**BCM Bible Study: Nov. 20/21, 2019**

**1 Corinthians 11: Love at Work in the Church Part 1**

Looking Back:

* Start off by following up from the challenge from last week. It was: “Throughout the week, consider how you can better glorify God with your life. In other words, in both the small and big things, how can your life be more geared towards others coming to know Christ?”
  + How did this go for everyone? Did you discover any ways in which your life was self-focused of sharing Christ with someone in word or deed?

Recap and Some Principles of Application

Up to this point, Paul has been asking Corinthians believers to imitate Christ by setting aside their rights and privileges for the purpose of loving one another. The world will tell you that you are self-made and free to do what pleases you. Jesus shows us that true, godly power comes from surrender and humility. We glorify God and point others to know Him by living this way.

Chapter 11 is a turning point in the book. The rest of the book will lay out as follows:

* + 11-14: Applying what Paul has said to life within the church
  + 15: The foundation of all of this – the resurrection
  + 16: Closing statements

We must be careful when applying Paul’s statements about church life to our lives. Sometimes, like in ch. 11, Paul will address a certain issue and we will attempt to obey by doing exactly what Paul says. In this case, we would insist that women cover their heads in worship and that men don’t cover their heads in worship (i.e., don’t wear your hat in church!). Instead, we would do better to determine **why** Paul is saying this to the people. We must ask, **“What principle is causing Paul to say these things?”** Once we can determine that principle, we can apply that principle in modern life. Sometimes there will be a direct correlation into modern life, but that is not always the case as we will see in 11:2-16.

Universal principle that is always true

1st century application

21st century issue

Head Covering Notes: **Read 1 Cor. 11:2-16.** This passage is **VERY** difficult to understand. After reading once, walk through the passage again while going over these notes for vv.2-6:

* In v.3, Paul is making an argument about spiritual authority. Elsewhere, Paul will say that men are the “head” of the wife and that she is to be submissive to him. (See Eph. 5:21ff) However, this spiritual authority does not involve oppression, but means that a husband is to lay down his life for the sake of his wife – this is the essence of Christ’s authority over us. In this passage Paul will speak more strongly to women than he does to men. This does not indicate that women are meant to be overly submissive or have more restrictions. Rather, this issue in the Corinthian church happened to involve the women.
* Two issues come up here: hair length and head covering. Both had cultural implications:
  + **Men**: Men who had long hair would have invited suspicions of homosexuality. Also, men often covered their heads as an act of worship to pagan gods.
  + **Women**: An uncovered head for women indicated singleness (thus inviting suitors) or general sexual availability, with the focus of luring men with their sexuality. An uncovered head in worship resembled the act of Greek women who uncovered their heads as a sign of transcendence of human sexuality. Also, short hair for women was related to homosexuality in that culture.
* Through v.6, Paul is making a cultural statement. Starting in v.7, he tells us his reasoning and we see the universal principle at play. He argues from the created order (man followed by woman) that the women should not do things that disgrace their husbands, which is what their actions were doing. In v.10, Paul insists that a woman should therefore take control over her appearance, specifically what she wears on her head.
* Vv.11-12, we must emphasize that does not intend to diminish women – they are **equal** in God’s creation. Paul is simply insisting that there are two different, but complementary genders. Maintaining this differentiation honors God and their husbands.
* Vv.13-16 are further questions and arguments prompting the women to behave differently. Paul’s general point is that men and women should consider cultural norms when deciding how to look and dress.
* The general principles are:
  + We must be careful to not send confusing sexual or religious messages by the way we act and behave.
  + We must think about how our actions impact one another or are understood by one another, even if we have the freedom to do them.
  + There is an implicit argument for God-given gender and sexuality. To behave in ways that suggest homosexuality or identification with a different gender is not God-honoring or honoring to people of the opposite gender.

Questions:

* In what way might people send potentially sexually promiscuous messages in modern life? (Note: Obviously, hair length or coverings does not communicate either promiscuity or sexuality in our culture, but in Middle Eastern and other cultures, it does.)
  + How does this passage impact our standards of modesty and how we behave towards people of the opposite gender?
  + What does it look like to behave in a way that honors the opposite sex?
* What are some ways that you might someone dress or act in a way that sends confusing messages about your religious affiliation?
  + What does it look like to “become all things to all people” (9:23) or “a Jew to the Jews” (10:20) to people of different religions without losing Christian distinctiveness? Think about customary dress, diet, customs, and behaviors for other world religions.
* What is the Christian relationship with social conventions of how to dress and act? How do we walk the line of being distinctive and yet not sending unnecessarily confusing messages?

The Lord’s Supper: **Read 1 Cor. 11:17-22**.

* What issue is Paul addressing in these verses?
  + The Corinthian church had a mix of wealthy and poor people and the divisions Paul speaks about is between these groups. The wealthy believers often hosted the Lord’s Supper (they had an actual meal, unlike how we practice it today) in their own houses and other wealthy Christians could come earlier to participate in the meal. The poor, having to work more, would come later and sit in an adjacent room and would not have the opportunity the share in the meal in the same way as wealthy believers. The wealthy would gorge themselves and even get drunk! Therefore, Paul says that this is not the Lord’s Supper – it is merely their *own* supper.
  + Have you seen this division of poor and wealthy continue in the modern church? What causes the issue? How can it be helped?
* **Read 1 Cor. 11:23-26**. What is the purpose of the Lord’s Supper? What are we supposed to remember when we partake?
  + Why is it incongruent to remember these things and also act like the church was acting?
  + In addition to remembering the Lord’s self-sacrificial graciousness towards us, what is another purpose of the Lord’s Supper?
    - The Lord’s Supper is an opportunity to demonstrate the Lord’s love by the way we treat one another and share with each other. It is not about satisfying your owns needs (see v.34), but about remembering the Lord and loving others as an overflow of his love for us.
* **Read 1 Cor. 11:27-34.** What does it mean to examine yourself (v.28) and to eat and drink without discerning the body? (v.29)
  + There is some debate here about whether Paul means the body of Christ or the body of believers. In my mind, it could be either and the takeaway is the same. By remembering the body of Christ, we remember his self-sacrificial love towards us *and everyone else*. **Read Matthew 25:34-40, 1 John 4:19-21.**
  + Why is the way we treat other people an indicator of our love for God?
* Do these verses challenge you personally in any way? Encourage people to share – leaders could even share first!

Challenge

In the end, this chapter is a continuation of what Paul has been saying. We should not look to our own desires and freedoms, but to the good of others. Find a way to serve or love someone else this week. This could be a practical thing (bringing someone coffee, driving them to class, etc.) or something more intangible (writing them a note, calling a friend). These things will cost you time and sometimes money, but we are called to set ourselves aside for the sake of others.