

A Study of First Corinthians

Week Nine

1 Corinthians 10:22-11:22

Day One

10:23 "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"--but not everything is constructive. 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

v. 23 – The issue of food sacrificed to idols must have been a major issue for the Corinthians for Paul spent a lot of time on this subject. Once again, I admire Paul's patience in walking them through this particular subject. I also appreciate that he didn't say, "Go ahead and eat it" or "Avoid it because it has idolatrous roots or intention." He was trying to teach them to discern the real issue at hand and to simply prescribe a behavior would have cut their education short.

He also wanted to emphasize the most important principle in the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols. To set this lesson up, he wrote that all things were permissible, but while permissible, they may not be beneficial for all involved.

v. 24 – The real issue was that we must take into account what others may think about what we do without allowing our behavior to be controlled by what others think. **Does that seem like a paradox to you?** I have written before that I can be driving and have a green light. Yet there in front of me is a pedestrian crossing the street, even though that pedestrian has a red light. If I continue and hit the pedestrian, I am technically correct according to the traffic laws. Yet common sense dictates that I stop because something more important than my vehicular progress is at stake, and that is someone else's well-being.

It is the same with spiritual things. I may have the "green light" but proceeding could hurt someone else. Therefore I must assess the situation properly if I am to do the correct thing.

vs. 25&26 – First Paul told them to eat whatever food is sold in the marketplace, without asking questions of its origin. The believer knows that the food is the Lord's because all the earth is His. Even if someone else dedicated or sacrificed that food to an idol, the believer knows that the idol is deaf, dumb and lifeless. The idol has no spiritual power over the partaker because God is supreme over all. So the believer is free to eat.

Day Two

27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This

has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake-- 29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

v. 27 – Paul furthermore encouraged the believer to eat anything put before him during a meal at an unbeliever's home. I think Paul was conscious of the fact that believers were deemed to be unusual and even weird to unbelievers at that time. I wonder if he wasn't trying to reduce their already controversial behavior by having them be more natural and less legalistic where eating was concerned. I would imagine that some of the Gentiles would have been aware of the dietary laws of the Jews and were watching to see how the Christians would handle the food issue. This then also became a distinction between the Jews and the believers, since the Jews would not eat certain foods but the believers would.

v. 28 – The fact that someone would mention that the food was sacrificed would be an indication that they expected the believer not to eat it. When that happened or when the believer sensed that the other person may have a problem with eating that idol food, the believer was to abstain from eating.

There are some believers who feel that alcohol is proper to be consumed; others feel it is wrong or sinful. It is right at times for the one who will partake not to do so if he or she knows it will offend those around him. Yet that person is not to abstain from ever taking alcohol because some others may be offended. This is the best modern example of this principle that I can think of. **Can you think of a better one?**

vs. 29&30 – In the case Paul described, the believer would not partake to help preserve the peace of the other man's conscience, not his own. For if he or she were to eat it, knowing it wasn't wrong, then it could not offend or unsettle their conscience. But to help the keep the other person's conscience clear, the believed would not eat lest the weaker party think, "How could he eat that, knowing it was sacrificed to that god? Perhaps worshipping that god isn't so bad after all. I think I will call on the name of the Lord and still participate in that idol sacrifice."

I would say, "I could eat this and if I did, it would not be wrong as concerns my eating food sacrificed to an idol. But it would be wrong as concerns possibly offending or even unsettling the conscience of another. So I may very well eat that same food in a different setting, but for now, I will help my brother and *not* eat as he works through this issue." Does that make sense?

Day Three

10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good

of many, so that they may be saved. 1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

v. 31 – Food was a large part of religious practice in Paul’s era, for both Jew and Gentile. There was undoubtedly a lot of legalism and debate that surrounded the basic practice of eating and drinking for Jews and some Gentiles. Legalism is a hard taskmaster, and Paul came along and applied the freedom from legalism that is found in Jesus to the basic exercise of eating. His advice was simple: eat for the glory of God. He set the people free of worrying about what they were eating and urged them to be thankful for their food as a gift from God. Then he urged them to eat and get on with the more important things of their walk with the Lord.

v. 32 – Paul was summarizing here before he moved on to another topic. He instructed them to eat in freedom, but not to eat in such a way that others would have cause for offense.

v. 33 – Paul reminded them of the greatest good, which wasn’t eating or drinking. It was leading people to Jesus. Paul was free of the dietary laws that had ruled his Jewish life, but he was willing to restrict that freedom to see others come to know Jesus.

v. 1 – Finally, Paul wrapped up the discussion by suggesting that they follow him as he followed Christ. There is no better description of the example that Christ left than in Paul’s letter to the Philippians:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

How is your attitude? Is it like that of Jesus? Have you taken on the role of servant wherever you may work, live or worship? Are you being obedient to your purpose and calling? Is your freedom in Christ hindering someone else’s chance of coming to know Him?

Day Four

11:2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. 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. 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. 5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head--it is just as though her head were shaved.

v. 2 – Paul had a body of teaching that he passed on to every church that he planted. He expected them to follow his directives and the Corinthians were doing that in some areas at least. Here he took the opportunity to affirm them as they did something correctly. Up to this point, he has rebuked them and taught them; at this point, he praised them.

A man named Ken Blanchard wrote a book years ago that encouraged people, especially leaders, to catch people doing something right and then give them a one-minute praising. I like that concept. Why not make it your aim today to catch people doing something right and commend them for it? Better yet, why not make this a lifestyle, not just an occasional event?

v. 3 – Now begins a difficult passage to comprehend for it seems that it was certainly influenced by the times in which Paul lived. I assume that the Corinthians had raised this issue with Paul in their letter and he took that opportunity to answer their questions and concerns.

There are some who conjecture that there were many temple prostitutes who worked out of a temple that was located high above the city. They took advantage of the many sailors who came through Corinth regularly. These women could have had their heads shaved and they could have prayed and even prophesied in the name of their gods. It is quite possible that these women now met the Lord and started attending the Christian assembly with their shaved heads, bringing with them some of their bizarre pagan practices. This could have been the source of the questions that the church raised with Paul.

God's order, as described by Paul, is that the man is the head of woman as Christ is the head of the man. From this point, however, Paul gave some instruction and directives that are hard to comprehend and apply in the modern world.

v. 4 – I find this interesting, because all Jewish men prayed with their heads covered. When I go the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, I am given a paper hat that looks like a cardboard container that holds French Fries. I must put that on my head or I am not permitted to pray there. So here is Paul, a good Jewish boy, saying that anyone who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors God. Is there no end to the changes and adjustments in thinking that Paul went through after he met Jesus?

As I write this, I am without my Bible commentaries due to a computer crash. I am wondering if the word head here isn't the word that we use for the head waters of a river, which are the waters where the river starts. If that is the case, then any man who prays or prophesies and cuts himself off from his source, which is God, dishonors God. I have known some who have done God's work in their own strength. In fact, I have done it many times myself.

v. 5 – Here is where my own understanding starts to diminish. A woman must, according to Paul, do spiritual things with her head covered or it is as if she were bald! I don't

understand this at all, so don't look to me for some special insight here. It won't be forthcoming any time soon! I know that the Catholics for many years taught that a woman could not enter a church without a head covering. That edict passed away years ago. Today there are very few Christian groups that require women to wear a head covering. I can only assume that the Spirit of God has adjusted this teaching and our understanding of it. **Do you have any additional insight on this issue?**

Day Five

6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. 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. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

v. 6 – I had a seminary professor teach us to be careful when there is only one mention of any doctrine or practice in the Bible. This whole passage is troubling for the content does not appear in any other of Paul's writings. Therefore the Corinthians must have been facing a unique cultural issue that perhaps none of the other churches were facing.

Consequently, I think we must be careful not to draw too many definitive conclusions from these verses.

I cannot help but think that there is somewhat of a cultural bias in what Paul was writing. In modern terms, it is not a disgrace for a woman to have short hair. I have no problem saying this and it does not in any way cast a shadow on the Bible, Paul or the reliability of the Scriptures as the inspired inerrant word of God.

The lesson for me here is that Paul had to address the issues of his day in a way that would set the people of God apart as distinct from all the other peoples of the earth. At the time that Paul wrote, it was absolutely unheard of for any woman in Israel or for most of the known world to wear short hair. So naturally, Paul would see a spiritual lesson in this that is now lost on modern man.

vs. 7-9 – I can't see this doctrine of short or long hair on men and women ever becoming an issue again. I could be wrong, of course, but that is my opinion. Paul did write a truth when he wrote about the man being the glory of God, since he was created first. The woman, then, is the glory of man for she came from Adam's side and is a product of his being, as part of God's handiwork. I think this truth can be presented as factual and is not affected one way or the other by the length of anyone's hair.

v. 10 – Here is another difficult verse. What does this mean? One third of the angels in heaven rebelled and were cast out—that we know for sure. They did not stay under the authority of heaven, but wanted to be under their own authority. Therefore a woman who submits and maintains her position as under the authority of her husband or the church

reminds the angels of what they should have done. It reminds them further that their judgment has come and is coming, while those humans who willingly choose to submit to God's government and authority will be honored in God's presence for all eternity. Those same angels, who should have shared in that presence, will be banished to the lake of fire.

We can never underestimate the truth that we are walking out our lives in the presence of heavenly beings, who behold our behavior. If that's not true, then what does this verse mean?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1).

Maybe I am viewing Hebrews 12:1 through my Catholic upbringing, but I think we are on display as we worship and work. At any rate, I'm not going to be preaching any sermons on these particular verses any time soon!

Day Six

11:11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. 16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice--nor do the churches of God.

vs. 11&12 – This is so true and has not been emphasized enough, in my opinion. In our zeal to establish the headship and authority of the man, we have neglected to balance the teaching by pointing out that the man is not superior to the woman, nor is the woman subservient to the man. We need each other! How many men could have been helped if they had submitted to their wife's gift or perspective without surrendering their headship in the home or church?

Does this make sense? As I have grown older, this is the advice I give to couples: "Each of you has gifts, strengths and weaknesses. Your task is to understand those gifts and then determine whose gifts are best-suited for the situation at hand. Whichever partner's has the gift best-suited for that situation should take the lead and the other partner should submit, regardless of gender!" Do you agree or disagree with this advice?

v. 13 – If I am to answer the question Paul posed, I would have to answer, "Yes!" It is proper. Sorry, Paul.

v. 14 – I would answer that until 50 years ago, long hair on a man was usually culturally unacceptable. But no longer is this true.

v. 15 – I would answer that a woman’s glory is no longer expressed by her hair length.

v. 16 – Ah, this may be the problem that Paul was addressing. There were those who were being contentious about this issue and Paul wanted to bring order and peace. I am sure you can tell that I am ready to move on from this passage and these verses, for I have no insight or perspective that would be helpful to anyone at this point. So, let’s move on!

Before we do, however, I want to pray: *Lord, show me where I have blind spots where your doctrine and practices are concerned. Show me where I have replaced Your word with my traditions and opinions. I submit to Your word, even this passage, Lord, and ask that You show me the truth. Give me any insight you may have that I need and use my readers to present it to me if necessary. Amen!*

Day Seven

11:17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18 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. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes 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 praise you for this? Certainly not!

v. 17 – In 11:2, Paul praised the Corinthians for following his directives. Here he rebuked them for their inattention to his intentions. Due to their sloppiness, their meetings were doing more harm than good. I have been to those kind of meetings! Unfortunately, I have led those kinds of meetings, where it would have been better if we had not met! This tells me that our meetings should always, always benefit those who attend.

The church I attend when I am home is a good church. The pastor has been there 22 years. Every time I go I sense God’s presence and almost every time I go I am better off than when I first came. I always receive some kind of encouragement or direction from the Lord when I go. **Can you say the same for your meetings? If so, praise the Lord. If not, what can you do to help make them more beneficial? Jumping ahead a few chapters, Paul wrote:**

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church (1Corinthians 14:26).

So everyone has something that they carry into the public meetings, even if it is to simply encourage someone else. Are you doing your part?

v. 18 – I’m not sure why Paul would have been tentative on this issue. He began the letter outlining the divisions that existed as one person identified with one leader and another person with a different leader. So this division must have been different. Based on what Paul wrote immediately following, I think he was referring to the class and economic divisions that were manifest around the Lord’s Table.

v. 19 – Paul expected that those who were following his directives would somehow be distinguished from everyone else. So he was being philosophical that the divisions were being used by God to set apart those who were blessed through their obedience. I’m not sure what signs Paul was looking for that would represent God’s blessings on the obedience, but he expected them to be there for all to see.

vs. 20-22 – It appears that the Corinthians had a reenactment of sorts of the Last Supper when they came together. They seemed to eat a meal together, or at least try to do so, and this meal had slipped into chaos. Some could afford to bring a lot to this dinner and some had nothing. Some used the occasion to partake of the communion wine cup in excess and got drunk.

Perhaps they thought they were doing a good thing by imitating the Last Supper where Jesus instituted the communion commemoration, but their experimentation had gone awry. It would seem that Paul did not expect nor had he directed them to meet in this configuration, for he asked if they didn’t have homes to eat in. The implication was that they did, of course, and that they should use those homes for eating and drinking, not the public worship gathering.

There seemed to be no end to the problems that the early church faced, both from without and within. Paul addressed the problems one by one, doing the best he could through personal visits, sending emissaries and writing letters. The church is no different today. We face different problems perhaps, but any time you gather a group of people, some of whom have known the Lord for many years and others a few weeks, you will have problems.

There are no perfect churches. If you find one, please don’t join it because you’ll ruin it! I stopped expecting perfection from my churches and from spiritual people. I try to put and keep my expectations in the Lord. **So how about you? Has idealism or unrealistic expectations caused you to become cynical or disillusioned where the Church is concerned? I urge you to reconsider your expectations and to then give what you can to your local church so that you can do your part to build up the body of Christ and extend God’s kingdom.**