

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WMPC - Men's Bible Study

First Corinthians - Winter-Spring 2017

Lesson 6

Read First Corinthians 10 and 11

Three Sets of Questions:

Q1: As you begin this week, it might be good to review an outline of Chapters 10 and 11. These two chapters cover very diverse amounts of material. The Hayes outline, with some notes from us, of Chapters 10 and 11, is as follows:

10: 1 - 22 Warnings Against Idolatry

Note the multiplicity of Old Testament lessons referenced in these verses

10: 23 - 11:1 Conclusion: Use Your Freedom for the Glory of God

This section is the conclusion of the question which starts Chapter 9 - "Am I not free?"

11:2 - 16 Hairstyles and Gender Distinctions

This section challenges our understanding of personal customs and gender expectations.

11:17-34 The Lord's Supper: Discerning the Body

The back half of Chapter 11 forms major components of our understanding of the Lord's Supper. Much of our communion liturgy is drawn from these verses.

As we start our look at these verses, it is easy to note the diversity of the topics they cover. It is the rapid shifts that lead scholars of biblical composition to wonder if our canonical version of the letter is a combination of several letters. This combining of several letters into one larger whole is more evident in 2nd Corinthians. What do you make of the diversity of topics - idolatry like that of the Israelites in the desert with Moses, the proper use of freedom, the order of genders in the Corinthian church, and the right understanding of the Lord's Supper? Could a skilled preacher do all four of these in one sermon and make any sense of them as a whole? Can you write two or three sentences which try to pull these disparate parts into a unified whole? If yes, share with group. If no, then write two or three sentences about what you believe is the most critical and most essential section of our chapters? Is one issue greater than the others?

Q2: Chapter 10 revisits a major theme from earlier in the letter. At verses 23 and 24, "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial. All things are lawful but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other." Such statements are both deeply theological and indelibly pragmatic. This interplay of theology and pragmatism reaches its zenith at 10:31: "So whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." This phrase is among the most famous in all of Christendom and church history. What does this phrase mean to you — "do all things to the glory of God?" What do we most often do — things for our own glory or things for God's glory? Are we more interested in building a resume or becoming a servant?

Q3: From 11:23 - 34 there is an interplay between the eating of meals and the distinctive Christian sacrament of the Lord's supper. First, what is a sacrament? How many sacraments does your church have? Where do the sacraments, whichever ones you count, where do they come from and by what standard are they set apart? Finally, what is the problem in the Corinthian church that Paul is addressing

- what do you think is going on that causes him to write all these thoughts about food and the Lord's Supper?

Three Insights:

I1: From Richard B. Hays:

"More than any other passage in this letter, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 presents severe problems for the interpreter. The first principle that should be applied in our readings of this text is the principle of hermeneutical honesty: we should never pretend to understand more than we do.

It will not do, however to say that the text does not apply to us because it is 'culturally conditioned,' for all texts are culturally conditioned. The aim of Paul's letters is to reshape his churches into cultural patterns that he takes to be consistent with the gospel. The question we must ask then as we wrestle with this text is whether Paul's directives are in fact persuasive on their own terms, whether he successfully mounts an argument consonant with his own fundamental theological vision." (Hays, *Interpretation: 1st Corinthians*, page 190).

I2: More from Hays, about Chapter 11:

"When Paul refers to the Lord's Supper at Corinth, he is not talking about a liturgical ritual celebrated in a church building. At this early date, there were no separate buildings for Christian worship. The Lord's Supper was an actual meal eaten by the community in a private home. Commentators sometimes refer to the distinction — documentable only later in the church history — between the 'agape' (love-feast) and the 'eucharist,' but Paul makes no such distinction. Evidently, the sharing of the symbolic bread and cup of the Lord's Supper occurred as part of a common meal; otherwise, the passage makes no sense." (Hays, *Interpretation: 1st Corinthians*, page 191).

I3: William Barclay on the theology of the Lord's Supper, that is sacramental theology.

"The Sacrament can never mean the same for every person; but we do need to fully understand it to benefit from it. As someone has said, 'We do not need to understand the chemistry of bread in order to digest it and to be nourished by it.' For all that, we do well to try at least to understand something of what Jesus meant when he spoke of the bread and the wine as he did. 'This is my body,' he said of the bread. One simple fact precludes us from taking this with a crude literalism. When Jesus spoke, he was still in the body; and there was nothing clearer than that his body and the bread were at that moment quite different things. Nor did he simply mean, 'This stands for my body.' In a sense that is true. The broken bread of the Sacrament does stand for the body of Christ; but it does more. To him who takes it into his hands and upon his lips with faith and love, it is a means not only of memory but of living contact with Jesus Christ. To an unbeliever it would be nothing; but to a lover of Christ it is the way to his presence." (William Barclay, *Daily Bible Study Series: Letters to the Corinthians Revised Edition*, pages 103-104).

Links for Further Study:

L1: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/sacraments/>

We ask above if we each know the sacraments celebrated in our own churches. Here is a very brief entry on the sacraments of the PCUSA.

L2: A blog entry on head coverings. Can you think of any faith traditions around the world that practice head coverings for women as signs of Godly obedience? Did you know that Amish and Mennonite traditions in the USA also have many female adherents to head coverings? Here is the blog:

<https://churchofgodinchristmennonite.net/en/content/devotional-head-covering>

L3: This video is not related precisely to our passage for this week. But I share it to give those of you who want to take the time to watch the two men, who we believe, are the finest Pauline and New Testament scholars working today. This is well worth 36 minutes of your time if you want to hear biblical scholarship at its highest level.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JM8DGANuq2k>