

Chapter Eleven

THE PROBLEM OF DISORDERLY WORSHIP (11:1-34)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why would order in worship be a problem to Christians?
2. What do head-coverings have to do with proper worship?
3. Is it really degrading for a man to have long hair?
4. Must there be factions in the church in order to find out who the genuine believers are?
5. Does eating meals in the church building profane the Lord's house?
6. What is eating the Lord's Supper in an "unworthy" manner?
7. What is eating and drinking "without discerning the body"?

SECTION 1

Opening Words (11:1-2)

11 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. ²I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you.

11:1-2 Commendation: Clearly, the first verse of the eleventh chapter should be the closing verse of the tenth chapter. It belongs to that context. Paul changes the subject to disorder in worship in 11:2. He commends the Corinthians for "remembering" to consult him about their problems, and for "maintaining" the apostolic teachings ("traditions") he had taught them. Paul is using the word *traditions* to mean Holy-Spirit-inspired-doctrines—not human traditions. He distinguished clearly between the two. In Galatians 1:14 and Colossians 2:8 he speaks of *human* traditions. In I Corinthians 11:2 and II Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6, he refers to apostolic "traditions" which were *delivered* and *taught* by the apostles and *received* by the Christians as the word of God (see I Thess. 2:13). This is precisely why Paul could address this church, with all its faults and difficulties, as "brethren," and "saints." They may seem grossly immature, but they knew where to turn for the truth! The *only source*

FIRST CORINTHIANS

for solution for the problems that plague the saints is the apostolic word (“traditions”).

SECTION 2

Order, a Requirement for Godly Worship (11:3-16)

³But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. ⁷For a man 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 was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) ¹⁰That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹(Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹²for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.) ¹³Judge for yourselves is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.

11:3 The Issue: The eleventh chapter of this letter very evidently deals with problems reported to the apostle Paul about public worship in the Corinthian congregational assemblies. Actually, chapters 12, 13 and 14 also deal with the problem of disorderly worship. But, since these chapters treat problems distinctly different than those of chapter 11, we will treat them separately.

The Hebrew word *shakhah* is the most usual word translated *worship* in the Old Testament. It means, literally, “to bow down, to prostrate oneself.” The Greek word in the New Testament most often translated *worship* is the word *proskuneo* and also means, “to bow down, to

prostrate oneself, and to do obeisance." The English word *worship* is a contraction of the early English word *worthship*. The old English *worthship* gives us an exact idea of what our modern word *worship* means. The one to whom we give *worship* must be *worthy* of absolute homage, honor, reverence and obedience.

Worship is essentially an attitude instead of an act! First, the performance of certain rituals of worship without the proper attitude is condemned by the Scriptures as "an abomination before God." On the other hand, a false emotion that discounts as irrelevant clear commands about definite acts of worship betrays a disobedient attitude and makes a mockery of worship.

Attitude in worship is the fundamental issue Paul deals with in chapter eleven. It is the issue of obedience to the revealed will of God as spoken and written by the apostles. The problem has manifested itself by two symptomatic actions in the public worship of the Corinthians; they are (1) the man-woman relationship; (2) the Christian-brother relationship.

In worship the outward man is bound up in the inward man. Worship is an outward act or acts springing from, and under the control of, inward attitudes and impulses of love and obedience. It is said, "To worship God is to make Him the supreme object of our esteem and delight, both in public, private and secret." It is apparent from chapters eleven through fourteen, the primary problem of the worship of the Corinthian church was that it was directed toward themselves. They were so interested in calling attention to themselves and to their supposed superiorities over others, they were not making God the supreme object of their esteem. The key verse to this huge context of four chapters (11-14) is probably, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (12:13).

While it is true regarding salvation and grace that men and women are of equal worth to God, it is also true that God has ordered certain hierarchies of authority within this world and his kingdom so long as it is in the world. In the church there are elders, evangelists and deacons to lead and shepherd the congregation. In the home the husband is the authoritative head. Evidently some of the Corinthian women misunderstood the teaching, "In Christ there is neither male nor female . . ." (Gal. 3:28). Some of them had cast off the cultural modes of ancient dress which particularly stressed and emphasized their *femininity*, hence their subordination to their husbands. While

FIRST CORINTHIANS

the primary focus of the apostle's discussion is on woman's subordination to man, the issue is not simply a wife's obedience to her husband's loving authority. It is much broader than that and covers attitudes of all women and men—married or unmarried. The broader issue is that women (and men too) must *not rebel* against the *divine order* of femininity and masculinity!

Paul discusses the divine order by declaring that the head of every male person (Greek *andros* instead of *anthropos*) is Christ. No man should wear a sign of subordination to other men when he prays (or worships). There is only one mediator between man and God, himself man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). In the same *divine order*, the head of a female person is a male person. This does not deny that Christ is the head of the woman also, nor does it mean that a female person is inferior or of less importance than the male. Paul is reinforcing God's order as it was ordained from the beginning (Gen. 2:18) when the woman was created as a *helper* for man. The divine order of masculinity and femininity involves differing functions which require hierarchies of authority. Man functions as leader, protector, provider; woman functions as mother, helper, supporter. This in no way means one is superior and the other inferior. It does not mean that the male person makes all the decisions arbitrarily and without consulting the wisdom of the female person. But Paul's teaching (in harmony with the rest of scripture) does mean that the husband is the final authority and the leader in the home.

11:4-12 The Illustration: Lenski says the general custom among Greeks was that slaves should cover their heads while free men went bareheaded. If a man wore a covering over his head in Paul's day it signified he was acknowledging final loyalty to a human being. It is wrong for a man to dishonor his masculinity in any way. God made man masculine. God made man to lead and be the final authority in the human order. On the other hand, the general custom among Greeks was that women, who desired the honor and protection femininity afforded them, wore veils in the public presence of men. Some of the Corinthian Christian women were apparently praying and attending public worship without being veiled. They were declaring their rejection of the divine order of human hierarchy by casting aside the first century symbols of this divine order.

In Paul's day the veil worn by women probably covered the whole head with openings for the eyes and reached clear down to the feet. No respectable woman would go without a veil in public for if she

did she would be in danger of being misjudged. The woman's veil in those days was an important part of feminine dignity and gave her security and protection. Sir William Ramsay explains: "In Oriental lands the veil is the power and honor and dignity of the woman. With the veil on her head she can go anywhere in security and profound respect. She is not seen and therefore not subject to male familiarities and crudities. It is a mark of thoroughly bad manners to become familiar with a veiled woman in the street. She is alone. The rest of the people around are non-existent to her, as she is to them. She is supreme in the crowd. . . . But without the veil the woman is a thing of nought, whom anyone may insult. . . . A woman's authority and dignity vanish along with the all-covering veil that she discards."

The veil was the woman's badge of honor and respect. It showed that she had a definite place as a person in God's order. Woman was not created to be simply a "thing" or an "object" to be exploited by any and all men. She is to be honored, protected, cherished, loved, served, and led by her husband because she is a female.

Any man who prayed or prophesied with his head covered dishonored Christ ("his head"). A man worshiping in those days with his head covered symbolized he acknowledged some other human authority before Christ. The male Christian who worshiped with uncovered head signified he was accountable only to Christ. But the woman who prayed or prophesied with her head unveiled dishonored her husband ("her head"). She would dishonor her husband unveiled just as if she had her head shaved. Shaving of the head in ancient times (as even now in most cultures) was a sign of disgraceful and shameful conduct. At the end of World War II, those French women who had fraternized with Nazi soldiers were caught and their heads were shaved in public. Any woman in the civilized world of the apostle Paul, Greek, Roman, Jew or Syrian, would have felt terribly ashamed to have had her head shaved. Since that was the case, says Paul, the women of Corinth should have covered their heads in public—especially in the worship services of the church. For the Christian woman of Corinth to go with her head uncovered was to act the part of a shamed woman whether she was one or not. And that, in turn, brought shame upon her husband, and upon the church.

In verses 7 through 9 Paul gives us clear scriptural proof of the divinely ordained human hierarchy. Woman was made from man, not man from woman. Man was made *first* and then the woman was made from his body (see Gen. 2:21-22). *Man is first* in the divine order.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Furthermore, woman was made *for* man, not man for woman (see Gen. 2:18). *Man* is *first* in divine *purpose*. Both the origin of woman and the reason for her being is found in man. There is no room for human speculations or rationalizations when we have both the creation account and the apostolic reiteration. No matter how much political and philosophical rhetoric and no matter how practical and appropriate it may sound when some activists demand that females have, not only the right, but the obligation to reject the customary, biblically-taught, function of femininity, and step into the world of maleness and function as any man, it is clearly not the revealed will of God!

The Greek text of verse 10 reads, *dia touto ophellei he gune exousian exein epi tes kephales dia tous angelous*. Translated, literally, "On account of this, she ought, the woman, authority, to be having, upon the head, on account of the angels." The New American Standard Version translates this sentence, "Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." The NASV has supplied the words, "a symbol of" since they are not in the Greek text. The New International Version *supplies* the same words. The Revised Standard Version supplies, "a veil" where there are no words in the Greek text. These versions are supplying words to give the sentence the *usual* interpretation.

This interpretation is the usual one, but some commentators have differed. They have taken "authority" as referring to the woman's authority over her own natural head. There is justification for this interpretation in the Greek words (i.e., authority upon). This combination of words is found three times in the book of Revelation with the meaning "have control of" (11:6, "over the waters"; 14:18, "over fire"; 20:6; "over such," meaning the saints). In each case the combination of authority plus the preposition (Greek, *epe*) is the same. If this translation is taken, it is possible that the expression means that the woman should maintain control over her head so that it would not expose her to indignity. The woman's veil then became her willing subjection to her husband, her refusal to expose herself to others. However, the ultimate significance of the two interpretations is the same. Willing subjection to her husband's authority was a recognition of that authority, and this is the meaning of the clause. Even so, it would seem that the usual interpretation has the best claim to validity (Fred Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 177).

We are not so sure the words “a symbol of” or “a veil” should be supplied here. We *are* sure the woman (and the man) should acknowledge that she “is to be having authority upon the head.” There are women today who have all the symbols (hats, dresses, cosmetics) of womanhood but verbally and vehemently declare their rejection of the subordination of femaleness to maleness in the divine order of creation. It is more than a mere *sign* of authority the woman is to put on. She is to be mentally, emotionally and physically subordinate to the man. This does *not* degrade the woman! In subordinating herself to man she is actually taking her God-ordained place. She is filling the place of *honor* God created for her. Strange as it may seem to modern female activists, the woman’s place of dignity is in her femininity. By God’s word it is the woman’s *right* to have the protection, dignity and honor that she alone can have in femininity. If she forfeits her femininity, she forfeits her rights! That is diametrically opposite to much modern feminist philosophy.

The reference, “on account of the angels . . .” simply reinforces the idea that all God’s creatures have their place. The angels who left their assigned place in the created order of God forfeited their rights, dishonored God and themselves, and were cast into the abyss (cf. II Peter 2:4; Jude 6).

Just because woman’s divinely ordered place is in subordination to man does not mean that man can exist independently of woman. For as the woman was made *out of the man* (Gr. *ek tou andros*), now the man is born *through woman* (Gr. *dia tes gunaikos*). Men and women are equally dependent upon one another—but each in their own God-ordered place!

11:13-16 The Indictment: The woman must not arrogate to herself the man’s place (pray with her head uncovered in cultures where it is a shameless usurpation of maleness to do so). The man is not to arrogantly defy God and take the woman’s place (wear long hair in cultures where it is not masculine to do so). Rebels and fanatics defy God’s created order; Christians obey it. It is unnatural and rebellious for men to wear their hair long like women. Nature itself shows that man, being short-haired, is intended by the God of nature to be unveiled; woman, being long-haired, is intended by the same God to be veiled. Generally speaking, in the more refined and advanced civilizations, men have always worn their hair short and women have worn theirs long. Plummer writes in the International Critical Commentary on I Corinthians, “At this period, civilized men, whether Jews, Greeks, or Romans, wore their hair short” (p. 235).

FIRST CORINTHIANS

“The long hair of the Greek fop or of the English cavalier was accepted by the people as an indication of effeminate and luxurious living. Suitable for women; it is unsuitable for men.” (*The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, I Cor. 11:14). “Homer’s warriors, it is true, wore long hair, a fashion retained at Sparta, but the Athenian youth cropped his head at eighteen, and it was a mark of foppery or effeminaey except for the aristocratic knights to let the hair afterwards grow long. This feeling prevailed in ancient times as it does in modern times.” (*Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, I Cor. 11:14).

According to Philip Vollmer’s *Modern Student’s Life of Christ*, archaeologists object to the conventional pictures of Christ with long hair because they are not true to history. A German painter, L. Föhrenkrog, says Christ certainly never wore a beard and his hair was beyond doubt closely cut. For this we have historical, archaeological proofs. The oldest representations, going back to the first Christian centuries, and found chiefly in the catacombs of Rome, all picture Christ without a beard. All the pictures of Christ down to the beginning of the fourth century at least, and even later, are like this. The further fact that Christ must have, in his day, worn short hair can be proved by the scripture. Among the Jews none but the Nazarites wore long hair. Christ was indeed a Nazarene, but not a Nazarite. Then, like the rest of the Jews, he wore his hair short. Further evidence is furnished by Paul here in I Corinthians 11:14, where he expressly declares that it is a *dishonor* for a man to wear his hair without having it cut, something that no apostle would have said had his Master worn it thus. One thing Jesus did not do was dress in such a bizarre way as to attract undue attention to himself. He was so much a conformist in his appearance, apparently, the soldiers had to ask which one he was when they went to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane!

Some have tried to equivocate over this passage about the prohibition of long hair on a man. They ask, “How long is long?” or, “How long should a *woman’s* hair be?” The point of this discussion is that the man is *not* to have what the woman is to have. Actually, the expression “long hair” in 11:14-15 is from the Greek word *komao* which means “let the hair grow.” The idea of length is not one of relativity here. It is not how long some woman’s hair is in proportion to how short some man’s hair is. Every man or woman with respect to their hair falls into one of two categories. Their hair is either *natural length* or it is not natural length. We either let our hair grow or we do not let it grow. We either cut it or we do

not cut it. Paul's instruction might be translated, "If a man let his hair grow, it is a shame unto him. But if a woman let her hair grow, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." The Greek word translated "nature" is *phusis* and could be translated, "instinctively." *Instinctively*, creation expects men to have short hair and women long hair. It is disgraceful in a man to be like a woman, and in a woman to be like a man.

God expects those who trust him to keep the distinctions between maleness and femaleness, both outwardly and inwardly, clear and unequivocal. Deliberate effeminacy in men and masculinity in women has always been an abomination to God. Israelite men were not to wear women's clothing, nor were women to wear men's clothing (Deut. 22:5). Homosexual behavior was a sin punishable by death in the Old Testament (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Deut. 23:17-18). Effeminacy is prohibited in the New Testament (I Cor. 6:9-10) along with homosexuality by either male or female (Rom. 1:24-27).

Many of the heathen poets and philosophers of the Greek and Roman civilizations considered long hair in men a mark of effeminacy. Livy, Roman poet and historian, spoke strongly against the effeminacy of his age. Juvenal, disgusted by the sexual excesses and perversions of his day, spoke loathingly of the dandies whose manners, perfumes, and desire make them indistinguishable from women; and by the women who think that emancipation means that they should be indistinguishable from men.

In Zephaniah 1:8 God said that he would "punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire." It has been thoroughly documented that the world-wide mania for long hair on men and hierarchical equality of women with men is fundamentally a *rebellion* against the divinely created and revealed order of God for the human race. When God's people, by their modes of dress, indicate they are more in harmony with the "foreign" (heathen) culture than they are with God's standards, it is time to apply the teachings of the apostle here in this eleventh chapter.

Notice the words used by the apostle in this context: "dishonors," "disgraceful," "improper," "is it proper?" and "degrading." For women (or men) to rebel against the place God has decreed for femininity or masculinity is serious sin. One cannot give acceptable worship to God in such rebellion. We repeat, the place *God* has ordered for femininity and masculinity is the basis of Paul's instruction here. Man praying with his head covered, dishonors his masculinity which

FIRST CORINTHIANS

is from God; woman praying with her head uncovered, dishonors her femininity which is from God. Man's dignity, or place, is to *lead* in society, to *protect* the weaker sex (female), to *provide* for the basic unit of society (the family) and to *discipline*. Woman's dignity is to be a *mother*, to be a *helper* in many things (see Prov. 31); to give sexual intimacy to her husband (see I Cor. 7), to help *rear* children (Eph. 6:1-4)—in essence, woman's dignity is to be feminine!

The apostle is *not* here advocating a dictatorship of the husband over the wife. In fact, as some see it, the husband as dictator and tyrant, and the wife as some non-thinking, non-speaking, non-human slave is not taught in the Bible at all. Many women—married women, too—in the Bible made decisions, spoke as individuals, and made crucial contributions to history. What the Bible does teach is that man has certain functions and woman has certain functions—neither is to replace the other. There are things women are not supposed to do and things men are not supposed to do (see Luke 8:1-3; Acts 9:36; 18:24-28; 21:19; Rom. 1:1-16; I Tim. 2:12-14; 5:9-16; Titus 2:3-5).

In verse 16 Paul makes the matter of subverting masculinity and femininity as God has revealed it, a matter of *disobedience* to apostolic practice and that is disobedience to God. Paul does *not* mean by verse 16, "If anyone objects or wants to argue against what I have said, just forget about it because I didn't mean it anyway." Paul is saying that "if any man, after this clear statement from me, is disposed to dispute the divine order of masculinity and femininity, and appears to be contentious, we simply say that we (the apostles) disapprove of the disordering of the places of male and female, and so do the churches of God." With any person who would dispute Paul's instruction here, argument is useless. Authority is the only solution to the controversy. Apostolic authority is unquestionable. And no man is justified, except on clearly scriptural grounds to reject the accepted and practiced customs of the local congregation of believers, (see I Cor. ch. 8-10).

SECTION 2

Oneness, a Requirement for Godly Worship (11:17-34)

17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18For, in the first place, when you assemble as a

church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and I partly believe it, ¹⁹for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²⁰When you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²²What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way also 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." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. ³⁰That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹But if we judged ourselves truly, we should not be judged. ³²But when we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

³³ So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—³⁴if any one is hungry, let him eat at home—lest you come together to be condemned. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

11:17-19 Cliques Stated: The church at Corinth was especially troubled by problems of worship. This was in part due to the variety of religious backgrounds among its members. The Jews in the Corinthian church would be accustomed to the simple, subdued, but dignified services of the synagogue. The synagogue would have been male-oriented. The women would have kept silent. Scriptures would be read, a scholarly dissertation of the scriptures would be given,

FIRST CORINTHIANS

prayers said, and, as the worshipers departed, offerings would be placed in the alms boxes. Most of the Gentiles in the Corinthian church, however, would be accustomed to the idolatrous services associated with Dionysus, god of intoxication and revelry—wild orgiastic feasts where food and wine were consumed in great quantities. The cult of Mithras, which was so popular with the Roman troops, initiated its converts in the *taurobolium*—a pit in the ground over which a bull was slaughtered. As the blood poured over him, the new devotee eagerly let it immerse his eyes, nose, and tongue. This makes it clear there would be difficulty in the Corinthian church about how the worship services should be conducted.

A serious problem had arisen about the observance of the Lord's Supper. Paul was very distressed over the reports of their conduct. Apparently there were *cliques* (small, exclusive groups) forming according to social and economic levels and separating from one another. It is clear that the worship service of first century Gentile churches was preceded by a communal meal (a fellowship supper). Paul says in this very chapter that the worship service in Corinth observed such a meal before worship (11:20-22). By having this "fellowship supper" they may have thought they were making progress in their Christian commitment. But Paul says they were coming together not for the better but for the worse! They would have been better off not even to have come together to behave as they were.

Division is abhorred by the Lord whether it is over church leaders, over opinions, or over social and economic status. Paul does not say here (v. 18-19) that *divisions* (Gr. *schismata*) and *factions* (Gr. *haireseis*, or heresies) are necessary in the church in order to prove who belongs to God. He certainly would not advocate that Christians should form denominations and sects and cliques so the world would be able to find the true God. Jesus prayed just the opposite (see John 17:1ff.). He is pointing out, however, that when people form cliques within the church, those who refuse to join them and refuse to approve of them, are themselves recognized as genuine in their faith. A Christian who is a genuine brother to all Christians will not only refuse to join cliques and factions, but he will resist them with loving admonition.

11:20-22 Communal Supper: William Barclay in his commentary writes about the communal meal in the first century church:

The ancient world was in many ways a much more social world than ours. It was the regular custom for groups of people to meet together for common meals. There was, in particular, a

certain kind of feast called an *eranos* in Greek language, to which each participant brought his own share of the food, and in which all the contributions were pooled to make a common feast. The early church had such a custom; they had a feast called the Agape or Love Feast. To it all the Christians came, bringing what they could, and when the resources of all were pooled, they sat down to a common meal. It was a lovely custom; and it is to our loss that the custom vanished.

This meal probably grew out of the fact that when Jesus first instituted the Lord's Supper it was in connection with the Passover meal he and his disciples had just eaten. It was a way of producing and nourishing real Christian *fellowship* (Gr. *koinonia*, sharing, participating). It offered the well-to-do a regular opportunity to share their material blessings with the poor. After this meal, all the Christians would partake of the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, to memorialize his atoning death for the sins of all men.

But in the church at Corinth things had gone sadly wrong with the "Love" feast (and as a consequence, it had defiled their act of partaking of the Lord's Supper). Paul treats this problem with one of the angriest outbursts in the whole epistle. He begins with sarcasm, "When you meet together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat." William Barclay again:

In this church there were rich and poor; there were those who could bring much of the finest of foods to the Love Feast and there were slaves and poor who could bring little or nothing. For many a poor slave the Love Feast must have been the only decent meal in the whole week. . . . The rich did not share their food but ate in little exclusive groups by themselves, hurrying through it in case they had to share. The meal or gathering at which the social differences between members of the church should have been obliterated only succeeded in aggravating these same differences.

Some in the Corinthian church began to eat before the others arrived, gorging themselves, consuming most of the provisions, and letting the others go hungry. The "drunken" are the wealthy who had the leisure to come early. They fed themselves full, and drank until they became inebriated. How shameful! The "hungry" were the slaves, common laborers, foundry workers, tired dock hands, and sick and disabled who were poverty stricken. Most of these would

FIRST CORINTHIANS

of necessity arrive late for the communal meal in the evening because they had to work until the sun set; these needed the most and received the least. It is scandalous to become drunken at the worship service; it is even worse to be "drunk" with a false sense of superiority and an indifference to the needs of the brethren.

What started as a "love" feast turned out to be an orgy of squabbling, hurt feelings and even drunkenness. This, of course, destroyed all possibility of properly commemorating the Lord's sacrifice in the Lord's Supper. Paul insists that this prostitution of Christian fellowship destroys the true meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. They go through the ritual of the Lord's Supper all right, but it does not glorify Christ. They have hardly turned away from showing their contempt for Christ in their factious gluttony before they are pretending to join their snubbed brethren in "communing with the Lord."

Paul is not prohibiting Christians from having "fellowship suppers" in the "church-building" in verse 22. In the first place, so far as we know historically and archaeologically, there were no buildings built specifically as church-buildings before 200 A.D. The Christians at Corinth were meeting in people's private homes (see I Cor. 16:19). Furthermore, it is clear that what Paul condemned was the manner in which they were conducting themselves, not the place of the supper. Paul's suggestion is that if they are going to continue with their insensitive arrogance and gluttony to humiliate their brethren, they should stop the "love feast" and eat in their own homes. The place had nothing to do with their despising the church of God—it was their carnality.

Once again we behold actions so carnal and shameful in Christians we wonder how Paul could call them "brethren." But with only a little soul-searching we all should acknowledge we are "ignorant" and "obstinate" brethren—in differing areas of behavior.

11:23-26 Covenant Shared: This parenthetical section—a review from Paul concerning the establishment of the Lord's Supper—serves as a reminder of the spiritual purpose of the Lord's Supper. Paul had not been an eyewitness to the initial institution of the Supper. But that did not matter since the Lord Himself revealed to Paul the historical and spiritual details of it—and Paul had taught that to these Christians at Corinth.

In this text the apostle is emphasizing covenant, not ritual. Some would make the ritual the Christian's covenant. The Lord's Supper

is *not* our covenant—it commemorates our covenant. Isaiah predicted at least twice that God would make the Servant (the Messiah) *himself* our covenant (42:6 and 49:8). Isaiah's statement 42:6, "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations," is *unquestionably* messianic (see Isa. 42:1-4 and Matt. 12:18-21) in its context. Jesus Christ, himself, is our covenant. When we observe the Lord's Supper we are *remembering* that through faith we have appropriated *him* (Jesus) as our covenant. Of course, observance of the Supper is an *act* of faith on our part, but neither our faith nor the ritual is our covenant. It is through faith that we have been made *partakers of the divine nature* (see II Peter 1:3-4). Jesus, himself, dying and atoning for our sins and rising from the dead to supply the new creation of his Spirit within us, *is* our covenant. How does one *partake of a person as a covenant*? Through assimilating his *word* (his Spirit, his will). We "eat his flesh and drink his blood" by believing and obeying his word (see John 6:63). It would be of *no* profit to us even if we could engage in some ritual where we ate the actual, literal, physical flesh and blood of Jesus. It is his will, his personality, his mind, and his actions he wants us to assimilate (to partake of, to have *koinonia* with).

Our communion (participation) is in his person, his nature, and must not be confined merely to rituals. Participation in the life of Christ may involve observance of clearly revealed ceremonies or actions specified by Christ or the apostles, but the ceremonies are not the covenant. A covenant is an oath. God's oath in the new dispensation was the Messiah himself (see Heb. 6:17, where it should be translated, ". . . he interposed *himself* with an oath"; see II Cor. 1:20, where *Jesus* is said to be God's oath of confirmation to all his promises). A covenant is a reconciliation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. 5:19). The ceremony of the Lord's Supper is the weekly reminder that we share in a Divine Person—not a system of rituals.

"Do this in remembrance of me," involves *more* than remembering the crucifixion scene. It involves remembering that ". . . one died, therefore all died." It involves remembering that "from now on . . . we regard no one from a human point of view . . ." (see II Cor. 5:14-21). It involves remembering that we *participate* in the very life of Jesus Christ, or that he controls, directs, orders our lives. When Jesus died, *we* died—if we accept his death for us. I no longer direct me—Jesus does.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Had this been the case in Corinth, the brethren would not have arrogantly and greedily disregarded their brethren. They would have waited at the "love feast" for the poor, lower-class, late-comers and would have "counted them better than themselves" for this is the *mind of Christ* in which Christians are to participate (see Phil. 2:3-8). This is the life we are to have in us, being lived out through us. This is being in covenant with Jesus. The Corinthians were faithfully gathering to observe the ritual, but they were not partaking of the covenant!

Twice in this context the Greek adverb, *hosakis*, "as often as" is used to qualify the imperative verb, *poieite*, "Do." There really is *no* distinct, categorical commandment from the Lord or the apostles as to when the Lord's Supper *must* be commemorated. No particular day is commanded and no commandment is made as to frequency. Since no explicit directive is given in the New Testament, our next best guide about time and frequency of observance would be some precedent set by the apostolic (first century) church. We would certainly be on safer ground by seeking apostolic precedent than by trying to guess about the matter some twenty centuries removed from the beginning of the church.

From Acts 20:7 and I Corinthians 16:2 we observe that the first century church met every first day of every week to do two things: "break bread" (Acts 20:7) and "put something aside" (take up an offering) (I Cor. 16:2). Even if we assume the phrase "break bread" in Acts 20:7 refers to the "love feast," we are still compelled to acknowledge (from our text here in I Cor. 11:23-26) that the "love feast" was followed by the observance of the Lord's Supper. However, we may just as well assume the phrase "break bread" refers specifically to the Lord's Supper rather than the "love feast." Whatever the case may be, we must admit the church at Troas, in the first century, observed the Lord's Supper at least *every* first day of the week.

Since the church at Troas was undoubtedly established and taught by the apostle Paul, we must assume they met *every first day of the week* to break bread in accordance with apostolic instruction. Alexander Campbell wrote in *The Christian System*, pp. 274-275:

The Apostles taught the churches to do all the Lord commanded. Whatever, then, the churches did by the appointment or concurrence of the apostles, they did by the commandment of Jesus Christ. Whatever acts of religious worship the apostles

taught and sanctioned in one Christian congregation, they taught and sanctioned in all Christian congregations because all are under the same government of the same king. But the church in Troas met upon the first day of the week for religious purposes.

Among the acts of worship, or the institutions of the Lord, to which the disciples attended in these meetings, the breaking of the loaf was so conspicuous and important, that the churches are said to meet on the first day of the week for this purpose. We are expressly told that the disciples at Troas met for this purpose; and what one church did by the authority of the Lord, as a part of his instituted worship, they all did.

Many of the early church "fathers" (Christian leaders of the church in the second century) testify in their writings that the Lord's Supper was observed on *every* first day of the week. Justin Martyr, who wrote about 140 A.D., says:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place . . . when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgiving, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.

In the compilation of writings called "The Teaching of The Twelve," written about 120 A.D. Christians were exhorted to gather *every* Lord's Day to break bread and give thanks. The Ante-Nicene fathers confirm this practice of observing the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

So, while we have no categorical command from the Lord about the frequency of its observance, we surely have clear apostolic precedent for observing it every first day of the week.

There may be a number of reasons we have no distinct and dogmatic order about the frequency of observing the Lord's Supper. First, if the Lord has to spell out in minute detail every spiritual action we are to take, he leaves no room for spiritual growth and character-building. It is in accepting the responsibility for discovering some truths, rather than in having them spelled out in detail, that we come to spiritual maturity. Perhaps that is why the Lord left the matter of

FIRST CORINTHIANS

frequency merely implied in the New Testament. Further, knowing the tendency of man to be legalistic, the Lord undoubtedly decided not to legislate the Supper's frequency. He would not want men to use a command about frequency of observance to attack, condemn and destroy ignorant and immature babes in Christ. Jesus would want this very significant and intimate act of worship to be done from love not from legalism. And if the Lord places in his word a veiled hint (or precedent) about its frequency, love will find it!

Observance of the Lord's Supper is not merely a remembrance of the past redemptive deeds of Christ—it is also a *telling-forth* (Gr. *katangellete*, a proclamation, a declaration) of the future redemptive deed of Christ in his Second Coming. The Christian, by observing the Lord's Supper every week, is declaring to the world around him that he believes the death of Jesus Christ to be efficacious for the forgiveness of sin and participation in the Spirit of God by grace. In observing the Lord's Supper the Christian is telling the world there is salvation in no other name under heaven than that of Jesus Christ. This testimony will go on, and on, and on, and on, in the world, as often as it is done, until Christ returns. The Lord's Supper is also a declaration to the world that Christians believe Christ is alive, risen from the dead, ascended to the right hand of God the Father, there making intercession on behalf of those who love him. It is a proclamation that Christians believe Jesus Christ to be living and communing in the Spirit with the church every time the Supper is observed (see Matt. 18:20). If this be the case, let us not argue about frequency of observance. Let us rather rejoice that we have apostolic precedent for observance at least every first day of the week when the church gathers for corporate worship. Consider the possibilities of intensifying the Christian proclamation with more frequent observance. Why not observe the Lord's Supper on other corporate gatherings of a congregation? Why not on Wednesday night at "midweek" service? Why not at ladies' meetings, men's meetings, youth meetings? The spiritual oneness, and moral constancy that would permeate a congregation meeting early every morning of every week, before scattering to different places of employment, would soon result in an evangelistic harvest.

11:27-29 Criticism of Self: A primary purpose of the Lord's Supper is, on the basis of Christ's loving atonement, to stimulate the participant into an examination of himself and his relationship to the *whole body* of Christ. This was what Jesus used it for on the very night he

instituted it. There, he challenged the apostles to examine their own hearts about betraying him. And each one did, asking, "Lord, is it I?" All the disciples, at that first Communion, were prodded into thinking of themselves in relation to Jesus and to one another. The Greek word *dokimazeto* is translated *examine himself*. It is the same Greek word used in II Corinthians 13:5 where the KJV translates the word, "prove." To examine is to test or prove. It means, literally, we are to put ourselves on trial.

But what is eating the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner"? The Greek word from which we get the English word *unworthy* is *anaxios*. *Axios* is the Greek word from which we get axiom, axiology, and axiomatic. The word in both Greek and English means, "value, proper, good, right, and worth." It is, therefore, possible to observe the Eucharist in an improper way. To do so makes a person guilty (Gr. *enochos*, liable to judgment of law) of the body and blood of the Lord (guilty as if the participant had crucified the Lord). Paul clearly says, "For any one who eats and drinks *without discerning* the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself."

To "discern the body" during observance of the Lord's Supper is not to be confined simply to a mental image of the crucifixion. To "discern the body" in this *context* refers specifically to *brotherhood*. It means to refresh one's memory about Jesus dying for *all* believers, rich or poor, famous or unknown, strong or weak. It means Christians, prompted by the Lord's Supper, are to discern the "body" in its membership, in its *koinonia* (fellowship). Too often, we focus too much on ourselves, even at the Lord's Supper. It *is* in keeping with the intent of Paul's discussion of the Supper here to have the burdens and needs of other members of the church upon our minds and hearts as we observe it. The less we think of ourselves during the Supper, the more likely we are to observe it as Paul wanted the Corinthians to observe it. The one way to drink it in an unworthy manner is to isolate oneself from the rest of the body in attitude and action. No man is unworthy in and of himself to partake. The Supper should be observed by sinners who are repenting. Sin should not keep us away from the Communion—it should drive us to it so we may get the right attitude. But the person who, like some of these Corinthians were doing, observes the Lord's Supper and is insensitive toward any other member of the body, drinks judgment upon himself.

The Lord's Supper was ordained by Christ to prompt people to love him and his body, the church. It is a "love" feast. It must be

FIRST CORINTHIANS

observed in unity. No one should dare observe it if he is not in harmony with his brethren. To observe the Lord's Supper and at the same time be slandering a brother, or disregarding a brother's needs, or agitating division within the body, is to profane and make a mockery of it. Such would be to blaspheme the very life he hypocritically professes to be sharing—the Life of Jesus!

11:30-34 Consequences of Such a Sham: Having the wrong attitude and still trying to play the role of a worshiper of God can have dire consequences. A separatist, schismatic attitude about the body of Christ while trying to pretend oneness and unity causes spiritual *sickness*, and, eventually, spiritual *death*. This is precisely the reason for so much spiritual sickness among Christians today. Too many Christians are “going through the motions” as they gather about the Lord's Table, but they haven't really surrendered to the mind and will of Jesus Christ as he revealed it “once for all” in the Scriptures. Too many, even Christians, want to judge the scriptures by their feelings and selfish desires rather than judging their feelings by the scriptures. This is the very point Paul is making here in Corinthians. He reminds these Christians at Corinth they must not judge their fellow church members by their feelings, but by the objective work of Christ documented in the New Testament. That is, all sinners are equally lost; all believers are equally redeemed. All Christians are equally members of Christ's body, the church. There may be different places of service within the kingdom of God, but every citizen is a servant. There is only one Master, and he is Jesus. Of course, there are specific hierarchical orders God has ordained within human society (even in the church), but still, there are no kings, only servants.

Paul told the Corinthians their spiritual sickness (Gr. *arrostoi*, feebleness) was directly due (Gr. *dia touto*, on account of this, therefore) to their profanation of the Lord's Supper by misdiscerning the body. The Bible speaks of spiritual sickness often (see Isa. 1:5; 33:24; Hosea 5:13; Ps. 30:2; Isa. 53:5; Jer. 6:14; 8:11; etc.). Spiritual sickness, and eventually, death, results from at least two causes: (a) improper ingestion of spiritual food—either not enough or the wrong food (see John 6:35-65 and Luke 12:1; Heb. 5:11-14; I Cor. 3:1-4, etc.); (b) exposure to the infectiousness of sin (Eph. 5:3-14; II Peter 3:17). Sin, if not treated by the spiritual healing of faith in Christ, invades our minds and infects them much like viral micro-organisms that cause physical illness and death. Sin, allowed to incubate, grows and develops and when it is “fullgrown” brings death (James 1:14-15).

Unworthy observance of the Lord's Supper brings condemnation to the whole body of Christians (11:34) when worship is profaned by play-acting. It is contagious. Hypocrisy and division will soon infect an entire congregation so that swift, radical, spiritual-surgery is sometimes called for (cf. I Cor. 5:1-13; Rom. 16:17-18; II Thess. 3:6-15; Titus 3:10).

The only worthy way to observe the Lord's Supper is to discern the body. Thus, from now on regard no one from a human point of view, but be consistently controlled by the love of Christ. At the Lord's Table concentrate on the fact that because one has died for all—all must die to self and live no longer for self but for him who for your sake died and was raised (see II Cor. 5:14-17; Gal. 2:20). Concentrate on viewing every Christian, every member of Christ's church, as an equal member of the body, a new creature in Christ. If all who meet at his Table will do this, every week, the church will be healthy and alive. Churches may *appear* to be alive and be dead (Rev. 3:1). Churches may *appear* to be healthy and be sick (Rev. 3:15-17). The Lord wants the church to be healthy at the very core of its being. This will be true only when the church partakes of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

APPLICATIONS:

1. Have you ever *thought* about what worship is? Is it all feeling? Do you worship when you attend church services?
2. Should women wear head coverings today when they go to church? Do you? Why do Jewish men wear head coverings in the synagogue?
3. What about women cutting their hair in modern society? Shouldn't they let it grow to its full, natural length?
4. As a woman, do you believe you should be subordinate to a husband? As a man, do you believe you should rule over your wife?
5. If you were asked to make a decision about whether young men should wear long hair or not, what would you decide? Why? How long is long?
6. Would you compromise Paul's teaching here on hierarchy or order within the earthly kingdom of God should it become a matter of contention?

FIRST CORINTHIANS

7. What would you answer a member of a denominational church who said I Corinthians 11:18-19 teaches there *should be* denominations in Christianity?
8. Is it forbidden to have meals and eat in the church building?
9. Do you think of yourself as being locked into a covenant with God? What is the basis of your covenant? What are its terms?
10. How often do you think we should observe the Lord's Supper? Would you object to or appreciate observing it more than once a week?
11. Have you ever thought of your partaking of the Lord's Supper as a proclamation by you? To whom do you make your proclamation?
12. Do you ever feel like you are unworthy to take the Lord's Supper? When? If you had committed a terrible sin on Saturday, should you partake on Sunday?
13. Have you ever partaken of the Supper without having "discerned the body"?
14. What do you think is necessary for a congregation to be partaking of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner?

APPREHENSIONS:

1. What is the apostolic "tradition"? Why should we obey apostolic tradition if Jesus condemned the traditions of the Pharisees? (See Matt. 15:1-20.)
2. What is worship?
3. Why is Paul discussing such insignificant things as veils on women and long hair on men in connection with worship? What is the fundamental issue he is discussing?
4. What is the proper order of hierarchy in the home? Where is the man's position? What is the woman's role?
5. Why does a man dishonor God by covering his head as he worships?
6. Why is the Bible so explicit about the feminine and masculine roles?
7. What does Paul mean when he says, "we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God"?
8. Why did Paul say, ". . . there must be factions among you *in order that* those who are genuine among you may be *recognized*"?
9. What specific faction is Paul talking about in this context?

10. Were Christians actually getting drunk just before the worship service?
11. How often are we to observe the Lord's Supper?
12. Is the ritual of the Supper our covenant?
13. What were these Corinthians doing that Paul accused them of partaking of the Supper in an "unworthy manner"?
14. What is "discerning the body"?