

# 1 Corinthians

11:1–34

## Introduce

Are there commands in Scripture that address cultural issues which are not applicable to us? What do we do when something addressed in the Bible does not seem to line up with our experience in the body of Christ? Tonight we are going to address a couple issues that may not adhere to our experience in church and we will need to determine if and how they apply to us.

## Investigate

### *Background*

After finishing a longer discussion prohibiting their involvement in pagan worship Paul now turns to three specific issues of abuse in their local church. We'll look at the first two tonight: Head coverings and the Lord's Supper. The third is addressed in chapters 12-14: Speaking in tongues.

### *Explore the Passage*

## Head Coverings

11:1-16

Here Paul commends them for maintaining the traditions he delivered to them, yet he must address a particular issue in which they were going astray.

- What is the specific church function that Paul is addressing in this passage?
- What is the function of verse 3 in the argument of this passage?
- Which “head” is dishonored when a man leaves his head covered or a woman uncovered?  
*[Note that it is Christ as the head of man that is dishonored if he covers his head. Similarly a woman brings shame on her “head”, the man, if she prays and prophesies with no covering.]*
- What is the manner in which men and women are to practice prayer and prophecy? Was Paul addressing men or women more in this passage?
- What does Paul mean in verse 7 as he gives a basis for his instructions on head coverings?
- What do we learn is the purpose of head coverings in verse 10? Why is a symbol of authority necessary? How might the issue of authority as it relates to head coverings have necessitated Paul bringing this issue to their attention?
- It seems that many in the Corinthian church were advocating a new spirituality which caused divisions in the church. Along with this new spirituality came a breaking down of distinctions including those between the sexes. If this is the case, how might that help us understand why Paul needs to address this issue?
- Does this apply to the church today? Why or why not? *[Make sure you help them understand that the bigger issue here is not covering or not covering the head, but going beyond the proper roles and distinctions between men and women as it relates to worship. It is difficult to apply the issue of head coverings today since we don't clearly understand the cultural practices of their day, specifically how covering/uncovering the head brought shame.]*

## The Lord's Supper

### 11:17-26

- What is the primary issue Paul is addressing in this passage? [*divisions within the church*] What issue are these divisions working themselves into?
- How is the church emptying the Lord's Supper of its meaning? [*They are emptying it by (1) in some way losing the special nature of the Lord's Supper as they eat a regular meal in conjunction with it and (2) depriving the poor of equal status in the eating of the Lord's Supper.*]
- What do you learn about the Lord's Supper in Paul's explanation in verses 23-26? What do we do as we eat the bread and drink the cup? What are other views of the Lord's Supper? Do they fit with what is said here?
- How do you view the Lord's Supper? Why do we tend to downplay its significance?

### 11:27-34

- What does Paul mean by partaking in the Lord's Supper in an "unworthy manner"? How might the context of this passage help us understand the way it can be partaken unworthily? [*The two ways they were doing in unworthily was by abusing the poor by depriving them of private meals and by failing to remember the Lord's work in their lives as they cultivated divisions in the church.*]
- What is the believer's responsibility as he or she approaches the Lord's Table?
- What is the danger of approaching it in an unworthy manner?
- According to this passage, what is the purpose of the Lord's judgment?
- What are Paul's instructions to the Corinthian believers concerning the Lord's Table?
- Is Paul saying that we cannot approach the Lord's Table if we have unconfessed sin? [*Make sure they see that our time of needing the Table the most is when we are in need of dealing with our sin. The greatest offense we can present with the Lord's Supper is by preventing anyone who is in need of remembering what Christ has done for them from partaking in it.*]

### Discover the Big Idea

Why should we take the historical and cultural background into consideration as we examine passages like this? How might we miss the larger issue in these passages if we were to fail to account for the cultural situations at the time of writing?

Summary: Paul addresses these two specific issues addressing particular issues within the Corinthian church. We must try to understand what is going on with the readers in order to fully understand how we should and should not apply the broader theological principles in this passage.

## Respond

- How might we take cultural considerations too far as we interpret Scripture?
- How do we deal with biblical issues or commands that don't seem to make sense within our culture?
- Pray for discernment as we study letters and books written to an audience so far removed from our own time and culture.