



1 Corinthians - Chapter Eleven

Summary of Chapter Eleven

Paul commences with a discussion about the conduct and appearance of men and women during corporate gatherings. Although men and women are equal in God's sight, Paul explains how they are to remain distinct for this is to the glory of God, celebrating the differences that he had created.

Paul then moves to issues over the Lord's Supper. It appears that divisions had occurred based on social status and wealth. Instead of Communion being a family act of worship, it had become a separation of those who would come along to feast and those who had very little or nothing at all.

Paul teaches them the purpose of Communion and the need for all believers to participate in a worthy manner. They are to ensure that their hearts are set on Christ before attending such meetings.

¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:1

This verse was commented on at the end of Chapter 10 as it concludes Paul's arguments that he set out from the beginning of Chapter 7.

V. 1 Corinthians 11:2-14:40 - Divisions over Corporate Worship

Paul addresses three issues that have come to his attention, either through the Corinthians' letter to him (7:1 and 12:1), or through an oral report (11:18). All three issues relate to the conduct of the Corinthians when they gather for worship.

V.a 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 - Head Coverings

Paul first comments on whether certain women, probably wives, may continue to pray and prophesy in corporate worship with their heads uncovered (v.13). By uncovering their heads in public worship, Paul says they bring shame instead of glory to their husbands, and this is not proper.

² I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you.

1 Corinthians 11:2

Maintain the traditions. Paul commends the Corinthians because they have at least kept the church protocols that he had taught them. However, as the chapter unfolds, it becomes apparent that they have not always observed them in the correct manner or with a faithful heart. Elsewhere Paul also advises the church to heed his teaching: <<***So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter***>> (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:3

But shows that Paul has quickly moved from commendation in v.2 to correction.

The husband is the head of his wife. Following Eve's participation in The Fall, God passed the following judgement: <<***To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you'***>> (Genesis 3:16). However, as the following comments will show, this is not necessarily what Paul had in mind on this occasion.

Wife is the Greek word *gunē* that can mean either wife or woman depending on the context. Since a woman's head covering in 1st Century Roman society was a sign of marriage, Paul's practical concern in this passage is not with the relationship between women and men generally but with the relationship between husband and wife.

Head. It is sometimes said that this term, Greek *kephalē*, means 'source', but in over 50 examples of the expression 'person A is the head of person(s) B' found in ancient Greek literature, person A has authority over person(s) B in every case. Therefore, it is best to understand head i.e. *kephalē*, here as referring metaphorically to authority, as is its use in: <<***And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church***>> (Ephesians 1:22), <<***For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour***>> (Ephesians 5:23), and: <<***For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority***>> (Colossians 2:9-10).

As with the authority of Christ over the church, this is not the self-centred exercise of power but leadership that takes care to serve the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of the wife. Jesus instructed his disciples to maintain this type of attitude just as he had: <<***and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many***>> (Mark 10:44-45); Paul expands on this further in Ephesians 5:25-30.

God is the head of Christ indicates that within the Trinity the Father has a role of authority or leadership with respect to the Son, although they are equal in deity and attributes as discussed further in 1 Corinthians 15:28. Paul applies this truth about the Trinity to the relationship of husband and wife. In marriage, as in the Trinity, there is equality in being and value but difference in roles. Refer to Ephesians 5:22-33.

⁴ Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head,

1 Corinthians 11:4

Any man who prays or prophesies. There were prophets serving the church in the 1st Century: <<At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius>> (Acts 11:27-28). Paul acknowledges this as a Spiritual gift to the church: <<And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues>> (1 Corinthians 12:28), and: <<The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers>> (Ephesians 4:11).

Something on his head or head covered. The Greek phrase *kata kephalēs* literally means 'down from the head' and may refer either to long hair that hangs loose (vv.14-15), or to a veil that covers the face, or to a piece of cloth pulled over the head, like a modern shawl or scarf, that leaves the face revealed.

As background for understanding Paul's point in this verse, Roman men sometimes practiced the custom of pulling the loose folds of their toga over their head as an act of piety in the worship of pagan gods. Paul thus draws on the example of this pagan custom, which everyone in the Corinthian church would have thought absurd, to make the point that men should not dishonour Christ by praying according to pagan custom. He then uses the idea to prepare the way for his argument that it is equally absurd for wives to pray or prophesy in public with their heads uncovered (v.5 and v.11).

Disgraces his head, that is, Christ, as noted in v.3.

⁵ but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head – it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil.

1 Corinthians 11:5-6

When a woman prays or prophesies she needs to be truly what she is, since it is to male and female alike, in their mutual interdependence as God's image-bearing creatures that the world, including the angels, is to be subject. God's creation needs humans to be fully, gloriously and truly human, which means fully and truly

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male and female. This, and of course much else besides, is to be glimpsed in worship.

Although most of the biblical prophets were men, there are examples of women with such a gift: <<At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel>> (Judges 4:4), <<So the priest Hilkiyah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, where they consulted her>> (2 Kings 22:14), with a similar account recorded in 2 Chronicles 34:22; and in Paul's day the evangelist Philip had gifted daughters: <<He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy>> (Acts 21:9).

Head unveiled. A married woman who uncovered her head in public would have brought shame to her husband. The action may have connoted sexual availability, with prostitutes dressing accordingly; or it may simply have been a sign of being unmarried. In cultures where women's head coverings are not a sign of being married, wives do not need to cover their heads in worship, but they could obey this command by wearing some other physical symbol of being married, such as a wedding ring.

It is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off. While a shaven head or short hair was considered shameful for a woman in 1st Century Corinth, long hair was considered to be a woman's 'glory'; refer to v.15. It was an ancient custom to shave the hair of a foreign captive that was then to be taken as a wife: <<suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry, and so you bring her home to your house: she shall shave her head, pare her nails, discard her captive's garb, and shall remain in your house for a full month, mourning for her father and mother; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife>> (Deuteronomy 21:11-13).

⁷ For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. ⁸ Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man.

1 Corinthians 11:7-9

The image and reflection of God is a reference to the creation account: <<Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them>> (Genesis 1:26-27), <<This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God>> (Genesis 5:1), and: <<Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind>> (Genesis 9:6). The Lord's brother confirms his agreement with the creation account when he writes about the use of the tongue: <<With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with

it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God>> (James 3:9). Although they are clearly special to God people must not elevate themselves to be equal with God: <<*what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour*>> (Psalm 8:4-5).

Woman is the reflection of man probably uses reflection, or glory in some translations, in the sense of 'one who shows the excellence of'. Paul argues that a woman, by the excellence of her being, also shows how excellent man is, since she was taken out of man at the beginning (v.8), and also was created as a helper for man at creation (v.9).

Paul does not deny that the woman was also made in God's image, something that Genesis 1:27 explicitly affirms; nor does he deny that the woman reflects God's glory. Paul probably continues to think primarily of husband and wife here since the first man and woman were also the first married couple: <<*Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh*>> (Genesis 2:24), also quoted by Paul in Ephesians 5:31.

Paul's appeal to the order of creation (v.3 and vv.11-12), shows that his words are not merely directed to the cultural situation of his day. The principle of male headship in marriage continues through all generations, although some cultural expressions of that principle may vary, e.g. that women should wear head coverings, there should be equality in domestic decision making, the wife having an independent career, etc.

The underlying point then seems to be that in worship it is important for both men and women to be their truly created selves, to honour God by being what they are and not blurring the lines by pretending to be something else. One of the unspoken clues to this passage may be Paul's assumption that in worship the creation is being restored, or perhaps that in worship believers are anticipating its eventual restoration.

¹⁰ For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

1 Corinthians 11:10

A woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head is more literally, 'a wife or woman ought to have authority, Greek *exousia*, over her head', where the word authority refers to a head covering, which was a symbol of authority. This probably means, in the context of the Corinthian church, that the wife should wear a covering over her head as a sign that she is under her husband's authority. Others, however, suggest that a head covering is a sign of the woman's authority to prophesy in church, or to participate generally in the church assembly.

Because of the angels. This probably refers to the invisible heavenly beings: <<*Do you not know that we are to judge angels – to say nothing of ordinary matters?*>> (1 Corinthians 6:3), and: <<*Of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire'*>> (Hebrews 1:7), who are present with the Corinthians when they worship: <<*I give you thanks, O Lord, with my*

whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise>> (Psalm 138:1), and whose presence makes propriety in worship that much more important. The NT elsewhere uses the fact that angels are watching as one motive for obeying God's commands: <<*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality*>> (1 Timothy 5:21), <<*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it*>> (Hebrews 13:2), and: <<*It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look!*>> (1 Peter 1:12).

According to the Dead Sea Scrolls, the angels were always present with worshippers, as many liturgies and theologians still affirm.

¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹² For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.

1 Corinthians 11:11-12

Nevertheless. Paul does not want what he has just said to be misinterpreted as a diminution of the importance of women. Women and men are both God's creation and are mutually interdependent at a basic level.

In the Lord woman is not independent of man. Cultural views may vary over the definitions of relationships between men and women, but there is only one viewpoint that really counts. For believers it is the view of the Lord that matters.

Just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman. The creation account shows how God made Eve from Adam's own body: <<*So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man*>> (Genesis 2:21-22). However, God had also created a biological process that ensured that all future births would come from within a woman's body.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

1 Corinthians 11:13-15

Here the word nature probably means 'your natural sense of what is appropriate for men and women'. It would be degrading for a man to look like a woman because of his hair style. Although the norms of appropriate hair style and dress may vary from culture to culture, Paul's point is that men should look like men in that culture, and women should look like women in that culture, rather than seeking to deny or disparage the God-given differences between the sexes.

¹⁶ But if anyone is disposed to be contentious – we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

1 Corinthians 11:16

Paul commenced the letter with an appeal to the practice of all churches: <<*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours*>> (1 Corinthians 1:2). He expects the Corinthians and all other Christians to not be contentious in the way they live.

No such custom. That is, there is ‘no such practice’ as that of those who disagree with Paul, therefore some translations render this ‘no other practice’, giving a similar interpretation. Paul’s objective is to bring the Corinthians into conformity with generally accepted Christian behaviour.

V.b 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - Social snobbery at the Lord’s Table

The Corinthians were using their gatherings around the Lord’s Table as occasions to make social distinctions between rich and poor. Paul was profoundly troubled by this development and argues strongly against it. Jesus makes no distinction between a person’s social status and the church should follow him in all things, otherwise they dishonour everything about him.

V.b.i 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 - Abuses at the Lord’s Supper

Paul had received word of the behaviour of some in the church when they gathered together to participate in Communion and he was not happy about what he was hearing. There were apparent divisions in the church with abuses of the Lord’s Table and instances of perceived social status undermining church unity.

Whereas they had been blurring the differences between male and female members when they should have been clearly defining them, as seen in vv.2-16, it now appears they were drawing lines of division based on wealth and status, rather than obliterating them altogether. This was not why Christ died for all of them!

¹⁷ Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.

¹⁸ For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it.

1 Corinthians 11:17-18

I hear. Paul now departs from addressing issues raised in the Corinthians’ letter to him (1 Corinthians 7:1), and returns to commenting on what he has heard by word of mouth (1 Corinthians 1:11 and 5:1).

¹⁹ Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine.

1 Corinthians 11:19

There have to be factions among you. In God's providential direction of the life of the church, he allowed controversy in order that the genuine spiritual quality of individual believers would be known. Note the evidence of factions in 1 Corinthians 1:11-12, 3:4 and 4:6-7. It is not clear whether Paul intended his readers to take this verse at face value or whether it had a sarcastic tone to it.

For only so will it become clear who among you are genuine thus refers to those who receive God's approval for how they act in the midst of controversy, Greek *dokimos*, that is genuine in the sense of 'tested and approved'. This is used several times to refer to approval by God: <<*Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus*>> (Romans 16:10), <<*For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends*>> (2 Corinthians 10:18), <<*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth*>> (2 Timothy 2:15), and: <<*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy*>> (James 1:2).

An alternative interpretation is that Paul is using genuine to refer to those who are true believers. John had identified members of his church who he believed were not true to the faith: <<*They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us*>> (1 John 2:19).

²⁰ When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper.

1 Corinthians 11:20

It is not really to eat the Lord's Supper. Because of their selfish elitism, when the Corinthians observe the Lord's Supper they are not rightly representing the sacrificial death of Christ (v.24 and v.26), or the true character of the Lord.

²¹ For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. ²² What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

1 Corinthians 11:21-22

Goes ahead reflects the Corinthians' self-centred disregard of others. The few who were wealthy in Corinth: <<*Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth*>> (1 Corinthians 1:26), have no regard for those who are hungry or who have nothing, while others have too much and some even get drunk.

Other NT writers held a similar opinion to Paul's of such people: <<They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, revelling in their dissipation while they feast with you>> (2 Peter 2:13), and: <<These are blemishes on your love-feasts, while they feast with you without fear, feeding themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted>> (Jude 12).

Your own supper. Most churches that celebrate communion do so with small, symbolic items of bread and wine or juice. However, the original was a full Passover meal with lamb, bread, sauces and plenty of wine. This tradition of a celebratory meal certainly continued during the early years in private homes and it appears to have been taking place in the corporate gatherings in Corinth. However, a key aspect of the celebration had always been that it was a shared family meal. The wealthier Corinthians, it seems, were taking and consuming their own food, leaving the poorer members of the church with little or no food for themselves. Paul quite rightly condemns them for it.

Paul sees this as doing two things:

1. It shows contempt for God's church, God's assembled people, regarding this assembly as a mere convenience, a point at which one's own spiritual and social advantage may be furthered, but with little significance beyond that.
2. It shows not just contempt for those who have nothing, but actually, whether intentionally or not, a desire to put them to shame.

V.b.ii 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 - The Institution of the Lord's Supper

Paul now explains the origins and purpose of the Lord's Supper.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,

1 Corinthians 11:23

For I received from the Lord. The traditions about Jesus that Paul delivered to the Corinthians ultimately went back to Jesus himself, although Paul probably learned many of them from early followers of Christ such as Peter: <<Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days>> (Galatians 1:18). It seems most likely that Paul received much of this information directly from Christ himself: <<It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat>> (2 Corinthians 12:1-4), <<For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ>> (Galatians 1:11-12), and: <<But when God, who had set me apart

before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus>> (Galatians 1:15-17).

The night when he was betrayed. Judas Iscariot left the Passover Feast early to go to the Jewish authorities and later the same evening took them to arrest Jesus: <<After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, ‘Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples – the one whom Jesus loved – was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘Do quickly what you are going to do.’ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the festival’; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night>> (John 13:21-30).

For other records of the Lord’s Supper refer to Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:17-20.

²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

1 Corinthians 11:24

The expression this is my body has been subject to widely varying interpretations throughout the history of the church.

- Roman Catholics understand it literally, and claim that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, that is, transubstantiation.
- Lutherans hold that the literal body and blood of Christ are present ‘in, with and under’ the bread and wine, similar to the way water is present in a sponge.
- Some Anglicans refer to the ‘real presence’ of Christ in the bread and wine.
- Most other Christian churches have argued that the body and blood of Christ are not literally, physically or really present, but that Christ is present symbolically; most would also add that Christ is present spiritually, with and in the believing recipients of the bread and wine, strengthening their faith and fellowship in him, and thereby feeding their souls. Christ’s spiritual presence can be supported from: <<**For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them**>> (Matthew 18:20), <<**And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age**>> (Matthew 28:20b).

Do this in remembrance of me. Remembering the significance of Jesus' death is an important component of observing the Lord's Supper and of obedience, do this, to Christ's command. Evangelical Protestant Christians have consistently been united on the importance of limiting participation in the Lord's Supper to those who have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus. Jesus' emphasis on remembering the significance of his death when observing the Lord's Supper, and his warnings to those who partake of the bread and the cup in an unworthy manner, both reveal the wisdom of this limitation.

No wonder the interpretation and practice of Communion has been so controversial in church history. It is an action which speaks louder than words. Some have used it as a weapon of power to boost their own prestige. Others have appeared afraid of it, and have downgraded or even sidelined it.

²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:25-26

The Mosaic covenant, made with Israel and constantly broken because of Israel's sin, was replaced with the new covenant, which provided complete atonement for all the sins of God's people, past, present, and future: <<*He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus*>> (Romans 3:25b-26). Refer also to 2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6 and Hebrews 8:6-13.

For as often. Neither Jesus nor any of the NT writers have stipulated the frequency of taking Communion. However, it is implied that it should be observed on a regular basis.

You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. The act of communion actually goes beyond individual remembrance of what Jesus has done for the individual. Participants are actually announcing his sacrificial death to the whole world. For his death had dealt with the powers that had put him on the Cross and offered freedom to all those who had been oppressed and enslaved by such powers. Similarly, they are announcing the certainty of his return in judgement.

V.b.iii 1 Corinthians 11:27-34 - Partaking of the Supper Unworthily

Having explained the purpose of the Lord's Supper, Paul goes on to show just why the behaviour of some in the church was so inappropriate for God's people. He instructs them to ensure that their hearts are right with God before they come to participate in this act of worship, remembrance and proclamation.

The Lord's Supper is a time when Jesus is present in Spirit with his follows for he was present in the body when it was instituted. It is the moment at which the past event comes forward to live again in the present, and the future moment of the Lord's return comes backwards in time to challenge believers in the present.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:27

An unworthy manner probably refers to the incompatibility of the Corinthians' divisive arrogance as compared to the sacrificial, selfless nature of Jesus' life and death. A broader application of this principle would encourage believers to examine their own lives (v.28), and to repent and ask forgiveness for any unconfessed sin before partaking in the Lord's Supper.

Will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Jesus' body was broken and his blood shed for others. Thus the selfish behaviour of the Corinthians was a sin against others, but it also represents a profaning disrespect for Jesus himself. Another author gives a critical warning to such people: <<***For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt***>> (Hebrews 6:4-6), and: <<***How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace?***>> (Hebrews 10:29).

²⁸ Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1 Corinthians 11:28

Whoever partakes of the Lord's Supper must examine himself first to see whether he has properly understood the unselfish, atoning nature of Jesus' death for others, and how that should be imitated in his own life. Paul returns to this in his final letter to Corinth: <<***Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test!***>> (2 Corinthians 13:5). Only then should they participate in Communion.

²⁹ For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves.

1 Corinthians 11:29

Without discerning the body is usually understood in one of two ways:

1. Some hold that it means 'not understanding that the bread represents the body of Christ that was sacrificed for all who would believe', with the result that such people do not act in a Christ-like, self-sacrificial way.
2. Others note that Paul does not mention the blood, and because of this they conclude that Paul has moved beyond the meaning of the bread to the idea of the church as a gathering of the body of Christ: <<***The cup of blessing that***>>

we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread>> (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Refer also to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

According to this second view, without discerning the body would mean ‘not understanding that Christians, since they are the body of Christ, should act like Christ when they assemble’. On either view, these people do not recognise the spiritual reality of what is happening at the Lord’s Supper, and therefore they are acting in a way that dishonours Christ.

Eat and drink judgement against themselves is a sober warning that the Lord will discipline those who dishonour the Lord’s Supper (v.30), and therefore it should not be entered into lightly.

³⁰ For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

1 Corinthians 11:30

Weak, ill, died. The discipline of the Lord sometimes has consequences in real life. Refer also to 1 Corinthians 5:5 and the comments made there.

³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged.

1 Corinthians 11:31

If we judged ourselves. When Christians rightly discern their sins and turn from them and seek forgiveness, then, as a general principle, they will not experience God’s disciplinary judgment, for they would have come to him in repentance: <<*Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’, and you forgave the guilt of my sin*>> (Psalm 32:5), and: <<*If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*>> (1 John 1:9). In specific application of this principle to the Corinthian situation, God would cease his discipline of the Corinthians if they would cease their misconduct regarding the Lord’s Supper. This verse thus teaches Christians not to think that God will somehow punish them for their whole lives for sins committed long ago, if they have sincerely asked forgiveness and made right what they can with those whom they have wronged.

³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:32

We are disciplined. When suffering alerts a Christian to the presence of sin and leads to repentance, it functions as an act of both disciplinary judgment and mercy: <<*While he was in distress he entreated the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God*>> (2 Chronicles 33:12-13), <<*Blessed is the one you discipline, Lord, the*

one you teach from your law>> (Psalm 94:12 NIV), <<*My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights*>> (Proverbs 3:11-12), <<*When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord*>> (1 Corinthians 5:4b-5), and: <<*For the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*>> (1 Peter 4:17). Refer also to Hebrews 12:7-10 and the associated comments made on those verses.

Condemned along with the world. There will be a future judgment at which those who refuse the Gospel will be condemned; Paul here refers to them as the world in a negative sense. Part of the strange privilege of being a member of God's people is to have one's judgment in advance, as it were, so as not to be judged on the last day. So when believers are judged by the Lord in the present time the result is discipline; things happen to them which are to be understood as both punishments and warnings.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. ³⁴ If you are hungry, eat at home, so that when you come together, it will not be for your condemnation. About the other things I will give instructions when I come.

1 Corinthians 11:33-34

Wait for one another. This may seem that Paul is implying that some of the people would start the meal before others have arrived. However, the word can mean 'receive or welcome as a guest', and that makes more sense of the problem Paul has described. That is, when the church meets together then it should be in unity for that was the purpose of Jesus instituting Communion. Those who cause division or disunity are the ones who do so with a wrong mindset. Those that do come with their hearts right before God are the ones for whom Paul declares it will not be for your condemnation.

If you are hungry, eat at home. Those who wanted a more substantial meal should eat before coming to the meeting. That way they would not cause any problems for those in the congregation who could not afford such lavish meals as some of them were enjoying according to the report Paul had received. By doing so, they would avoid giving offence to others. Otherwise the solemn moment when past and future come together in the present may bring judgment, not blessing.

I will give instructions when I come. Paul had already stated that it was his intention to pay a further visit to Corinth: <<*But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power*>> (1 Corinthians 4:19). He would achieve this ambition after visiting Macedonia, and it was during that visit that he wrote his letter to the Romans.