

Reverence In Worship And Fellowship

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

Key Verse: 11:26

“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

Thus far in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul has dealt with the problems of church division in chapters 1-4, and with moral and ethical issues in chapters 5-7. Then in chapters 8-10, he taught about the proper use of Christian freedom through food sacrificed to idols. Chapters 11-14 are about practical problems in church meetings. In dealing with them, Paul lays down principles for building a sound church. For any organization to be healthy, there must be friendship and love among members. Yet the church is more than a human organization. The church is God's dwelling place. The church is based on the truth of God's word and the love of Christ who died for our sins. Within the church there must be spiritual order based on the word of God and spiritual love based on Jesus' sacrifice. A church rooted in these can spread God's blessing to the world. We are all members of the church, the body of Christ. Today let's learn how to build up our church.

I. Reverence and order in worship (2-16)

Look at verse 2. "I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you." Thus far in his letter, Paul has had to give painful correction. But here Paul gives a word of praise. Paul not only rebuked the Corinthians, Paul also praised them. Paul could do so because he was

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thankful to God for his grace upon the Corinthians (1:4). We learn from Paul to sprinkle in words of encouragement when handling difficult problems.

Then Paul returned to the task of correcting. Paul wanted to teach the Corinthians how to build their church on the foundation of God's truth. Paul does this through addressing a very practical problem: Corinthian women should cover their heads in church. In the cultural context of ancient Corinth this was understandable. Typically, Greek women covered their heads as a sign of submission to their husbands. If a woman did not cover her head, it was a sign of disrespect or waywardness. Why did Corinthian Christian women refuse to cover their heads? Paul does not say exactly. But we can guess that it might have been too hot in the Mediterranean climate to wear full body coverings. Or perhaps they wanted to promote women's rights, claiming equality in God. Or they might have just been rebellious. Maybe their attitude toward men was, "Anything you can do, I can do better." Paul gives several reasons why they should cover their heads.

First, women should cover their heads to keep spiritual order (3-6). The term "spiritual order" has been used frequently in UBF. What does it mean here? Look at verse 3. "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." Here, "head" signifies the one in authority. Jesus Christ is Lord of all and he is the authority over every person in the church. Each church member should enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and live in submission to him, the head. The same word, "head," describes the position of a husband in a family. The husband is the head of the family. His wife should submit to him to keep spiritual order in the family.

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Verse 3 ends, "...the head of Christ is God." Christ is not only our Lord, but also our example of submission to God. God and Christ are equal; they are both God. Their relationship is one of absolute love and respect. Jesus loved the Father and always did what pleased him (Jn 5:30; 8:29). The Father loved the Son and placed everything in his hands (Jn 3:35). They were truly one--one in mind, heart and spirit. But in their function they were different. The Father is Sovereign Ruler; the Son submitted to the Father in everything. Christ did not try to grasp equality with God, but submitted to death, even death on a cross. Through Jesus' submission we are saved. So we willingly submit to him in everything (Rev 5:13). Christian husbands gladly love their wives with life-giving sacrifice. Christian wives are happy to submit to their husbands with genuine respect. The Christian church, as the bride of Christ, submits joyfully to her Husband and Savior. Spiritual order is not a synonym for Confucian hierarchy or another way of saying "dictatorship." It means there is mutual love and respect, necessary authority and willing submission.

Some may raise an issue here, for many abuses have happened in the name of "spiritual order." Paul is not condoning abusive relationships. Rather, Paul refers to the holy example of the Father and Christ as the model for us all to strive for in learning submission to Christ and one another.

In verses 4-6 Paul affirms the Corinthian cultural custom. Men should uncover their heads and women should cover their heads during public worship. To violate this custom was dishonorable culturally and Paul affirms that it was also dishonorable before God. A man should dress like a man, and a woman should dress like a woman to be honorable in the house of God. There are also biblical

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precedents for women covering themselves, such as Rebekah before meeting Isaac (Gen 24:66).

Second, women should cover their heads to keep creation order (7-12). Look at verse 7. "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man." Here Paul makes a distinction between men and women. Man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. This is based on Genesis. God made man in his image to rule the world. God made woman as a suitable helper for man (Gen 2:18). Man and woman are both made in God's image and they are equal (Gen 1:27), but woman was created as a suitable helper. In verses 11-12, Paul explains that a husband and wife are interdependent. Man and woman need each other. Neither one can carry out their God-given mission without the other. They must cowork together. Then they can experience amazing success, bear much fruit, and be happy. Likewise, when church members keep creation order, the church will be healthy and happy.

Third, women should cover their heads to keep natural order (13-16). In verses 13-15, Paul makes another appeal, this time to the "very nature of things." It is natural for a woman to have hair longer than a man, both in terms of length and time. Historically, a woman's long hair has been the symbol of her glory, and there have been relatively few bald women. Since this distinction is inherent in nature and in creation order, it should be respected during public worship with visible signs. In Corinthian culture, it meant that women must cover their heads. Since this was rooted in spiritual principle, Paul insisted on it and would not yield (16).

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We must remember that coming to worship is coming to meet the holy God. We join the holy angels in worshipping him. We are coming to a God of awesome majesty, order and peace (1 Cor 14:33). We must worship with reverence and a sense of spiritual order. We must honor God from our hearts, in our relationships, and through our appearance. These days many people say, "God sees my heart. As long as I am sincere, appearance does not matter." Some young men want to wear a t-shirt, shorts, and a baseball cap to church. Yet they would never go to a job interview dressed in such a way. We should not be legalistic about this. However, as a general principle, we should wear our best clothes to worship service. Women should not be uncovered in church so that they become a distraction. Women should dress modestly, and with propriety, to worship God. At St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, there is a clothing monitor at the door. If a person wants to enter, and is not properly covered, the monitor gives them a temporary cover to wear while inside, even if they are just tourists. Sometimes we may need a clothing monitor in our church, too. Let's remember that God is a God of order who wants reverence and order in worship.

II. Reverence and love in the Lord's Supper (17-34)

The second problem Paul deals with is celebrating the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper there is a cross. We have a vertical relationship with Christ through which we receive grace. We have a horizontal relationship with others. We must love and respect our brothers and sisters in Christ. In John's gospel, at the Last Supper, Jesus got up from the meal, wrapped a towel around his waist, and washed his disciples' feet one by one. It symbolized his humble service and sacrificial love for each one. Jesus bore with each of them in humility and love until they became holy men of

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God. Jesus would die on the cross to wash their dirty sins. Since Jesus set this example, Jesus' people must do the same. The rich and powerful must sacrifice themselves to serve the poor and needy. The mature must humbly embrace newcomers with great affection. Men and women must show love and respect toward each other. Then the church is full of love and grace.

However, in Corinth, the celebration of the Lord's Supper had become a travesty (17-22). Instead of coming together in the love of Christ, they divided into different factions. Some rich people brought beef steaks, corn on the cob, mashed potatoes and gravy, and fresh cherry pie. They also brought fine wines and premium beer and ate and drank freely. Meanwhile, the poor looked on with growling stomachs and watering mouths, and tears began to roll down their cheeks. Paul was upset that the poor were humiliated in such a way. Paul was even more upset because Jesus was dishonored. Paul said clearly, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (20). Their meetings were doing more harm than good.

Paul reminded them of the true meaning of the Lord's Supper in verses 23-25. Let's read these verses together: "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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.' In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" We learn several things from Paul here.

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First, it was the Lord's Supper. Verse 23 says, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you." It was not Paul's idea to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper originated with Christ himself. The celebration of the Lord's Supper must be done in the Spirit of Jesus and according to his instructions. To do it in one's own way is a profanity.

Second, Jesus gave his body and blood to us. The bread and cup symbolize Jesus' body broken on the cross and Jesus' blood shed for us. Isaiah 53:5 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." In addition to hearing the message, we need the bread and cup to taste the reality of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus' body was really broken and his blood was really spilled for our sins. Jesus gave his own life for us. We must accept Jesus' sacrifice with sincere repentance and faith.

Third, Jesus' blood forgives our sins and brings us into a covenant with God. Sin separates us from God and leaves a stain that nothing else can wash away. But the blood of Jesus has power to bring about forgiveness and true cleansing from our sins. The blood of Jesus restores us to a love relationship with God. Romans 3:24,25 say, "...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood." When we accept Jesus' blood, we can be "at one" with God. We enter into a covenant with God and receive God's faithful love and spiritual blessings. Jesus invites us to come to him every day and eat his flesh and drink his blood (Jn 6:53-57). This satisfies our souls with the life and love of God. Then we can love

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one another with the love of God. In celebrating the Lord's Supper, it is most important to remember Jesus with repentance for our sins and faith in his blood.

Look at verse 26. "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." When we eat the bread and drink the cup by faith, we proclaim the Lord's death with spiritual power and meaning. Our hearts overflow with God's love, the joy of salvation, and heavenly peace. Christian brothers and sisters begin to truly love one another from their hearts, forgiving one another based on Jesus' grace of forgiveness. They form a genuine Christian community. This community, marked by God's love, proclaims Jesus' death to the lost world.

There have been many great celebrations of the Lord's Supper in Christian history. Right after the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, the early church members devoted themselves to the good news about Jesus, to Christian fellowship, and to celebrating the Lord's Supper. The love of God descended upon them tangibly, and many great miracles were done. They became generous toward each other and willing to share their possessions with one another. They invited each other to their homes and had intimate fellowship. It was a picture of the kingdom of God on earth. This was so attractive to people in the world that many became believers.

Another example is the Moravians in Herrnhut in 1727. At first they were a disjointed group of Christians from several different traditions who argued a lot about doctrine. Then on August 13, 1727 they came together and celebrated the Lord's Supper with sincere hearts. They repented their sins based on the word of God and asked Jesus' blood to cleanse them. God poured out the Holy Spirit and

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the love of God came into their hearts with power. They changed dramatically. Those who held grudges forgave their brothers and sisters. Those who had material goods began to share with others freely. They developed a holy passion to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. In a short time Moravian missionaries began to spread all over the world.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper with sincere hearts and receive the love of Jesus, God can use us to proclaim the Lord's death in a powerful way. As we prepare for the Purdue Conference and pray for it, it is most important that we remember the grace of Jesus on the cross, repent of our sins and receive the love of Jesus in our hearts. Then we can love God and love one another joyfully. As we reveal the love of God to our dear brothers and sisters from around the world, God will be glorified through us and we will be happy indeed. What is more, this conference will speak loudly to our generation that God is living and that God is love.

When Jesus was on earth, he ate and drank with all kinds of people: tax collectors, prostitutes, and even Pharisees. Jesus shared the words of life with them and salvation came to people and households. As they ate and drank together, they tasted the real spiritual joy of heaven. We want to follow the example of Jesus Christ. In our worship service, we must do our best to listen to Jesus' words and to repent our sins and receive his grace. After worship service, it is good to eat lunch together, sharing fellowship with all kinds of people, talking about the word of God and the work of God. As we do so, we can taste the kingdom of God on earth. There are many who strive to have this kind of fellowship, including Mother Barry, Dr. John Jun, Missionary Grace A. Lee, the Raricks, the Moons, the Gradys, and so

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on. We must do so more and more. In this genuine Christian love and fellowship all human distinctions disappear. We can experience the unity of love. We can taste the joy of heaven in this world. This is worth striving for.

Let's remember what kind of church we must have. First, we must keep spiritual order based on God's words and truth. Also, we must remember Jesus' grace on the cross to renew our love relationship with God and to practice the love of God with brothers and sisters. As we do so, may God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.