

**VCBC SLG Fall Term 2023**  
**The Book of I Corinthians**  
**Lesson #8**  
**Answers to Their Letter (III)**  
**Ch. 11**

**I. Introduction:**

As Paul ends his teaching on the use of the new-found freedom in Christ, using his answers to the matters raised by their previous letter (7:1) as a platform, he appears to continue with dealing with “reports” that he has heard about the church in Corinth, more specifically about their divisions that spill over to their observance of the Lord’s Supper (11:17ff). Before addressing that issue, Paul seems not to have finished with his teaching on the use of the freedom in Christ, and thus addresses the role of Christian women in leadership, more particularly the manner in which they exercise spiritual authority through prophesying and praying during church services.

However, as it turns out the three main issues that he will be dealing with next, whether issued out of freedom in Christ or prideful divisions, they also amount to “abuses” that occur during their public worship services, namely women prophesying without head coverings (11: 3-16), eating at the Lord’s Supper inappropriately (11: 17-34) and speaking in tongues in a disorderly manner (which takes up chs. 12-14 as a unit.)

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Abuse**

**11: 1 -16 The Role of Women in Public Worship**

***11: 1-2 –Following the example of Christ***

**“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions (teachings) just as I passed them on to you.”**

One wonders if Paul is sincere in his praise for the church in Corinth because he has just chastised them with a broken heart about how they have criticized and judged him, and yet, here he praises them.

I do not think Paul is such a hypocrite that he would lie about how he feels, rather, since he will be talking about “*agape* love” soon (in chapter 13) he is simply practicing what he preaches: **“Love always bears; love always trusts; love always hopes, love always perseveres.”** (13:7) If we focus only on the faults of others, how can we have hope.

Paul exemplifies a love that seeks always to find the goodness in others for which he can give thanks. The worst of our brothers and sisters will always have goodness that we can appreciate, if we care to look. In a sense, Paul is following the sample of Christ whose throne is always a throne of grace. (Heb. 4:16). Of course, he is not blind to their faults either, and so he is very honest and says later that **“In the following directives, I have no praise for you...”** (11:17)

### **11: 3-10 –The Issue of Women covering head in Prophesying (I)**

**“But 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. <sup>4</sup> Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup> But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. <sup>6</sup> For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.**

**<sup>7</sup> A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup> neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup> It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.”**

#### **The exercise of the gifts of prophesying and praying:**

It is obvious that there is a dispute about whether it is appropriate for women to prophesy and pray during church services without covering their heads and such is also reported to Paul.

First, we need to understand that the gift of prophesying is given to both men and women alike—Isaiah calls his wife a prophetess (Isa. 8:3) and so are the four daughters of Philip (Acts 9:21), and the exercise of which carries spiritual authority.

- Prophesying, by virtue of its function, necessarily points to having a message about the future which only the Holy Spirit can reveal to a person. However, it also necessarily contains words to instruct and encourage as explained by Paul:
- **“And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged”** (I Cor. 14: 30-31)

Although, there are differences in opinion as to whether the gift of prophecy still exists today, for now, it is clear that what Paul is seeking to deal with is about Christian women who are inspired by the Holy Spirit to preach and teach through prophesying which appears to go hand in hand with prayers as well. It is also obvious that the Holy Spirit does so to use them to build up the body of Christ and prophesying is thus a form of spiritual leadership, not necessarily accompanied by an office.

#### **The issue:**

While Paul definitely is not against women exercising their gifts of prophecy (which is preaching in essence), but only against the fact that some do not cover their heads while they preach. Based on his arguments, we cannot help but wonder if they are cultural or biblical. Let’s take a brief look at the cultural aspect:

#### **The cultural and religious background of head-covering**

The ancient culture: The headscarf was born out of necessity, with wearers across Mesopotamian societies using linens to safeguard their heads from the rain and sun, as well as aid in sanitation.

Head coverings were first written into law around 13th Century BC, in an ancient Assyrian text that mandated that women, daughters and widows cover their heads as a sign of piety. Headscarves were forbidden to women of the lower classes and prostitutes. The consequences of wearing the scarf illegally were public humiliation or arrest.

However, in Paul's time, while women still covered their heads in public as a sign of modesty, but "the practice of covering the head seems to have become a matter of personal choice." (Encyclopedia.com) However, it was still very common for women to cover their heads in pagan religious rituals.

Jewish Traditions: According to *halacha* (Jewish Law that constitutes the practical application of 613 mitzvot (commandments—248 positives & 365 negatives), the dating of which is rather fluid, but it was definitely influential in the time of Jesus), "a woman must cover her hair after marriage...The obligation to cover hair applies in public areas." (*Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia).

So, we can assume that in the secular Greco-Roman culture at the time, wearing head cover for women was an optional, personal choice. However, since Christianity was birthed not too long ago from Judaism, the church and her services were still fashioned after the latter (minus those rites already fulfilled by Christ, like Sabbath, circumcision etc.)

However, Paul's arguments in vv. 3-10 are definitely based on theological understandings.

### **7: 3-6—Whose "Head" is it—learning from Christ and God (their relationship)**

**"But 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. <sup>4</sup> Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup> But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. <sup>6</sup> For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head."**

It is obvious that Paul uses "head" both metaphorically (HEAD) and literally (head). For clarity, I capitalize the metaphorical use as "HEAD". So, let's look at the reasoning again:

**The Head of every man is Christ, and  
the Head of the woman is man, and  
the Head of Christ is God.**

"HEAD" has to be metaphorical, but what does it mean. To understand its meaning, we have to start with the more obvious one: the HEAD of Christ is God.

Since Christ is not created and is one with the Father (John 10: 30), HEAD does mean "authority" given the fact that the Son submits to the Father who is, as we like to call the "Godhead."

Modern culture has bred an aversion to authority, but submission does relate to authority, as Jesus puts it: **"Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."** (John 5:19)

And thus, if we are true to Paul's reasoning, he says that man is to submit to Christ as his HEAD which we all immediately agree. But can such a reasoning be extended to between woman and man? Where is the basis of such an extrapolation?

Sure, within a marriage relationship, it is true between husband and wife: **“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the HEAD of the wife as Christ is the HEAD of the church, His body of which He is the Savior”** (Eph. 5:22-23) But can it be said of the role of women in public worship? Paul will address this later in this pericope. But for now, let's see how he applies this reasoning to women prophesying in public.

**Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.**

**<sup>5</sup> But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—**

**it is the same as having her head shaved**

So, Paul says the physical head of a person symbolizes where his or her authority lies and since to prophesy and pray the exercise of which is an expression of spiritual authority to which the hearers must submit

- If a man does so with his head covered, he denies the role and the authority conferred to him by Christ, and thus he dishonors his head (and his HEAD)
- However, if a woman does so with her head uncovered, she is usurping the role and authority given to man and thus she dishonors her head (and her HEAD).
- Such a dishonoring is not different from having her head shaved (which, in ancient culture, and for that matter, in most culture was and perhaps still is to a certain extent a shame). Thus Paul concludes:

**“For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.”**

#### ***7: 7-10—Whose “Head” is it—learning from the Order of Creation***

**“<sup>7</sup> A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup> neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup> It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her (own) head, because of the angels.”**

In order to reinforce his biblical argument, Paul appeals to the principle behind God's creation of the first man and the first woman.

#### **(A) Image and glory:**

- The 1<sup>st</sup> man, Adam, definitely is created in the image and (therefore) the glory of God
- The 1<sup>st</sup> women, Eve, then is created “after” the image of Adam and thus is or shall reflect the glory of man, just the same.

#### **(B) Source of Life:**

- The 1<sup>st</sup> woman came from the 1<sup>st</sup> man (from the rib of Adam in Gen. 2:21)

- The 1<sup>st</sup> man did not come from the woman, but directly from God.

**(C) Purpose:**

- The 1<sup>st</sup> woman was created for the 1<sup>st</sup> man—“I (God) will make a helper suitable for him.” (Gen. 2:18)
- The 1<sup>st</sup> man was not created for the woman—Eve did not exist at the time of Adam’s creation.

Paul opines that such facts behind the creation of Adam and Eve reveal God’s design when it comes to the relationship between men and women, and we should be honest to admit that such was not disputed even within the church until recent eras:

**“All of which (the contextual problems) has been further complicated by the resurgence in 1960s...of the feminist movement, both within and outside the church, so that many of the more recent studies on this text are specifically the result of that movement.”** (Fee, 492)

But Fee is quick to add that, **“This is both good and bad for exegesis. It is good because it has caused scholars to look at the text with unusual care...it is harmful, however, when the prior conclusions both for and against women’s equality determine how one is going to understand the text.”** (Fee, 492)

In any case, based on his opinion, Paul urges that the woman **“ought to have authority over her (own) head because of the angels.”**

Many opine that the “authority” here refers to the woman’s, but some see it refer to “sign of authority” which appears to fit the context of Paul’s argument much better.

- It means that a woman should cover her head to signify she is, by God’s design, under the authority of man, and
- Paul is quick to remind us that it is exactly the reason for the fall of some angels—the rejection of God’s authority (Jude 6).

***11: 11-16 –The Issue of Women covering head in Prophesying (II)***

**“<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup> For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.**

**<sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, <sup>15</sup> but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. <sup>16</sup> If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.”**

**7: 11-12—Paul’s Qualification**

But Paul seems to qualify that “in the Lord” there should not be any exercising of “authority” based on gender differences. If so, are his previous arguments not “in the Lord”? I believe, Paul seeks to qualify his arguments by saying that what have been argued are said within the context of prophesying and praying in church services only. Thus:

- It is perfectly fitting for women to prophesy and pray in the church (just as men do) except that she should cover her head as a sign that as she exercises her spiritual authority

through her preaching, she does so acknowledging her role in God's order or fashion of creation.

- Outside of this context,
  - men and women are absolutely equal in the Lord  
**“woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman”**
  - There should be no hierarchy:  
**“For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman”**
  - If headship signifies “source of life”, there is only one source, one head  
**“But everything comes from God.”**

### 7: 13-16—Final Appeals to Common Sense

The long human tradition in this respect, as far as Paul is concerned, has not been accidental

- He is not asking us to follow pagan religious traditions which demand head covering for women in temples (and in this case, Paul is not advocating head covering within the church, but only when it comes to the exercise of the gifts of prophesying and praying).
  - But he is appealing to the cultural understanding, in general, which sees covering of heads by women is a sign of modesty (dating back to ancient times).
- And he also sees that it is important for a man to distinguish himself from a woman which to him is common sense:
  - Shorter hair portrays masculine manliness, and
  - Longer hair portrays feminine gracefulness.

**His final conclusion:**

**“If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice (outside the church)—nor do the churches of God.”**

- At this juncture of civilization, we have to acknowledge that hair length, in general, is not the mark that distinguishes a man from a woman necessarily so, although for the most part, men still keep shorter hair than women.
- My own conclusion is: what Paul teaches in the last chapter, gives us extremely useful guidelines concerning the exercise of our freedom in Christ which are:
  - Do it for the glory of God
  - Even if it is lawful, we must ask if it is beneficial to others, would I cause anyone to stumble, and
  - Do everything for the sake of the gospel so that we may save some.

Since we do have “other practices” outside the church (except in say, Islamic regions)

- In that head covering does not convey any sign of authority;
- And that almost all churches do not require head-covering for women who preach or pray in public:
  - We, whether brothers or sisters, should still keep to the most important principle and that is “do it for the glory of God”
  - By wearing an invisible head-cover—acknowledging that we are not worthy in front of God and that the gifts we exercise do come from Him, He is our HEAD,
  - And so we teach, we preach, we pray and we serve with great humility!

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Abuse

### **7: 17-34 Eating at the Lord's Supper in an Unworthy Manner**

#### ***7: 17-19 The Opposite of Praise—Divisions***

**“<sup>17</sup> In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup> In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval”**

The “following directives” that earn the Corinthians no praise are marked by the repeated use of the term “come together” (11: 17, 20, 33, 34 & 14:26) which, like the issue about headcover, deals with issues of abuse at their public worship.

It is more than likely that when Paul praises them in 7:2, he is already anticipating this reprimand. When Paul says, “in the first place”, the Corinthians can expect more to come, in terms of reprimand.

The immediate reprimand is about “divisions” which have been addressed in earlier chapters about their elevation of human knowledge and the pitching of one leader against another, but Paul seems to be talking about a new issue and its core problem is their desire to show which of them “have God's approval”. This will be elaborated in great details in chapters 12-14, concerning the issues of desiring greater gifts.

As an immediate application, our problem may not be about spiritual gifts in this respect, but the desire to prove ourselves more correct (in terms of opinions) or to impress others of our learning which often contributes to “divisions” as well in the church.

#### ***7: 20-34 The Opposite of Praise—Eating at the Lord's Table in an Unworthy Manner***

##### **The Background of the Abuse**

**“<sup>20</sup> So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!”**

##### **The Background:**

We have to understand that in the early church, Christians did not come together in a church building, but at the home of one of the members' household big enough to house the assembly, exactly like the house churches in China.

And it was very common that as they gathered for their worship it was preceded by a love feast (Jude 12). It was also common that the household would provide the food for all to eat (likely

supplemented by some who would bring their “private supper”). Some commentators suggest that the less wealthy ones (the laborers) and the slaves could not afford to bring their own, and more than likely came directly after work without bringing much food.

Since this is not an Annual Passover type of meal, but a weekly one that preceded the worship, we do not have to concern or equate the ceremony of observing the Lord’s Supper with the Jewish Passover’s rituals, except to the extent of the blessing of (or giving thanks for) the bread and the cup.

#### The Abuse:

The problem that Paul is reprimanding them has to deal with their failure to “recognize” that it is the Lord’s Supper that they are participating at, demonstrated by

- Their eating of the meal (not the bread and the cup) without waiting which fits the assumption that those less wealthy ones are not able to come as early, and
- The eating of their own food, not the food provided by the host (on behalf of the church), defeating the purpose of a community “love feast” and thus
- They are guilty of “despising the church of God.”
- As we read what Paul goes on to talk about the Lord’s Supper, it is important to note that the motif is warning against the “despising of the church of God” through the manner in which they eat the Lord’s Supper.

#### ***7: 23-26 The Purpose of the Lord’s Supper***

**“<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> 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.” <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”**

Since Paul has used the Lord’s Table to compare to the demons’ table in chapter 10, it will be helpful for me to repeat the meaning and purpose of the Lord’s Table already elaborated earlier. However, before that I wish to consider the followings:

- Some commentators see the use of the word “received’ as referring to the Lord’s Supper traditions already been in place based on the Synoptic Gospels. But here, as in Galatians 1:12; 2:2), Paul’s emphasis is clearly on these words being “received” directly from the Lord. Not that they are any different, but that they appear to be given in greater details and Paul sees this as a very opportune time to share with the Corinthians.
- His emphasis on the “night He was betrayed” should not be ignored, as it is clearly a warning to the Corinthians not to “betray” the Lord as Judas did through their careless participation at the Lord’s Supper.

Allow me to repeat what I have written earlier in chapter 10 concerning the Lord’s Table:

### What the Lord's Supper is and is not

The words emphasised by the Lord concerning this ordinance which He Himself has instituted shortly before His crucifixion are: **“do this in remembrance of me”** which He said twice, once concerning the eating of the bread and once about the drinking of the cup.

- Therefore the Lord's Table is a “remembrance”
- The “remembrance” is not just about the completed work of His redemption, but a “remembrance of me”—the person who gave us His body and His blood.
- Hence, Paul says such a “remembrance” is a participation (the Greek word is *koinonia*), which means a fellowship or a communion.
- In other words, the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup is an act of remembering Christ, the person, and with such a remembrance, we are having a time of communion with Him through such a remembrance by means of the bread which reminds us of His body broken for us, and by means of the cup which reminds us of His blood shed to seal the New Covenant (or New Testament).
- Such a remembrance or communion is sacred, not to be taken lightly, or some would say, we enter into a sacred space through his remembrance or communion—although the bread would not turn into His sacred body, and the wine would not turn into His sacred blood which would be a repeat of His sacrifice, not a remembrance.

Perhaps, the following further clarifications are helpful as well:

- At the night the Lord instituted this Supper and in His physical presence, the bread that He said, “is my body” and the cup “my blood” did not “transubstantiate” and change into His actual body and blood that night. It is a sign, a holy sign” for His remembrance.
- I once read an article by a Christian woman who turned from Catholicism in which she shared honestly that she'd rather prefer believing that the bread and the cup were changed into the actual body and blood of Christ and that made her remembrance more moving.
- But our observance of the Lord's Supper is not meant to cause us to be “more moving” at the time which is really very self-serving. We have to be true to the Word, and by faith, not by imagination or speculation, come into communion with the Lord through the remembrance of Himself.
- Also, whether the body is “for you” or “broken for You” (as some MSS would have the latter) is not important. Death on the cross is truly a very horrific death which our Lord suffered for our sake.
- Finally, Paul reminds us that the observance of the Lord's Supper is a “proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes.” This carries two possible meanings:
  - The Lord's Supper clearly speaks to the heart of the gospel—the substitutional death of Christ that offers us a new covenantal relational with God. As such it is a clear gospel message for all, especially for unbelievers; and
  - The entire ordinance implicitly declares also Christ' resurrection, but the “until He comes” seems to be linked immediately to next motif of judgment, both in the present and in the future which Paul uses to warn the Corinthians against their abuse in this respect.

### **7: 27-34 The Warning of Judgment**

**“<sup>27</sup> So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. <sup>29</sup> For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. <sup>30</sup> That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. <sup>31</sup> But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. <sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.**

**<sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. <sup>34</sup> Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.”**

It is important to note that vv. 27-32 and vv. 33-34 are linked by the same “So then” which is key to the understanding of this pericope, together with the opening words that introduce this section: **“Do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?”** (11:22).

So, let’s take a look at the concluding admonitions first:

- The key admonition is oneness in Christ as a body which Paul reminded them earlier: **“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf”** (10: 17) which seems to be the pretext to the warning against abusing the Lord’s Table.
- So, by eating **“not all together”** will invite the judgment of the preceding verses—the recognition of such a purpose for Paul’s admonition serves to eliminate many unnecessary misinterpretations of the preceding verses which we now seek to deal with.

Let’s take vv. 27-32 one verse at a time:

**V. 27: “So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.”**

- The unworthy manner, given the context, refers to their not waiting for one another which is a despise again the church and a humiliation of the body of Christ
- This is a sin against the body and blood of the Lord which was broken and shed for both the wealthy ones and for those who have nothing in the church.

**V. 28 “Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.”**

- While self-examination obviously extends to the examination of our sins before the Lord’s Table, but the emphasis of such examination is explained in the next verse linked by the word, “for”.

**V. 29: “For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment (*krima*) on themselves. “**

- The discernment or examination is particularly directed to the “body of Christ”, as Fee points out: **“But here Paul says only ‘the body.’ One is hard pressed to argue that this is**

a 'shorthand' for 'the body and blood of the Lord,' since Paul otherwise mentions both when he intends both." (Fee, 563)

- And "It should be noted further that 10:17 offers the only interpretation of the bread as such in the NT." (Fee, 563)
- So, without recognizing that we are sharing the Lord's Supper as one body in Christ, we sin and invite judgment (*krima*—as in sentencing) on ourselves.
- "What judgment?" we might ask.

**V.30: "That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep."**

- Paul does not mince with words—he attributes what he heard among them in terms of sickness and death as God's judgment on them.
- The natural question is: "Will it happen today?"
- Frankly, it is God's prerogative!

**VV. 31-32: "But if we were more discerning (*diakrino*) with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment (*krima*).<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, when we are judged (*krino*) in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world."**

- Paul is saying it is better (and here is a play on the words *diakrino* and *krino*)
  - That we judge ourselves, making sure we observe the Lord's Supper worthily, as in recognizing its sacred and communal nature as a body that we will not receive God's judgment, but
  - If we are judged by God, it is really a discipline that, as Hebrews 12:10-11 puts it, **"But God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness (and) . it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace..."**
  - And thus, we will be spared of the final (eternal) judgment that will come upon the world.