

Observe the proprieties

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 July 2013

Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0 : 00] So, 1 Corinthians 11. As you can see, it seems to say some quite complex things about the relationships between men and women and relationships in the church generally.

! So I thought perhaps before we turn to this passage, we ought to remind ourselves of another letter of Paul's, the letter of the Galatians 3.28, in which Paul reminds us that in him there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus. So let's keep that in mind as we turn to this passage. Well, we've seen quite a lot about 1 Corinthians up to now, and we've gone through quite a bit of it.

So perhaps we could try and say at this point, what do we think 1 Corinthians is about? I mentioned this to Phil, and he said, well, Dick Lucas had told him that it's about over-realized eschatology. So if you know what that means, you can think in terms of that, but maybe we might even touch on that next week. But I'd like to suggest a slightly simpler explanation of what 1 Corinthians is actually about.

[1 : 21] It's about what are the forces that will tear a church apart, and how are those forces to be resisted? And what have we seen so far?

We've seen certainly that the answer is not just lots more rules. That just doesn't work. You see that Paul remarks on these fault lines in the church again in verses 18 and 19.

When you come together as a church, there are divisions among you. I mean, with some of these earlier, when the people are saying, I am for Paul, I am for Apollos, I am for Cephas, and so on. And so I think we need to keep this in mind as we come to this chapter. So what are the forces that can tear a church apart? And I think we also need to keep in mind that at least some of the problems of the Corinthian church related to sexual morality and sexual practices.

And so we need to keep that in mind also as we come to this passage. Now, as I said last week, well, last time, chapter 10 is about a bit of a watershed.

[2 : 36] He's taught more generally about the pressures on Christians up to now. Now he starts to talk about what happens actually when the church meets together.

And the next few chapters are really concerned with what happens when the church actually meets together. And he says that, well, not everything is bad in the Corinthian church.

I praise you for holding to the teachings that I pass them on to you. So they've not at least become completely unorthodox and gone away from the word of God. But nevertheless, it's clear, as he says, that there are lots of things.

When the church meets together, all is not well. And so what are the two issues here that particularly he deals with?

Well, two things. First of all, the dress code. And secondly, the meeting together in the Lord's Supper. Starts with the dress code, interestingly enough.

[3 : 46] I suppose that makes sense. What's the first thing you notice when you come into an assembly of people of any sort? What are they wearing? That tells you what they're wearing.

It tells you quite a lot about their status and their class. And it tells you also a bit about what they're gathered together for as well.

If they've all got salopets and fluffy jackets on, you can assume they're going skiing. What are they gathered together for? And their dress tells you that as well.

And if we don't fit in with the dress code, we can be a bit uncomfortable. I once went to a Presbyterian church on Georgetown, which is a sort of posh suburb of Washington, D.C.

And I was just about to get on the plane. I just had time on Sunday. I'd been to a conference in Washington. I was on my way to the airport, really. But I had time to pop into a service before I went to the airport.

[4 : 55] And I went into this Presbyterian church in this rather posh suburb. And let me tell you first of all what I was wearing, which was jeans and a T-shirt. It was very hot.

And I was just about to get on the plane. Everybody else in there was wearing a black suit and a tie. Yeah. And I mean, they were friendly about it.

They weren't nasty about it. But obviously, I felt a little bit uncomfortable. And I guess probably they did too. Because I wasn't dressed the same as everybody else.

And it can affect us, can't it? You feel uncomfortable. Anyway, but the specific item of dress code, actually, that Paul focuses here is actually one of headgear.

What we wear or don't wear on our heads. And so that's particularly what he's going to talk about.

And I think we need to be quite careful here not to read in our own prejudices.

[5 : 57] Whether they are prejudices of sort of romantic medieval view of womanhood. Or indeed the prejudices of 21st century feminism. And there are problems with this passage, frankly, in interpreting what it means.

Paul tells us in verse 16 that his intention is to avoid contention. Not to create it. And yet, you know, in one sense we shouldn't be manning the barricades over trivial issues.

But it's clear that Paul thinks he's got something important to say here. And we need to try and sort out what it is through the cultural barriers. Which to some extent we do have.

The second part, of course, is very familiar to it. Of course, we probably read it in at least half the times when we meet for the communion service. I don't know whether Mark's planning to read it tonight or not.

But we very often do. Oh, he's not. There you are. He's got it in the service as well. But we very often do read it in our communion services. And we think we understand that very well.

[6 : 59] And perhaps we do. But we could be missing something by its very familiarity. The focus is on unity. And yet, Paul reminds us that there may be divisions. And so we mustn't shy away from controversy in the church.

Totally. We want unity. But if we're not sometimes prepared to take on the divisions. Then we land in this kind of moral laxness that was endemic in the Corinthian church.

So we'll look at the two sections separately. I'll spend a bit more time, I think, probably on the first one. Simply because it is the more difficult of the two. And then perhaps I'll say a little bit about the end.

On why perhaps Paul brings these two things together. Nope, that didn't work. So what's all this about heads and hair and this sort of stuff?

Seems a bit strange to us, doesn't it, really? He seems to, at one point, Paul seems to be saying, you know, that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is the man.

[8 : 10] It seems a rather strange thing to say. I mean, if you took that at face value, then you would think, well, does that mean that the only way that women can obtain access to Christ is through a man?

In that case, why on earth, in a few pages earlier, in chapter seven, was he saying that, well, widows, you might be better off not remarrying. It wouldn't make any sense at all. So presumably that's not what he means.

So he can't be saying that. And it's clearly contrary to the rest of what we read in scripture anyway, in chapter seven of this book and in that verse, for instance, in Galatians 3.28 that I put on the first slide.

So he can't be saying that. And actually there are other problems with this as well. Because on the face of it, he appears to be misquoting Genesis 1.27. Because in saying that the image of, that man is the image of God and somehow in a sense the woman is not, because in fact, if you look at Genesis 1.27, it says exactly the opposite of that.

It says, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. So, okay, it says man there. But the next line says, male and female, he created them.

[9 : 36] So it's clear, in fact, that man here means mankind. And that it includes both men and women made in the image of God.

And verse seven is actually also quite strange. It says, a man ought not to cover his head since he's the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man, implying, presumably, that the woman should cover her head.

But where does this come from? It's certainly not Jewish practice, because in a Jewish assembly, and they still do today, when men pray, they do cover their heads. They wear skull caps. You've probably seen them. And certainly not the pagan practice, because in pagan worship, men and women would pray with their heads uncovered. So where on earth does this come from? It seems to be some sort of Christian innovation that, on the one hand, men and women should both pray, but there has to be some sort of differentiation between the two, in terms of headgear.

[10:50] Well, I noticed that nobody's wearing a hat tonight, but I don't think, you know, is that being lax? I can tell you that when I was, even when I was young, there were still a few strip-mapses churches and brethren assemblies that would insist that women wore a veil or a hat.

But we've, I don't, there are any church in England, at least, that still maintains such a rule. And, is that just 20th, 21st century laxness? Should we be insisting on that again?

Or, is that not the point? Is, but surely God is not really concerned with hairstyle, hairstyles. And perhaps the most confusing thing in this section at all, is this word that's translated in, at least in the New International Version, sign of authority in verse, it's verse 10.

The authorised version just says authority. I think the ESV also says sign of authority or something like that. What is this word and what on earth does it mean?

Well, the Greek word that's translated that is *exousia*, and the traditional interpretation derived from the context of verse 3 is that it means a sign of a husband's authority over here.

[12:16] But the problem with that interpretation is that it just doesn't seem to be what the Greek word means. Even Leon Morris, who's not perhaps the most radical commentator in the world, says, quotes, Greek scholars are saying it just can't mean that.

What does *exousia* mean? Well, it means authority in the sense of legal authority, power. It means regal authority.

And it can mean a sign of authority. But when it means that, it normally means the sign of authority, the authority of the person who wears it.

So for instance, when it's applied to headgear, it usually means a crown. So it's used in that way in the New Testament, I think, occasionally to mean a crown.

So in the context, it doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. And in fact, to be honest, we're not entirely sure what this does mean. But what the Greek scholars say is probably, from the context, what it implies is to wear some sort of veil or head covering that implies, that shows that this woman is a woman of honour, a woman of dignity, rather than having her hair uncovered, which, well, we'll come back to having your head shaved off later.

[13:45] But that's probably what it means. It implies that this woman is a woman of honour and dignity and respectability. So that's probably what it means. Paul himself says it's her honour or dignity in verse 5.

Well, anyway, let's see if we can get our head round what Paul is talking about here. And I have to say, when I tried this out on my wife, she's not entirely convinced.

She's not being totally submissive about it, but let's try this. I think this is something of what Paul's getting at. It might not be all of it by any means.

But at least, perhaps give us some idea of what Paul's getting at here. I'd like you to try and think like a Roman. So here's a Roman, a Roman lady, as you can see.

I'm trying to give... Oh yeah, sorry, the other word I didn't mean to mention. The other word that he talks about, he talks about in verse 15 that a woman's hair is her glory.

[15:02] And that word is *doxa*, from which we get the English word *doxology*, a word of glory or a word of praise. And that word also has a range of meanings.

It means a splendor or brightness or magnificence. And it can also mean dignity and grace. So in a sense, Paul is doing a kind of Paul thing that he does often, playing off two words of quite similar meaning against each other.

And he says a woman's hair is her glory. So, let's see if we can get our head around this, all this talk of heads. by getting into the head, perhaps, of this young Roman woman.

Perhaps this is a way to look at it. She buys the best shampoo. You've all seen the shampoo adverts, I mean, haven't you?

Shampoo is a personal hygiene product, isn't it? Of course it isn't. It's not what they're selling you at all, is it? What they're selling you is, if you buy our products, your hair will be shinier.

[16:16] It will be more flowing, more glorious, more alluring. That's what shampoo adverts are selling you and it seems to me that Paul is somewhat on the same wavelength here.

He's saying a woman's hair is her glory. So here's this woman, young, wealthy, attractive, educated, possibly born in Rome, at least certainly a Roman citizen.

She's married perhaps to a government official or to a rich merchant. She was brought up on tales of Cleopatra, you know, the story of Cleopatra, switched lovers as a convenient way of switching alliances.

That's the way she operated. Egypt has a history of women rulers going back to Nefertiti, but in Rome itself and in most of the cities of the empire, actually high office was barred to women. But no Roman woman worth a soul to ever let that cramp their style. Her whole life is spent in advancing a social position and pushing her husband or son or lover another notch up the ladder, even if he doesn't want to go.

[17:42] That's the environment you operate in. That's the way you think, the way you work. And news has just arrived from Rome that Agrippina, the wife of the emperor Claudius, has poisoned her husband.

Allegedly with mushrooms. And put her son Nero by her previous marriage on the throne. Well, okay, that's a bit shocking.

Assassination is maybe a bit extreme, but it's a high risk strategy, but still, it's only an extreme form of what the Roman women were doing every day.

Manipulating, maneuvering. This is the way things are done. You might consider assassination a last resort, but since Agrippina succeeded, she's going to get away with it.

I mean, Nero's not going to say anything, is he? Do anything? So that's the way you think, as a high ranking Roman woman, perhaps.

[18:44] And perhaps you have a Jewish friend. Now that might be a little bit unusual, but it's not unknown. And anyway, actually just a touch of scandal can be quite useful in your social operations.

And your Jewish friend tells you that actually it works pretty much the same way in Judea. She tells you of how Queen Herodias and her daughter Salome had conspired to have the prophet John the Baptist beheaded.

same sort of thing really. And bizarrely, she tells you that when John's cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, was tried, for some reason, Pilate's wife actually tried to get him freed.

Not quite clear why, but the record says that she did. But as it happened, she was unsuccessful. But this kind of interference by women in the political process was commonplace enough.

But then your friend tells you that actually this isn't the end of the story of Jesus of Nazareth. His followers claim that he'd been resurrected. And so you're intrigued.

[20:01] And you investigate a bit and it appears to be true. So, what are you going to do about this? Well, what do you do? You're expecting your husband home soon, so you put on your slinkiest dress and you let down your hair.

And when hubby comes in, you pour him a nice glass of wine and you say, darling, I think we need to check out this new religion. That's the way you'd go about it, probably.

And to cut a long story short, perhaps you and your husband start attending the meetings of the church in Corinth. And when that nice educated man, Apollos, is in town, I'm not sure about some of the other people.

I mean, Peter's a fisherman. But Apollos is a good educated man. And so when he's in town, you get him to baptize you. But actually at first, you're a little bit about outside your comfort zone.

How does this new community you've joined, how does it work? You don't know the ground rules. You don't know how it operates. But then you've joined this church in Corinth and when you've been around for a bit, you discover well there are factions in the church.

[21:19] And you discover that there are some people who are important, influential people, and that there are other people who don't seem to matter so much. Who are the people who are going to the top?

Who is it that your husband needs to know? And that's no problem. You're the past mistress at this game, aren't you? So what do you do?

Next time it's the agape, the love feast, you dig that dress out of the cupboard again. And you get your cook to whip up something fancy. And perhaps you're too respectable to let down your hair,

but maybe you just loosen it a bit.

And you glide up to your target and you purr, try some of this meat, it's delicious. Oh, and may I introduce my husband? And there you are, you've done it, mission accomplished.

That's the way you've always worked and perhaps you don't see any reason to change now. Well, that may be perhaps a bit far-fetched, but I think maybe this does get a head around what Paul is actually trying to say here.

[22 : 31] Perhaps he's saying that in the church a woman should not attempt to outshine the angels, how can a man focus on the glorious headship of Christ if he's distracted by the glory of a different head in the next row of seats?

Perhaps this may not do full justice to the full force of Paul's words, but it might help us to go some way towards understanding. What would Paul have to say to our Roman woman?

Well, it's not all bad, is it? He would have to say yes. It's good that you've got the best interest of your husband at heart. It's good that you want to encourage your husband to spiritual progress.

It's good that you want to help him network within the church, particularly if it's a large one. Women are often better at this than men in meeting and talking to people and just chatting and communicating.

that's a good thing to do. It's just that perhaps this is not quite the best way to go about it. If you're going to use your femininity like that, says Paul, how are you different from those who have had their hair shaved off?

[23 : 50] And again, it's not entirely clear what this business of having your hair shaved off is about either, but certainly in some cultures, having your hair shaved off was a sort of ritual humiliation that was practiced on women who were either prostitutes or convicted of adultery or something like that, convicted of some sexual sin.

They would have their hair shaved off and possibly this is what Paul is getting at here. He says, really, if you're going to behave like that, you might as well have your hair shaved off.

And yet, this is a subtle thing, isn't it? I just can't help thinking of Abigail in the Old Testament. You remember the story of Abigail. David had asked Abigail's husband, Nabal, for some food for his men.

And basically, Nabal had told him to get lost. And David was very angry. And Abigail hadn't been in at the time, but what did she do as soon as she found out?

She leapt onto her nearest horse and rushed off to talk to David. And what did she do? Well, frankly, she charmed him, didn't she? She bowed down to him.

[25 : 11] She talked gently to him. She talked him away, and perhaps that Nabal couldn't. She used her femininity to disarm the situation, to make up for her husband's folly and David's anger.

Was there a hint even of sexuality in that? Well, perhaps there was, because we know that very shortly afterwards, when Abigail was widowed, David very quickly snapped her up and married her, so he must have found her an attractive woman.

But this is not what she's noted for and praised for, is it? It's her wisdom and her common sense and the way that she used her femininity there to cause peace, not dissension, cause, to disarm the folly and anger of her menfolk.

So these are subtle things. It's not that, say, that women are supposed to behave like men in the church, they most likely are not.

But at the same time they have to avoid sexual exploitation or using your sexuality as power. Why does he say that?

[26 : 34] Well, ladies, you need to cut us poor weak men some slack, frankly. We are too easily led astray. Don't use your freedom to cause a brother to stumble.

Dress with modesty and dignity in the church so that we men are not distracted or tempted. And don't try and compete with each other in either in terms of a fancier hat or more expensive designer clothes.

I mean, places when women do wear a hat in church still, of course, are at weddings. But I don't think that's quite what Paul is getting at, is it? If you look to the hats that were worn at the royal wedding in Westminster Abbey, I don't think submission was quite what they had in mind.

It was more a case of trying to outshine your neighbour. Well, okay, maybe at a wedding, that's acceptable. If you must do that sort of thing, go to Ascot, where it's perhaps part of the fun.

But you shouldn't be doing it in a church, not when the church comes together. you should dress modestly. To misquote Mae West, if you've got it, don't flaunt it.

[27 : 49] Not in the church, anyway. And what is the advice he's saying? I'd say, obviously it's not a good idea to go around trying to seduce the elders, but that wouldn't happen, would it?

You wouldn't think so, but in a church not a million miles from here, it does appear to be what's happened, I don't know all the gory details, but it certainly takes two to tango, so there must have been something going on in that church, and of course it caused a great deal of damage. But actually it's more subtle than that. I once heard somebody say, I couldn't track down the quotation unfortunately, but it hit the point, it's amazing what a man will do for a woman in a short skirt.

And I think there's a fair amount of truth in that. It's not that we think she's really offering sexual favours, but it is sexual manipulation in a sense.

And women need to be careful in the church to avoid that sort of thing. Yes, use their femininity, use their charm, use their ability to relate in a non-aggressive way, but don't go further than that.

[28 : 58] And men, we need to treat our women, don't we, with dignity and respect. We need to remember that they're not shaven women. They're not objects of sexual gratification and humiliation, that's not all they're there for.

We want a wife, not a mistress. Of course, the sexual connection should be part of the marriage, it's a very important part of it, but it's not all of it.

And of course, we shouldn't be expecting our wives to submit in terms of blind obedience. If what you want is blind devotion, then I suggest you get a dog, not a wife.

I'll take my own advice on that. The one word you couldn't use to describe Brenda as is docile. I think that's good, really.

Women are partners and mothers within the plan of God. And notice this dress code does apply to men as well. Perhaps we think it's more obviously applicable to women, but Paul says it does apply to men as well.

[30 : 07] We shouldn't be dressing to shock either. We should dress in a way that is welcoming to those who come in. We dress probably not so much to please God.

It seems an odd thing. We are assembled to please God, and in a sense, we dress to please God, but surely really we are in one sense dressing for those who come in.

We want to make them feel comfortable and at home, as uncomfortable as I did when I went to that church in Georgetown. It wasn't my fault. That was what everybody wore there, and fair enough. If that's what people there wear, that's the right thing to wear.

But we want to try and avoid making people feel uncomfortable when we come in, either by say maybe wearing a suit and a black tie, but on the other hand, we shouldn't be dressing, we shouldn't be wearing hoodies and torn jeans either I would suggest because that will also make people feel uncomfortable.

So we need to dress in a way that looks welcoming and inclusive to those who come in. We adorn ourselves in order to adorn the gospel of Christ.

[31 : 14] Christ. So let's move on also to the next. Get the slide to change. Sorry, I missed that one out.

Ladies, don't attempt to outshine the angels. Perhaps that's what he means when he says because of the angels. Jesus said that in the resurrection we'll be like the angels, but perhaps what he's saying, you shouldn't be attempting to outshine the angels.

Let's move on to the second part of this section, this chapter. And again it's worth looking at the words that are actually used here, the meaning of the Greek word.

The Greek word translated supper is deipnon or deepnon, I'm not sure of the exact pronunciation to be honest. But what it means is a formal evening meal.

Brenda and I once ate in a fairly trendy gastropub out in the Yorkshire Dales. And a gastropub in the Yorkshire Dales is pretty much like a gastropub in Sussex, but with one exception.

[32 : 26] And that exception is that they insist that what they're selling you is supper, not dinner. If you want dinner, you come at lunchtime. and it's supper.

It's an evening meal, often a formal meal, but basically an evening meal. That's what the word means. We distinguish, don't we, between a communion service and a social church lunch and a charity supper.

Although at Calvary we actually do hold all of these. Possibly verse 22 is a justification for such a distinction. It says if you want to eat, you can eat at home. But actually in the early church, they used to hold what was often called a love feast, an agape.

That word is used in 2 Peter 2.13 and in Jude verse 12. Literally means just a love, a loving if you like. And it seems to have had all three functions in fact.

It was a community meal, it was a communion service, and also perhaps there was a pagan tradition of a feast called an Aranoi in which the rich would share their food with the poor.

[33 : 46] And possibly the Corinthian church or the church had adopted a bit of this idea as well, that as they met together it should be a sharing. Those who had much should share with those who had little.

And this idea may have been incorporated into the Christian practice. So I think what he's saying here certainly doesn't only apply to the communion service because I think some of the things he said perhaps would not be directly applicable to the communion service as such.

But it applies whenever we meet together. It applies when we meet together for a church lunch or whatever as a social meal. And actually the word that is translated Lord's, genitive case, possessive, belonging to the Lord.

That's not actually what the Greek says. It only occurs twice in the New Testament, this word. It's kuriakon. It's translated Lord's Supper here and Lord's Day in Revelation chapter 1.

That's the only two occurrences of the actual word kuriakon although kuriakon means Lord of course is very common. It's actually not a possessive, not a genitive case.

[35 : 05] It's not a possessive word. It's an adjective. It describes the type of supper or the type of day that you're talking about. And in other words it's saying that we would literally translate it perhaps the lordly supper or the lordly day or the lordlike supper.

And of course what Paul's saying here is that well you may be meeting for supper all right but your supper is not lordly. It's not you may be eating supper okay but it's not a lordly supper.

Why not? Well he lists the reasons doesn't he? Verse 21 it's unseemly it's a time of drunken revelry maybe more like a feast of Bacchus than a feast of Christ.

The Greeks of course would have been Romans would have been familiar with the Bacchus the god of wine and maybe this looked more like a feast of Bacchus Bacchanalia I think was what they used to call it wasn't it rather than a feast of Christ.

And in verse 22 it breaks the rules of charity in which the community had things in common together in which they shared but instead the poor believer is not only is he not going away unfed because the richer members of the congregation are sharing you know try this caviar guys but not sharing it with the poorer members who didn't have anything perhaps much to share themselves and therefore people wouldn't share with them because they weren't sharing.

[36 : 48] And so not only do they go away unfed but they go away humiliated as well because it's shown that they have nothing and say look we have plenty but you have nothing.

The exact opposite of what the community should be doing sharing together. And it breaks the rules of the family meal doesn't it? In which all the whole family eats together but in verse 21 it says as you eat each goes ahead without waiting without waiting for anybody else.

That's a thing that's very much under attack in our families today isn't it? Families don't eat a family meal together. The husband is home late children need to get to bed they eat early the mother has had enough so she turns on the television and sticks them in front of the television and sticks a plate in front of them.

The family doesn't meet together but that is a very dangerous thing for a family and it's a very dangerous thing for the family of the church because it shows that we're not really interested in each other doesn't it?

We not really want to have that time to communicate not just to communicate food but to communicate and share the affairs of the day.

[38 : 19] A family meal is a very important social occasion in fact. It's part of what holds a family together and when we eat together it's part of the way we operate as humans that when we eat we make a social thing of it and we meet together to talk and discuss and to share but this supper was breaking the rules of that people were just turning up with their lunch and they couldn't be bothered to wait for anybody else because they weren't really interested they just wolfed it down and off they went and it despises the assembly of God's people so it's unholy he says this again in verse 22 do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing shall I praise you for this

certainly not and possibly also in verse 29 he says anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the

Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself their meetings together were not set apart to the Lord they were in the literal sense of the term unholy so this supper was unlordly because it was unseemly uncharitable unfamiliar and unholy so we need to keep all these things in mind and I say not just in our communion service either some of them are more appropriate probably to a church lunch but however we do it we need to have these things in mind but of course when we think of the Lord's supper we do particularly think of course of the communion service the supper that the Lord himself hosted in that upper room and so Paul points us in that direction and unlike this supper that they were the Corinthians were celebrating which was designed in all ways to separate them to drive them apart the Lord's supper focuses on the things that unite us so what does he say he says in verse 24 that we all remember the same

Lord in verse 25 we all participate in the same blood in the same covenant we share it together we all share in fact the same sacrifice in verse 26 we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes we proclaim that death for each of us and we all do it until he comes in other words we all await the same returning Lord so when we come together for the Lord's supper instead of focusing on things that drive us apart we focus on the things that unite us we focus on the body and the theologians can argue about whether the body means the Eucharist itself or the church as the body of Christ and I think the probably the correct interpretation is that in a sense it means both it means that the Eucharist the Thanksgiving as it as it reminds us of Christ but also of the community of God's people the body of Christ and Paul reminds us here that we are what we eat the secret of a healthy life is a healthy diet that's true you know every ordinary everyday diet isn't it we can't live on a diet of sugar and McDonald's hamburgers and you know and it's just not healthy we'll get fat and we'll get ill and maybe actually that's what he's all he's saying in verse verse 30 many of you among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep maybe this was simply as a result of the drunken orgies that they were holding it just was too unhealthy for them but I think most of us would probably say actually he's saying a bit more than that perhaps he's saying that what's true of our physical diet of our physical bodies is true of our spiritual diet and our spiritual bodies also we are what we eat and if you live on spiritual junk food you're going to get spiritually sick and maybe it was even a direct intervention judgment of the lord he says a number of you have fallen asleep in other words presumably died maybe that was a direct judgment or maybe it was a spiritual sickness like happened to

Annia and Sapphira that's right yes or maybe as I say it was just the result of too much wine made them ill we don't know but whatever it was they were eating themselves ill instead of eating themselves healthy but when we come to the lord's supper we need to eat ourselves healthy so what paul is telling us here in this passage is basically isn't it to behave in a seemly manner to observe the proprieties it's alright to fit in with the social conventions of the society that we live in to some extent we should do that because we don't want to make unnecessary barriers as paul said if he was in a jewish meeting he'd behave like a jew if he was among gentiles he'd behave more like a gentile not because he was being hypocritical but just because he wanted to fit in with the society that he was in and to some extent we need to observe the proprieties of the cultural norms of the society that we live in in one sense it's right that we do because we're not in the business of shocking people for the sake of shocking them on the contrary paul tells us we need to have a good reputation with those outside as phil was reminding us when we looked at that passage in timothy it's about elders should have a good reputation outside but of course as chris pointed out well of course we should all actually be aiming for that we're not in the business of shocking for the sake of shocking we don't want to put any unnecessary barrier in the way of those seeking admission just by sort of dressing in a weird way or something this is why frankly I have a problem with communities like the

Amish it seems designed to exclude people we should be trying to include people not exclude them but at the same time we need to remember that the church challenges and ultimately undermines those norms and those social conventions because as Paul says in Galatians there is neither Jew nor Greek slave or free male or female even in Christ Jesus and the distinctions that the world maintains are a fact broken down by the church people have commented on the fact that why didn't Christianity confront slavery for 1800 years 1700 years but actually it did in fact if you read what it says about slavery it didn't confront it head on it didn't say no this is absolutely wrong one must stop

but the way it told masters to treat their slaves the way it told slaves even to behave to their masters in one sense actually undermined the very fabric of the idea of slavery and in fact in early [46 : 33] Western Europe slavery wasn't a big issue at least in the extreme form but there was feudalism and there was the attempts at the king to have an absolute right over his subjects and the church did indeed oppose those to some extent not always consistently not always coherently even but it does the Christianity does undermine these distinctions and so in the end when it takes root in a society it will reshape it but Christianity in that sense is subversive it's not revolutionary it doesn't attack the society head on it subverts it and the way that it thinks and perhaps we need to bear that in mind when we think about how we embed ourselves in the culture that's around us undermines the social distinctions on which the institution rests so what is just to sum up

Paul's message here the gospel teaches men to treat women with respect and women the same with men not to be provocative it teaches the rich to treat the poor with compassion and in our meetings at least to override the social distinctions that our society makes much of because we're all equal before God we all know the hymn I've forgotten the first line now having said that we'll see if Alexander what's the thing how's it start all things bright and beautiful yeah we all know the hymn all things bright and beautiful but of course there's a verse of that hymn that we never sing and that voice goes I don't know why he wrote this but he wrote the rich man in his castle the poor man at his gate God made them high and lowly each to his own estate well that's true as far as it goes but we all feel uncomfortable singing that wouldn't we there's something not quite right about that because we are all one in

Christ Jesus and it is true that there are divisions of social class and some people certainly do have more money than others and yet we are in the end all one in Christ Jesus because God invites all of us rich and poor Jew and Gentile man and woman to the wedding supper of the lamb Thank you.