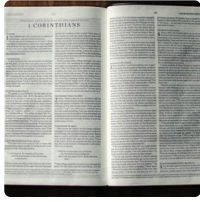


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1 Corinthians 11:14 - 34



1 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this session, Steve Gregg focuses on the latter half of 1 Corinthians 11, which addresses various forms of disorder and misbehavior in Corinthian worship services. The discussion covers the biblical symbolism of a woman's head covering, the importance of modesty, and the need for self-examination during communal meals such as the Lord's Supper. Overall, Gregg emphasizes the importance of correcting problematic behavior within the church rather than dividing and starting new congregations.

Transcript

Last time we took the first 16 verses of 1 Corinthians 11, which is about women being veiled. I thought we did pretty well to get as far as we did in that session. But we were unable to really comment on verses 14 and 15, at least a few things in those verses.

And I had mentioned that these were not in the original text. I'm going to read them now. end of our last session we would not leave those unaddressed, but I'd comment on them at the beginning of this session.

Actually, of course, what we want to cover most of this session is the remainder of 1 Corinthians 11, which after verse 16 is an entirely different subject having to do with the Corinthian behavior at the love feast, at the Lord's table. However, disorder of various kinds seemed to mark the Corinthian worship service. Whether it was women beginning to unveil themselves or people misbehaving at the communion love feasts or the method in which people exercise their gifts, which of course Paul gets into in chapters 12-14, it seems clear that their worship services had many things about them that were not in order, which Paul had to address.

Now as for the women being veiled, yesterday we talked verse by verse up through about verse 13 and also spent time identifying what was meant by custom in the statement in verse 16, which really leaves verses 14 and 15 unaddressed. Now, I would like to summarize that one of the main concerns that I was hoping to address in talking about this material yesterday was the issue of whether the covering of women is still something that Christians ought to be observing. There are those, of course, who believe

that this is the case, that women should veil themselves, because it's in the Bible and the Bible is the word of God.

If God said it, then we ought to do it and even if we don't know the reasons for it, ours is not to question why. Ours is just to do it, do what God says. So, this is the way some people are, but others feel, and I'm among them actually, that although some things are found in the word of God, and although they are applicable in some way to us, it is necessary to find out what the transferable truth is, because the word of God is written to people in a particular culture, with particular circumstances that needed in this case especially to be corrected.

Many of the epistles especially are written to people who needed to be corrected about something, and we wonder whether Paul sometimes gives a bit more strict restriction upon them than he would if there wasn't a problem to correct. I'm thinking, for example, of later on in chapter 11 where he tells people to eat food before they come to church. Is this something all Christians need to do? Well, I think not.

Paul says you have houses to eat at home in, in chapter 11, 34. Eat at home before you come to church. But I don't think that's something we just apply across the board.

All Christians need to make sure they have a meal before they come to church. It's in view of the fact that they had a problem with people not restraining their appetite at the communal meal. And he was saying, well, you've got a problem with that, you might as well make sure your appetite is under control by eating first and not coming hungry to church.

But the instructions, of course, are relevant to a particular problem of a particular group, and it's not always easy to tell to what degree those instructions apply beyond that particular problem. For example, later in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, he says that the tongues speakers should only speak two or three in a meeting, one at a time, and only with an interpretation. I've often been asked about the common modern phenomenon of whole congregations singing in tongues together, singing in the Spirit, as it's called, and whether this is biblical or not.

Well, strictly speaking it's not biblical in the sense that the only instructions Paul ever gave about this are to the Corinthians and told them to only speak one at a time, and only two or three all together, and that only with an interpreter. And of course none of those things are being observed when a whole congregation sings in the Spirit. On the other hand, I'm not sure whether Paul's restrictedness on that was relevant to principally the disorderly conduct of the Corinthian church.

There are times when our kids get so noisy we just tell them, don't say anything for the next ten minutes. It doesn't mean that we think children should never speak in any ten minute segment, it's because they've been overdoing it. We put a more strict restriction

on them, or if their hands are flailing around and they're careless and knocking things over and so forth, we might say, now sit on your hands for the next five minutes or something, and keep track of where your hands are.

When things are out of control, sometimes to bring them into control you put restrictions that are more than ordinarily restrictive. And it's possible that the misbehavior with people going wild in tongues and so forth, shouting each other down possibly, Paul doesn't say they were shouting each other down. I've always heard in expositions of 1 Corinthians 14 that that's what was happening.

I thought, oh, I can't imagine people doing that until I went to some actual churches where that was being done. I mean, people were literally competing with each other to be heard as they were giving competing utterances in tongues. Fortunately that doesn't happen very often in the charismatic churches I go to, but I've been in a few Pentecostal and Quasi-Cult-like groups that do just that.

So I suspect that kind of thing may have been going on in Corinth, and because of the insanity of it, and Paul calls it that because he says if an unbeliever would walk in, they'd think you're insane. He says, listen, let's just have three people total, one at a time, only with an interpretation. Now, if the church had not been going as berserk as they were, it's possible he would not have given those instructions, and he might not give such instructions to a church, for instance, where there's an orderly four people speaking in tongues with an interpretation.

Well, that's strictly speaking going beyond what Paul told the Corinthians to do. I don't know if it goes against the spirit of what he wanted, because his whole issue was to let everything be done decently in an order. Even singing in the spirit as a congregation can conceivably be done in a fairly orderly fashion, it seems to me.

I'm not much into it myself, not having been raised a Pentecostal or whatever, but I can say that I'm not sure that an orderly expression of worship in tongues, even corporately, though it violates the instructions Paul gave to the Corinthians, I'm not sure that he would have given the same instructions to a more orderly group. We have to remember, as I said, I think, yesterday, we're reading somebody else's mail, and we're reading Paul's specific instructions to that group, and while it is true that that group was not unique, and that everything Paul instructed was based upon some principle that is transcendent and universal, the application of the principle may not be. And when we come to the subject of head coverings, that is, of course, one of the issues we have to decide.

Is it so that Paul's instructions about women covering their heads is universal, and we should just take it as it stands and apply it across the board to all women in all cultures? Or is there some transcendent principle, some concept that is universal and spiritual, which in that particular situation was best observed by the covering of women, but in

another culture, another situation, could be observed in some other way, as legitimately? Again, Paul gave these instructions to the Corinthians, but he does not necessarily indicate that he knows himself to be giving these instructions to anybody other than them. Whether he would have given the same instructions to all cultures is what we're trying to decide. Now, there are those who say he would, and those who say he would not, usually determined by how they understand verse 16, where Paul says, If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

Some translations say, no other custom, which, as I say, is not a translation, but an interpretation, because the Greek word is such, and it gives an entirely different spin. But depending on which way they translate it, which way they understand the meaning of custom, some say that Paul is enforcing head coverings as a universal custom observed throughout all the churches of God, and therefore no church should consider itself immune from the instructions here. Or, whether he's saying the opposite, that the custom he's telling them to observe here in Corinth is not a universal custom.

It's applicable to them, but it's not a custom that is observed at the churches at large. Now, we went into this in detail yesterday, I will not again today, just to summarize what my conclusion was. I believe he was saying that the customs of head covering of women, of the shameful of women being shorn, and the shameful of men wearing long hair, that those things that he refers to in verses 3 through 15 are Greek customs, relevant to Greek culture.

Greek churches, like the Corinthian church, should observe it to avoid offending people in the culture. But they are not observed in the same manner by all cultures, or even all cultures of Christians. I gave as an example the fact that the Nazarite vow was observed even among Christians, we know, in Jerusalem, in a Jewish culture, and the Nazarite vow involved, at one point, a man growing his hair out to a length which no doubt the Greeks would call shameful for a man to wear.

And women, if they took the Nazarite vow, and after class yesterday someone pointed out that in Numbers chapter 6, where we have the Nazarite vow talked about, Numbers 6-2 mentions that a man or a woman could take the vow. But part of the procedure of the vow was shaving the head twice. Once at the beginning, once at the end of the vow, which means that a woman taking the Nazarite vow would have her head shaved at two different points, which in the Greek culture would be shameful.

But in the Jewish culture, the Nazarite vow was a thing of honor. I mean, not honor in a fleshly sense, but it was an honorable thing to do in the sight of God. It was dedicating oneself especially to God.

So, obviously, the customs of which Paul speaks about women covering their heads in verse 6, about it being a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaved in verse 14, about it being a shame for a man to have long hair, those are customs that were agreeable with

the Greek culture, but are not universal ways of looking at things throughout the world. And that, therefore, I think indicates that when Paul says in verse 16, we have no such custom, he means we Jewish Christians or we of another culture outside of Greece, we don't necessarily share these customs. Now, there are three ways that the whole passage of head coverings is looked at in Paul's rationale for it.

And I don't think all three could be correct. I think, I'm not really sure. As far as why Paul wants women to wear head coverings, there are three possible answers to that.

I guess I kind of ran them, they came up in the discussion yesterday, but I didn't itemize them for you. I'd like to do so at this time. And the way you want, which of these you choose will determine, to some extent, how universal you think the instruction should be applied.

One opinion is based upon verse 10, to some extent, where it says, for this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels. Now, although I pointed out yesterday that words, a symbol of, are not actually in the Greek, they're in italics here, where the translator is letting you know they've added them. It just says a woman should have authority on her head.

It is probable that Paul is thinking in terms of that authority being symbolized by having a veil. That veil is her authorization to pray or to prophesy in the church. It demonstrates her submission to her husband.

It symbolizes that she is not a rebel. She is submitted to the proper God-ordained authorities over her husband, principally. Now, some have felt that Paul would enforce the idea of not only women being submitted to their husbands, but showing that by a symbol, a particular symbol of something on her head.

She should have this authority or symbol of authority on her head. And it is something like a ritual, of course, because there's nothing moral or immoral about head coverings. Morals are essentially the same for men and for women.

And, I mean, for instance, murder, adultery, theft, lying, these are moral issues and they're equally applicable to men and women. If something is, you know, to be worn by a woman and something else is to be worn by a man, it's quite clear that it's not essentially a moral issue. Unless, of course, there's something culturally unacceptable about it and, for instance, a man begins to wear something that is a woman's garb, culturally recognized as such, or vice versa.

But some feel that there's something God-ordained, a God-ordained ritual, a God-ordained symbolism here, where that a woman should show by the symbol of having something on her head that she is in the proper role of submission. And without this, she is doing something offensive, offensive in the sight of God, offensive in the sight of the

angels, something that should even shock Christians. So that Paul says in verse 13, judge among yourselves, is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? The implication being the answer is no.

Now, in favor of this idea that the head covering was a divinely-ordained symbol of authority that Paul wants all women to have in order to perpetuate the message of submission, some have pointed out in verse 15 that it says, if a woman has long hair, it's a glory to her, for her hair is given to her for a covering, or for a veil. Now, the question arises, what does it mean her hair is given to her? I mean, a woman is born with hair, but on the other hand so are male babies. I mean, males and females are, let's put it this way, the quantity of hair on a baby's head is not usually any determinant of whether it's male or female.

A boy baby may have quite a lot of hair, or a little, but so can a female baby. In what sense has God given her her hair? I actually read a commentator that said, well, God has given a woman a greater abundance of hair than man. Well, I know some women with some pretty thick hair.

I know some men with some pretty thick hair, and I suppose if they never cut their hair, there would be really no difference in the abundance of hair that's given to them, as opposed to the abundance of hair that's given to a woman. I think the principal difference in the amount of hair that women have is determined not by nature, but by customs of cutting it or not. Women in that culture did not cut their hair.

Men did. In what sense then could the long hair on a woman be said to be something given to her, as if, for instance, by God? Her long hair is not given to her in any magical or supernatural sense, and therefore some would say, well, it means given to her in essence that God has granted her, or has given her the responsibility of having long hair, whereas that is not given to men. Now if that, see that's how it is understood by some, because they know that God has not physically given women more hair than men.

But that women generally have longer hair by men is a given that God has ordained. He has given it to women the responsibility to keep their hair long, and not given that to men. This is how some understand it.

In which case again, the long hair on the woman, which is akin to the veiling of the woman, is something God has ordained as a symbol of their femininity or whatever, or of their submissiveness. And so some have taken these things to indicate that God himself is behind this custom of having a symbolic covering on a woman's head, whether it's long hair, or as Paul seems to indicate, long hair and a veil. Both seem to be required.

I say that because of verse 6, for if a woman is not covered, then let her also be shorn. The implication meaning if she has long hair, and doesn't cover her hair with a veil also, then it's not acceptable. She must well cut her hair too.

So the long hair without a veil is not regarded to be enough of a veil in Paul's context here. Now what I'm addressing here is, at this point, what it means for a woman to have her hair given to her as long hair. Again, as I say, nature doesn't give her longer hair than men, generally speaking, and therefore it must be custom or divine ordinance that grants her a longer hairstyle than men.

And some have understood it so. But let me just say this, I don't necessarily see it as God who gives women the ordinance of longer hair. Now Paul is stating something that was considered to be already known.

It's given to her to have long hair as a covering. But if he means God has given it to her, in the sense of ordained it to be so, where did he do so? I mean, it's nowhere in the law, there's no mention of a woman's hair length. There are some commandments about women's hair in other parts of the scriptures, mostly in the New Testament, but they usually have to do with forbidding elaborate hairstyles and the braiding of hair, along with things like the elaborate clothing and jewelry and outward adorning in general.

But those passages never address the length of a woman's hair necessarily. Apart from this passage, we certainly couldn't find anywhere in the Bible where God has given it to women to have long hair. There is, of course, the possibility that he's just revealing that right now.

You know, we've never told anyone before this, God's never mentioned it before, but I, an apostle, am going to tell you this, God has ordained that women should have long hair. But I have the feeling that since he's not defending that, he's not even saying, thus saith the Lord, as if he's giving some new revelation. He's just stating something as if it's understood.

It's a given. It's something they can judge within themselves and know. Now, I'd like to suggest to you that society has given it to women, and particularly in Corinth, to have long hair.

By the way, I personally prefer long hair on women, and so I'm not trying to discourage that or try to say, okay, women, in view of this, I encourage you all to cut your hair. Frankly, I wouldn't mind if God had ordained for women to have long hair, but as far as exegetically, I don't think that can be proven to be the case. It indicates in the previous verse that it's a dishonor for a man to have long hair.

That dishonor, I believe, is socially conditioned. We'll talk about that verse in a moment. We haven't gotten to that yet.

But it's a dishonor in the sight of men in a certain culture, in the sight of certain societies, for a man to have long hair. Not all societies saw it so. But society has granted to a woman to have long hair.

It has not granted that right to men. That is, Greek society has not. And the word given here is actually, if you look it up in the Greek, can be translated granted or permitted or whatever.

So her long hair is permitted to her as a veil. By whom? Some people just take it for granted it means God. Though as I say, it would be hard to find some passage in the Bible that Paul could be referring back to where God has so permitted it or not.

God has never addressed hair length anywhere else in Scripture. And as I say, Paul doesn't phrase this as if he's giving some new insight prophetically about the thing which has never been revealed by God before. He speaks as if it's a known fact.

And I think therefore what was known is that society has granted that women could have long hair, but men could not. But as I say, not all societies have exactly that same assumption. What I'm saying here is there is not the evidence in this passage that some people find in it to prove that God has ordained women to have their heads covered by hair or a veil or both.

It is something that I think that straight through is treated as a cultural phenomenon. Now, modesty is another thing that I think is a possibility. Besides the idea of a divinely ordained symbol that has no moral value but is necessary because God has ordained that this symbol be honored, there is the possibility that Paul, secondly, second option, is that he wanted women to cover their heads for the sake of modesty.

This would be particularly arguable in view of the fact that the word covering that is used here in the Greek, not in verse 15, that's a different word, but in the other parts earlier in the passage, covering refers to something that hangs down and wraps around, something that is thrown around and wraps. It's the same Greek verb, for example, that is used, as I said, for skin covering a body or bark covering the trunk of a tree. It wraps around and covers it completely.

And almost certainly the kind of veil that Paul is referring to here was a shawl or a wrap that not only covered the hair and the head but probably wrapped around most of the face as well. And if this is so, then one could argue Paul's whole issue here is he's concerned with modesty. He doesn't want women's faces and hair out on public display because of the possibility of stumbling men who can be aroused to wrong kinds of desires through visual stimuli.

It is possible that Paul is concerned about that. We know that in Timothy and in Titus and in other places in the scriptures, in 1 Peter 3.3, 1 Timothy 2.9, these other passages of scripture suggest that women should be modest, that women should not try to attract attention and admiration on the basis of their outward looks and so forth. But none of those passages mention anything about shawls or hair length or anything like that as something that is necessary to modesty.

Now I would say that in a Muslim culture, for instance, where women are, their faces and heads are mostly covered, I would say that is a standard of modesty I could appreciate. I mean, I would never enforce it because I don't think biblically it can be. What I'm saying is I wouldn't mind if I lived in a culture where all the women did that.

I do think that degree of modesty would eliminate a fair amount of temptations that are otherwise confronted all the time. Now you women might think I'm being a little too chauvinistic because after all I'm not suggesting that men, it would be nice for us to veil ourselves completely and hide our faces and maybe women would say, well, we've got the same problem with these hunks walking around. I mean, it would be nice if they covered themselves up too as far as that goes.

I think visual arousal is more of a problem on the part of men when they see women than it is on the other side. I'm not saying it's totally absent on the other side, but it's, I think, understood generally that men have a greater problem. Men are just inferior in that way.

They're inclined toward visual stimulus. That's not inferior, it's just a weakness, I guess. But what I'm saying is Paul may well have liked it if women all covered their faces and their heads for the sake of modesty and for the sake of avoiding an otherwise more tempting situation for men, but that hardly seems to be his thought here because as I said in other parts of Scripture where modesty is enjoined on women, never is it referenced to covering the face.

It's just a matter of the makeup and things like that are sometimes referred to, but even that suggests possibly that their faces were visible or else what would have mattered if they wore makeup. Maybe if eye makeup was all that was in view, then he assumed that only their eyes would be showing, but we don't have any specific teaching anywhere else in Scripture that modesty necessarily means that a woman's face not be seen in public. As I said, in Muslim cultures and possibly in the Greek culture, that was an understanding, but different cultures have different ideas on modesty.

Now that doesn't mean that every culture's ideas on modesty are okay. Our culture, for example, I think has really lost touch with the concept of modesty, so much so that Christians themselves were hardened to things. When I was growing up in Southern California, it was nothing for Christian women at church beach parties, at church swimming pool parties to be wearing the same kinds of bikinis and so forth that a woman who had no Christian convictions would wear.

My wife tells me that even before she was a Christian, I don't know how common this is among women, she said every summer in Santa Cruz, the first time she put on a bathing suit, which I presume was the same worldly kind of bathing suit, even the more modest kinds of bathing suits for the most part are much better than painting the body as far as hiding things. But she said she, even as a non-Christian, felt embarrassed going out the

first day of summer, the first time she went out in a swimming suit, after the season of coldness, she hadn't worn one for a while, she said she felt immodest, but she just learned how to harden herself to it, which I don't know if that's a universal thing or if she's just more conscientious than most people before she was a Christian, but the fact is we have hardened ourselves to it. We don't think it's strange, even for Christian men or women, to wear clothing that covers less than underwear covers.

And I think our society has a very slipshod standard in the area of modesty, so while I'm saying that covering the face and head of women is not a universally understood standard of modesty, that doesn't mean that other cultures' ideas of modesty are all okay. Our society probably needs to rethink the whole issue of modesty of women and men, but that doesn't mean we need to go to a Muslim model where women cover their whole faces and heads and everything. There are things in between those two extremes that might be acceptable as modesty.

I personally do not think that modesty is the issue that Paul is concerned with in this passage. He is in other passages, but I think not here. As I said yesterday, the third option, and what I think is his concern, is not offending the local culture.

The fact that this passage falls immediately after a discussion in chapters 8, 9, and 10, where he was concerned about the same thing, not offending people by eating meat sacrificed to idols. So here also, there is some other behavior in the church that might lead to offending the culture. Women casting off their veils, which the Greek women would not do.

And so that's my understanding of it. Now, against this view, it is sometimes pointed out that Paul appeals to nature itself to support his custom. Does not nature itself teach you, he says in verse 14, that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him.

If it is in fact something that we know by nature, that's instinctive or that's demonstrated in the world of nature out there, it would suggest, of course, that these customs have divine origin, not just cultural, and they'd therefore be more universal. They're built into nature. However, we need to examine and ask for a moment, what can be meant by Paul's statement, does not nature itself teach you? If we're looking at what humans are like by nature, for example, one possible meaning would be, nature tells you that a man shouldn't have long hair because, look, babies are born.

In his most natural state, a man doesn't have long hair. He's not born with it, so he shouldn't grow it out. But it seems to me like the same thing could be said about men's beards then.

They're not born with them, but eventually they have them. Would that argue for having to cut them off? I imagine Paul and almost all Jewish believers were bearded. It's a fairly universal Jewish style.

Though the Greeks shaved. But Paul probably was bearded, and I don't think he'd be arguing that the way you were born in this respect is the way you should stay. If you were born that way, let nature be your God.

God didn't naturally give you long hair at birth, therefore he wants you to have short hair. But of course that doesn't work real well because nature didn't give women long hair at birth either. I mean, babies are just not born with long hair.

They may be born shaggy at times, but they're not born with long hair. So he can't be referring to the way we were naturally born as the God. It's possible he's referring to the animal creation.

Somehow when we look in the animal creation, we should be able to see this phenomenon that it's a shame for a man to have long hair. But actually the animal creation would seem to convey the opposite impression. Most animals, as far as hair length is concerned, or plumage, aren't really much different between the sexes.

But where they are, it's usually the male that has the more remarkable plumage. Among birds, for example, there are many species where the female is a very ordinary plain brown or black bird, but the male has bright coloring and so forth. The male peacock is the one with the great feathers that we think of a peacock as having these big things.

These are to attract the female and so forth. Among the animal world, one of the few animals that looks very different in the male and female species and was very familiar to the people of the Bible was lions. But lions, it's the males that have shaggy manes, and the females have nothing in their place.

So I don't know how Paul could be trying to point his readers over to that side of nature. Nature teaches you that it's a shame for men to have long hair. And by nature, he means what National Geographic means by nature, the animal kingdom or whatever.

But no, I don't think that teaches us that. It would be a very weak argument. In fact, it would seem to prove the opposite of what he's trying to say, if that's the nature he's referring to.

So it doesn't seem like he's referring to our natural state at birth or nature in the sense of the animal kingdom. So what nature is he referring to? I think he must be referring to what we could call our natural instincts or our natural sense of propriety, a natural sense of revulsion that we feel about certain things. For example, for a man to cross-dress and put on the clothing of a woman.

I think everyone would feel somewhat repulsed by that initially until they harden themselves against it. I don't know, our culture is getting weirder and weirder and our sensitivities are being dulled, but I would say that almost everyone in here, if I suggested to you that this weekend I'm going to put on women's makeup and women's clothing and

go out and walk the streets in that condition, you'd think I was a pervert and you'd be right. I don't do that, but you'd be right that I would be a pervert if I did that.

I don't even think you would need the Bible to tell you that. Of course, the Bible does say that, as a matter of fact. The Bible says it's an abomination to God.

It says in Deuteronomy 22.5, it's an abomination to God for a man to wear that which pertains to a woman and for a woman to wear what pertains to a man. But even if God had never said so, I think we would feel a natural revulsion to that. Now, someone might say, well, you don't know if we would or not because we live in a culture that's been conditioned by the Bible so long, you don't know what we'd naturally feel.

Well, I'll still hold to my point. I still think there'd be a natural revulsion in almost everyone, including pagans, to certain kinds of perversion like men taking on a woman's apparel. And, of course, on that very basis, some people have objected to women wearing pants or short hair or some other things that used to be exclusively the province of men's styles.

There are still some Christians who feel like women should never wear pants because they feel that's a violation of Deuteronomy 22.5, a woman's wearing that which pertains to a man. However, while there may be something to be argued against women wearing pants on the basis of modesty, some people feel like pants are just not modest enough for women. And maybe there's some truth in that.

I must confess I have not found myself to be more or less stumbled in terms of temptation by a woman wearing a dress or wearing pants. Some men may find it very different than I find it, but I have heard people argue that pants on a woman stumbles them not because it pertains to a man, but simply because it accentuates parts of the body that would otherwise be covered by another style of women's dress. And on that basis, I could sympathize with those who would prefer for women not to wear pants.

But there is another group who object to it on the basis of principle, that pants are a men's style and women should not wear men's styles. In the 20th of this century, women first began to bob their hair and cut it real short in the roaring 20s and so forth, and it scandalized the culture, it scandalized the church, because they were wearing their hair short. Of course, traditionally it had been understood that women should have their hair long, and it was a tremendous scandal.

Nowadays, it isn't a scandal. Virtually every hair length seems culturally acceptable for both men and women. Twenty years ago, for a man to wear his hair long in this culture was considered to be making a statement of rebellion against something or another, and therefore was wrong and wrong-headed and wrong-hearted for a man to wear long hair.

It seems to me now our culture is kind of relaxed in a lot of areas. It's no longer

necessarily assumed that short hair is a man's style or long hair is a woman's style. It seems to be the full range of persons, even in respectable business pursuits.

You see these guys who are business executives with a ponytail sometimes. It would have been real strange 20 years ago. I mean, you'd see people with ponytails 20 years ago.

I was one of them, but we weren't business executives and we were not mainstream culture either. But now in the mainstream, certain styles that were once considered men's styles and other styles that were considered women's styles, like hair length, for example, have fought their way through and become acceptable and so forth. Now, someone should say, but that just shows the corruption of our society.

We've been so corrupted that we no longer are appalled by men with long hair and by women with pants and short hair and things like that. Well, the only way I could appreciate that particular argument is if we could show that there's something morally wrong with men having long hair or women having short hair. Otherwise, it's simply the shifting of styles and fashions which happens all the time.

I mean, in the beginnings of our country, men wore powdered wigs. Many of them were Christian men. In fact, many of the preachers, the great preachers, I mean, whether it's Jonathan Edwards or some of these great guys, they'd be wearing powdered wigs.

Now, that seemed silly for one thing in our society now and real weird and maybe even effeminate today. That's just not a style anymore. It went out of style.

The founder of the Baptist denomination in this country, Roger Williams, had long, long hair, longer than most women have. He was a very conservative evangelical, but it never crossed his mind that for a man to have long hair was a shame to him, even though he certainly knew his Bible. It was a cultural thing.

Then, of course, the thing shifted, so men wore their hair only short, and then, of course, it came back in the 60s or whatever. Men began to fight their way back to having long hair, some of them, and now it seems to be acceptable. Now, these shiftings of clothing styles and so forth, insofar as modesty is not the issue, insofar as none of the styles are becoming less modest, and some of them are, by the way.

Some styles are getting less modest. We need to avoid those. But if it's just an amoral issue of whether a man's hair is long or a woman's hair is long or short, or a particular style used to be considered a man's style.

In the old days, men only wore pants, and now women wear them, too. As I say, if modesty is not the basis for the objection, I can think of no moral issue that can be objected on this point. Now, when people say, well, pants are clothes that pertain to a man, and therefore women shouldn't wear them, I would challenge such people who say

that to go into any woman's clothing store and look at the pants there and ask how many men they know that would wear any of them.

I dare say that pants are not, as a category, a style that is strictly masculine. There are feminine styles of pants as well. Unless, as I say, we argue that pants are too immodest a style for women to wear, and that's not really what some people are arguing, then I don't see any reason to see this as a mark of corruption, just a mark of fluctuation of what's stylish and what's not stylish.

Now, here's another thing. Skirts, in Scotland, what they call kilts, we call them skirts but we humor them and call them kilts, but men wearing that comparable style here would be considered a style that pertains to a woman. I mean, men just don't dress like that around here unless they're in a bagpipe parade or something.

That's just not a male's fashion in this country. In Scotland, it is. And that's one thing I think demonstrates that styles do vary from place to place and there's nothing intrinsically moral or immoral about them, unless of course there are many kilts, you know, and they show too much of the leg or something.

But now, as far as skirts, as far as skirts in our culture, I have been blessed not to be around men who were wearing them. I haven't really observed it, but if you tell me that many alternative people in the alternative culture are wearing skirts now, men, I guess my response emotionally is very much like my parents' response were to men wearing long hair. It's probably comparable.

When men began to wear long hair in the 60s, it was in fact the adopting of a style that had previously been reserved for women. It has fought its way into the mainstream of culture now, so it's no longer restricted to a female or feminine style. Skirts may eventually fight their way into the culture that way too.

I certainly hope not, but maybe they will. If they do, and if 20 years from now or 30 years from now, it's as common for men to wear skirts as for women, and it's mainstream, it's not some group, alternative group or whatever, it's just common American fashion, then I would have to say, while I may never wear a skirt myself, even if it becomes fashionable, that I would, I couldn't object to it on moral grounds because it will have ceased to be a feminine style, you see, it'll suddenly be a unisex style. I will say this though, that the men who first began to wear their hair long, or the men today who first began to wear skirts, there may be some objection to be raised about them, because they are wearing that which is in fact, in the time that they are doing it, not recognized as a male style, and is recognized as a female style, and one has to ask, what is their reason for doing so? I mean, why does a man take on himself that which pertains to a woman? Now, conceivably 20, 30 years from now, skirts may not be regarded as that which pertains to a woman, just like 30 years ago, pants were not considered things that pertain to, I mean, were things that pertain to a man, but aren't any longer.

Styles change and I don't see any reason why that should, why moral stigma should be put on it. Conservative people sometimes just don't like to see change from the way things were when they were a kid. But I will say that the trailblazers in these areas, those who first begin to take on this garb, to begin to change the style, I do question the legitimacy of their behavior.

Now, you happen to come into the scene years later and it's already an established style, your own motives are not necessarily questionable. But those who do this initially, the men who first started piercing their ears, for instance, nowadays that's as much a masculine style as a feminine style, but somewhere back there, not too many years ago, it was strictly a woman's thing to do, and then some men started doing it. Now, we know that long ago before that, there were men, you know, the Vikings or pirates or whatever, who were men who pierced their ears.

We realize that there's not some universal code that throughout all of history earrings are a feminine style. But 20 years ago, they were in this culture. And now that's changed.

But the first people that begin to put on, the first men who begin to put on a style that is at that time recognized as a woman's style and go out and brave the shame and so forth, they might see themselves as heroic. I see them as rebels. And probably in violation of Deuteronomy 22.5, because they are in fact putting on things that pertain to a woman.

I think the women in America in the 20s who began to bob their hair were also in rebellion. And they were wearing that style, which was a man's style. But women who do the same now are not in the same cultural milieu, and there are not the same ramifications or implications about it.

I'm going to have to move more quickly, but let's go on here. So what does nature itself teach you? What nature? I think he's just talking about the natural revulsion that exists when at the thought of a man garbing himself in a woman's style. But that would be culturally conditioned.

It may be nature, it may be human nature to be revolted at man putting on what pertains to a woman, but culture would dictate what particular garments trigger that revulsion. Because culture would dictate which garments we interpret as feminine or masculine garments or hair lengths or whatever. Do you understand what I'm saying? There is something there in our nature that is appalled by men rejecting their sexual identity and imitating in style women.

But as far as what constitutes a woman's style, that would be something that is different in different cultures, and that natural revulsion would be triggered by different stimuli in terms of specific fashions at different times. In Greece, for a man to have long hair was a

shame to him. And if you saw a man with long hair, you'd wonder why he was doing that.

That guy's cross-dressing, as it were. He's wearing a woman's style in Greece. That was a woman's style.

And there's something in your very natural instincts that would say there's something twisted about that. There's something bizarre, there's something perverted, there's something shameful about that behaviour. And that's what I think Paul's referring to.

Pretty much we need to move along now. I will just make this further point. Where he says in verse 13, judge among yourselves.

Is it proper? It does indicate that such judgments of what is proper need to be made within the community about some of these things. Is it proper for a woman to have her head uncovered? Judge among yourselves. It seems to be basically giving the corporate community of Christians the final word in this matter.

Is it acceptable? Is the church going to accept this as a style? Women praying or prophesying with their head uncovered. Paul suspects that most of them will be appalled by it, that most of them will not approve of it. And that's because it's a socially conditioned thing and they are products of their culture.

Just like I am. I mean, I try to pretend I'm liberated and I'm not part of this culture and so forth, but I'll never wear an earring. My cultural conditioning.

I'm not saying that no one else should, it's just I'm a slave of my culture to that extent that I still think of earrings as something feminine. Although I'm not necessarily eager to have women wear jewelry either, but that's none of my business and it's another issue altogether. Now, going on in this chapter, verse 17.

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. I've been told I should go to church because everyone should go to church. Well, I do go to church.

Some people say I should always go to the same church. Well, I don't do that. I don't say anything in the Bible that says a person is supposed to necessarily do that.

But what I find interesting is how culturally conditioned this is. That people say, well, you should be in the same church all the time, you should be a member of a local church, blah, blah, blah. And this, the criticism that I've on occasions received and I'm not lashing out against it, I just want to clarify something.

I happen to know that if I would join any church in town, the criticism would go away. I could join the most apostate church, the deadest church, a church where there wasn't anything of what I would recognize as spiritual life in it, but so long as I was dedicated to

going to that church, no one would criticize me as being unchurched. And you probably know this is true too, I do.

I mean, in our day of ecumenism, we don't criticize people for going to different churches than we do. When I was a kid, in a Baptist church, I might have criticized someone for being a Presbyterian, a Lutheran, an Episcopalian, or something like that. That's way out of our mentality these days.

If someone's going to a Methodist church and we're going to a Presbyterian church or a Charismatic church, we don't criticize that anymore. And what's interesting, as I say, is that the assumption is you should go to church, just any church. The better the church, the better, but so long as you're going to some church.

And yet Paul indicates that some gatherings of Christians are worse than none. When you come together, he says, it's not for the better, but for the worse. Things are worse as a result of your gatherings than if you hadn't had them.

Now, he's not, of course, advocating that they break up their gatherings. He's advocating that they change what's bad about them. And someone might say to me, well, you know, if I told them, well, the reason some churches I don't go to, in fact, I haven't even joined any of them, is because in some ways I'm still looking for a church that it's better to go there than not to.

That coming there, meeting there, is for the better. And that it's better, my spiritual life, my family's spiritual life, our love for God, our worship, our obedience to God, our purity, our love for the brethren, that these things are enhanced by having gone more than if we hadn't gone. And in many, I mean, everyone makes their own judgments and has to assess how they're being affected by the meetings they go to, but if I don't find a church that has that effect, but I'm still not remaining aloof, I still go to church every Sunday, I just don't join with one because there's not any one that has that effect that I'd want to just isolate myself to that one group, despite the fact that nothing is improved as a result of my going, that wouldn't have, you know, over what would have happened if I hadn't gone.

I just don't believe in being that religious. I believe Christians are supposed to get together for the better. Now, some people say, well, if, I mean, Paul's not arguing that people should stop going to church, he's arguing that they should stop doing the wrong things that make it a worse kind of experience.

I agree. And if I had such influence in a church, if I could go to a church and make sure that I could change all the things that I think make it an experience that's counterproductive in some cases, then I'd probably do it. But I'm not looking to cause trouble, you know? I'm not going into a church to change it.

You know what the elders in the past would think of me if I was? I'd be going in there to undermine them, I'd be going in there, and I don't want to do that. I want to go in there and support them, bless them, encourage them, and get out of there alive. That's basically what I want to do.

I get out with my family's spiritual life intact. Now, that might seem like a really critical thing to say about churches, and I have not tried all the churches yet, and I know of churches that are more profitable to go to than not to go to. It's just that they're not always close enough to go to all the time.

What I'm saying to you is that Paul does not assume that a church gathering is always an improvement over none. In this case, the gathering of the Corinthian church often results in a worse situation than before the meeting. Now, ideally when Christians gather, it should be for the better.

We should be edified. The kingdom of God should advance. There should be some discipling going on.

There should be some real pure worship happening, not just a bunch of soulish stuff. It should be really unself-centered, God-honoring kind of stuff. I mean, there are things that should happen when we gather together, and they can and do happen in some places.

But there are some places we have to admit that that doesn't happen, and either those places have to be changed, or else they'll continue producing something worse than if people hadn't gone there in the first place. Changing is the ideal, but then again, usually change is not in our hands if we're not the pastor, elders, or do not have a strong influence over those who are. I love to worship with Christians, and I love to go to church.

There are some churches I go to, though, I wouldn't take my kids to, because what happens there in the name of Christianity is not what I want my kids to think of as Christianity. I want my kids to have a more radical, more biblical idea of what Christians do, and what Christians stand for, and so forth. It's not always easy to find a place that communicates those ideals.

I do not give up on the church, however. I want to make that clear. I still visit churches virtually every Sunday, and if we find one that is clearly to the benefit, spiritually, of our family to join, that's what we'll do.

People have to make their own decisions about that, and my own judgments have to dictate our family's behavior, obviously, as yours must. But Paul indicates that he cannot praise the Corinthians on this point. Now, this is in contrast to verse 2, in the same chapter, where he says, Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things,

and keep the traditions as I deliver them to you.

But now he says, and now in giving these instructions, I do not praise you. Paul's a good diplomat. He first praises them for whatever he can praise them for, before he has to tell them what he can't praise them for.

He affirms them before he criticizes them. Jesus does the same thing in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. If there's anything good he can say about the church, he says that first, though he usually follows it up by saying, but I have a few things against you.

Obviously, the reason for writing the letter is mostly because of a few things he had against them, but rather than just jump to that, he first says any kind thing he can about them beforehand. I know your works, you're patient, and your labors, and you haven't denied my name, but... And Paul's sort of taking the same approach. By the way, it's not a bad approach if you have to criticize somebody, if you have to correct somebody, to affirm them first, because many people misinterpret criticism as rejection.

Now, you might not reject the person you're criticizing. In fact, you may be criticizing them for the very reason that you don't reject them, that you're committed to them, and you think that it's a good thing for them to be corrected. It's good for them and for the relationship.

But a lot of times people misunderstand correction. They don't like correction, and they consider it to be something hostile or rejection or something like that. And so one way to help smooth the way for the correction to be received is to affirm the person in whatever way you can.

So in verse 2, Paul did affirm them. I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions as I deliver them to you. But here's an exception.

There is something that I can't praise you about, and this is what I need to talk to you about, he says. In giving these instructions, I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better, but for the worse. Now, of course, he's not saying stop coming together, but let's get this fixed.

Let's fix this thing. Now, what happens usually in the modern church, see there's only one church in Corinth. You couldn't just say, well, this church, these people are abusing the Lord's table.

These women are casting off their veils. These people are chaotic in their worship service. We'll just take us, the group of right-on ones, and we'll go sit on the right-on church in the next corner in town.

That's what happens in this country. That's been happening ever since the Reformation. I

affirm the Reformation, but I will say that the concept of the unity of the church has definitely been altered by the results of the Reformation, because as soon as Luther said to the President, well, I can't change the Catholic Church, so I'll just start my own church, separate from it.

Then, of course, those that were Lutherans, some of them said, well, the Lutheran Church needs to be changed, so if it can't change, we'll start our own church, too. Then it just started chain reactions. Every group has malcontents in it who think the group's doing something wrong.

The commonest thing is for those people to go out and, well, let's just start a church that we agree more with. That's what some people have told me I should do. Just go out and start.

You don't like some of the things in these churches? Just go out and start your own. I don't want to start a church. There's too many churches already.

We don't need more churches in this country. We need fewer. We just need more unity and more purity than the ones we've got, but starting new churches, I don't think, is the answer.

That's been the solution that's been taken for the past 500 years, and now we have over, I don't know the exact number, years ago I heard there were over 4,000 Protestant denominations in the United States alone. I think it's exceeded that by a fair amount since that time. I heard this back in the 70s.

I think I heard something more like 6 or 10,000 now. It just keeps multiplying as long as there's still malcontents who don't like what's in the church, and I am such a malcontent. I think I've made that plain.

When I go to church, there's things about it I don't like. There's usually things I can tolerate. There's things I do like.

It's the things I do like that make me go there, but there are things I don't like. I'd love to be able to change them, but I'm not in that position. But the response I'm going to have is not to go out and start another church, because that just perpetrates greater division.

You see, by starting another church, what you do is schedule out fellowship with the people that are in the church you're not in, unless you start one on another day of the week or something like that. Typically, people start churches on Sunday mornings, and of course, in order to be at their church, that means they can't be at any of the other churches. They have to disassociate with the church they were in.

What I think is a better approach is what probably has always gone on in church history before the Reformation as well as after, which maybe John Wesley would be a good

example. John Wesley was an Anglican. Now, I'll tell you, the Anglican church is a denomination I wouldn't want to be very wrapped up in.

Not to criticize those who are, it's just not my style of worship. It's not my style of church. It's as close to the Catholic, because you can get in style without being Roman Catholic, I think.

But I guess the Reformation is a little closer still. But Anglicans, the church hasn't really much to be desired, and Wesley thought so too. But he refused to ever leave the Anglican church.

He started the Methodist Societies. He started a counter-cultural movement within the church. And yet, he always urged the people in the Societies to stay in the church.

But they had this other stuff going on on weekdays, or other days of the week, or whatever. And to the day of his death, John Wesley, of course, whose followers later institutionalized as the Methodist denomination, he died an Anglican. He never was anything other than that.

And he urged his missionaries to stay in the Anglican church. He did not, I suppose like Martin Luther, make it his only goal to reform the Anglican church, but probably just to improve things while in it as much as he could within the system. He never called people away from some things, and maybe he should have, but he basically tried to get people alive, tried to bring people to life.

Find the remnants that were in the church and nurture them and disciple them. And I suppose that's probably the approach that should be done now. That's kind of the approach of counter-culture, I guess what we call para-church organizations now.

The church is neglectful of missions, then some group of people in the church go out and start their own mission society. They don't leave the church, but on the side they start a mission society, or a prison ministry, or a soup kitchen for homeless people, or a crisis pregnancy center, or a Bible school, or something like that. They're not rejecting the church wholesale.

What they're starting doesn't make them leave the church. They just feel like, well, if the church is deficient in this area, we'll just get together with people who'd like to... I mean, we're not going to reject the church, but we will also add to our church involvement some of the things that we think are missing. Of course, I don't know to what degree that was available for people to do in Corinth.

Yes? What do I think about home churches? I believe that if you are in a church, that is, you're interrelated with people who are in a church organization, call it church, that there's no reason for you to have to reject that structure in order to add to it home groups. Now, if you're not in such a church, I think it's as valid to start your own home

group as it is to join one of the existing churches. You might say, didn't you just say that we don't need more churches? We don't need more churches of the institutional type.

I think we need plenty more fellowship. People meeting in homes, most of them are, I think, not really trying to start an institutional church in the normal sense. I mean, if they meet on Sundays, of course, it does tend to replace other church involvement for them.

I won't criticize, I can't criticize that any more than I criticize anyone else who goes out and starts another church. I mean, I don't know that that wasn't a possibility in the first century. Although I stated it as detrimental to unity, it is still one of those things that some people feel like it's their only option.

There are little towns with very few churches and every one of them are apostate. I mean, I have lived in such a town. I shouldn't say apostate, but let's just say really, really dreary.

Really dead and unchangeable. I mean, where the elders are alcoholics and masons and unbelievers and so forth. I mean, there are imaginable circumstances that a Christian might find himself in where there is no church in his area that has any claim to really being called a church at all.

I mean, it's principally unbelievers including in leadership or else very corrupt people who, you don't want to call them unbelievers, but you can't tell much of a difference. I don't say that's the case in most American cities, but I would say anything that we consider to be a moral thing has to be universal. And if we would say a person would be wrong to go out and start another church and they can't do that, we'd have to apply that across the board.

You see, it is possible that those who start a home church or another church are doing so because they can't really see any of the churches that are other options put in the area as being what they think a church is. And they don't want to be unchurched. And even going to one of these other institutions, they would still think themselves unchurched.

Like I said, the way people think is different than what I think the Bible indicates. If I started going to the first Baptist church here in town, which happens to be very liberal, a couple of years ago the minister married a couple of homosexuals to each other. If I started going to that church, people might wonder about why I selected that church, but most people would not consider me unchurched because after all, I'm in the church meetings on Sunday morning.

The church may leave much to be desired, but it's a church, right? In my opinion, it's not a church. If it's not standing for the gospel, if it's not standing for the word of God, I don't care what they call it. They can call themselves a church if they want to, but that doesn't make it so.

And there are people who would say, you know, the churches that are around here that I'm looking at, I'm not saying this, I'm saying this is a situation that could easily arise in some places. All the churches in our town, even if I go there, I still feel unchurched. There's no fellowship, there's no exhortation, there's no feeding, there's no loyalty to Christ, there's no true worship going on.

It's for the worse, not for the better, getting together. And therefore, I can think of no arguments to go there. But when I gather with a few of my friends here in my home, we really do worship the Lord and there is all the things happening, or at least many of the things happening that seem like should happen in church.

And therefore, it's not so much I'm starting another church, it's almost like I'm trying to start a church in town because I can't find one where I sense it. Now that's a very subjective feeling, because the very place that I might feel like nothing good is happening here for me, someone else may be getting a great deal out of it. And yet, I think that everyone has to decide where God is leading them to go and there are different decisions to be made on it.

In Corinth, there was only one church. In every town in the New Testament, there was only one church, though there were various gatherings. In Rome, for example, there were five, apparently at least five, house churches.

Altogether, they were probably considered one church in town, but they didn't all meet together, they met in different house churches. And it's probable that if a person didn't find anything in any of the existing house churches, or in a house church they didn't like, they could maybe go to a different one. I don't know, I'm not sure how things were understood, I imagine that would be the case.

Because it was all one church. I think it's a little different in the understanding of modern Christians, I think, unfortunately. Because if we had the same mentality today that I think they had in, say, Rome about the church, then we would say all the churches in town are like individual house churches and there's one church in this town which they're all part of.

And therefore, in a sense, for me to go from one church to the next isn't really changing churches. There's no disloyalty happening, there's no changing of membership or anything like that, because any Christians who live in McMinnville and fellowship in McMinnville are part of the church of McMinnville. And if I go from this congregation in McMinnville to another congregation in McMinnville, I'm still in the same church.

At least I think that's how they understood it in the New Testament. I don't think that all the Christians in Corinth met in one house, necessarily. Some people think they did, but I don't think it's necessary to assume that.

It depends on how big the church was. Certainly there are cities like Rome where the church must have been so large, you could never fit them all in one building. In Jerusalem it must have been that way, when there were 5,000 believers.

And then it kept growing. They must have had individual houses, like the house of John Mark's mother, where they had gatherings for prayer and things like that, and maybe had their regular gatherings in separate locations, but they were still the church. They were still, for instance, in Jerusalem, they were all supervised by the same body of apostles.

And yet they might have, as far as we know, met in a number of different places, but they were just the church in Jerusalem. And if someone was in one house group and decided, well, I think we're going to start going to this house over here, because we've gotten kind of close to some people who go to this one, and our families are close to something. I don't think anyone would consider that disloyalty or changing churches, because there's only one church in town.

And that's very different than the way things are now. You see, we could view it that way. In fact, I do.

In this town, I consider that the Nazarene church and the more conservative Baptist church and the Mennonite church and the Truvine church and the Forest Park church and, you know, I don't want to, I can't name them all, but many churches, I think they're just all part of a church in McMinnville. They're just different houses of worship. Now, the leaders of those churches may not view it so, which makes it difficult perhaps, but that's the way I would view them.

And I personally think that's the way the Bible teaches me. Which means that if I'm going to the Mennonite church for a while and decide that I've, you know, there's some people I feel like I should be getting together with more often over in the Nazarene church and start going there, that the people of the Mennonite church shouldn't think, oh, he's defected to the other side. He's in the Nazarene group now.

You know, it's just part of the one flock, one flock and one shepherd, you know, Jesus said. And it should be understood that there hasn't been a defection. But the problem with the modern understanding of church is that anyone can start his own independent church.

Or even if it's not independent, he's usually linked up not with the other churches in town, but with a network of churches maybe nationally or internationally, with their headquarters in Springfield, Missouri or Cleveland, Tennessee or somewhere else. So that, for example, if one of the local churches in town loses a pastor, he dies or falls in disgrace or something like that, most of the local churches would never call the church across town and say, hey, we need a pastor, could you send someone over? Which I'm

sure would be a very natural thing to do in the early church in Corinth, you know, they're all one church, you know, hey, you got anyone over in your group you can spare to come over here and oversee this group over here? That would be unthinkable in most towns, you know, that the Baptist church loses their pastor, they call the Nazarenes and say, can you send over someone to pastor our church? We don't have anyone here to take those issues. Instead, the Baptists would call their headquarters in wherever it is, many states removed from here probably and say, got anyone on your list that you can send out to Oregon here to take the place of Pastor Joe? Well, again, in saying these things, all I'm trying to do is register my disagreement, but not my condemnation of them.

As far as I'm concerned, a lot of the things that were happening in the early church were possibly flexible enough that we could do them differently now and God could still honor it. But I think we need to understand that it is different. And I personally would prefer to see things the way they were though I'm not an idealist that says if I just rant and rave about it, nothing is going to change for the better.

I used to think that when I was young and idealistic in my twenties, but now I've come to say, I'll just plug in, I'll just encourage the churches as they are and do something on the side that's more like what I believe in. Just because some churches don't agree with me on some points doesn't mean they're not brothers and sisters or that I can't fellowship with them. Usually I let them decide when I can't fellowship with them anymore.

House churches, I can see them more as a parachurch kind of a thing or as church. A house church that you'd start might be more church than any of the other things in town that call themselves that. I guess I don't feel like condemning people starting new churches.

I'm just saying I don't know that the town needs more churches. It is a very important point. I think that's what I think has given rise to the whole concept of parachurch things, which I personally think parachurch is just church, but there are those terms bandied about and distinctions made.

If any of you don't understand some of those terms, parachurch and so forth, my apologies, I don't have time to go into them. It takes a little far field of the exposition of the text here. Paul says in verse 18, for first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you and in part I believe it.

For there must also be factions among you that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Now the word divisions in verse 18 is the Greek word for schism. It's a Greek word that sounds very much like our English word schism or schism.

And in verse 19 where it says factions, the actual word is heresies in the Greek. So we got schisms and heresies. I don't know if schisms or schisms is a better pronunciation, but the point is that these words have modern meanings that may not be identical to the

way they're understood here.

Heresies today is a word we usually use for false doctrine, but actually the word means a faction. It speaks of a sectarian kind of a quality, dividing the church and of course false doctrines often are the means of dividing the church, which is why the term heresy is common usage to refer to false doctrines as the point of division. But Paul says he's hearing of divisions in the church and on one hand he doesn't disapprove of that.

He says that's really kind of necessary I guess because there's always in the church those who are and those who are not part of the true church. There are those who are genuine or approved as he puts it here and those who are not genuine, who are the disapproved. There is a sifting that takes place.

There is a sorting that goes on in the providence of God. Paul is assuming of course that those who are leaving the church in this case are the ones who are disapproved. They're showing themselves to be not genuine.

They're not staying in it. They're abandoning the church and those who are going to tough it out are the ones who are genuine. Even though the church has got serious problems, the church of Corinth had some very serious problems as you can see by reading this letter and yet staying in the church was still what was expected to be done.

They weren't supposed to separate themselves and start some rival movement, which I don't even know that anyone was starting a rival movement. Now it's also possible that leaving the church was not what Paul had in mind when he talked about divisions and heresies and this sorting taking place. It could be that what he's saying is you can just tell by seeing how some people are dividing themselves even inside the church.

You can see that some of them are definitely not motivated properly. It raises questions as to whether they're really being followers of Jesus genuinely or not. We read of divisions in the Corinthian church back in chapters 1-4, although some commentators think that here Paul's referring to some other division.

After all, he raises it as if it's a new subject here. I hear that there are divisions among you. He pointed that out in chapter 1. It's possible another kind of division is in mind here and a number of teachers feel that this is more like an internal division, not horizontally.

I'll stand by Paul, you stand by Paul, you can stand by Cephas, but vertically. Sort of an elitist kind of thing and some have felt like it was over the issue of rich and poor. That the richer were in some way discriminating against the poor.

Now I must confess I don't see a lot of evidence for that interpretation in the passage. There is one statement in the passage that is said to give credence to that and that is where there is some people eating more than somebody else gets. Paul indicates that

one thing they're doing is causing those who have nothing to be ashamed and those who have nothing are thought to be maybe poor and therefore those who are not poor were discriminated against the poor, though there is another possible way of interpreting that.

I don't know what the nature of the division was. Maybe it's just, maybe he's not even talking about formal divisiveness, but just plain old self-centeredness that makes oneself an island divided from everybody else. Because the behavior he describes is just putting yourself first and putting everyone else out.

Dividing yourself from them, not in the sense of leaving the church or putting yourself in a category against some other category as often happens in church divisions, but just that there's this division. There's not a unity. Everyone's looking out for himself.

It's a fragmented, unbonded sort of a group where they're not concerned about anyone but themselves. I mean that's the most fine divisions you can get, not into two or three or four categories, but every person is his own category against everyone else. That strikes me as a possible problem he's referring to here.

And those who do this show themselves to be, or at least are in the process of giving evidence that they are maybe not approved, that they are not really genuine Christians. He says in verse 20, therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. Now this is a statement that's a bit ironic because he is actually talking about when they did gather to eat the Lord's supper.

When they were gathering to take communion, which they did every time they got together, apparently, as far as we know from the early writings of the church, they probably met weekly, at least they did in the second century, and they may well have been doing so even in Paul's time, meeting weekly, possibly on Sundays. This was happening when the Didache was written, which was before the end of the first century and may have been happening this early. At any rate, they might have been meeting daily as far as that goes because in Acts chapter 2 we find them getting together to break bread on a daily basis.

We don't know how frequently they were doing it, but let's just, for the sake of argument, suggest that they were possibly following the custom at this point that later became universal before the end of the first century, as they were meeting on Sundays. And in doing so, they had a variety of activities, one of which was having a meal together, a love feast, as Juden refers to it, and at the love feast they would also incorporate a remembrance of the Lord's supper in some form, what we call communion or what some groups call the Eucharist. They were in fact, therefore, meeting in order to participate in the Lord's supper, but he's saying when you meet you aren't really, this isn't the Lord's supper.

What you're doing is not anything the Lord would endorse. You may in fact be following

the formality of it in some respect. You might be calling what you're doing the Lord's supper, but as far as I'm concerned, Paul says, it isn't the Lord's supper because it is not anything that honors the Lord in what you're doing.

Verse 21 says, For in eating, each one takes his own supper, not the Lord's, it's his own supper, ahead of others, and one is hungry and another is drunk. What, do you not have houses to eat and drink in, or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. Now in trying to reconstruct what was exactly going on, a certain amount of conjecture is called for, though we can be pretty sure that one of two things was probably happening.

These communal meals, we have no reason to believe they were catered events. Probably people brought their own food. It's not likely that out of a church budget that there was a budget for catering these meals.

It's more probable that they had something analogous to a modern potluck thing. Everyone brings some food. Now either this food was put on a common serving table and everyone took, it was like when you put it on the table, it was no longer yours, it was just part of the communal meal, and everyone just took what they wanted.

And the sense that some were getting too much and some too little would be reflected in the fact that some were just more aggressively putting themselves forward at the communal serving table and leaving nothing for the people who were further back in line, which is perhaps the way we would picture it in view of our modern customs of potlucks and stuff. This could happen. In fact, many of us have been at potlucks if we were at the end of the line.

In fact, it doesn't even take a potluck. Just eat meals here. If you're at the end of the line, sometimes you may find that some people got a good portion and you ended up with not a very good portion.

Another possibility that's very closely related to it, not very different, is that while people brought their own food, they brought their own food to feed their own families, but also to share some with people who didn't have any. In other words, there might not have been a communal serving table at all, but people just brought their own food. They took responsibility for their own feeding of their families.

But the expectation was that those who had an abundance would share it with those who couldn't bring much. On this view, those who were bringing food instead of sharing it with others were in fact eating it all themselves, but those who were poor and couldn't bring much didn't have enough. It's not a matter of someone just wolfing down all the communal food, but someone just eating all their own food.

Everyone's eating his own supper, it says in verse 21. Each one takes his own supper

ahead of others. And another is left hungry, or another is eating too much and drinking too much.

Another is drunk. Again, I don't need to make an issue of this, but I think it's worthy to note again in passing that if people were getting drunk at the table, that the wine that they had must have been alcoholic wine. Some feel that wine in the Bible was not alcoholic, but it's hard to know how anyone would have gotten drunk at the table if they didn't have alcoholic wine.

And Paul does not say, what? What is this alcohol doing at the table? He's concerned that people are drinking more than their share. He's not concerned that the drink is an intoxicating drink. He's concerned about the quantities that some are getting, and some people aren't getting enough.

Some are getting none. So the suggestion here that they're bringing to shame those who have nothing would mean the poor. The poor who can't bring enough and who kind of count on those who have a lot to share, sharing.

But if those who have a lot to share, they bring their own meal and they eat it all themselves, then those who have nothing to bring are left with, you know, kind of, they stand out like a sore thumb as people with empty plates. Everyone else is feasting. And it kind of embarrasses the poor who have nothing.

And I say, what shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. Now, he reminds them in verses 23 through 26 what the original institution of the supper was all about. Of course, it harks back to Jesus at the table with his disciples.

He says, for I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you. Now, that may mean that he got it by direct revelation from the Lord, but it's not necessary. Everything he says in this passage is written in the Gospels and the other apostles taught it.

Therefore, he may have gotten it from the apostles. But to say, I received it from the Lord means that what I'm sharing with you goes back to the Lord as the originator of this. It doesn't mean that he didn't have any intermediate people who shared it with him and that he got it directly by revelation.

But I received it from the Lord, meaning that I didn't originate this, this custom that we're talking about goes all the way back and originates with the Lord himself. That the Lord Jesus, on the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, take, eat.

This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same manner, he also took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, Paul says, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Now, a few things here.

This is one of the few passages in the epistles or anywhere in the Bible that gives any kind of teaching about the ongoing Christian practice of the Lord's Supper. Paul uses the expression, the Lord's Supper in verse 20. They should be taking the Lord's Supper, although he says what they were doing wasn't worthy of being called that.

But taking the Lord's Supper goes back to the Lord himself and how he had this last supper with his disciples and how he conducted himself and what he was instituting. Now, we have other names for it, but almost every denomination practices this ritual in some form or another. In the more liturgical churches, it's sometimes called the Eucharist.

The reason for that is because the word gave thanks in verse 24, Jesus gave thanks for the bread. In the Greek, the word gave thanks is Eucharistisos, from which you derive the English word, or the Anglicized form, Eucharist. It means giving thanks.

Protestants often have other names for it, communion, Lord's Supper, whatever. Now he tells how Jesus, at the table, broke the bread, but it's also important, I think, to point out that he gave it to his disciples. He broke it and said, take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. He didn't just eat it first, like some of the Corinthians were doing, he gave it to the disciples first. Now, I realize that the marginal note says that the words take, eat, in verse 24, are not found in the Alexandrian text, which of course is true, it is not found in the Alexandrian text, but those words are found in Matthew's reciting of the story of the Lord's Supper with his disciples in Matthew 26, 26.

So even if the Alexandrian text leaves it out of this passage, Matthew 26, 26 confirms that Jesus did say this, take, eat. He offered it to his disciples, whereas some of the Corinthians were having the opposite attitude toward their food. They weren't offering it to anyone, they were taking it to themselves.

Also the statement, my body which is broken for you, the word broken, again, is not in the Alexandrian text. The closest thing you have to it in the Gospels is Luke 22, 19, which he has, which is given for you. Of course, I prefer the text as receptive, so I have no objection to the word broken being here, but just as a point which you'll note in the margin, broken is not in some manuscripts.

But in Luke 22, 19, Jesus says, this is my body which is given to you, or given for you. Then it says in the same manner, verse 25, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

Now, the thing here is, of course, that Jesus says in both places, when you do this, do it in remembrance of me.

In fact, he says, as often as you drink it, as often as you eat it. In verse 26, Paul says, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup. He doesn't say how often we must.

As I say, it was fairly customary, it seems, at the turn of the first century for Christians to meet weekly, usually on Sunday, to do this, to take this communion. And that was as often as they did it. Many denominations still do that.

Presbyterians, I think, customarily do it four times a year. A lot of groups, like the Baptist church I was raised in and also some of the charismatic groups I was in for years, typically took communion once a month, the first Sunday of the month or some other marked day. It's quite obvious that there's no clear teaching in Scripture how often to do it.

How often did the disciples do it? Well, when Jesus sat at the table with them, he was at a feast that they had on a yearly basis. It was the Passover. It's true he changed its meaning and added some concepts to it that they hadn't formally associated with it, but it was an annual feast.

And when Jesus on that occasion said as often as you eat this, he did not necessarily say, you know, do this weekly or do this monthly or do this three times a year or four times a year or X number of times or daily. For that matter, it's possible that the early church did it daily because they met together daily for the breaking of bread. That was for meals.

They may have also taken communion in that situation. But the point is Jesus didn't institute any particular frequency of it, nor does Paul specify how frequent it should be, although in the context Jesus probably was referring to an annual thing, which was how often they took Passover. Anyway, however often you do it, it always means the same thing.

You are proclaiming the death of the Lord. When you eat the bread and drink the cup, you're commemorating his body and his blood and the institution of a new covenant. Now, verse 27, therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup for he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason, many are weak and sick among you and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home lest you come together for

judgment and the rest I will set in order when I come.

Now, real briefly here, not discerning the Lord's body, I don't think means you're not discerning that this bread is some mystical, mystically turned into the Lord's body. I think the Lord's body is the body of Christ, the church. And when they're eating in an unworthy manner, it's what they were doing.

They were wolfing down the food and not sharing it. They were not discerning that the brother that they were, that they were leaving out of this meal was part of the body of Christ. He was part of Christ.

To sin against a brother is to sin against Christ. And they're not discerning that. They're just seeing him as another guy who has no relation to them.

They're not discerning that they and he and all the church are the body of Christ. And you cannot omit from the fellowship or from your generosity a person in the church without doing so to Christ. And this has brought judgment on the church in the form of some people dying and some merely being sick.

This judgment is a judgment from God. So we know that God does inflict sickness on people, although some people say only the devil does that. He says this was the chastening of the Lord.

And God does that to correct the church so they won't be condemned with the world. We should judge ourselves, correct our own behavior so God doesn't have to do it. If we don't, however, God will.

He'll chasten and he does so for our good that we will not be condemned with the world, he says. Therefore, he recommends that we control ourselves so God doesn't have to bring such chastening and judgment on the church. We have talked a little bit about these passages in other occasions and other settings, so we'll consider, since we're low on time, finished with time, in fact, we're out of time, that we will not take them any further than this.