

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

A Symbol Of Authority

April 19th, 2015

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 11:2. That's on page 958 in your pew Bible. After last week's message I anticipated getting a fair bit of email. I expected to hear from folks who love tattoos, little old ladies and the nation of France. You were very kind. Of course it also helped that I left the country right after the message; so that worked out very well. If anything, this week's message is even more potentially controversial than last week. There is a cultural gap to be overcome and a fair bit of internal resistance to the message of this text as well. Therefore before we begin let me go to God and beg for help and mercy. Let us pray.

Hear now from God's Holy and inspired Word:

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. 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. 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. (1 Corinthians 11:2–16 ESV)

There are a lot of complicated linguistic and cultural issues at play in this text but most of them are peripheral to the main concern. Therefore what I want to do in the time that we have is to help you see 3 things in the text and then I want to discuss two very important practical implications as we attempt to respond to the text in our worship in the church today.

Three Important Things To See In This Text:

First of all, and most importantly, I'd like you to see:

1. **Paul's concern for the Corinthian Christians to manifest contentment with the created order in the manner of their corporate worship**

Like a good pastor Paul tries to balance encouragement and correction. Look at verse 2:

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.

You are doing some things very well when you gather for worship; you are doing a very good job of maintaining several of the traditions that I left with you HOWEVER, one thing you have forgotten is that the Gospel does not OBLITERATE gender, neither does the Gospel conflict with the created order, rather the Gospel restores that which was broken and it returns us to the original and GOOD design of God.

Apparently, there were some in Corinth who had wrongly interpreted what Paul taught about our oneness in the Gospel. Paul preached in Corinth for 18 months and so we can safely assume that he said to them many of the same things he said to other churches. He said for example, in Galatians 3:

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all **sons of God, through faith**.²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, **there is no male and female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ And **if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise**. (Galatians 3:26–29 ESV)

With respect to the promises God made to Abraham, there is no distinction between Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female. If you are in Christ by faith, then you are a full participant in our common inheritance. That's why he says: "you are all sons of God, through faith". Sons inherit. He isn't saying you are all boys as opposed to girls, he is saying, you are all HEIRS – EQUALLY; that's the point. However, as every pastor knows sometimes people hear things you didn't say, or at least they hear things you didn't mean. So here. Paul wants to be clear that while we are equal in Christ with respect to our salvation and inheritance we are still men and women. We are equal but different, **as at the first**. That is the main point that Paul is making.

That is also the reason that we cannot skip this passage. I know that many would like to. Many people view this topic and this passage as needlessly divisive. I've been told that there are people in this town who love our church, who want to come to this church but they don't and they won't because we teach on this issue. If we would just remain silent on this issue they would come and tithe and serve and we would be lucky to have them – or so the argument goes.

But we need this passage. We need this passage because it reminds us that the Gospel takes us home. The Gospel CANCELS the curse and brings us back – FOREVER under the favour of God. Do you remember the curse? One of the things God said to Eve after she and Adam had sinned was:

Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. (Genesis 3:16 ESV)

After the fall, the Bible says, the relationship between men and women is going to be characterized by resentment and oppression. Women will resent and men will oppress. How does that sound as a summary of gender relations for the last several thousand years or so? But in Christ, on the cross, the curse is forever CANCELLED. That's what the Gospel does. In the Gospel we believe that Christ BECAME the curse, he BORE the curse in his body on the tree so that we could be healed and saved and forgiven and RESTORED. Restored to what? What we were created to be. Male and female in the image of God. A unity of persons characterized by loving leadership, voluntary submission and a delight in mutual glorification. In other words, the only authorized analogy for the nature of God as Holy Trinity. That was what we were before we fell – the IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD!

Do you know why the second commandment says not to create any image of God? BECAUSE WE ARE THE IMAGE OF GOD! Male and female. A unity of diverse persons characterized by loving authority and voluntary submission resulting in mutual glorification and delight. THAT'S WHO GOD IS and that is who we were before we fell. But the Gospel brings us home. The Gospel CANCELS THE CURSE. The Gospel heals our resentments and rebukes our oppression and it changes us by degrees into the image of Christ himself so that we can be again, as we were at first, the only authorized analogy for the nature of God as Holy Trinity. When a Christian man lovingly leads and a Christian woman voluntarily submits and when a Christian couple delight in mutual glorification what you see there is something you can only see there. A picture of God as Holy Trinity. That MATTERS. That matters with respect to our voice on same sex marriage and that matters with respect to our witness with respect to gender and headship in the home and in the church.

So when you worship, Paul says, please don't forget that part of our story. Don't worship as if you don't BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL. SHOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE. SHINE that others might draw near and see and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. That is the heart and substance of this text but there are two other things that I would like you to see.

I would like you also to see:

2. Paul's desire for the Corinthians to express their contentment in culturally appropriate ways

Paul wants them to HAVE a distinctive Gospel identity AND he wants them to EXPRESS that identity in culturally appropriate ways. Every culture has a language and a variety of symbols that they intuitively understand. Dress is very much a part of that. As Judith Lynn Sebesta wrote in her book The World Of Roman Costume:

the traditional costume of the Roman matron "signified her modesty and chastity ... It consisted of her distinctive dress, the woolen *stola*, which was worn over a tunic; the protective woolen bands which dressed her hair; and the woolen *palla* or mantle, which was used to veil her head when she went out in public."¹

¹ Judith Lynn Sebesta, The World Of Roman Costume as cited in Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 516.

So a married, chaste, Roman woman who embraced her role as mother and wife and who operated chiefly in the domestic sphere dressed a certain way. She had a recognized costume. Sebesta goes on to explain:

For a married woman to neglect the covering of her head while in public would traditionally be understood as “a sign of her ‘withdrawing’ herself from matronage” and the decision of a Roman husband to divorce his wife for doing so would amount to “a ratification of the exclusion her bare head had expressed.” ... A move towards the abandonment of the female head covering would have struck many at the time as a move towards a more licentious, a more sexually provocative, way of appearing in public, precisely the kind of social influence Paul is anxious to avoid.²

Clothes communicate. If the women heard Paul’s preaching when he was with them in Corinth and misunderstood that to mean that they were no longer women IN ANY MEANINGFUL WAY and that they should abandon their marriages and begin to live as GENDERLESS CHRISTIANS – Paul is now very eager to correct that misunderstanding. “Put your mom clothes back on and conduct yourself in a way that will not bring scandal and shame upon the name of Christ”. That’s what he is saying. Communicate through your clothing that you love being a wife, that you love being a mom and you love being a woman. Communicate your Gospel identity in culturally accessible ways.

Now I think that it rather goes without saying that we will need to think through afresh how to communicate our Gospel identity as men and women to our culture today. That is not accommodation that is contextualization. Accommodation is when we change the message to appease the culture. Contextualization is when we change our methods to communicate the SAME message to a new culture. That’s what is called for here. If you come to church next Sunday wearing a Roman palla I don’t think that will communicate your Gospel identity in any meaningful way to our culture. But there are dozens of ways to communicate these same values in symbols and actions that make sense today. Andreas Kostenberger in his book Men, Women and the Bible says for example that when a wife takes her husband’s last name in our culture, that communicates a lot of what a Roman palla communicated in Paul’s day. We certainly notice when a woman doesn’t take her husband’s last name don’t we? Now, that one act does not communicate all of what we would want to in our culture, but I offer that just as an example of a symbol that means something in line with our Gospel identity and that is immediately intelligible to the people in our context today.

²Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 517.

Now, I do think that dress still communicates an awful lot that we need to pay attention to. When a woman comes to church dressed like she's going to a dance club; that communicates. When a 45 year old mother of two gets surgical enhancements, that communicates. I'm not prepared to advocate for MOM JEANS or anything that banal, but I do think we communicate with our clothing even today. Men and women at church should give some thought to all the ways they can communicate their restored identity as male and female in the image and likeness of God. However that looks – and we should talk more about that in our same gendered peer groups within the church as per the instructions given in Titus 3 – but however that looks, Paul is concerned that the Corinthians find culturally appropriate ways to express their Gospel identity as men and women under Christ.

Thirdly, I want you to see and appreciate:

3. Paul's assigned priority to the issue of gender in this discussion of corporate worship

I think I mentioned last week that Paul begins a new section of content at 11:2 that runs all the way through to 14:40. Commentators often talk about a transition from personal worship to corporate worship or something to that effect. What's interesting then is that the very first thing Paul wants to say about corporate worship relates to the issue of gender and headship. That is interesting because we so often hear that this issue is NOT a Gospel issue and therefore should not be allowed to divide Christian fellowship. Now, I think we've already seen that this is a Gospel issue, in fact I struggle to understand what in the Bible is NOT a Gospel issue. The Gospel is the message of the Bible. It is the story of God and his perfect character and his perfect for all creation. It is the story of us. The crown of God's creation and yet, because of the fall, terribly reduced and corrupted by sin and tragically unable to do that which we need to do to maintain fellowship with our creator. It is the story of how God answers that problem in the person of Jesus Christ. It is the story of grace offered and grace responded to by the redeemed. It is the story of people saved, changed, displayed and gathered into the glory that God envisioned from before the world began. It is, in other words, the GOSPEL. So how is this not part of that? It is absolutely INTEGRAL to that. That is the point that Paul is making in this passage so to say that this is not a Gospel issue is only to betray a total ignorance of the Gospel story. This is a Gospel issue and in addition this is a WORSHIP ISSUE of obviously some priority. Paul

mentions it FIRST and he gives it about the same word count that he gives the next topic of Holy Communion. Would anyone like to suggest that THAT IS NOT A GOSPEL issue? I'm not suggesting that we can determine priority based on word count but I am suggesting that it is a very dangerous thing for us to try and decide what things in God's Word can safely be ignored. If it is here it is here for a reason and not only is it here it is accorded PRIORITY POSITION here in Paul's discussion of corporate worship.

It matters. It seems to matter a great deal to Paul and so it should not be skipped or scorned by us. It is important to Paul that women be permitted to participate in corporate worship – let's not miss that; that actually was absolutely REVOLUTIONARY AT THE TIME – but in their participation he wants them to be careful to manifest a contentment with and a restoration to the created order. That's important for Paul and I think that all of that should be important to us.

Lastly, I want to close by highlighting two important practical implications.

Two Important Practical Implications:

1. The worship of the church must be informed by the content of the Gospel

That is the assumption behind ALL of what Paul has to say about corporate worship for the next several chapters. He is addressing GOSPEL DEFICIENCIES IN THEIR CORPORATE WORSHIP. In the next section on the Lord's Supper that is very obvious and transparent. Paul has nothing good to say about that part of their worship service because not only does it OBSCURE the Gospel as does this mishandling of gender issues, but it actually aggressively CONTRADICTS THE GOSPEL. He will talk about how they are not eating together, the rich have larger portions than the poor, there is an obsession with seating and status and it has become a Gospel denying GONG SHOW and Paul actually goes so far as to say, if that is how you are going to do communion than better that you stay home. That part of your worship actually DENIES THE GOSPEL. It is so far off. Paul's overriding concern is that the WAY they worship must accord with the CONTENT of the Gospel.

That concern needs to be freshly attended by the church in every generation. Let me give you an example of a way that I have seen the way we worship actually begin to contradict the message

of the Gospel in our day. I am very concerned with the trend over the last 20 years towards the ubiquity of targeted church. Smart people have figured out that you can grow a church much faster by targeting a specific demographic. It turns out that unsaved people like to hang around with people who are the same colour as they are, the same age as they are and who come from the same socio-economic bracket as they do. So it tends to be much easier to attract people to a church that already looks like them. I began my ministry career in a church that unashamedly identified itself as a church for baby boomers. I was the youth pastor and my job was to look after their kids. I have come to realize the complete Gospel bankruptcy of that approach. For one thing it completely marginalizes seniors and those with disabilities. The smart people do not tend to target them and so they get left behind. For another thing it obscures the fact that the Gospel is the message of our reconciliation! The Gospel gathers us back into the household of God through the adoption that is ours in Christ. A family has moms and dads and it has kids and it has grandparents. It has people of every age and category united together under one head, and gathered together around one table. That's the Gospel and so when we worship as a church we need to look like we believe.

Secondly,

2. The way we live and worship as saved men and women needs to tell a story about the power of the Gospel to redeem and reconcile the whole of God's creation

Paul has been concerned throughout this letter with how Christians are perceived. He is constantly worried about how what we do will LOOK to other people. We talked about that last week. In chapter 8 he was concerned about what would happen if someone SAW you eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. He was worried about what that might communicate and he doubled down on that concern in chapter 10. Likewise he will express again in chapter 14 that he is very concerned that their careless and unbiblical use of the gift of tongues in corporate worship would communicate a culture of chaos and silliness to the watching world. He says:

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? (1 Corinthians 14:23 ESV)

Paul is concerned with how our personal and corporate conduct COMMUNICATES to on

looking people. Here in chapter 11 we see evidence of a similar concern. Paul puts a stop to behavior that would have communicated something he didn't communicate and he tells them to begin behaving in a way that will communicate the things he wants them to communicate. We also catch just a hint of another and very much related concern and while I don't want to open a can of worms here, I want you to see it because it is there. Look at verse 10. Paul says:

That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, **because of the angels**. (1 Corinthians 11:10 ESV)

Because of the angels. Paul wants us to be careful to ensure that when we participate in corporate worship we give evidence that we have been restored to our created identity as male and female in the image and likeness of God. BECAUSE OF THE ANGELS. What does that mean? Now, we can't be dogmatic here because good Christians offer several suggestions as to what this means, but it seems to me, given the context of Paul's explicit concerns and given the things Paul has said about angels elsewhere, that his concern may be that when angels come to look into the progress of God's redemptive work and they see a gathered church that looks nothing like men and women were created to look that may confuse and even outrage the angels who are eager to look into these things. Did you know that the Bible says that ANGELS eagerly watch us in order to understand God's work in the Gospel? The Bible says:

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached **the good news** to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, **things into which angels long to look**. (1 Peter 1:12 ESV)

Angels are interested in the progress and effect of the Gospel! God is TEACHING THE UNIVERSE through the restoration of the crown and climax of his creation. Paul said that in Ephesians chapter 3. He was very aware that his ministry of preaching and explaining the Gospel, while directed at human beings was being eagerly watched by the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. He had a human audience AND AN ANGELIC AUDIENCE and he wanted his churches to KNOW IT. He said:

⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,¹⁰ **so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places**. (Ephesians 3:8-10 ESV)

When we gather as the church we are not the only ones who come to hear the Gospel, Paul says.

THE ANGELS COME AS WELL. They are eager to look into these things. They want to understand. One day the angels will submit to us as indeed Paul already said back in 1 Corinthians 6 and so they are eager to watch as God restores the creatures who will one day RULE THE WORLD! They want to see what God is doing in the Gospel because what the Gospel does in you and me has consequences for every other creation in creation. Paul said that in Romans 8. So, they are watching and waiting for the Gospel to do its work on YOU; on us as men and women. Think about that, Paul says, when you gather together to worship.

Now, I don't know for sure who is here today, watching us worship but I wonder what they see who are here. More of the same as confusion and resentment and conflict as in culture? More of the curse? More of the fall? Or do they see unity and friendship; loving leadership and joyful submission and perpetual delight one in another? In other words: DO THEY SEE GOD WHEN THEY SEE US? Do they see the Gospel in all its power to restore?

I pray that they do. Increasingly, by degrees, by the grace of God in Christ I pray that they do.

Prayer: O God, help us to be a people transformed by the Gospel when we gather in this place to worship. Help us to be men who lead lovingly and sacrificially. Help us to be women who help faithfully and who create beautifully. Help us to tell a story to whoever is watching about the power of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in whose Name we pray, amen.