*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 17 - 22

*First Corinthians Chapter Eleven*

**Monday, February 17 1 Corinthians 11:2-6**

*“She should wear a head covering”*

Verses 2 through 16 of this chapter are probably the most complex and controversial of any passage of comparable length in the New Testament. A survey of the history of interpretation reveals how many different options there are for the many questions the text raises. This, in turn, should raise a fair measure of tentativeness on the part of anyone who writes a daily devotion on the text. Still, there are several points about which interpreters have generally agreed.

One timeless principle that may be declared from these verses is that Christians should not try to blur all distinctions between the sexes. Christianity recognizes that God created men and women as sexual beings, with sexual differences. So we must not try to eliminate these distinctives by dressing or grooming in ways that blur gender differences. There is also general agreement that there is nothing inherently moral or immoral about head coverings, whether veils, shawls, hats, or the length of one’s hair. The issue is what the use (or, non-use) of head coverings in first-century Corinth implied about either the sexual or religious circumstances of the members of the church.

*May all that we do, Lord, even how we dress, bring honor to you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, February 18 1 Corinthians 11:7-12**

*“Women and men are not independent of one another”*

In verses 8-9, Paul presents a two-fold argument from creation: (1) Adam was created first and then Eve; (2) woman was created to be a helper suitable for man. Verse 10 applies the creation argument to the issue of a woman’s head covering (either with long hair or with a shawl) to indicate both her responsibility to keep her head covered *and* her authority to pray and prophesy in Christian worship. Christian tradition from Pentecost on had approved of such worship practice by both men and women (Acts 2:18), and it readily fit Paul’s own emphasis on freedom in Christian worship for both men and women.

Verses 11-12 introduce an important qualification into Paul’s discussion. Paul reminds the Corinthians that as Christians, notwithstanding creation, men and women are fundamentally interdependent. The order of creation is reversed in subsequent procreation, with the woman being necessarily first before the man can be born. Further, everything comes from God and his authority is over all.

*Male or female, Lord, you call us to mutual honor and respect. Amen.*

**Wednesday, February 19 1 Corinthians 11:13-16**

*“We have no other custom than this”*

In these verses, Paul returns to the specific issue of head covering, this time explicitly referring to long hair on men and women, with three further arguments. After appealing to the Corinthians to conclude that what Paul is saying is true (“Judge for yourselves . . .), he argues further from propriety (v. 13b), nature (v. 14-15), and the widespread first-century custom of all believers (v. 16). The first and third of these clearly refer to the “status quo” in Paul’s day.

“Nature” sounds like an appeal to the way God created things, but Paul the Jew would have known of the Nazirites whom God blessed precisely because they did not cut their hair (of whom Samson was the most famous example; Judges 13:15). It was true, then as now, that most cultures maintained a relative difference in hair length between men and women. So “nature” is probably best understood here as that which is a long-established custom. Thus, Paul concludes, since long hair serves as a covering for a woman’s head, she should not cut it short or shave her head as a man might.

*May we be wise Christians, Lord, choosing our battles carefully. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

February 17 - 22

*First Corinthians Chapter Eleven*

**Thursday, February 20 1 Corinthians 11:17-22**

*“You are not really interested in the Lord’s Supper”*

Once again Paul refers to divisions (as in 1:10). But here he is not thinking of the rival parties who support different leaders but of the gulf between the rich and poor within a given house-church. The minority of well-to-do believers, including the owners of the homes in which the believers met, would have had the leisure-time and resources to arrive earlier and bring larger quantities and finer food than the rest of the congregation who had to finish their work-day before coming to church in the evening – there was as of yet no legalized day off from work in the Roman empire. Those that could not afford to bring a full meal, or a very good one, did not have the opportunity to share with the rest in the way that Christian unity demanded.

The result of the lack of consideration by the wealthy for the less well-to-do implies that they are not celebrating the *Lord’s* Supper at all, merely their *own* supper. Instead of sharing a kind of potluck and ensuring that all get plenty to eat and drink, some gorge themselves and get drunk at the expense of those who come later or have less.

*We will treat each person equally, Lord, for that is how you treat us. Amen.*

**Friday, February 21 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

*“In remembrance of me”*

Paul’s method for correcting the unworthy eating and drinking taking place in the Corinthian church is to go back to the very beginning and to remind his readers of the Lord’s Supper institution and meaning. First, the Lord’s Supper is rooted in history. It was a certain man, the Lord Jesus, and it was a certain night, and it was a certain event in which he took actual bread and wine and instituted the sacred rite. Paul’s explanation is an effort to remind the Corinthians of the historical roots of the meal they were abusing.

Second, the Lord’s Supper is about God’s gift of life that is ours through Christ’s death. We are to “do this in remembrance of me,” that is, in remembrance not only of his death but of his life and his teachings, his resurrection and the hope that it brings, and we are to remember his purpose in the world. Third, the Lord’s Supper celebrates a new covenant in which we have entered into a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He is our God, acting on our behalf, and we are his people, obedient to the commands of his Son.

*We remember your sacrifice, Lord, whenever we take bread and cup. Amen.*

**Saturday, February 22 1 Corinthians 11:27-34**

*“Whoever eats or drinks in an unworthy manner . . .”*

The message Paul gives in these verses is an effort to apply what he has said about the institution of the Lord’s Supper to the abuses being practiced in the church. What does he mean by the word “unworthy?” Does he mean that those who do not have perfect lives should not participate? Does he mean that if we can think of any way in which we do not measure up that we should not come to the table? The answer to these questions is “no.”

This is not a discussion of the character of the worshiper but highlights instead the nature of their actions. Thus his warning was not to those who were leading unworthy lives and longed for forgiveness but to those who were making a mockery of that which should have been most sacred and solemn by their behavior at the meal. If we truly enter into the spirit of the Supper we will have a heightened sense of our own unworthiness and of God’s grace. This awareness of God’s love for us ought to make it easier for us to love one another and, thereby, avoid the types of abuses that were occurring in the Corinthian church.

*We receive the bread and cup, Lord, with reverence and humility. Amen.*