

# **The Christian Philosophy of Man**

*A Question of Loyalty to Christ his Head  
Studies in 1 Corinthians*

*David W. Gooding*

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The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast, N Ireland

BT1 9YR

w: [www.myrtlefieldhouse.com](http://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com)

e: [info@myrtlefieldhouse.com](mailto:info@myrtlefieldhouse.com)

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## Symbols of Headship

In these sessions we are seeking to trace some of the major themes of the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. We shall be obliged to consider some of the mistakes and faults and misbehaviours on the part of our ancient Christian brothers and sisters, the believers at Corinth. As we examine their mistakes, we shall do it sombrely and with humble hearts, remembering that one of these days we shall have to meet them. And remembering ourselves also, lest we be tempted to misbehave as they misbehaved. It's one of the advantages of not being in the first rank of the Christians that we can profit not only from the good example of those that went before but also from their mistakes.

More even than interest in the mistakes, we will be interested in the way that Paul seeks to put these mistakes right. We will observe that he does not simply quote a specific rule from the Christian handbook. Rather he calls them back to the basic Christian gospel and points out how their mistaken behaviour conflicts with the glorious wonders and the basic principles of our great Christian salvation that has been procured for us by Jesus Christ our Lord. As we consider their mistakes and then the way they are corrected, we shall come to a firmer grip on the great doctrines of the Christian gospel and our hearts will rejoice as we consider its glory.

As Paul brings them and us back to the basic principles of the Christian gospel, it will raise once more in our minds one of the major themes in this epistle. We have called it *The Christian Philosophy of Man*, by which we mean, according to Christianity, what is man? What does it mean to be really human? And since this is a Christian epistle, we must add not merely what does it mean to be human, but what does it mean to be a redeemed human being? And then again, since human beings come as male and female, we shall be asking what does it mean to be a Christian man and to be a Christian woman? That's not the same thing as being a man and a woman: as this age advances, the two things will less and less coincide.

We shall be putting these things in the context of chapters 11–14 but we shall only be picking out some of the salient themes. What we shall find is something strangely wonderful. We shall have impressed upon our minds what is the specifically Christian plan of redemption. You see, for Christians, redemption means something exceedingly special. It is not a question merely of receiving forgiveness, not simply a matter of being justified by faith. Abraham was forgiven and Abraham was justified by faith, but Abraham himself knew very little about the things that we shall now be considering. For, in Christian redemption, men and women are not simply brought back to the state in which Adam and Eve were when they

were first created and placed in the garden of Eden, beautiful and glorious as that original couple were—there's something more wonderful than being restored to Eden's perfection.

Christian redemption involves nothing less than a completely new kind of human being, a new human race. It will involve, as we shall see, the creation of a new entity, the like of which had never existed in God's universe before. That entity is called the body of Christ and it involves a new regime, of which Abraham knew nothing. Let's see how those things are presented to us as we take a bird's eye view of our four chapters, 11–14, and then, just in case you haven't enough to consider, chapter 15 as well! We shall take them in reverse order.

Christian redemption involves a new kind of human being. There was the first Adam, there is the second and last Adam. The second and last Adam, who is our blessed Lord Jesus Christ himself, was not just a perfect edition of what Adam was originally and should have continued to be. There is an infinitely large difference, for the first Adam was of the earth, a man of dust, but the second man is the Lord from heaven. The first man was made a living soul and could transmit his physical life to his progeny. The second man, though truly man, is not just a living soul. The second man is a life-giving spirit.

It is true to say that our blessed Lord Jesus is truly human. He's a real human being, but it wouldn't be true to say he is only human. It will warm our hearts and fill them with wonder to think how happy are those people who have met with Jesus Christ, who is a life-giving spirit. Jesus said, as he stood here a man amongst men,

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will  
... For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.  
(John 5:21, 26)

So the blessed Lord Jesus imparts life, spiritual life, to whoever he will. He has life in himself. We human beings got our life from our parents and they from their parents and thus all down the annals of time. None of us has life in himself, and one day we shall depart our physical frames. The blessed Lord Jesus, the man Jesus, is a life in himself and the source of life, and he is able to impart eternal life to all who trust him. What a message that is for us little human creatures sitting here. And more for me than for you, because you look in the bloom of your youth, and the decay of the old mental cells and the enlargement of the arthritic knees hasn't troubled you yet. It will do presently, if not before the end of the meeting then later on!

And then you will bless God that ever you met Jesus Christ our Lord—the man who was not only sinless, over whom death had no claim, but a man who, when you meet him and trust him, can impart to you now the very life of God, eternal life. He is a life-giving spirit. And not only can he now impart that eternal life to all who trust him, he is now risen from the dead, human still, but with a transformed and glorified body. One day, as you have borne the image of the old earthly body, the body you got originally from Adam, so you shall bear the image of the heavenly. It will almost make us impatient to have it, like Paul. Your earthly body isn't worn out yet, so perhaps you don't feel that way, but there is a beginning of a longing, isn't there? A kind of wistfulness such as perhaps a butterfly still in the chrysalis

might feel if he had heard a rumour that you didn't have to be always inside a chrysalis, but that one day you will be transformed into a thing of radiant beauty and ascend to the heavens.

Oh that the very longing of it might work in you what it worked in Paul, when he said, 'It's okay to be here in the body, but I've a longing—not escapism, but a longing wrought by the Holy Spirit—to be absent from the body and present with the Lord and then to have my glorious habitation, which is from God, the eternal habitation, the body of glory in heaven' (Phil 1:23). You never know what God is going to do next, so to speak. He is not content just to forgive us our sins: not content just to put us back where Adam was before he sinned. Instead God will take the occasion of man's sin to do something absolutely breathtakingly new and wonderful, a new kind of human race.

Coming backwards to chapters 12–14 we see that there has come into existence a new entity such as never was before in the whole of God's universe. It must have been a startling thing for the archangels and Gabriel to observe the ascension of the blessed Lord Jesus and to see what heaven had never witnessed before, a resurrected human body, a real body, a tangible body in heaven. I wonder what Michael said to Gabriel on the day of Pentecost. I think these angels must have had an exciting time as they saw this new development, the body of Christ.

This is God's solution to the problem of human individual personality, with all his personality problems and personality clashes. A new kind of a being in which myriads upon myriads of redeemed human beings, without losing their individual personality, would be formed into one great living entity. The only thing like it you could think of in our world is a human body made up of many individual members, each with its own personality, but one entity. The breath-taking thing about it is that each member is taken up into, placed into the Holy Spirit, and each one is filled with the Holy Spirit. It goes beyond our greatest imagination!

Then as we come backwards still further to chapter 11 we find not only a new kind of human race and a new entity of people in the heavens, but a new regime in which we're not saved and then left like Abraham, simply as an individual directly responsible to God, with no intermediary. There is now for Christian people a new regime where, as well as God the Father to whom we are ultimately responsible, God has appointed us a Christ, a messiah, a sovereign, a leader, a shepherd—call him what you will, to be the Lord to whom we are immediately responsible. Abraham didn't have that; we do and it's part of what it means to be a redeemed man and woman.

I say it's new, but you might perceive some early prototypes of this in the Old Testament. Come to Moses for instance, who was used of God to bring Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Moses came to reveal the name of God to the Israelites in Egypt and get them to put their faith in God. But for the exodus to be a success, it was necessary not only that the Israelites believed God: they had to believe Moses. God gave him all kinds of miracles to do so that the people should believe Moses.

It came to the critical moment on which their very fate hung. They stood on the banks of the Red Sea and looked back to hear what the noise was coming behind them and saw Pharaoh and all his chariots, and they cried out in panic. They thought that they must go back under Pharaoh now and could almost feel the lash of the taskmaster again upon their naked backs. They cried to God. God told Moses to take his rod and the waters parted. So there stood Moses, and Israel had their choice—go back to Pharaoh or get baptised to Moses.

Believing in God meant believing in Moses. Believing in God meant you committed yourself to Moses as the God-appointed captain of your salvation. If you were a true Israelite, you couldn't believe in God without accepting Moses as the captain and leader of your salvation.

You find another prototype in King David. When God eventually had him anointed as the divinely chosen, divinely appointed king, the anointed one, the *messiah* in Hebrew, if you would be loyal to God, you must obey the king.

So you might see in the Old Testament, early shadows, early prototypes of what would become a distinctive thing in Christianity. It's not enough nowadays to believe in God. If you would be saved, you must believe in the Lord Jesus. '[You] believe in God; believe also in me,' said Jesus (John 14:1). He stands unique—neither Moses nor David was a new kind of human being and Israel was never called the body of Moses. As for David, his sepulchre is with us to this day and his bones are still somewhere in a sepulchre in Jerusalem. These shadowy prototypes fall into the background and leave us with this extraordinary wonder, which is our blessed redeemer.

What is man? What is redeemed man? What is redeemed man and redeemed woman? All something magnificently wonderful, part of this new race, already part of this new entity which is the body of Christ and willing subjects under a new regime, under the blessed Lord Jesus as head. How I wish I could impress upon you the wonder of it, to get you to see it as you've never seen before.

But now we must come down to the practicalities. What does it mean to be under this new regime? Would you look in your text to 1 Corinthians 11, and we're going to start thinking about the first set of faults. In chapter 11, there are two sets of faults, so to speak. Both concern themselves with the misuse and abuse and neglect of the Christian symbols laid down for our use by our blessed Lord Jesus and his apostles. These are symbols by which we express our obedience to God, our devotion to the Lord Jesus and our respect one for another. Here in the first major paragraph of chapter 11, Paul deals with this custom, this set of symbols under which, when Christian men pray or prophesy they do not cover their heads; but when Christian women pray and prophesy they do cover their heads. They got it wrong, apparently, at Corinth. They were either misusing or completely neglecting these symbols.

Our interest is not so much in their fault, but what Paul does to correct their fault, and for that purpose I ask you to notice first verse 4: 'Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head.' If he has his own physical head covered when he prays or prophesies, what head is this that he dishonours? Verse 3 will give you the answer. I would like us to concentrate on that verse for a moment because this is something we as believers need to know and to grasp. This is essential before the problem can be solved.

'I would have you know that the head of every man is the Christ, the Messiah, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.'

These are the basic facts and they take us in one stride to the heart of the wonder of our Christian gospel. Notice that last remark, 'the head of Christ is God'. We might well spend our whole study on that phrase, working out its implications and the wonder of it. If we did, I suspect we should end in worship. Just imagine what this verse is saying—the head of the Messiah, the head of the Christ, is God. Who is this Messiah, otherwise known as the Son of God—the second person of the Trinity, as the theologians call him?

When we remember this we shall immediately remember that the blessed Son of God, Son of the Father, the second person of the eternal Trinity, was not always the Messiah. There were uncharted ages of eternity before he became Messiah. He became that Messiah for God's sake, and for our sakes so that he might redeem us and bring us back to God. 'I would have you understand that,' says Paul, 'lest salvation should become to you a thin little thing, an arbitrary matter of a few regulations that could be ignored.'

Let the wonder of this grip your heart just now. For your sake and for mine, as for God's sake, he who is God and stood on equality with God, for our sakes became Messiah to bring us back to God. And becoming Messiah meant for him knowing God as head. The wonder of it is beautifully expressed in the early Christian hymn that Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians: 'Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped' (Phil 2:5–6), for he never ceased to be God, but what he gladly surrendered for our sakes was to be on equal terms with God. He thought it not a prize, something to be grasped and held on to.

The marvellous wonder of it, that he would not cling to his outward dignities. He whom angels worshipped on an equality with God gave up being on equal terms with God. While God was forever as God was, in his unsullied presence, this blessed one was born in a stable amongst some of the humblest of his little creatures. He emptied himself, 'poured himself out' the word means, and took the form of a servant. From being God, he became a servant (v. 7). That's what it means for him to be Messiah, grasp it if you can.

We have such funny ideas of what it means to be Messiah and what it means to be king. James and John saw more clearly than others that one day Jesus would be acknowledged as Messiah and they rubbed their hands with glee at the prospect. 'If only we follow him a bit now and give up a penny or two, or a shekel or two, we've got in,' they said to themselves; and Mrs Zebedee wasn't behind in helping her sons on in their ambitions. 'Play your cards right,' she said to John as they went out in the morning, 'and make yourself readily available to Jesus because when he becomes Messiah the chances are you'll sit on the right and on the left, and you'll sit on a throne with a big sceptre. You'll never have to do a stroke of work again!'

When they asked if they might so sit, our Lord replied, 'You don't know what you ask, gentlemen. Can you drink the cup I drink of, and be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?' (Mark 10:35–40). They said, 'Yes, Lord. To put it bluntly, we don't care what it costs so long as we get the top two places beside you.' 'Well, then you've not understood,' he said. 'In the first place, it's not mine to give anyway, but do you know what being first

means? The one that's first is the one that serves most people.' It isn't the one who's down at the bottom that serves the most. Not to compare great things with small, but which do you think is the more important, half a dozen pigs in a sty all shouting to be fed or the farmer who comes to feed them? It's the farmer, isn't it?

The comparison is so weak and thin, compared with what it meant to him to become Messiah and king. That he should step from that throne to kneel at our feet and wash them and serve us. 'Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Phil 2:8). Not a heroic martyr's death, surrounded by thousands of his loving disciples, admiring his courage and praising him even as he died, but to die as the song of the drunkard, with the spittle of ignorant and sadistic men, and little religious prigs mocking him.

This is what it meant for the Son of God to become Messiah and to accept God as his head and do the will of God to secure our redemption. 'Oh, I would so like you to get hold of that, my dear Corinthians' says Paul. That is a fundamental and once you get hold of it, it will re-orientate your whole attitude and outlook. Christ has his head.

It is wonderful to think what happened when he was born in the manger and for our sakes went to Calvary, but for a moment let's remember what chapter 15 tells us of God's great scheme in appointing him. 'For God has put all things in subjection under his feet' (1 Cor 15:27). That is quoting Psalm 8.

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet. (vv. 4-6)

That's God's word about the Messiah, but then Paul adds,

But when it says 'all things are put in subjection' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:27-28)

That's a very complicated sentence in modern English. It means this, that God who subjected all things to Christ and put them under Christ's feet, still remains above the Messiah. God was confronted with a whole universe gone astray, and the world of men and women gone astray, how should God bring back his great empire? He appointed his own son as his viceroy, who became for our sakes the Messiah and became man. God's plan was that he should redeem mankind by being obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Now God has highly exalted him and set him above every name, not only in this age, but that which is to come, and God has ordained that one day everything in heaven, earth and hell will bow the knee and admit Christ's right to rule (see Phil 2:9-11), 'And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (Col 1:20).



And when the blessed Lord Jesus has brought that vast empire, including you and me, back to the Father, the Son shall himself bow at the Father's footstool and be subjected to the Father. What a magnificent role our blessed Lord Jesus carries and we do well to sing it.

I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,  
Should set his love upon the sons of men,  
Or why, as shepherd, he should seek the wanderers,  
To bring them back, they know not how or when.  
But this I know, that he was born of Mary,  
When Bethlehem's manger was his only home.  
And that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,  
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,  
When at his bidding every storm is stilled,  
Or who can say how great the jubilation  
When every hearts with love and joy is filled.  
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,  
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,  
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer,  
'At last, the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is king!'<sup>1</sup>

'I'd like you to know that,' says Paul. 'I'd like you to think of it, I'd like you to use your God-given imagination to grasp it, and when you grasp it, now listen . . .' And Paul appeals first of all to the men. It's no secret that sometimes these verses are expounded as though the ladies had the monopoly of their interest. You'll forgive this hard-hearted man if I give a little prominence to the men just to make up the weight! So, my good fellow Christian men, listen to this. If you've grasped what is involved in the Son of God becoming the Messiah and obeying God as his head and becoming a servant, then listen you men, 'Every man', male that is, 'who prays or prophesies with his head covered, dishonours his head.' Not his own physical head, dishonours his head just mentioned in verse 3, dishonours the Lord Jesus. You wouldn't want to do that, would you?

Why don't Christian men cover their heads when they pray or prophesy? Some say that it was simply because they're good Irishmen and others say it's simply because they're polite Englishmen! That's nothing to do with it, of course. Some say it was a Greek custom, a custom in Corinth. Well, perhaps it was. Greeks when they prayed to their gods, prayed with nothing on their heads: *capite aperto*, as the Romans said. The Romans by contrast, at least the high official ones, when they were at their dignified ceremonies, prayed *capite velato*, their heads veiled. The customs weren't the same in the ancient world.

For the Jews nowadays, if you go to a Jewish synagogue, you'll find the men not only wear the yarmulke, but when they pray they cover their heads with the prayer shawl, out of

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<sup>1</sup> William Young Fullerton (1857–1932), written c.1920; stanzas 1 and 4.

reverence to God. Like Elijah did when he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave and God passed by (see 1 Kgs 19:13).

So why is it that Christian men, when they pray and prophesy, don't cover their heads? The reason is that they are pointing to who they believe Jesus is. By this symbol they are indicating that Jesus is their head, he is the Messiah and that they stand under him as his representatives, immediately responsible to him. For a Christian man to neglect the symbol and pray or prophesy with his head covered would therefore be understood in heaven as dishonouring the Lord Jesus.

It's rather like a wedding ring. Maybe things are different nowadays, but in my youth ladies used to wear wedding rings and jolly proud they were. 'Is that a wedding ring?' 'Yes.' 'And who's your husband?' Well they were very quick to tell you. It would be odd if a woman got rid of her wedding ring. People would say, 'Why aren't you wearing your wedding ring?' 'I don't want anybody to know I'm married.' 'Who are you married to?' 'I never tell anybody and the last thing I want to do is to advertise it.' It would be odd, wouldn't it?

Christian men, to pray and prophesy with your head covered dishonours your immediate head, that is Jesus Christ our Lord. You'll say, 'What's the use of symbols like that? Nobody nowadays understands them.' Well nobody in the ancient world understood them either. If an old Greek had seen a Christian man at his prayers and the man was praying with his head uncovered, it wouldn't fizz upon the Greek. That's what he did himself anyway. But if nobody understood what was happening, why do it?

Well, tell me about the Lord's Supper, where you take bread and wine in memory of the Lord Jesus. If a Greek had wandered into a Christian church and had seen early Christians eating bread and drinking wine, they would have said to themselves, 'This is some kind of communal religious meal or something. True, but they would never have guessed in all eternity, unless you told them, that the bread was symbolic of the body of a carpenter who worked in Nazareth and the wine represented his blood. No Greek would ever have imagined that in his wildest dreams, but then the Christians could always tell the Greeks. For all I know, the pygmies wouldn't know why you ladies wear these aforesaid wedding rings. You would have to tell them what they meant. That's how symbols are, and this is a God-appointed symbol. Gentlemen, you will observe it, won't you?

With that we come to the difference, that much disputed difference. The man honours his head—that is the Lord Jesus—by uncovering his own head. Now what about the woman? Why should she cover her head when she prays and prophesies? 'But I want you to understand,' says Paul, 'that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is the man' (1 Cor 11:3). The coward in me would remind the ladies present that I didn't write it, I'm only telling you what the Bible says! But I imagine Paul felt that when the Corinthians read this they wouldn't all be smiling and he added a little something, '*and the head of Christ is God.*' Does Christ have his head? He does indeed. Will the ladies object to having one, if Christ himself has a head?

Anyway, it stands written that thus it is, and if a woman will not use the symbol and prays or prophesies with her head uncovered, unveiled, she dishonours her head—that is,

her head immediately above her—she dishonours the man, 'for it is one and the same thing, as if she were shaved or shorn' (v. 5). That is saying something very dark, for in the ancient world adulteresses could be paraded with their heads shorn, hair cut off completely, and what a shame it was to their husbands when society treated a woman like that. 'And to refuse the symbol is to dishonour her head,' says Paul. You say, 'Well, why the difference? Why is it that to honour their head men have to leave their heads uncovered, but to honour their heads the women have to cover their heads? Why the opposite way round?' From this Paul proceeds to explain,

For 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 was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (vv. 7–9)

That accounts for the difference and here Paul takes us back, not simply to redemption as he has done in the first few verses but he takes us back to Genesis and creation. 'Man is the image and glory of God.' In what sense? Man is God's viceroy. Says Psalm 8, 'You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour . . . you have put all things under his feet,' the animals in particular. As far as the animals are concerned man is a kind of a god. He comes between them and God. Man officially is God's viceroy and therefore carries the glory of God. But if you observe the story of Genesis, you will find two things. Firstly, that man and woman were not made exactly at the same time. According to Genesis 2, man was first made, then God summoned the animals before him and Adam named them, a fitting occupation for someone who was to be their lord and master under God. 'Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him"' (v. 18). So woman was not made at the same time as man, says Genesis. Secondly, man was made direct; woman was made out of man, not man out of the woman and the woman was made for man to be a help for him and a support in his tasks.

Sum all that up and you'll say, 'Man is the image and glory of God, man is God's viceroy and the woman was made for man—she is man's viceroy. Man is the glory of God, woman is the glory of man.' There is a difference, then, in function. Of course, if you don't accept Genesis, then all this is so much nonsense. But I'm talking to people who, I'm persuaded, do believe Genesis. What is man, according to the Bible? This is God's idea of man, this is how God made them.

Let's clear away one or two misapprehensions. When it says that man is the head of the woman, it's not implying that woman is somehow an inferior kind of human being. It doesn't mean that. When it says for instance, that God is the head of Christ and Christ has his head, it doesn't mean that the Son of God is inferior in essence to God. He's equal with the Father, equally divine; but being equally divine in nature he chose to humble himself in his function. So a woman is every bit equal with man as to her essential nature and similarly, when it comes to salvation, men and women are saved on the same terms. Be you Jew or Greek, or Gentile or whatever you are, all are one in Christ when it comes to salvation. We're saved on

exactly the same terms. We're not talking about salvation. We're now talking of function and our functions are different. They are different at the physical level, they are different at the spiritual level by God's design, and when it comes to redemption and our functioning in this new regime, God proposes to keep the difference.

Let's use an analogy: cricket or, if you prefer, football teams. Now all the better football teams have a board and the board appoints a manager. The manager, and the board perhaps, choose the team and appoint one chap amongst the eleven to be captain. That doesn't mean that all the other ten in the football team are inferior human beings to the captain, but it does mean that on the field they agree to obey the captain. Of course, each individual footballer can appeal above the head of the captain, to the manager, and if they like the players on the field can appeal beyond the manager to the central board in control. But in the day-to-day workings, the ten men on the field obey the captain. Off the field, the captain and all the others obey their manager, and when it comes to the yearly accounts the manager and all the rest of them have to do what the board says! I don't know whether anybody gets very upset about it. And so under the new regime is it thus.

There is another reason, Paul says, why we ought to obey these symbols. It is 'because of the angels' (1 Cor 11:10). The best meaning of it, as far as I can make it out, is what Paul says in Ephesians 3, 'So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places' (Eph 3:10). What is Michael thinking, and Gabriel likewise, and all the vast intelligences as they see the ruin and chaos that sin caused in our world, and now they see the blessed Lord Jesus, the redeemer, not only forgiving us, but bringing us into his regime and creating a harmonious hierarchy of his servants, copying him who accepted his head and obeyed.

Of course, that is not to say that men are to act as tyrants over women, particularly in the home. Paul goes on to point out that creation is one thing—when Adam was made by God direct and Eve was made out of Adam—but in ordinary life in the home, things are somewhat different. Most men have a mother and most women have a father these days! So the two sexes are mutually interdependent in the home and they are both subject to the Lord, each with his or her own function.

And finally, says Paul, observe these symbols:

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (1 Cor 11:14–15)

Here he was speaking to Greek people and expected that even their own sensitivity and nature itself should teach them that for a man to have long hair was a dishonour to him. Thus at least it was felt in the ancient world. But in the case of the women, 'If a woman has', (notice the 'if', not all do) 'if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?' And still to this day it's true. You see a woman with a beautiful head of hair and, even if the ladies don't realise it, the men are open-mouthed in admiration! It isn't always so in the animal world. Take lions, for instance,

it's the male that has the big mane around it and the lioness is a poor nondescript-looking affair. But in humans it's the other way round, it's the men folks that look nothing and it's the ladies who have beautiful hair. And if they have, it's a glory to them. That's why they should cover it when it comes to spiritual activity. for it's not to herself and to her own glory that she would want to call attention.

I remember being at the Lord's Supper once, when in came a dear sister with such a hat and with such a feather that would have cut the necks of people sitting two seats away! At which moment, it wasn't exactly the best preparation to concentrate the mind on him who for our sakes was crowned with thorns. However glorious and to be admired the good lady was in other circumstances, when it came to spiritual exercise, etiquette, if nothing else, would suggest that she should cover her glory, that all attention be riveted on Christ.

And thus does Paul correct the faults. It does not mean, and he is not saying, that women have no part to play. Every woman praying and prophesying, not in church, but in many other semi-official occasions—like Anna the prophetess and Elizabeth, the mother of John Baptist, and many others both in this land and in foreign lands—exercise a powerful ministry for God in their proper sphere of opportunity,

'But I want you to understand,' says Paul, 'that in our ministries, we men and women are under a new regime where everyone has his head, our blessed Lord included.' And we do well to follow his example and to keep those symbols that point to our ready obedience and proclaim to the world who exactly we consider Jesus is. May the Lord help us, even in the matter of these symbols, to glorify him and to magnify his grace and to serve him acceptably and with godly fear.

## Symbols of Remembrance

We come now to our second session. While in one sense we have more material to cover, it is better known and therefore will not take us long to select its leading thoughts. We must now think about a second set of symbols that the Corinthians were likewise completely perverting.

That may seem strange to us if we have not considered it before, because the second set of symbols were no less than the bread by which our Lord Jesus asked us to remember him and the wine, the cup of wine, by which we remember the fact that he poured out his blood for us. Nevertheless, the fact is true: the Corinthians were coming together and behaving in such a manner that it was not possible for them to eat the Lord's Supper as it should be eaten (see 1 Cor 11:17–23). The Greek may even be translated that they had no intention of eating it as it should be eaten, for the simple reason that they had lost sight of the meaning and the significance of those sacred symbols.

So we shall be thinking of their fault in this matter but, once more in particular, about the way in which Paul goes about correcting their fault. He quotes them what he himself had received from the Lord Jesus about the significance of the Lord's Supper and so brings them back to what lies at the very heart of our Christian gospel.

It would appear that the way they came to spoil these symbols was that they were much attached to the early Christian custom of meeting together for a meal of friendship and fellowship, in some sources called *agapē*, or love feast. It is thought that each person would have brought their contribution and then shared out what they had one with another. So that the rich, who brought more, should share with the poor, who couldn't afford to bring so much, and all would be satisfied. The occasion, of course, was to eat, not just to satisfy crude hunger, but in the eating to express the common bond of love and fellowship that exists between believers. That then was their early custom and highly to be praised. It is so easy, isn't it, to sit in formal meetings of a church and scarcely get to know the one that sits besides you as a person. You know him just as somebody who occupies a pew somewhere nearby. To get to know them in the atmosphere of a Christian meal and fellowship is a delightful thing and can only eventually enhance our spiritual worship.

Unfortunately with these Greek Christians, the habit grew that the love feast was turned into a common meal where, in complete disregard for one another, each hogged what he had. The rich brought plentiful supply without bothering to share it. They just treated it as though they were at home and ate to their full and beyond. They brought their drink and, if the Greek text is to be trusted, some were a little bit tipsy by the time they had finished. This behaviour had a most unfortunate effect on the poorer members of the church. When they

saw their richer brothers and sisters thus indulging in the kind of spread that the poorer people only saw once in a blue moon, it made them feel alienated, scarcely welcome and humiliated, because they were only able to bring their small provisions. It was therefore in the first place a denial of Christian love. Instead of promoting fellowship, it did the very opposite. More seriously, they so concentrated on this so-called love feast that when it came time to eat the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him, they were not in any fit state to do it. And if they did it, it was merely a mockery, because they couldn't concentrate on what they were doing. Paul now proceeds to rebuke them for this grievous fault and then to put it right.

That may seem very, very distant to us, who would never dream of doing any such thing. But I have been at the Lord's Supper, not in this country but in another one that shall be nameless, where the music, if you could call it that, was so loud and raucous that when the Lord's Supper was kept and the bread and the wine passed round, I could hardly hear myself think, let alone concentrate on what I was supposed to be doing. So I shall not count myself necessarily superior to these Corinthians that seek to listen very carefully as Paul corrects them. He will do it by bringing them back to the significance of those symbols, the bread and the wine.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also 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.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (vv. 23-26)

No words of mine are necessary to show the significance of these two symbols, the bread and the wine, that take us to the very heart of our Christian Gospel. It underlines the lesson that has now been recurring many times. It is possible for us Christian people, even in church activities, gradually to drift away and lose our grip on the very basic elements of the gospel and fail any longer to perceive their wonder and their wealth. They become mere routine trivialities and we go through them thinking of half a dozen other things, not concentrating, distracted by this and that. So the routine becomes empty of meaning and, being regarded empty of meaning, is sometimes then discarded as being unnecessary.

How could we ever forget? Our Lord could have chosen many ways for his people to remember him. He could have ordained that when we meet together, someone should get up and read, in official voice, the Sermon on the Mount. That being so, we would have remembered him chiefly as a teacher of ethics. Now he did teach ethics, but that's not how he asked to be remembered. He could have ordained that somebody should get up and read selected miracles that he performed and thus we would have remembered him chiefly as a performer of miracles. Now his miracles were important and exceedingly significant, but that is not how he asked us to remember him.

Taking what lay at his very heart, and had done from the moment he stepped out of heaven, and what surely must lie at our hearts and bind us to him, he chose these humble elements. 'Take and eat this bread,' he said, 'to remind you of me, that I gave my body for you. Take the cup and drink it, the wine will recall for you my blood, and remember I poured

out my life for you.' How could we forget it? How could we let anything come and distract us from it? What hurt we would do to the Lord Jesus.

Deftly but solemnly, Paul puts some key words into the description of his instructions from the Lord Jesus, 'I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus *on the night when he was betrayed . . .*' Remember it, for what a sermon it preaches. To think that on that very night when he instituted this remembrance feast, there was one there who was about to betray him and another that was about to deny him and all the others squabbling about irrelevant and distasteful things, like who should be greatest among them. If that was their heart, then what about mine? Who could describe the kind of love that, knowing Peter and the rest, he gave his body and he gave his blood. How could we forget it? Albeit Peter tells us that there are Christians—I suppose they're Christians,—that presently as they march on in life have forgotten that they were cleansed from their former sins (see 2 Pet 1:9).

I know it sounds incredible, but then we have a precedent for it. The dear Israelites had been slaves in Egypt and they groaned and they called out to God. God heard them and brought them out through the blood of the Passover lamb and through the baptism in the Red Sea. All went well and they got away from Pharaoh as fast as their little legs could carry them. They got a few miles down the road and, do you know what?—they forgot what the whole thing was about. Impossible? Well, it happened. 'What are we doing here in the middle of the wilderness? This is rather ridiculous, you know, and we remember the garlic and the onions and the cucumbers' (see Num 11:4–6). It would have been helpful if they'd remembered a few more things, such as taskmasters, but they came to the point of suggesting giving up the whole scheme.

You say it's incredible, but in middle life we can behave sometimes as though we've done what Peter says. We forget what the whole thing was about—the cleansing of our former sins—and we begin as believers to behave sinfully and selfishly and compromise the Lord's name and glory. Lest we forget, wisely did our blessed Lord tell us to take bread and wine and remember him. You say, 'I'm afraid the routine would dull it of its significance.' I suppose you can get used to being forgiven, can't you? It becomes kind of ordinary. I remember when strawberries were looked forward to once a year, because they were rather rare things and strawberries were marvellous—they're not marvellous now, since you can get them any day of the week! Forgiveness is not like that; not if I will do what the Lord Jesus said and let God Holy's Spirit bring afresh to me the meaning of that bread and wine and what the Lord Jesus did.

To take the bread and the wine, symbols of the body and blood that Christ gave that I might be forgiven, and to come to that ceremony with sin unconfessed and not attending to what I'm doing, that is a very solemn thing, says Paul. That could be to be guilty of the body and blood of Christ, guilty of murdering the Lord Jesus' (v. 27). In a very profound and real sense it was our sins that killed the Lord, and as we remember it the first thing we do is to repent again and we have his forgiveness. To sin and not repent and yet take that cup is to be unashamedly, unrepentantly guilty of having killed the Lord Jesus. You say, 'The best thing then is to stay away.' How could you think such a thought? What, so that you can go on



sinning? No, the best thing is to come and to remember what our sins cost him so that we might repent of them more deeply and live thereafter the more holy.

But there is another side to it. When our Lord Jesus took the cup he said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me' (v. 25). So this is a matter that we must attend to when we drink the cup at the Lord's Supper. It is not simply that his blood was poured out that we might be forgiven, it is that in handing us that cup he calls us to observe that this cup is 'the new covenant in his blood.' What does it mean? The very ceremony by which our Lord Jesus introduced it, simple as it was, recalled the old covenant when God gathered the Israelites around Mount Sinai and announced his propositions to them—that they should be his special people, a kingdom of priests, if only they would keep the terms of the covenant.

The people said they would be agreeable, so God had Moses recite the terms of the law that would be the basis of the covenant between them. Not content with that, God said, 'The people have heard it, but, Moses, write it in the book so that it might be there in black and white and no one thereafter will say, "But I didn't know that was in the covenant."'. So Moses wrote it all in a book; and then he made it very clear he wasn't making it up as he went along, he was reading it from the book.

These were the terms of God's holy law that formed the basis of their covenant and the challenge went out to the people, did they or did they not accept these terms? And they replied, 'All that the Lord has commanded we will do and we will be obedient' (Exod 24:3). And that being so, Moses brought the covenant sacrifices and had them slain and he caught their blood in a basin. Then, holding up the basin full of blood before the people, he said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord makes with you, the terms of which you now promise to obey.' That was the old covenant and you will see the similarity between that and what the Lord Jesus did as he took a cup and filled it with wine. Holding it up to his disciples, he said, 'This is the blood of the new covenant' (Luke 22:20).

Why should you need a new covenant if you already had an old one? Well there were certain deficiencies in the old covenant. It wasn't the old covenant's fault, for the best the old covenant could do was to have the laws inscribed on the tablets of stone, written by some master mason or, as the text says, by the very finger of God (Exod 31:18). And you put them in the tabernacle for good preservation and the laws told the people what they had to do.

It was excellent and you couldn't find fault with it, except it didn't work. Why didn't it work? Well, the law on those tablets of stone could tell people what to do, but it couldn't give them the power with which to do it. It could tell the people what not to do, but could give them no power to refrain from doing what they should not do. In the end, they broke the covenant and God set them aside. When God did that at the great exile, he moved Jeremiah to prophesy that one day God himself would bring in a new covenant (Jer 31:31).

But why another covenant if the first one didn't really work? Ah, because it is a *new* covenant based on better terms and a superior sacrifice than the old covenant (see Heb 9:14–15). I feel like calling for volunteers just now to stand up and repeat the words of the new covenant, perhaps somebody who has been observing the Lord's Supper these last ten years, so that you've kept the Lord's Supper and taken the cup over five hundred times! I hope we

could recite them all, otherwise we weren't really attending to what the Lord was saying when he handed the cup, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.' And here are the terms of the covenant: 'I will put my laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people' (Heb 8:10).

You say, 'Mr Preacher, when are you going to get round to the real point of the Lord's Supper? It's the worship meeting—did you not know that?' Well, I've heard that said and there's no other thing on earth more calculated to move our hearts to worship than the remembrance of the Lord Jesus; but actually in the New Testament you'd be hard put to it to find any instruction that at the Lord's Supper you're supposed to worship. Carry on worshipping, I'm not discouraging you so by all means worship. How could you refrain from worshipping the Lord if you remembered him?

But what he was primarily concerned with as he handed the cup was, 'This is the new covenant in my blood and what I'm proposing to do is to write my laws on your heart. Yes, there will be forgiveness. You will not be perfect at once, but you are to know that God will never bring up your sins and iniquities against you in the court of his justice. The penalty's been paid, once and for all, through my blood. This is the blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.' And God himself in the terms of the covenant says, 'For I will be merciful towards their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more' (v. 12). The whole business, as far as a penalty goes, is finished. But it doesn't mean that, because my sins and their penalty will never be brought up against me again, I'm free to do as I like.

What is it to be a redeemed man and to be a redeemed woman? It is to be under a new regime. Call him King or call him Lord, it comes to really the same thing; and it's the Lord, as he hands us the cup, who stands and says, 'I will write my laws on your heart.' There were doubtless some of the Corinthians who criticised Paul for preaching the doctrine of justification by faith.

They were tempted to say, 'Now look here, Paul, if you will go around preaching to people that they can be saved by faith and sure of it, apart from the works of the law, what do you expect? Preach that to the Corinthians and they'll be inventing all kinds of sins and aberrations. You ought to preach them the law.'

'Not so,' says Paul. 'The law can tell people what to do, it can't give them the power to do it, but I have seen a miracle happen in Corinth. What God is doing is writing his law, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts, using me as the pen and the Holy Spirit, so to speak, as the ink' (2 Cor 3:3).

The blessed risen Lord had begun to write on the hearts of the Corinthians and that took some doing. You can write laws on a bit of stone, because the granite stays put and, so long as you've got a sharp chisel and moderate technique, you can get the letters to stay put. But try writing a message on people's hearts, which are slippery things. Yet this is the genius of our blessed Lord, risen from the dead; using his servants, the apostles and the evangelists and the teachers, as pens, by his Holy Spirit he engraves his message, the laws of God, on the heart.

What does it mean? First of all, it means to give them the very life and nature of God and then to educate them so that that life can be developed. What a lovely thing the Lord is saying when he invites you to remember him. Not merely that he's cancelled your sins and their

penalty in the past, he's going to make you like God, he's going to make you like himself. 'I promise it,' says he, 'and I seal my promise with my blood.'

I don't know about you, I suppose when you come to the Lord's Supper that you come every week and are hurrying to get there, glad to come and ready to burst forth into praise. I don't always. I come after a difficult week and boundless disappointment at my shabby, substandard Christianity. Perhaps like me you say, 'Where are all my resolutions of twenty years ago and am I no better than this, and is it worth trying to carry on?' I shouldn't be thinking of those things, should I? I should be like you, full of the Lord. I get round to it in the end, when he hands me the cup and I take it and he, knowing the worst, says, 'But you see, I signed it in my blood, I'm going to write my laws on your heart,' and do it he will. One day we shall be conformed to his image. You say, 'Lord, but this week I've failed.' 'I know that,' he says. Listen, 'Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.'

But do come, won't you? For the Lord means business and if I don't come, or if I come carelessly without any attempt to discern myself, just living as I always do then what will happen? I must mean business with the Lord, constantly saying to him, 'Now, Lord, what's the next thing that's got to change in my life? Lord, please deal with this.' But if I just come and sit carelessly, what will happen? Well, my dear fellow believer, what will happen is this. The Lord has covenanted to write his laws on your heart and signed the covenant in his blood. He will do it, only this time it mightn't be so comfortable for you. Do let him do it with your cooperation. Sometimes that will be painful; but if I don't cooperate it is a covenant and, if it means rigorous discipline, he will not stop short of that rigorous discipline to write his laws ever more deeply on my heart.

Do we have to come? Let me tell you a story. I was in a country far away from this and in a church I'd never visited before. On a Sunday morning they had two sessions. The first session was the Lord's Supper at which I was invited to pass on a word. Then after some break they had a second meeting at which I was invited to preach.

As they drove me home one of the elders asked me, 'What did you really think of our church today?'

I said, 'It was marvellous, I enjoyed the Lord's Supper and I was struck with how many unconverted people you got at the second session.' Because at the Lord's Supper there was a handful of people and at the second session there must have been getting on to one hundred or more.

I said, 'How marvellous to get such a crowd of unconverted people into the second session.'

And their faces fell. 'They weren't unconverted people,' he said, 'they were members of the church.'

'Members of the church but they weren't at the Lord's Supper?'

'No,' he said, 'in our church the majority don't come to the Lord's Supper. You can't make them come, can you? You can't tell them they have to come, so they don't come.'

That set me thinking. Well I've never been an elder so I've been excused the decision, but can you tell people they've got to come to the Lord's Supper? We'd better put the question to the Lord Jesus, 'Lord, do you tell people they ought to come to remember you, or have you left it optional?'

And when I think of that, I can't help remembering what Luke tells us in his early history of what happened on the day of Pentecost, when the multitude that so recently had denied that Jesus was the Messiah and had him crucified were brought to repentance by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. So they came to the apostles and said, 'What should we do?' They had come to believe that Jesus was, after all, the Messiah. They had murdered him and now in great consternation they came to the Apostle Peter, and said, 'What shall we do?'

He said, 'You'd better start by repenting' (Acts 2:36–38). He didn't tell them to believe—they believed already that Jesus was the Messiah, that was why they were upset. They were wondering what to do about the fact that they had murdered him.

He said, 'You'd better start by repenting.'

'And what will that mean?'

'Well you'll be baptised, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus.'

That was surely inconvenient for some of them. I can imagine some chap coming up to Peter and saying, 'Can I have a word with you, sir? You said that if we really repented we ought to be baptised. Well, I have repented but baptism would be highly inconvenient for me. My father is a leading member of the Sanhedrin and it would be awfully embarrassing for the family if I were to get baptised. So I've just come to make sure that I can repent without being baptised.'

What do you suppose Peter would have said?

'Did you not stand publicly here some weeks ago and say "Crucify him" when you stood with his murderers, and now you've repented. Well let me tell you, God won't take your say so unless you're prepared to show by your actions that you mean what you say. Publicly you denied him, now publicly you will confess him; and if you're not prepared, God isn't prepared to take your say so for it.'

So they got baptised because they had really repented. And then, having repented, Luke says this is what they did. 'And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship' (v. 42). They really believed that Jesus was the Messiah and Peter and company were his apostles. Jesus was God's Son incarnate and heir to the universe, so of course they came and consorted with the apostles and were eager to learn everything they could about the Messiah. You can't really say, 'I believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but that's as far as I'm interested to take it—I don't want to take it any further and get deeper into these things.' You don't? You don't want to get very deep into heaven, I suppose?

And they continued in the fellowship. Listen to John talking about the Lord Jesus, that great eternal Word who became flesh and men saw his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that your joy may be complete. (1 John 1:1–4)

To say that you've repented and believe in Jesus, but you're not interested in his fellowship would be odd talk, wouldn't it?

Not only did they continue in those things, they continued in the breaking of bread (1 Cor 11:42). At one time they had said that Jesus wasn't the Messiah-King, now they said they'd repented and had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah-King. They learnt from the apostles what the Messiah had said the night in which he was betrayed, 'Come, remember me.' The new covenant said that he would write his laws on their hearts; how could they say they had repented if in effect they turned round to the Lord Jesus and said, 'Well that's as may be, Lord. We have repented, but as for your writing your laws on our hearts and coming to remember you, we don't see the need for that.'

If the king says, 'Come, take this bread, take this cup. Let me remind you that I died that you might be forgiven and my purpose in saving you is that you and I might do business together as I write my laws ever more deeply on your heart,' how should I stay away if I could be present? And if I do stay away because I'm careless, or for some inadequate reason, how shall I face the Lord Jesus and persuade him that I have actually repented and received him as Lord?

Sometimes it is said that the Lord's Supper is such a solemn and grim time that you can concentrate too much on it. I suppose there is some truth in that. But we do also remember that the blessed Lord who died has risen and the act of remembering him is only 'until he comes'—so we remember his promised return. How shall we say that remembering the Lord's death is so lugubrious as would put us off? If it is, then you wouldn't be advised to go to heaven for the song sheet has already been printed in heaven, or at least the beginning of it has:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5-6)

Not for all eternity will God or you forget that you were once a sinner and Jesus died for you. It will remain the greatest wonder that ever will be revealed to you, though the experiences of God's eternal heaven be wonderful beyond our wildest imagination.

My dear brothers and sisters, it can be that the Lord's Supper becomes arid. We cannot command our emotions. Sometimes our emotions flow and sometimes they ebb and, to be frank, we come not feeling full of bounding love, bursting with praise. We should come nonetheless. Suppose your dear wife gives you some remarkable Christmas present, the like of which you've never had in all your days. She's saved up all her housekeeping money and scrimped on the Brussels sprouts for months to buy you this present. It so happens that when she gives it to you, you're having a bit of a hangover from the day before and you don't feel very good. Would you say, 'Well I don't feel like saying "Thank you, my dear", so I shan't'? On the contrary you say, 'I don't feel like doing it, but this I must do. Look at this thing she has given me!' You take yourself by the collar and shake yourself, because in the end it's not a matter of emotional feeling.

And so it is at the Lord's Supper, this is what the Lord Jesus did for me and I deliberately call on my soul to remember and to bless his holy name. God forbid that I should ever let

anything else so distract me that I could not attend to the remembrance of the Lord, for this in the end is the secret of his empire. This is how he proposes to govern us from now until an endless eternity.

*The Christian philosophy of man*, what it means to be a redeemed man and woman under the new regime, that has been our study in these two sessions.

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.