

## **1 Corinthians Session 8: Covered Heads and Broken Bread (1 Cor 11:2-34)**

(Scripture references based on NIV)

### **1. Key Learning Objectives**

*Key pointers to keep in mind as you prepare and lead the session.*

To understand:

- Paul's instructions in the areas of head coverings and the Lord's Supper.
- How we can love God and others through culturally sensitive behaviour and proper conduct in corporate worship.

### **2. Warm-up activity / Starter Question**

*These questions are meant to establish a baseline level of understanding or tease the themes of today's passage. You may pick one of the two. There is no need to hear from everyone or correct any opinions here.*

- What are some elements of corporate worship that you think are especially important? Do you know of any variations to these practices in other churches/ churches in other countries?
- When you eat with friends, what is the atmosphere like? Do we intentionally exclude others because we find them weird as a result of their behaviour/race/religion etc?

### **3. Opening Prayer**

*Thank God for bringing everyone here. Ask that God would grant each of us wisdom to understand this passage, and a fruitful and meaningful discussion. Pray that His word would continue to speak to each of us, and that He would give us strength and direction even as you navigate a tumultuous world.*

### **4. Context**

#### **Link to previous studies**

- Previously, Paul has instructed that, while we have freedom as Christians, we should be considerate to others in all that we do.
- For example, the Corinthians were not to consume food that is sacrificed to idols if it stumbles other Christians.

## On “man” and “woman”

- Married men and women, not singles!
  - Note that the ESV uses the words “husband” and “wife” instead of “woman” and “man”.
  - This suggests that Paul is primarily describing the relationship of married couples and not singles when he speaks of men and women in this passage.
- Headship
  - The Greek word used for “head” (v3) is *kephale*.
  - Although translated literally as a physical head, *kephale* takes on a metaphorical interpretation here. According to Andrew Wilson’s commentary, in an honour and shame society, the “head” is the “head”/prominent part of the household, i.e. whose reputation is either honoured or shamed by the actions of those in his household.\*

## On traditions

- Whilst it seems as if Paul is speaking in a very paternalistic manner, Gal 3:28 may be a helpful reference to understand Paul’s actual view about women: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”
  - Instead, it is likely that Paul is addressing a very specific pastoral issue happening in the Corinthian church, e.g. not adhering to the culturally expected behaviour of propriety for men / women when worshipping God, e.g. head coverings or hairstyles when praying or prophesying.
  - In this passage, Paul seems to be addressing the traditional or cultural practices of propriety of that time in honouring God and one another.\*\*

## On hair and head coverings

- Definition of “uncovered hair”
  - The Greek word used here for “uncovered hair” is used only one other time in the Greek translation of the Bible in Lev 13:45: “let their hair be unkempt” where a leper’s “head shall be unbound.” There is also evidence that during Paul’s era, women did not wear their hair unbound.
  - For this study, we will assume that when Paul talks about head coverings, he is referring to unkempt/unbound hair of women.
  - Head uncovered is a reference to a woman’s unbound hair hanging loose from her head, instead of being plaited and wrapped up around the head according to normal Greek practice.
- Unbound hair for women
  - Long unbound hair was associated with the low level of temple prostitutes, which is shameful and scandalous.\*\*\*

- Unbound hair is also associated with some mystery cults in the Greco-Roman World and there might be the possibility of such influence among female worshippers in Corinth.\*\*\*\*
- Having their heads shaved was a form of public humiliation for women who had committed certain offences.
- Unbound hair for men
  - Long hair for men was associated with homosexuality.
  - Hair was grown long so that it might be artistically decorated, and any slight decoration was interpreted as effeminacy and suggested sexual ambiguity.
  - Hence, it was culturally inappropriate for a man to have long hair / wear a head covering in the church.\*\*\*\*\*

### On the Lord's Supper

- Lord's Supper was a "deipnon", which is an evening meal and the main meal of the day. It was a real meal, meant to satisfy people's hunger.
- During the Lord's Supper, there would be the sharing of food as well as the breaking of bread and wine.\*\*\*\*\*

\* Perriman, Andrew C. "THE HEAD OF A WOMAN: THE MEANING OF ΚΕΦΑΛΗ IN 1 COR. 11: 3." *The journal of theological studies* 45, no. 2 (1994): 602-622.

\*\* Marshall, Jill E. "Uncovering Traditions in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16." *Novum Testamentum* 61, no. 1 (2018): 70-87.

\*\*\* Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom*. David C Cook, 2010.

\*\*\*\* Ekem, John DK. "Does 1 Cor 11: 2-16 legislate for" head covering"?. " *Neotestamentica* 35, no. 1\_2 (2001): 169-176.

\*\*\*\*\* Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. "Sex and logic in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16." *The catholic biblical quarterly* 42, no. 4 (1980): 482-500.

\*\*\*\*\* Alikin, Valeriy Alexandrovich. "The earliest history of the Christian gathering: Origin, development and content of the Christian gathering in the first to third centuries." PhD diss., Leiden University, 2009.

## 5. Scripture Reading

*Divide the reading of the passage among the youths. Each youth can take 4-5 verses.*

## 6. Discussion Questions

### **Q1-2: Head Coverings (v1-16)**

- 1) a) In v.3 Paul presents a view of marriage that shows God as head of the household. Reading vv. 4-16, what are some Greco-Roman traditions for men OR women in honouring God when they pray or prophesy?

- Women should cover their heads (v6) while men should not cover their heads (v7).
- Men should not have long hair (v14) while women should have long hair (v15).

**b) Refer to the context on hair and head coverings. Given the answers in a) and the context behind it, what do you think Paul wants the Corinthian church to know?**

- We should respect the different cultural rules of propriety for men and women when we come together in worship. This is so that we may honour God not only in our praying and prophesying, but also in our dressing. For example, we do not want to distract others in their worship of God by wearing something that is considered lewd or indecent in church.
- God has also made both man and woman fundamentally different and unique in creation, hence there are different cultural rules of propriety governing each gender. Both genders are a reflection of God and are neither superior or inferior to one another, but they are equal in God's sight.
  - Genesis 1:27b - "in the image of God he created them (mankind); male and female he created them." - implies that male and female are fixed, distinct entities which are not interchangeable.

**2) Why do you think Paul is so particular about cultural sensitivity?**

*Hint: Consider what you learnt in study 6 about Christian freedom and the exercise of our Christian rights.*

- While they have Christian freedom, their freedom is not unlimited.
  - There are still some cultural norms that they have to respect such as those pertaining to their gender, especially if it could be stumbling for others.
- Being culturally sensitive not only honours God, it also honours others.
  - Honouring God by behaving in a manner that reflects the different roles he has made for husband and wife (v3)
  - Avoiding the potential of distracting others from worship with enticing clothing or manner of dressing.

**3) (Advanced Question) Eph 5:21-33 helps us to understand that Paul views marriage as a mutually submitting relationship. How should either gender behave towards each other in a God honouring way?**

- Roles of husbands and wives in a marriage
  - Husbands
    - As Christ is the head of the church, husbands are the head of their wives (Eph 5:23).
    - "Husbands ought to love their wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (i.e. husbands are to sacrifice themselves for their wives) (Eph 5:25).

- Ought to work to sanctify her - help her to grow in holiness and Christlikeness (Eph 5:26).
    - Husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies (Eph 5:28b).
    - Ought to nourish and cherish their wives (Eph 5:29).
  - Wives
    - Submit to their husbands as to the Lord (v22, v24)
- Possible adjectives we could use to describe the relationship:
  - Sacrificial leadership, loving submission
  - Models Christ's relationship with the Church

### **Q3-5: The Lord's Supper (v17-33)**

#### **4) What was the problem at the Lord's Supper?**

*Hint: v21. Also read the context of the Lord's Supper.*

- There were selfish and unloving practices when the church gathered (v21).
- They did not:
  - Wait for each other
  - Share what they had
  - Remain of sober and of sound mind
- These accentuated social divisions in the church and compromised the unity of the community (v18).
- The Lord's Supper was supposed to be a 'potluck' where each believer brings their own food and all the food is supposed to be shared equally among the believers, symbolising their unity and communion in Christ.
- *Additional thoughts:*
  - *In fact, in the prayers spoken at the Lord's Supper, the following prayer is said about the bread: "Just as this broken (bread) was scattered upon the mountains and reunited has become one, so let your Church be reunited into your kingdom from the ends of the earth because yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever."\* So the partaking of bread (and consequently the meal) is meant to bring about unity and not division amongst believers.*

\*Draper, Jonathan A., ed. *The Didache in Modern Research*: 1996. Vol. 37. Brill, 1996. Page 276

**5) Refer to v23-26. What is the significance of Paul outlining how the bread and wine consumed at the Lord's Supper relates to Jesus' body and blood?**

- Paul reminds them of the sacramental function of this meal.
- The Lord's Supper is supposed to:
  - Reflect the unity between believers as a result of what Jesus has done.
  - Proclaim Jesus' death until His second coming (v26).
- Paul's hopes for the Corinthians
  - He hoped that this would encourage the Corinthian Church to partake of the meal in the appropriate way since they had been so unholy in their practice of it.
  - By remembering Jesus' love and sacrifice on the cross, hopefully the Corinthians would likewise be able to model such love to fellow believers through their unity during the Lord's Supper.

**6) a) What are the consequences of improper practice of the Lord's Supper?**

- Improper practice of the Lord's Supper would result in judgement (v31,34) due to its sacred nature. In fact, there have already been instances of judgement (v29-30).
- Initial judgement from improper practice is a warning of eternal judgement (v32)
  - *Nonetheless, individual sickness/death may not necessarily be caused by personal sin (see John 9:1-3).*

**b) Why do you think God wants us to treat the Lord's Supper so seriously?**

- The Lord's Supper is sacred because we are remembering Jesus' death and Resurrection.
- Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, it is a constant renewal of our love for God (by always remembering the cross) and our love for others (by uniting with them in communion and fellowship).

**7. Main Discipleship Takeaway**

*Ask the youths how they would summarise everything that has been discussed today with one sentence.*

We are to love God and love others by being culturally sensitive in our dressing during public worship and through proper practice of the Lord's Supper.

## 8. Application / Reflection

*Split up into smaller groups to share. Leaders are encouraged to have prepared their own thoughts and sharings for the application questions. It is recommended to pick at most two of three questions for deeper reflection.*

- 1) Why do you think our churches do not wear head coverings today? What might be our modern day / cultural equivalent?
- 2) What are some examples of poor behaviour/attitude in corporate worship during YM service? Are you guilty of any of them?
  - *Consider discussing playing mobile phone games during worship, sleeping during sermons, not being thoughtful about Holy Communion etc.*
- 3) Are we mindful and sensitive to socio-economic differences within our YSG?
  - *e.g. When we discuss fellowship outings or where we want to eat, do we factor in whether everyone can afford it?*
- 4) Do you need to be baptised to partake of Holy Communion? If you bring a non-believer to church and they ask to participate in the Holy Communion, how would you advise them?
  - *In the Methodist Church in Singapore, you do not need to be baptised to partake in Holy Communion as long as you profess that Jesus is Lord. To read more, refer to articles XVI, XVIII and XIX at this [page](#).*

## 9. Closing Prayer

*Thank you Lord for today's sharing and the opportunity to delve deeper into your Word. May the lessons that we have learnt and the insights we have gained continue to guide us in our journey of faith. Grant us all a great week ahead with You until we meet again. Amen.*