

1 Cor 11:2-16 - "Healthy Church - part 1"

Steve said on Sunday that we were skipping the latter half of chapter 10 because it's a summary passage and it's predominantly about food sacrificed to idols (for the third time). But read it together and pay specific attention to verses 31-33 ~
Read 1 Cor 10:23-11:1.

Verses 31-33 play a significant part in the following passage although it's not immediately clear as it seems like a completely different direction that Paul is heading in at first.

Read 1 Cor 11:2-16.

This is one of the most complicated passages of Scripture in the New Testament.

Q. What is your immediate reaction to what Paul is saying in this passage? If you were to sum up Paul's message in one sentence do you think you could?

It's hard to know for sure what Paul's addressing but it would seem from verse 2 that the Corinthian church has made a statement of Paul's that they agree with and are walking in. Quite possibly this would be about the equality of men and women (see Gal 3:28).

Q. If this is what Paul's addressing, does Paul see men and women as equals?

A. I think he does. Paul has been accused of being chauvinist by many before but I can't see that in a careful study of this passage.

Q. What does Paul mean by "head" in verse 3?

A. Whenever the word *head* is used metaphorically in the New Testament it appears to always be in terms of authority. But don't forget what Paul says in Eph 5 about submission of women to men, "as to the Lord" and men to love women, "as Christ loves the church." That authority is easy to submit to.

Q. What does Paul mean by "head" in verses 4-5?

A. This is a pun - a man who covers his head (literally more likely "has long hair" - see verse 14) disgraces his spiritual head who is Christ. A woman (probably "wife") who does not cover her hair is a disgrace to her spiritual head (her husband). In 1st century Corinth married women covered their hair as a sign they were married. By not covering her hair she's saying she's available even though she's married. A man with long hair was seen as effeminate - possibly gay and/or a prostitute. And a woman with short hair was probably either an adulterer or a lesbian!

Q. In verses 8-9, 11-12 Paul appeals to creation order to make what point exactly?

A. Something along the lines of, "woman was created from man but now man is created (given birth to) by woman." It's almost as though Paul is saying that God has evened things up? [As for verse 10 in the middle there - the angels? Your guess is as good as anyone's!]

Q. What's the point of Paul's appeal to nature in verses 14-15?

A. First of all it looks as if Paul's saying, "doesn't it just *seem* natural for men to have short hair and women to have long hair?" Then with the second half of verse 15 he's suggesting that it's natural because "naturally women keep their hair" and then by extension (no pun intended) - men 'naturally' lose their hair.

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Q. Then what is verse 16 about?

A. Probably something along the lines of, "just because you're free in Christ, it doesn't mean you should be contrary to culture."

The point that Paul's making is that by being contrary to culture the Corinthian church is making it hard for people to hear the gospel. It's hard to preach the gospel to people who have already rejected church based on Christians and their activities or behaviour!

Three questions for discussion then (remember 1 Cor 10:31-33 as you answer):

Q. What do we put in the way of people hearing the gospel (good news of Jesus) - what stops them setting foot in church today?

Q. Even if people DO hear the gospel and respond to it, do they see us living it out? Do they come to church expecting to find people who look like Jesus and find something else?

Q. Does what we do and who we are point people TO Jesus or AWAY from him?