Reverence in Worship and Fellowship

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

Key Verse: 11:26 “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

In chapter 11, Paul brings up new issues: the attitude and manner of worship and fellowship, especially the Holy Communion. In our relationship with God, worship is very important. In fact, worship is everything because our whole life should be an act of worship. Paul said in 10:31, *“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*.” According to Wayne Gruden, worship is the activity of glorifying God in his presence with our voices and hearts. We glorify God while we are studying. We glorify God while we are working or reading the Bible or praying in a private room. Here, worship means glorifying God among a public assembly of believers like worship services in church today. It is not too much to emphasize the importance of worship. What did God say to Pharaoh when he was going to take the Israelites out of Egypt? “*Let my people go, so that they may worship me*.” (Ex 9:1) God wanted to see his people worship him freely in the Promised Land. In today’s passage, Paul teaches us how to worship God with reverence and in the right way.

First, keep spiritual order (creation order) (2-16) Paul said in verse 2. “***I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.***” In Paul’s day, there was an untold tradition among the Jewish worshipers in the Corinth Church: Women must cover their heads while men must remain uncovered. This is similar to the Muslim tradition where women wear hijabs in public. (Ge 24:65) There were some Greek speaking believers in the church who would not cover their heads. To Paul, covering or not covering their heads during the worship service did not matter, as is today with us. But for the sake of the unity in the church, Paul asked them to follow the tradition. Paul asked all men not to cover their head or not to have long hair because these acts dishonor God. (4) He asked all women to cover their heads when they worship God to honor Him and respect their husbands. (6,12) Still, it could be a controversial matter even today when we mention about this. In fact, in 1985 when I was converted at the Bible conference, I had a long hair like the Beatles. God’s grace came upon me who had long hair even covering my shoulders. It really does not matter whether we cover our heads or not or have long hairs or not, but what matter is our attitude of reverence toward God and respect to others.

So, what does Paul want to say? He wants to say, “Keep spiritual order in public worship.” Look at verse 3. “***But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.***” He also said in verses 7-12, “***A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.... For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God***.” In the beginning, God created a man first, and then out of the man’s rib God made a woman. (Ge 2:22) Men may claim their superiority over women because they were made prior to women. Women may claim their superiority over men because men were born of women. But Paul concludes, “*But everything comes from God*.” We are not objects who compete or compare, but who co-work, co-operate to worship God. Men and women cannot be independent. We must depend on each other to serve God and worship him together as we do. In our church, our men missionaries clean the Bible house and prepare for worship service while our women missionaries cook lunch and pick up their children. Each has his or her own role and mission. Our God wants peace, peace from keeping creation order, which is God first, men second, and women third. When we respect and honor God’s creation order, God is pleased with our worship service and bless our gathering. Amen!

Second, the Lord’s Supper (the Holy Communion) At that time in the Corinth Church there was an eating fellowship, called, “agape dinner”, which is like a potluck dinner today. Each believer brought food and they ate together in the church. The rich brought more food whereas the poor brought less. (19) What really mattered to Paul was their selfishness. Some came earlier and did not wait for others, but they ate their own food while others remained hungry. This selfish and self-centered behavior broke the unity of the church. The purpose of the agape dinner was to learn God’s sacrificial love and to become one in Christ by sharing food. But some selfish people made others mad and defiled the purpose of the agape dinner. What was Paul’s advice? He said in verses 33-34. “***So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment***.”

Now Paul teaches them the true meaning of the Holy Communion in verses 23-32. Whenever a chance was given to Paul, he used it to preach the gospel. Look at verses 23-25. “***For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*** Holy Communion in public worship has the purpose of making the believers one, like an agape dinner. But this Holy Communion has a more deeper and wider meaning than just fellowship. First, Holy Communion is Gospel. Breaking bread is giving Jesus’ body and drinking his cup is shedding his blood. This is why Jesus said, “This is my body, which is for you... This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Jesus gave his flesh and blood for us. Since everything is cleansed by blood, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. (He 9:22) Jesus established a new covenant in his blood. This blood covenant completed all animal sacrifices of blood in the OT. Hebrews says that Jesus entered the Most Holy Place once and for all by his own blood, obtaining our eternal redemption. (Heb 9:12) This is why Jesus said on the cross, “*It is finished*.” (Jn 19:30) Second, by eating bread and drinking the cup we become one with Christ. Jesus said in John 6:55-56, “*For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remain in me, and I in them.*” During the Holy Communion, by eating bread and drinking the cup we believe that we share in his suffering and death as well as the power of his resurrection. Through the communion we proclaim that we belong to the Lord and the Lord is in us and with us. We also believe that our soul is nourished by the flesh and blood of Jesus, which means that the presence of Jesus makes our relationship with Jesus like a vine and branch relationship. Third, by participating in the Holy Communion we affirm the love of God in us. After Jesus broke the bread and drank the cup, he asked his disciples to remember that moment. Jesus asked them to remember how God loved each of them. God loves us so much that Jesus gave his life for us. How can we be sure of God’s love for us? Remember while we are eating bread and drinking the cup during the Holy Communion. This is why Paul said in verse 26. Look at verse 26. “***For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.***

Third, worthy manner and right attitude for worship. (27-32) In this part Paul warns of unworthy manners and wrong attitude toward Holy Communion and worship. Look at verse 27. “S***o then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord***.” What is an unworthy manner? According to Paul’s concern, it is the unloving and self-centered mind during the agape dinner. But it has a broader meaning beyond just a selfish mind. It is an unrepentant heart toward God and others. Not only a selfish mind, but also an ungrateful, angry, arrogant, judging, rebellious spirit are unworthy manners. Paul said that this unworthy manner is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. (27) What should we do then? We should repent before we come to church or worship God. Look at verse 28. “***Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup***.” Before we come to church or a meeting, we must examine our hearts and see whether our heart and mind is right with God and with others or not. If not, we must repent of our sins and then come to Him. It is busy every Sunday morning before we come to church. We must wake up our children to be prepared for church. We must clean the house and finish any remaining housework or papers. Our women members often cook lunch as well as participate in the worship service with prayer or special music. So, we often lose our cool when things do not go as well as we expect. Even before we arrive at the church, we are full of anger and a complaining spirit. Especially for those who are entrusted with worship programs, their spiritual and emotional condition is critical to the mood and atmosphere of the worship service. Therefore, I urge you to be patient with your sluggish children or demanding spouse and become co-operative for the worship service. Repent of all your sins before we come to church. Repent while you are driving in your car. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, “*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.*”

What is the worthy manner? What is the right attitude toward God when we worship Him? It is a holy, thankful, respectful, loving, willing mind with joyful spirit. Colossians 3:16 says, “*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*” Paul adds in Ephesians 5:20, “*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Gratitude and a thankful mind are very important manners for worshipers. Paul urges us to give thanks to God for everything. We must remember how God saved us and blessed our lives through Jesus Christ. We must give thanks to God for giving us an opportunity to worship him freely every Sunday. We must give thanks to God who gave us faith in Jesus Christ for our salvation. We must make music to the Lord with gratitude in our hearts. Psalm 22:3 says that the Lord dwells among those who praise. Amen! This is the reason why we must sing hymns loudly until the power of darkness disappears, until evil spirits are cast out, and until our hearts are filled with the Holy Spirit. Amen!

The worthy manner is to bring our prepared heart to God. Before we come to him, we must prepare our hearts with prayer, repenting our sins and asking for his mercy and grace through the worship service. Soften our hardened heart so that we may be ready to receive a shower of God’s blessing! In fact, an offering a whole-hearted worship service is the channel of God’s blessing. God is pleased with our undivided devotion through the worship service. This is the reason why I ask you to come to church at least 15 minutes earlier than 11 am so that you may prepare your heart for the Lord. Amen!

We must make every effort to meet God and worship Him. God is pleased with our worship. God wants us to worship Him in the Spirit and in truth. Jesus said in John 4:24, “*God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*” We must worship God the Father with the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the Son Jesus. Amen!