

Male and Female and the Glory of God **1 Corinthians 11:1-16**

We've seen a lot of volatility in our culture in recent years as groups of people react to past abuses and injustices. We've seen it from the black community and other minority groups, from the LGBT community, and from people fighting for women's rights to name a few. I think we would all agree that regardless of what we think about some of these groups, any abuse or injustice against human beings is wrong and needs to be ended.

But then there's the question of how far should you go? Putting a stop to abuse and injustice is one thing, but a lot of groups don't stop there, they try to go a lot further. And it's understandable if you put yourself in their shoes. If you've been abused and mistreated, it's only natural to want an accounting for those who hurt you, some kind of protection so it doesn't happen again, or some kind of reparation to make up for the pain you've gone through. But where do you draw the line? It seems to be in that space where things can end up going too far.

This morning I want to talk a little bit about the abuses against women. In many times and places throughout history women have been terribly mistreated, including our country. In some cases women have been treated like slaves, like property, like inferiors, like second class citizens. And sadly, it isn't just the pagan cultures that have done this. Many of the abuses against women have come from the church – from husbands and church leaders who have grossly misused Scripture to beat women into submission and demean them. In many churches women are treated as inferior and second-class members and it's an outrage.

This is deplorable and should be stood up against wherever it is happening. I am deeply sorry that these things have happened in the church. Jesus made it clear that women had tremendous value and worth – equal to that of men. He treated the women in his life with gentleness, love, and honor, much different than his culture, and we should too. We should treat women with the dignity and honor that God has given them and nothing less.

I've seen a lot of churches take these steps and it's a good thing, but I want to ask, can things be taken too far? If you look at our culture, women's rights groups have advocated for equal rights and a lot of good changes have been made, but I've also noticed that in the effort to fight for equal rights there also seems to be an effort to remove anything that would suggest that some differences might be

good, and that in some ways men and women are not exactly equal. I don't mean that one is superior or inferior to the other, I mean that there are real differences and that could actually be a good thing that we should celebrate and not try to erase.

I see a similar thing happening in churches. In theological circles people talk about "complementarianism" and "egalitarianism." According to Christianity.com, *"Complementarianism stresses that although men and women are equal in personhood, they are created for different roles. Egalitarianism also agrees that men and women are equal in personhood but holds that there are no gender-based limitations on the roles of men and women."* So egalitarianism tends to erase gender distinctions in marriage and the church and it seems to be growing in popularity among churches.

Is that what we should shoot for as we seek to honor women in the church? Is it demeaning and discriminatory to acknowledge differences between the sexes? Should we try to eliminate gender based roles in marriage and the church?

That was becoming an issue for the church of Corinth. The Reformation Study Bible explains that there were people in that city that were trying to obliterate the distinction between the sexes and that mindset was beginning to affect people in the church. Some of the people were beginning to question certain traditions that were emphasizing the distinction between men and women. Should they do away with that tradition? Paul writes about it in our passage for today.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-6

² Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. ³ But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵ but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶ For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.

I bet you wish you could preach on this passage! This is a very difficult passage to interpret – there are cultural difficulties, language difficulties, and assumptions

Paul made about what his original readers knew that we don't know. Plus, in our culture, some of this just sounds offensive. Scholars have all kinds of different interpretations, so I am going to present you with what I think is the correct interpretation based on the study I did and what I understand from the whole of Scripture.

Paul talks about maintaining the traditions in verse 2 and the particular tradition that was being called into question had to do with head coverings. When the people gathered for worship men were supposed to remove any head coverings they might have on and women were to put a head covering on. This was a tradition that was being passed on by Paul from church to church and in Corinth it was beginning to be pushed back against. Some people didn't want to keep doing it, so Paul offers a rebuttal in this passage.

He begins in verse 3 with a statement about the head of man, woman, and Christ. According to Leon Morris, the word translated "head" in this verse meant "source," like the head of a river. And at that time and place in history it never meant leader or authority like it does today. They just didn't think of "head" like that back then. So Paul is saying that the source of man is Christ, the source of a wife is her husband, or more generally, the source of woman is man, and the source of Christ is God. Or another way to say it is that man derives his being from Christ. Woman derives her being from man, which points to Eve being created from Adam's rib. And Christ derives his being from God.

Paul is pointing out that in God's original work of creation, he created there to be distinctions between male and female. They didn't have the same source. Adam was created from the dust of the ground and Eve was created with Adam's rib. Paul makes this statement because he's going to talk about the distinctions between men and women in the following verses and how that corresponds with the tradition of wearing head coverings.

First he talks about men. If a man worshipped with his head covered, Paul says it would dishonor his head, which was Christ. Thus men worshipped with their heads uncovered to honor Christ. He'll explain that more later. Then he moves on to women. If a woman worshipped with her head uncovered, she would dishonor her head, which was man. That's an interesting statement – what does he have in mind?

Well he gives a clue by bringing up another practice going on in their culture. There were some women in Corinth who were shaving their heads, which at that time was very counter-cultural. It wasn't about a different hairstyle, it was about making a statement. Women wore long hair in that culture and it was a sign of their womanhood. But according to the Reformation Study Bible, some women were shaving their heads as an intentional way to obliterate the distinctions between the sexes – to declare that they were not going to be governed by society's norms regarding the roles of men and women. Paul points out that this practice was seen as disgraceful in the church.

He goes on in verses 5-6 to say that if a woman was going to worship with her head uncovered she should just go ahead and shave her head. Why? Because it meant the same thing. So according to Paul, both practices in that culture were a denunciation of women as distinct from men. Both were a rejection of womanhood as distinct from manhood, which ties into Paul's earlier statement that for a woman to worship with her head uncovered was to dishonor her head, or source, which was man. She was rejecting the unique way that woman was created (by using Adam's rib) and the distinct role that was established by God that went along with it. She was denying the glory of woman and the glory of man.

So Paul felt pretty strongly about the tradition of head coverings and you can see he also felt strongly about the importance of the distinctions between men and women. He continues in verse 7...

Read 1 Corinthians 11:7-10.

⁷ 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. ⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

(I wonder how badly these verses have been misused by careless interpretation...) Paul points out in these verses that both men and women glorify God in worship by following the traditions regarding head coverings. Men glorify God in one way, women in another. So the head coverings or lack thereof were about glorifying God in unique ways. Paul says in verse 7 that for a man to worship without a head covering was to glorify God's creation of mankind in his image and glory. Humans

were created to be the image bearers of God and so for a man to worship with his head uncovered was to symbolize and demonstrate that. And it makes sense.

And when it came to women in worship, Paul refers to a woman's head covering as a sign of authority – not to be misunderstood as a sign of subjection or inferiority, but the opposite – Leon Morris points out that it was a sign that she had been given authority by God to glorify him in worship in a unique way. Therefore the head covering was a symbol of blessing, that in Christ women were just as valuable as men in bringing glory to God.

For a woman to wear that symbol of authority on her head was to glorify God's creation of mankind as male and female. Paul says "woman is the glory of man," which means she was made from man and for man. In other words, Eve was not the same as Adam, nor did she have the same role as Adam, and so it is for all women. The distinctions between male and female are a part of the glory of God in creation and a woman's head covering in worship was to symbolize that. Her head covering was to honor the glory of God as demonstrated in the creation of womanhood and manhood as distinct.

Therefore, Paul felt that the Corinthian believers should continue to observe the traditions regarding head coverings, especially in that culture where the glory of God demonstrated in the distinction of the sexes was being diminished.

You probably noticed that Paul mentions the angels and it seems that he has the angels who were watching over the believers in mind. They too would have been present in worship and they were all about obedience and submission to God. So for the women in Corinth to reject the tradition of wearing head coverings in worship would be seen as an act of defiance against God by the angels who were God's messengers that regularly appeared before him. It seems like Paul is suggesting that you don't want them bringing a report of defiance before God, (though I can't be certain).

Paul finishes his thoughts beginning with verse 11...

Read 1 Corinthians 11:11-16.

¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹² for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man

wears long hair it is a disgrace for him,¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.¹⁶ If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

So Paul clarifies that even though men and women are different and distinct, they are not independent of each other – woman was made from man in the original creation, but since then, man is born of woman.

And then Paul gives one more argument for why they should observe the tradition and he points to nature. He says, “Judge for yourselves...” Look at what occurs naturally... In that culture, men’s hair was naturally shorter and women’s hair was naturally longer. That’s obviously not always the case, but it was at that time and Paul points to it as further support for why they should observe the traditions of head coverings in worship. Celebrate the distinctions, don’t obliterate them. And don’t be contentious because it won’t be allowed in the church.

We don’t practice that tradition anymore. It was lost sometime in the past 2,000 years. Men still usually don’t wear hats in church, but it isn’t because we’re trying to demonstrate that mankind is created in the image and likeness of God, it’s simply a sign of respect. Women don’t wear head coverings anymore other than maybe an Easter hat, but that’s just dressing up, it’s not to demonstrate that God created man as male and female. And I don’t think we need to start up the tradition again, although if you want to on your own, you certainly can.

But I do think we need to pay attention to what the tradition was meant to highlight – For a man to remove his head covering in worship was to highlight that we have been created by God in his image and likeness, therefore we have incredible value and worth as human beings and that is equal when it comes to men and women. Men and women are equal in value and worth. Neither men nor women should ever be seen or treated as superior or inferior. Both sexes should be treated as equal in value.

But we have also been created by God as uniquely male and female and that’s what the head coverings for women were meant to highlight. Men and women are wonderfully different – and that’s a good thing! God has made us very different and he has given us unique roles by which we glorify him. Men glorify God the Father in their role as men and women glorify God the Son in their role as women. Together, men and women glorify the equality and distinction in the

relationship of God and Christ. Therefore, we shouldn't try to obliterate the differences between the sexes like we see happening in our culture, we should celebrate and honor them.

The church has done a poor job of this throughout history and often treated women as inferior in their role and that's terrible. Women are no more inferior in their role than Christ is inferior in his. Philippians 2:9-11 says, *"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* That doesn't sound inferior to me. That sounds highly honored. So as women glorify Christ in their role as women, that's how they are to be treated by men in marriage and in the church. That is the direction I believe God wants us to go – not to obliterate the sexes, but to celebrate and honor them.

So maybe you're a guy who's had a demeaning view of women. I challenge you to repent and seek the forgiveness of the women you've been devaluing and mistreating in your life. But it's not just men who do that, I've seen plenty of women who demean the role of women as well and that needs to stop. That has no place in the church of God.

On the other hand, maybe you've been caught up in the cultural reaction to the mistreatment of women and you've been trying to obliterate the differences between the sexes. I hope you can see why we shouldn't go there. We have been created uniquely by God to glorify the equality and distinctions of God the Father and God the Son and God doesn't want us to try to do away with that. He wants both men and women to embrace their roles in bringing him glory and do so with joy and honor. We can do so in our marriages and we can do so in the church, and there's always room for us to improve for the sake of the glory of God.