

On Fashion and Food
Excerpts from 1 Corinthians 11
Small Group Guide

Opening Icebreaker Question:

- During this political season, we think of what is good for the country. What might be some obvious ways that we forego an individual freedom for the good of the entire country? Any examples?

BACKGROUND: This past Sunday we started a new sermon series that's going to take us through the month of May, and we're calling the series, "Organic." We're looking at several chapters in the book of 1 Corinthians, specifically chapters 11-14, where Paul addresses a few areas of church life.

Corinth was a very influential city, one of the most important commercial cities in the Roman Empire. It was situated with water on two sides, in essence having a port in two separate seas, making it a strategic place for shipping, frequented by people from all over the world. But it was also the Las Vegas, the Sin City, of its day. The sexual promiscuity of Corinth was legendary.

The Apostle Paul had spent about a year and a half in Corinth around 50 AD, and saw the first people come to faith in Jesus there. He had started the first church there. Of course churches weren't buildings yet, where hundreds of people came on Sundays—a church was a gathering of people who shared their faith in Jesus and got together in one another's homes.

Probably 3-5 years have passed, and Paul is writing this letter in response to a letter he's received from someone at the Corinthian church. Throughout this letter he's correcting their misunderstanding of some very important aspects of life as the people of Jesus.

READ 1 Corinthians 11:2-6, 16-29, and 33-34.

Note: In the addendum section of this study guide, we have printed the portion of Josh's sermon where he addressed the cultural context, the particular problem at hand, and a summary of Paul's argument. You can use that to review, if needed.

- Josh summarized the primary application of this passage as follows: *I think that this passage is ultimately not about gender roles, though it certainly gives some insight there. I think we would be mistaken to see its primary application to us as having to do with gender. I think that this passage is ultimately about the independent-mindedness of the Christians in Corinth. They have this fiercely independent spirit; they want to exert their rights. They're not all that different from us. All throughout the letter Paul has to keep calling them back to realize this truth: their connectedness is more important than their individual rights. Any time you think about the exercise of your own freedom, or preference, think about how it will impact other people in this family of faith. This is the principle that ought to govern everything else about how we conduct life as a church: **In Christ, the regard for your family of faith is greater than your exercise of personal freedoms.***
- We will flesh out some applications of this principle in the ensuing discussion of vv. 17-34.

READ 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Background (from Pastor Josh's sermon): There was a custom in the earliest days of the church of celebrating the Lord's Supper every time they got together. And it wasn't just one little cracker and a sip of juice or wine. It was a full meal—they called it a love feast. But in Corinth, it had become distorted.

Because apparently, they would get together in someone's home, and the wealthy Christians would get there early, and go into a private room, and have a rich feast with the finest meat and finest wine, in the name of celebrating the Lord's Supper. And when the poor would arrive, they would force them to meet in their own, segregated room, with whatever scraps may be left.

1. According to this passage, what specifically is the purpose of the Lord's Supper?
2. Thus, why is Paul so offended that the Corinthians would demonstrate class distinctions during the Lord's Supper?
3. V. 29 indicates that if we are dishonoring the church body while we take the Lord's Supper that we "eat and drink judgment" on ourselves. What is your first reaction to this statement? Would this change how you prepare to take the Lord's Supper?
4. What, then, does Paul mean when he refers to taking the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy manner?" (V. 27). Why is it not possible that this refers to an individual who has lingering areas of sin in his/her life?
5. While this passage deals primarily with the exercise of the Lord's Supper, it leads us to think beyond that setting, and to ask, "Are there areas where devalue other members of the body of Christ, perhaps reinforcing social distinctions, even unintentionally?"
6. The Lord's Supper reminds us that Jesus paid a costly price to invite everyone into his family. How can we better express how much Jesus values every member of this body?
 - a. Caveat: What is the balance between treating each person in the Body with love versus setting a boundary on who you choose as your friends?
7. Josh's main point was "**In Christ, the regard for your family of faith is greater than your exercise of personal freedoms.**" What personal freedoms can we give up or allow to bend for the benefit of the body? (Below are suggested areas for discussion.)
 - a. Worship
 - b. Dress
 - c. Mixture of elements in a small group (Bible study, social, prayer, worship, etc.)
 - d. Décor
 - e. Other?
8. The beauty of Christian small groups is that often they bring people together that would not normally choose to hang out together. You don't have to hide a smile here as we all know it's true. ☺
But this gives us a great opportunity to learn from people who are different. Let's go around, choose one person at a time and say something that we have learned and/or appreciated about that person. As a group, let's say at least three affirmations of each person in the group.
9. **Share and Pray:** Among our prayer requests, let's pray that we will grow in our ability to treat every member of the body as God does and each person outside of the body as someone that God values.

ADDENDUM (Quoting Pastor Josh's sermon, 5/1/16)

Because this first half of chapter 11 deals with gender issues, it's important to give you a bit more background on the world into which Paul was writing. For every 1.4 million men in the Roman Empire, there were only 1 million women. Why? People didn't want daughters, they wanted sons. Infanticide was known to be practiced, and girls were often the victims. Women's voices were not heard in city councils, or as witnesses in a court of law, or as valued members in families; they were considered the lesser sex by far. Women were not encouraged to go anywhere in life. Success was finding a husband and having babies.

But things were different in Christian circles. Paul had written in one of his other letters, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3.28). Because Jesus brings us before God and into a community of faith on equal footing through his death and resurrection, no one has a leg up due to gender or race or social status, and no one is outcast for those reasons either. You are each sons and daughters of the king, as a sheer gift of grace.

Archaeological discoveries have shown that there were a disproportionate number of women in Christian communities. Not only women, but the poor were a disproportionate part of their circles. Christians welcomed as equals those who the world at large did not. Not only were women welcomed to be present in Christian gatherings, they were allowed to pray and prophesy out loud. We'll talk more later about what prophesying is, but for now, it meant that women were given a dignified place to speak on behalf of God in public, in mixed company, which didn't happen anywhere else in that society. There was a radical sense of equality that was emerging in the life of Christian churches.

But this radical new dignity and equality had apparently produced a challenge in Corinth—a growing pain, if you will. There is admittedly much that we still don't know about the specific situation that Paul was addressing. But we do know this: respectable, married women in Corinth typically wore some kind of external head covering, like a shawl, as a sign of respect for their husbands; and yet some Christian women, because of their newfound freedom in Christ, were ditching this head covering in a way that was considered shameful.

The women seemed to be saying, "Because in Christ there is no gender distinction, and in the new creation we will be like the angels, neither male nor female, we're throwing off everything that speaks of gender distinction." One scholar says it would be like the women in our church today, when they came here for worship, taking off their wedding rings as if to say, "In heaven there will be no human marriage, so in the church we're going to remove every sign that we're married."

Men, on the other hand, were doing something different. There was a custom that at Roman idol temples, men would pull their togas up over their heads as a sign of worship to their pagan gods. And some Christian men seem to be mimicking that as well, in solidarity with their culture.

That's the specific problem that Paul speaks to in the first part of chapter 11. And although there's still much mystery surrounding the passage, Paul's argument basically goes like this:

Women should keep to the cultural custom of wearing their head coverings when praying or prophesying in church gatherings, and men should keep to the custom of having short hair and keeping their heads uncovered.... In other words, when a man prays or prophesies in public worship with his head covered, he dishonors God. When a woman prays or prophesies in public worship with her head uncovered, she dishonors her husband...

But then he counter-balances this point with another very important one in vv. 11-12:

Nevertheless, in the Lord 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.

He is saying, “There is an inter-dependence between men and women in the family of Jesus.”

So here’s the summary of what he was saying to the Christian women in Corinth: “Yes, you are equal in Christ. Yes, you have this radical new freedom. The only problem is, you are still in the here and now, and you are still married, and the custom of throwing off your head-covering somehow conveys dishonor to your husbands and to the men in your midst. It says, ‘we don’t need you,’ thank you very much. It’s more important to value the well-being of the church as a whole than to exercise your personal preferences.”