
    - We have to guard against slipping into a mindset that says we must pay penance or show a contrite heart to be worthy of Christ's sacrifice
      - That borders on a works' mentality
      - The gift of salvation came freely
      - We are memorializing the death that made that possible
- Finally, Paul leaves the church with a warning for how the Lord may respond in discipline to any church body that does not observe this tradition properly
  - In v.29 Paul says that the one who fails to identify failings within the church body is risking judgment from the Lord

- When Paul speaks of judging a body, he means the church body, not our physical bodies
- In other words, if a church goes on practicing the Lord's supper in the wrong way, that church body is in harm's way
- And in fact, Paul says that there was evidence in Corinth to indicate that the Lord had already begun to take disciplinary action against the church for their sins
  - There were members of the Corinthian church who were suffering weaknesses, sickness and even death
  - The Lord revealed to Paul through the Spirit that these cases of sickness and death were punishment brought by the Lord against the body for their sin against Him
  - In a sense, the church was harming the symbols of Jesus' body, and so He brought a judgment of a similar kind against them
- What a powerful lesson for any church!
  - We learn that the Lord is capable and willing to bring our physical bodies harm to discipline us for sin
    - If we test the Lord in any way, we may see Him take action in a physical realm to bring us into obedience
    - Or at the very least, the Lord is removing us from the earth to minimize the damage we might do against Him
      - Sobering stuff, isn't it?
  - Paul says we can avoid receiving the Lord's judgment if we rightly judge our own behaviors and keep them in line with the Lord's commands
    - Otherwise, the Lord will judge us to ensure we stand out from the world's condemnation
    - If the Lord let us continue in sin without a challenge, then the message of the church would be distorted in the world
    - To prevent that, the Lord will step in to stop the church's bad behavior if necessary
  - To summarize his instructions, Paul says let's come together in unity, not division, and for a message, not merely for a meal
    - Wait for each other so as to act in unity
    - Don't come to eat the food out of hunger
    - Eat as a ritual of respect to Jesus' death
    - Practice it in a way that avoids the Lord's judgment
    - And if there were other details that needed addressing, Paul says he would correct them when he is present and can observe them firsthand