

The Book of I Corinthians

24

Morning Devotions

Read a Scripture passage of your choice. Talk with the Lord as you read his Word. When you are finished, go back and select one or two verses that you believe the Lord is using to speak to your heart. Meditate thoughtfully and prayerfully on what he is saying to you.

Morning Study

Today we will take a closer look at **1 Corinthians 11**. This chapter is divided into three subsections. Before you begin reading however, we recommend that you first read the Insight page on “Women in the Church,” included with this study. After reading the Insight page, read each subsection and answer for yourself the questions associated with them. Type out your answers (or jot them down on a piece of paper) and file them together with your morning study.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1-2

- In **11:1**, what example does Paul say he is following?
- In **11:1**, Paul goes on to tell the Corinthians to follow his own example. Looking at the context of this verse (note **10:33**), what is this example he is asking them to follow?
- Why did Paul praise the Corinthian Christians? (**11:2**).

Read 1 Corinthians 11:3-16

- After reading the Insight on “The Covering of Heads” (page 2-3), what do you think Paul is instructing the Corinthian Christians to do? (**11:3-16**).
- In **11:11**, Paul says that man is not independent of woman, nor woman of man. Who are both dependent upon?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

- In what particular matter did Paul say he had no praise for the Corinthians and why? (**11:17**). Note also how this verse relates to **11:2**.
- What particular thing was causing harm to their meetings? (**11:18**).
- What were the Corinthians doing when they ate of the Lord’s table? (**11:21**).
- What was causing many of the Corinthians to be weak and sick? (**11:29-30**).

Insight

The Covering of Heads

There are many varying opinions as to what Paul is seeking to communicate to the Corinthian Christians in **1 Corinthians 11:3-16**. But we must remember that to the Corinthians, Paul's words were not ambiguous. They were very clear. This is because Paul is answering a question that the Corinthians had posed to him.

In many ways, reading **1 Corinthians 11:3-16** is very much like listening to a one-way telephone conversation. You can hear Paul speaking, but you don't know what the person on the other end has been saying. But just like listening to a one-way conversation, if you know the person speaking and the person listening, you can work out much of what is being said.

The first thing to determine is: What is the question, posed by the Corinthians, that Paul is answering?

A quick reading of this passage might lead one to believe that Paul is telling men *not* to cover their heads and telling women that they *must* cover their heads. But this is not in fact the case. Paul is actually explaining why a woman should *continue* to cover her head, while a man should not. The question that had probably been asked by the Corinthians was:

“Why do the women continue to cover their heads, but men may not?”

Remember that this question had arisen because of accusations by the Judaizers, who were telling the Corinthian Christians that it was shameful *for a man* to pray or prophecy with his head uncovered. Paul had instructed the Corinthian men that when they prayed or prophesied, they no longer needed to cover their heads, yet had instructed the women to continue to cover theirs.

Jewish men wore a prayer shawl, or *tallith*, over their heads when they prayed. This shawl symbolized their unworthiness before a holy God. This covering of their head was not based on scriptural command but upon the Oral Law, which the Judaizers held on equal footing to the Written Law.

Paul had instructed the Corinthian men that they no longer had need of a prayer shawl because their guilt and unworthiness had been removed by the Cross. But the case for women was somewhat different.

According to Charles Trombley, Jewish custom dictated that...

“Men covered their heads to symbolize their guilt and unworthiness before the law while women cover their heads (and faces) because they were guilty and unworthy before men.”¹

Paul saw the Gospel as the liberation of both men and women (read **Galatians**

3:26-28). Yet their circumstances were slightly different in relation to the wearing of head coverings.

There were many women in the Corinthian church who had unbelieving husbands (**1 Corinthians 7:13-14**). Some of these women were Jewish women with husbands who did not directly oppose the Gospel and were “willing to live with” their wife. If a Jewish wife was found in public with her hair uncovered, the synagogue authorities could compel her husband to divorce her. So Paul allowed women to continue to cover their heads in public worship.

There are two important things to determine about reading a passage with obscure meaning like this one:

- **Firstly, what was the *original intent* of Paul in writing to the Corinthian church?** This can only be determined through an understanding of Paul himself (from the balance of his other writings) and an understanding of the unique cultural conditions of the letter’s recipients.
- **Secondly, what does this passage *mean to us today*?** For if we determine that this passage addresses a uniquely cultural situation in the first century church at Corinth, we cannot and must not use this passage to create a regulation binding on Christians today.

Should a man wear a head covering while praying or prophesying? Should a woman wear a head covering while praying or prophesying? Only you can answer that question, as you read that passage for yourself. As Paul says:

“Judge *for yourselves*: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?”

But whatever your answer may be, remember the balance of Scripture and, in particular, Paul’s words in **Galatians 5:1**:

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

Paul goes on say that circumcision, if forced by the Judaizers upon a Gentile believer, would be an undoing of the grace of the Gospel (read **Galatians 5:2-4**). If Paul was so strong in defending the Gospel against the incursion of the Judaizers in this area, how could he, in his next breath, turn about-face and support their legalistic demand for women to cover their heads?

To understand Paul’s thinking, let’s do a word substitution in **Galatians 5:6**:

“For in Christ Jesus neither [covering your head] nor [uncovering of your head] has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

¹ Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach?* (South Plainfield, New Jersey: Bridge Publishing, 1985), p.139.

MEMORY VERSE

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Here are a few suggestions that may help you to memorize your memory verse:

- ➡ Ask the Lord to help you remember his Word (see [John 14:26](#)).
- ➡ Use the version of the Bible you are most familiar with. What you normally read in your Bible is what you need to be memorizing.
- ➡ Don't just memorize the contents of the verse; memorize its "address" (the verse reference) as well. You can do this by following this pattern: Step 1: **reference**; Step 2: **verse content**; Step 3: **reference**. Then repeat steps 1-3. Note that you are quoting the reference twice as many times as you quote the actual verse content. This gives the verse a clear "reference tag."
- ➡ After you have read your memory verse out aloud several times, try going through your memory verse *without* reading your computer screen.
- ➡ Look up your memory verse in your Bible. Look at its immediate context and read the verses that come before and after your memory verse.
- ➡ Print out your memory verse or jot it down on a piece of paper. Take this paper with you when you go to work or do other daily activities. Meditate on the meaning of the verse throughout the day.
- ➡ During your noon appointment with the Lord, take out your memory verse and go over it again. Talk to the Lord about what this verse means to you personally.
- ➡ In the evening (at either your evening study or your evening devotions), see if you can quote your memory verse from memory. Then, without looking at the memory verse itself, see if you can find it in your Bible.
- ➡ The next day, before you begin committing a new verse to memory, rehearse your previous day's memory verse and see if you can remember it (without cheating!).
- ➡ Finally, at the end of the week (possibly on the Sunday), collect all your week's memory verses, rehearse them and see if you can recall them without reading them. Spend a little extra time on any verses you have difficulty recalling.
- ➡ Remember: Don't just memorize a verse. Put it into practice ([James 1:22](#)). It is not being able to quote a verse from memory that counts. It is His Word *abiding* in your heart that counts ([John 15:7](#)). When you actually apply a verse consistently to your daily life, that is when you *truly* know that verse!