

## 7,31,25 1 Cor. chapter 11, Allowing All Temporal Decisions To Be Governed By Eternal Principles

The first section of this chapter deals with something that was unique to that culture and that time in history. There may be instances in some churches where this comes up because of some tradition or custom that is being carried over, but it's rare. It's the issue of "head coverings".

What we'll do with it, though, is draw out the principle behind it – the principle that *does* apply to us and to all assemblies. But first, let's read through the passage to get an idea of what Paul was concerned about;

(1 Cor. 11:1-16) Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason, the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

I found it interesting that Paul starts his whole discussion on this with the statement; "Imitate me in the same manner in which I imitate Christ." So, I'm going to start our study by giving you a personal theory related to the construction of

these verses, and then I'll close this part by simply saying that my theory is possibly irrelevant; and then we can move into head coverings. You'll see what I mean.

Ok, here's the theory. In the original manuscripts there were no chapter breaks in the epistles. And this is one of those cases where having a break between the last verse of chapter 10 and the first verse of chapter 11 can make things a little confusing.

For example, if we go back to Paul's capstone statement at the end of chapter 10 (vs. 33) we read, "I (do all I can) to (give no offense) to anyone, by not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, so that they may be saved." That's a powerful exhortation and principle that should guide every decision we make.

In Rom. 15:3 Paul said, "Even Christ did not please Himself . . ." So, when we see Paul saying, "Imitate me as I do Christ" right after he said, "I do not seek my own benefit, but instead I seek the good of others . . ." That makes sense.

10:33 ties perfectly into 11:1. Here's what they would be if they were together, (which they are in the original manuscript), and if Rom. 15:3 was included;

Christ did not please Himself . . . I do not seek my own benefit, but instead I seek the good of others so I can save as many as possible . . . Imitate me in the same manner in which I imitate Christ . . .

But if you begin chapter 11 at vs. 1 without considering the end of chapter 10, you have this instead; "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you."

You can make it fit, but it's a little awkward. So, my theory is that 1 Cor. 11:1 should have been 1 Cor. 10:34; and 1 Cor. 11 should have begun with vs. 2.

But, regardless, we need to answer several questions that author Thomas Schreiner raised about the meaning of Paul's unusual discussion in 11:2-16. Here's what he wrote:

This chapter has some features that make it one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible. For instance:

How does verse 2 relate to verses 3-16?

Can we identify the custom regarding the adornment of women in the passage?

What does Paul mean when he says that the woman is to have authority on her head, and what does that have to do with “angels” (1 Cor 11:10)?

And finally, what does the word “nature” mean in 1 Cor 11:14?

First, we have to keep in mind that this part of 1 Cor. isn’t talking about Christian activity or behavior in the community or at work; chapters 11 through 14 exclusively address the various aspects of church assembly. So, many of the things we’ll see were things that were happening when the Church met for study, worship and fellowship. And apparently, women’s apparel was one of the traditions existing at that time that needed clarification.

The Greek word for “traditions” (*paradosis*) means literally;

Tradition means nothing more than what is delivered or handed over. It signifies an act of transmission or that which is transmitted and thus refers to that which is handed down or transmitted from generation to generation.

We have “traditions” also; things we consider appropriate to wear or do when we are at church that don’t necessarily apply in public. I’m assuming that in the first century culture, whatever a “head covering” was is one of their traditions. I think vs. 15 gives us a clue to what Paul is trying to say; “But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her hair* is given to her for a covering.”

Personally, I don’t think Paul was talking about women wearing a bonnet of some kind; he wanted them to be visibly adorned in a way that clearly distinguished what he brought up in the *majority* of this part of chapter 11, which is that there is a difference between men and women, and that difference should be honored and apparent in their apparel and in the length of their hair.

We understand the apparel; women wore women’s clothing and men wore men’s clothing, the Corinthians weren’t cross dressers or transgender; but why was hair an issue?

Here are some thoughts on that;

Paul appeals to biology to illustrate the appropriateness of following the cultural standards: women naturally have longer hair than men, and men are much more prone to baldness. That is, God created women with a “*natural veil*” and men with an “uncovered head.”

And there have been times in various cultures over the centuries in which women cut their hair short to represent rebellion against male headship. I can still remember in the 60’s when women like Helen Reddy (who sang “I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar”) cut their hair short to basically rebel against all authority but their own.

That may have been happening in the Roman empire also – I know that homosexuality was rampant; there was a ‘sexual revolution’ taking place. Satan always moves against the clarity of God’s chosen genders in order to destroy the family and to isolate Christians who take the “Adam and Eve” approach that God established in creation.

Here’s another author’s input on this;

While hair length is not the main point of this passage of Scripture, we glean the following applications from it: We should adhere to the accepted indicators of gender. Men should look like men, and women should look like women. God is not interested in, nor does He accept, “unisex.” We should not rebel just for the sake of rebelling, in the name of some sort of Christian “liberty.” It *does* matter how we present ourselves. Women are to voluntarily place themselves under the authority of the male leadership of the church. We should not reverse the God-ordained roles of men and women.

Our culture today does not use veils or head coverings to indicate submission to authority. The roles of men and women have not changed, but the way we symbolize those roles changes with the culture. Rather than establish legalistic standards of hair length, we must remember that the real issue is our heart condition, our individual response to the authority of God, His ordained order, and our choice to walk in submission to that authority. Men and women have different, God-ordained roles, and part of that difference is shown by their hair. A man’s hair should look masculine. A woman’s hair should look feminine

Now, why did Paul bring “angels” into this in vs. 10, “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels?” There was a commentator named “Lenski” who made this statement: “‘On account of the angels’ implies that God’s angels are present when God’s people come together.” J. Vernon McGee agrees with that; he said this: “I am of the opinion that we are being observed by God’s created intelligences. We are on a stage in this little world, and all God’s created intelligences are watching us.”

I’m not sure why neither of these men brought up the passage in Eph. three, but I’m sure that must have been what they were thinking about:

(Eph. 3:10) To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places . . .

Angels are watching and learning from what they see the Lord doing in the development and shaping of the character of this new humanity called the body of Christ.

Finally, I had to look for awhile to find something on why Paul used the word “nature” in vs’s 14 & 15; “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her.”

Here’s the one I settled on;

I loved physiology in medical school and one thing it taught us clearly was the manifold differences between a male and a female, whether it was related to hormones or hair. There is a clear distinction that the God of nature has so arranged as to once again show His orchestration of order even down to the hairs on our head. And it is to this last distinctive difference that Paul appeals to the Corinthians to support his teaching of different roles for each sex. The Corinthians did not need to go to medical school to instinctively observe the innate differences between the way a man appears and the way a woman appears. All they had to do was look at their hair (at least in that culture). This is the first part of his second rhetorical question and in this case he phrases it in such a way so as to expect a "Yes." Paul's point is that even nature supports what he has been saying in the previous passages. He is speaking of nature as God has so

arranged it. Paul does not mean nature in the sense of “the natural world” or “Mother Nature.” It denotes “the way things are” because of God’s design. Paul’s point is that when a man wore long hair it was humiliating and degrading to him. Or stated another way it was not in the nature of a man to wear long hair like a woman.

One other thing I probably should mention is that this discussion in 1 Cor. 11 shows that the Lord is definitely interested in what some might consider totally irrelevant customs or traditions in the assemblies. We obviously aren’t to be critical of what really *is* irrelevant, but there may be things we are doing that are visible expressions of an underlying spiritual principle which we should be paying attention to.

Like I said, I can’t read minds or hearts, and I don’t want to get judgmental about this, but I always cringe when I see a man (especially if he’s in some kind of leadership or “on the stage” position) with hair halfway down his back. It may be just an issue of me being jealous that he has that option, but passages like the one we just read make me wonder if there isn’t more to my discomfort than me being envious.

Anyway, that’s between him and the Lord. All I know personally is that even if I could grow my hair out, I wouldn’t do it now; because I can’t just pretend like this verse doesn’t exist: “. . . if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him.”

Ok, moving on. There are more important things that need to be addressed in *contemporary* Christianity than men with long hair or women with shaved heads; those are probably the least of our problems.

Here’s our next section of 1 Cor. 11;

(1 Cor. 11:17-22) Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you

despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.

First, Paul reiterates his exhortation in chapter one regarding the divisions in their church. In vs. 19 Paul says something that needs a better translation. Here's what's actually there;

For doubtless there have to be factions among you in order that they who are genuine and of approved spiritual fitness may become evident and plainly recognized among you.

Those at Corinth who were sorrowful over the divisions and competition, like Paul was, were the ones in that church who were "spiritually fit"; they stand out from the crowd as disciples of Christ who realize the importance of unity in His body.

When we studied John, we referenced Luke 12:51 where Jesus said, "Do you suppose that I have come to give peace upon earth? No, I say to you, but rather division . . ."

There are times when division is inevitable, but it has to be for the right reasons; and the Corinthians were dividing over things like competing allegiances with certain super-saints they admired ("I am of Paul, I am of Cephas, I am of Apollos", etc.). It would be like Christians in our generation who boast about the superiority of their church over all others; as if we were sport's teams. It becomes a game and there's no recognition of the need for an eternal, unifying vision to keep us all moving in the right direction.

Then Paul brings back some sarcasm to make his point by saying, "When *you* gather for your meetings, it is not the supper instituted by the Lord that you eat, for in eating each one [hurries] to get his own supper first [not waiting for the poor], and one goes hungry while another gets drunk."

See if you can picture that – the church comes together to honor the Lord's sacrifice by taking communion but instead of using that time to truly honor and meditate on what He's done for us, they stuffed themselves with the bread and got drunk on the wine.

In vs's 23-25 Paul gives what is probably most famous explanation of communion in the Bible; here's the Amplified version:

For I received from the Lord Himself that which I passed on to you [it was given to me personally], that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was treacherously delivered up and while His betrayal was in progress took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke [it] and said, Take, eat. This is My body, which is broken for you. Do this to call Me [affectionately] to remembrance. Similarly, when supper was ended, He took the cup also, saying, This cup is the new covenant [ratified and established] in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink [it], to call Me [affectionately] to remembrance. For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are representing and signifying and proclaiming the fact of the Lord's death until He comes [again].

And we saw the *spiritual* significance of this when we studied John 6:53-58;

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

We are all familiar with this tradition. It's called "communion", the "Lord's Supper" and sometimes the "Eucharist" (which literally means, "giving thanks"). And as we saw in John, it represents our union with Christ and the Life that we have because of that union ("He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him . . . He who eats Me, will live because of Me."

So, we see what the Corinthians were doing with this. It's meant to be a time for celebration and solemnity and gratitude; not gluttony and drunkenness. As Ironside put it;

We have here perhaps the fullest instruction concerning the correct observance of the Lord's Supper that is given us in Scripture. It is very evident that it was intended to occupy the hearts and minds of Christians during the dispensation in which our blessed Lord is absent in body, sitting on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. It was intended to call Him



very vividly to mind in order that His people might be so occupied with Him that, as they went forth afterward in service, Christ Himself might be the joy of their hearts. Apparently at a very early day Christians began to misunderstand the Lord's Supper.

I'm sure that what the Corinthians were doing in mistreating the Lord's Supper would seem pretty serious to us, but I don't know if it would reach the seriousness that Paul expresses. He gives the Corinthians one of the most severe warnings of any in the New Testament:

(vs's 28-30) So then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in a way that is unworthy [of Him] will be guilty of [profaning and sinning against] the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man [thoroughly] examine himself, and [only when he has done] so should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discriminating and recognizing with due appreciation that [it is Christ's] body, eats and drinks a sentence (a verdict of judgment) upon himself. That [careless and unworthy participation] is the reason many of you are weak and sickly, and some of you have fallen into the sleep of death.

To help us understand the implications of this, here's something interesting I came across;

Given the fact that Paul teaches on the importance of self-examination before taking the Lord's Supper to avoid suffering divine discipline, it seems that this ordinance can have a "purging" or "cleansing" effect on the individual saints and on the local body or assembly. This query is predicated on the assumption that this ordinance is approached with a sense of solemnity and sobriety each time, because of the danger of irreverently participating in the body and blood of the Lord. I personally think this could be a powerful agent for increasing the degree of holiness in a local body (and the individual Christian). I recall a time when we were celebrating the Lord's Supper and my wife tapped me on the shoulder and said she could not partake of the elements until she went and asked forgiveness from another woman in the congregation. And so, she literally went to another part of the sanctuary where that woman was seated, confessed her sin and asked forgiveness. She then returned and partook of the elements. I have never

forgot that event and always wondered what might happen in a body of believers if we took Paul's words of warning literally? Perhaps there might be fewer participants in the event. In most churches I fear people simply follow others who get up to take the elements but do so without genuine heart cleansing. I am sure that is not everyone, but my guess it is at least some. I have often thought it might be interesting to survey the congregation the week after communion to see if there was anyone weak, sick or dead who had taken communion? I am just offering these thoughts for you to ponder. I do not mean to be dogmatic or legalistic or graceless.

Partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner could result in experiencing an Ananias & Saphira event. One author I read put this in a simpler, more direct way;

It has been said, "God has been known to give 'dishonorable discharges.'" In other words, eventually, God says, "Enough is enough. Your time is up!" Why does God do this? For the simple reason that He loves us and wants to ensure that we are in fellowship with Him. Since pain gets our attention, He uses pain. "Sometimes Christ sees that we need sickness for the good of our souls more than healing for the good of our bodies." But even when He resorts to this form of discipline, He does so because He loves us.

We need to remember that there are things we do as believers that may be a great deal more important to the Lord than they are to us. There is a danger in constant repetition of traditions and ordinances. They can become routine and to that extent, ritualistic and even stagnant; something we do because we have to, and we want to get it out of the way so we can do what we'd rather to do instead. That's a real danger that we have to find a way to avoid.

But, as we saw in our passage in Corinthians, those in the assembly who are "spiritually fit", who understand the significance of remembering the death of the Savior, are grateful for the opportunity to pause in life and take a few minutes to quietly express our gratitude and love to Him for what He's done for us.

Finally, on this, vs. 32 needs a better translation. Here's what's in the New King James and probably most translations: "When we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."

Here are some clearer translations:

When we are judged by the Lord, we are corrected by the Lord to save us from being condemned along with the world.

If punishment does come, it is sent by the Lord, so that we may be safe when the world is judged.

In other words, the judgment Paul speaks of is discipline, not condemnation. We may *deserve* condemnation, but God will make sure that never happens to us. As MacDonald puts it;

God is dealing with us as with His own children. He loves us too dearly to allow us to go on in sin. Thus, we soon feel the shepherd's crook on our necks pulling us back to Himself. As someone has said, "It is possible for saints to be fit for heaven (in Christ) but not fit to remain on the earth in testimony."

You can see, even feel, the underlying principle or atmosphere that permeates all of Paul's practical exhortations. It's going to be summed up in chapter 13 because it's also the guiding principle of the use of our spiritual gifts. Everything we do has to be driven by love, by the loss of ourselves for the sake of others.

As I've mentioned before, that's why Paul told the Romans that love is the fulfilling of the Law – love fulfills literally every action and responsibility we have in this life. If we act in selfless love toward the Lord and toward those around us, we will never be outside God's will. "Picking up our cross" is the foundation of discipleship, of following Christ. If, in every decision we make, we start with removing any consideration of how our decision will affect us and focus exclusively on how it will affect others, we will always move in the right direction.

In a commentary I once read on the Thessalonian letters, the author wrote this;

You never have to say to one whose heart is fully set upon God: "You must give up this and give up that." It is a very blessed thing to see a heart set upon the Lord. You need have no worries in that direction. All the anxiety lies in the realm where the heart is not set for the Lord. The apostle's two letters to the Thessalonians are full of joy. He thanked the Lord on every remembrance of them. He could not speak too highly of them or in terms

too glowing, simply because they turned from the world unto God, “to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven,” and he had no anxiety about them. We have to make a clean cut with the world and the self-life and say: “I am out for the Lord completely!”

In some ways, the hard part isn’t acting in love; it’s to pause for a few seconds before we move forward and consider what’s driving us at that moment. What’s our greatest desire? Is it Christ? In some ways, our battle is more an issue of self-control than of trying to generate compassion.

When we are completely conformed to the image of Christ, it will be love more than anything else that characterizes all we are and all we do. He will fill this universe with what people must have seen in the eyes of Jesus of Nazareth.

Ok, we need to close up, but I want to end this study by reading something that sums up the bottom-line of all Paul is trying to communicate to the Corinthians – and to us, regarding what it means to be disciples of Christ.

From the smallest things in this life to the biggest and most important things we face, it won’t be rules, laws and commandments written in stone that ultimately guide us. It will be the measure of Christ formed in us; a step at a time; a day at a time. Here’s what I want to share;

There is one comprehensive and all-embodying truth which, if it really gained the complete mastery of our hearts and dominated our whole consciousness, capturing our will, our hearts, and our minds, it would revolutionize everything, just as the new covenant represents a revolution from the old covenant. The great truth which embodies everything is this: God has determined that nothing which is not of Christ shall remain, and He is working toward that end in each one of us at all times; on the one hand to rid this universe of everything that is not of Christ; on the other hand to fill this universe and to fill us with that which *is* of Christ. It means that God puts His seal upon what is of Christ, and it is all a matter of the measure of Christ. It is a tremendous thing when that really does come home to our hearts with the force and the power which it represents. It explains everything of God's dealings with us; what we are going through; why we are going through what we are going through. It gives us the key, the meaning, to our problems, challenges and even our suffering. It sets us at once upon the highway of

God's own purpose. He is conforming us to Christ; our job is to allow Him to do so in whatever way He deems best.

The author just said, better than I could, that knowing the love of our Savior and being shaped by the working of the indwelling Spirit takes us to the place where divine Life and Love become both the motivation and the power of a life lived to the glory of God.

As the writer said, when that “. . . really comes home to our hearts with the force and the power which it represents” it becomes a genuine revolution in our lives. The Bible becomes an open book; the purpose of God makes sense; and our place in that purpose becomes clear. People who see, by revelation of the Spirit, the ultimate purpose of God in Christ never need to be told what they should or shouldn't do; doing the right thing becomes as natural as breathing. That's why our focus must be on “growing in grace and the in knowledge of Christ” rather than servile compliance to the guidelines and rules of the Christian religion.

As Sparks simply stated in response to Matt. 11:29 where Jesus said, “Learn of Me”;

The great business of Christians is to learn Christ. This is not just a subject to study. I want to ask you: What is the greatest desire in your life? I wonder if it is the same as mine! The greatest desire in my heart – and the longer I live the stronger it grows – is to know the Lord Jesus.

He goes on to say that his desire is not to conform to Christianity in order to please Man; but to deepen his understanding of, and his relationship with, his Savior.

If we let that drive our lives, we will always be in held in, or (if necessary) brought back to, the absolute center of God's will.