

## Honoring God's Order in a Disordered World (1 Corinthians 11:1-16)

When teaching about the end times, Jesus warned, “*And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold*” (Matthew 24:12). How many of you know, we are living in a time of increasing lawlessness and disorder (Matthew 24:12). Concerning this disorder, God's word also says in James 3:12 *that where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice*. In other words, lawlessness and disorder brings both confusion and chaos.

And this chaos, which results when God's order of things is not honored, manifests itself in various ways. Recently, we've seen mobs of people breaking into stores and looting. This past week 3 men, who thought they were the law, were found guilty of killing an innocent man jogging down the street. In another senseless act of violence, a deranged man in a red SUV ran over innocent participants in a parade.

Now the disorder and chaos in our world not only manifests itself in vile and violent acts towards others, but also in cultural phenomenon like transgenderism. Transgenderism, as society defines it, is a condition where someone feels they are not the same gender that they were at birth. How many of you know, putting our feelings above the way God ordered creation does not lead to happiness and fulfillment, but confusion and chaos.

In his book, *The Church in Babylon*, Erwin Lutzer writes: “Transgendered people tell us that their bodies don't match their internal reality. The trans movement believes that relief from this dysphoria can only come if the outer “false” appearance is changed to match the inner “true” state of the person.” In Bruce Jenner's case, he puts it this way, “Bruce Jenner ... was ‘always telling lies.’ Caitlyn Jenner ... ‘doesn't have any lies.’ ... Caitlyn Jenner has the possibility to make it right.”

What do we say to those who insist they must live according to their feelings or orientation and not according to their biological anatomy?

After all, they tell us they want to live “authentically.” Shouldn’t people always be “true to who they feel they are”? The legendary UCLA head coach John Wooden once said: “Being true to ourselves doesn’t make us people of integrity. Charles Manson [now deceased] was true to himself, and as a result, he rightly is spending the rest of his life in prison. Ultimately, being true to our Creator gives us the purest form of integrity.”

Now, keep in mind that like the church today, the church of Corinth was also in the midst of a society that was filled with moral confusion, chaos and corruption. So Paul wrote to the church of Corinth and exhorted them to live counter-cultural lives in the midst of such a perverse society to the glory of Christ.

**Main idea:** Whatever the culture is doing around us, the church must honor God’s order of things and reflect the culture of His kingdom.

To unfold this theme, we are going to consider three counter-cultural ways that the church is to honor God’s order of things so that we might shine for Christ in a disordered world.

### **1. God’s order is honored when we adhere to cultural norms that are rooted in biblical truth.**

Notice first of all that the church is to honor God’s order by adhering to cultural norms that are rooted in biblical truth. After exhorting the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitated Christ, (v.1) Paul writes, *“Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you”* (1 Corinthians 11:2).

Paul didn’t just talk the talk, he walked the walk. And through the message of the gospel and the scriptural traditions that he lived by and passed on, Paul impacted many lost souls for Christ. But although the Corinthians, received the message of the gospel and the scriptural tradition that he delivered, they didn’t always apply them correctly. Many of the Corinthian believers understood that they were free in

Christ and no longer had to follow the ceremonial and dietary laws of Moses. However, freedom in Christ does not mean that we can disregard how our actions may impact others.

As we learned in previous messages, the ultimate factor for determining our actions as Christ's followers is not what we feel our liberties are, but the law of love. When counter-cultural Christians make decisions, they don't just consider their interests, but the interests of others (Philippians 2).

Furthermore, counter-cultural Christians understand that like God fine-tuned creation to sustain physical life, God has also established order in how the people of His Kingdom are to live for their good and His glory. God's order of things, like how a marriage and family is to function, should permeate the culture of the church, family and society.

America, for example, was founded on Judeo/Christian ethics and principles. In other words, many of the laws and ethics that govern our society were rooted in scripture. No doubt one of the reasons why America has survived and has been a prosperous nation is because of its Judeo/Christian heritage. God ordained government to establish order. Because for a civilized society to function, there has to be an established order that people adhere to and follow.

But in more recent times, the Judeo-Christian heritage that has influenced our culture, especially regarding how a nuclear family should function, has been under attack and is eroding. And the breakdown of marriage and family has resulted in an increase of lawlessness, confusion and chaos in our society.

Now, as I noted, the church in Corinth in Paul's day also lived in a society that was morally corrupt and decaying. One of the challenges to the church of Corinth in reflecting the culture of the kingdom was that it was made up of believers from different backgrounds and traditions. Some in the church had certain customs and traditions that were very important to them because they were rooted in God's order of things.

Some believed that women should wear head coverings in the church, but that men on the other hand should not wear head coverings. Others in the church, because of their understanding of their freedoms in Christ, did not feel the need to adhere to appropriate cultural norms.

Now the problem in the church of Corinth wasn't that it was made up of people from different cultures and traditions, rather the problem lay in the dysfunctional way they related to one another, which led to disorder and division in the church.

So, to deal with the disorder and division in the church, Paul pointed the Corinthians to God's order of things in marriage and in the church. When Christians honor God's order of things, healthy cultural norms will be developed and maintained so that God's kingdom order is established.

This brings us to a second way that the church of God is to honor God's order of things in a disordered world.

## **2. God's order is honored in our submission to God ordained authority.**

In addition to adhering to cultural norms that are rooted in biblical truth, God's order is honored in our submission to God ordained authority. After commending the Corinthians believers for maintaining the traditions that he had delivered to them, Paul continues: "*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*" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Keep in mind that one of the main problems in the church of Corinth was disorder in their public gatherings. As Warren Wiersebe explained, "Some of the women were [assuming certain liberties that they should not have]; there was disorder at the Lord's Supper, and there was confusion in the use of the spiritual gifts. The church had been enriched with spiritual gifts, but they were lacking in spiritual

graces...Paul sought to restore order by reminding the Corinthians that God had made a difference between men and women, that each had a proper place in God's economy."

Now concerning the differences between men and women, Paul emphasizes first of all that the head of every man is Christ. The fact that Paul doesn't mention that Christ is also the head of a women doesn't mean that He is not. Christ is the head of the whole church, which includes women. What Paul is emphasizing here is God's order in marriage and in the church. In a marriage, God's has given the responsibility of headship to the husband. And in the church, God has given the responsibility of overseeing the flock, as Pastors and elders, to men that meet the biblical qualifications.

It's important to note also that the different roles and responsibilities that God assigns to men and women in the home and in the church has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. Men and women are equal in Christ. The difference has to do with order and function. Notice that Paul also points out that the head of Christ is God (v.3). In the godhead, God the Son is subordinate to God the Father in His role, but in essence He's co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. Similarly, a husband and wife are equal in worth, but are different in their roles and function.

It's important to also note, that Paul's reference to Christ's headship over man not only has to do with God's order in creation, but also with what qualifies a man to exercise headship in the home and in the church. A wife is to submit to her husband's leadership in the home as he submits to Christ.

And as she does she lifts her husband up to fulfill his responsibility of headship in the home. And a husband, as Paul writes in Ephesians 5:25, is to love His wife as Christ loved the church. When a wife and husband fulfill their roles in marriage, they experience a divine oneness that reflects both the love relationship between Christ and the church, and the perpetual love relationship in the 3 persons of the godhead.

God's kingdom operates under the principles of authority. As Adrian Rogers put it, "We will never be over what God has put under us until we are under what God has put over us." To be change agents for Christ in this disordered world, the church must honor God's kingdom order in the home, as well as in the church, in the power of the Spirit to the glory of Christ.

This brings us a third way the church is to honor God's order of things in a disordered world.

### **3. God's order is honored when we respect and embrace the God designed distinctions between men and women.**

God's order is honored when we respect and embrace the God designed distinctions between men and women. After establishing God's order of authority and headship, Paul continues: "*Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head,<sup>5</sup> 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.*" (1 Corinthians 11:4-5)

Now before we get into what head coverings are all about, it's important to note that most commentators agree that the precise meaning of Paul's instructions and how they apply today is not easy to determine. And one of the main reasons his instructions here and in the subsequent verses are hard to interpret and apply is that they are connected to the cultural norms in Paul's day.

Concerning the cultural norms in Paul's day, Greg Allen explained, "It is my personal conviction that the main issue is not the symbols themselves. Such things as the length of hair, or the covering of heads, were culturally determined symbols for that time; and they vary from one culture to another. But the real issue was the rejection of the idea of humble submission to a divine order of headship in the household of faith—however that headship may be culturally symbolized. In another time or place, it may be that it was symbolized by the covering or uncovering of the head. In our time and culture, it may be symbolized by the wearing of a wedding ring, and by the wife taking

the last name of her husband. But I believe that the main point of this passage is that—whatever the temporal, outward symbols of that headship may be—we must honor the Lord’s pattern of headship in the way that we worship in His household of faith.”

Another reason that these verses are hard to interpret is that the word for covering could be a reference to long hair, as we see in verse 15, or it could also mean something like a shawl or veil that is placed over the head as a symbol of respect and modesty. Some also believe that the covering is a reference to how a woman should wear her hair in a public church gathering, namely in a bun on top of her head as opposed to flowing down on her shoulders.

There are churches today that dogmatically practice and require women in a church gathering to wear their hair in a bun or to cover their heads with some kind of veil based on how they interpret this passage. I lean towards the head covering being a reference to some kind of veil, which in Paul’s day, was a symbol of a women’s respect for authority, femininity and modesty. But whatever Paul meant by head covering, we should not lose sight of what head coverings for women and no head coverings for men was pointing to.

Paul makes clear that if a man prays or prophesies in the church with a head covering, he dishonors his head and if a woman does not wear a head covering she dishonors her head (v.4-5). Now Paul uses the word head here to mean not just a person’s physical head, but as a reference to headship and authority.

Remember that in verse 3, Paul laid out God’s order of authority in the home, which applies also to the church. In the home and in the church men and women are to reflect the glory of the godhead by honoring God’s order and the distinctions He ordained between male and female. And because of the importance of obeying God’s order of things, Paul instructs the church of Corinth to maintain certain cultural norms, like head coverings, because they symbolized and demonstrated respect for God’s order.

This demonstration of respect for God's order was not a light thing for Paul. Notice that he continues in verse 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"* (1 Corinthians 11:6).

What Paul is saying here is that if a women would not adhere to the established cultural norm that was rooted in scripture as a way to honor God's order of authority in the home and in the church, she might as well shave off all her hair. And it's important to know that in Paul's day a woman with a shaved head, was defiantly demonstrating that she did not respect the God designed distinction between men and women.

So, what Paul seems to be saying, as one bible teacher put it, is "if she is going to throw off the symbol of her husband's headship, she is heading down a road of shame and might as well go all the way with it. But however we understand this, the main point remains the same. We should not cast off the meaningful symbols of headship; but honor God's appointed roles for us in His divine order of things—and especially do so when we worship in His house." Greg Allen

To further emphasize the importance of demonstrating respect for God's order through outward cultural symbols of authority, Paul explains: *"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. <sup>8</sup> For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup> That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels."* (1 Corinthians 11:7-10).

When Paul says that a man ought not to cover his head since he is the image and glory of God, he's speaking of an outward sign for how a man showed respect and honor to God's authority over him while in God's house. This is a practice that many men still exercise today as they will remove their hats when in God's house or when they pray. It's a sign of respect for God's authority over them.



On the other hand, while a man would avoid covering his head in order to show honor to God, a woman in Paul's day would cover her head, because she is the glory of man. This doesn't mean that a woman is inferior to a man, but rather by wearing a covering she is demonstrating in the house of God that she honored her husband's God ordained headship over her.

Furthermore when Paul writes, "*For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man,*" (v8-9) he is not saying that a man is superior to a woman and a woman is inferior to a man. Rather Paul is pointing to God's order of things, which includes the way a husband and a wife are to relate to one another for the glory of God. But although men and women are distinct in this, both are created in God's image and are therefore equal in worth and value.

Now to emphasize the equality of men and women and their interdependence, Paul explains in verse 11, "*Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; <sup>12</sup> for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God*" (1 Corinthians 11:11-12).

Although men and women are different in roles and function, *in the Lord*, these distinctives complement one another. A husband is not better or more important than his wife and vice versa. God made us different to make us one. There's a mutual interdependence within marriage. And this is also true in the church. We need each other to be all that God called us to be.

Let me emphasize again that the cultural symbols of authority that Paul points to are not the main point of the text. The real issue was the honoring of God's divine order of headship in the home and in the church however that headship may be culturally symbolized. It's important that when we are trying to understand difficult passage, like our passage this morning, that we keep the main thing the main thing.

There's a principle for interpreting the bible that says, "The Plain Things are the Main Things and the Main Things are the Plain Things." In other words, don't read more into the text than what is stated in the text. And don't base your spiritual and doctrinal convictions on obscure passages of scripture. Furthermore, don't obsess over unclear and hidden implications of a passage as much as you are to observe the plain message being taught by the text itself.

With this in mind, notice that Paul further emphasizes the importance of adhering to the cultural norms of his day, which demonstrated the greater implication of God's order and authority. Concerning God's order of authority in marriage, Paul writes: "*That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*" (1 Corinthians 11:10).

What do angels have to do with a wife honoring the cultural symbols of showing honor to her husband's headship in the home? Because Paul doesn't make clear what he means in the text, I won't make any dogmatic statements. What I will do is give you two possible interpretations for what Paul might be speaking about.

Some commentators suggest that Paul is speaking of fallen angels that rebelled against God. Regarding fallen angels, some believe based on their interpretation of Genesis 6, that these fallen angels took on human form and had sexual relations with the daughters of men, producing a race of giants. Under this interpretation, the suggestion is that Paul is pointing to fallen angels that rejected God's order, which resulted in chaos and captivity, as example of what not to do.

One other possible interpretation is that Paul is referring to angels who worshipped God and are submitted under his authority. Concerning angels who worship God, Paul pointed out earlier in his letter to the Corinthians, as did Peter in his letter, that angels are intently looking at what's going on in the church (1 Cor. 4:9; 1 Peter 1:12). The author of Hebrews also refers to angels as ministering spirits sent out to serve the inheritors of salvation.

So according to these passages, some commentators suggest that angels have been given the awesome responsibility of watching over and protecting the worship of God. As we gather for worship, angels are present and are observing what we do. Therefore we should be joining with them in the worship of God and in submission to God's order of things rather than working against it.

Now whether Paul is referring to fallen angels as an example of what not to do or to angels who are watching over us, remember that the greater implication is not what the angels are doing but what the church is doing to honor God's order. In light of this, it appears that in the name of freedom in Christ, some in the church of Corinth were casting off God's order of things to exercise what they believed they had the liberty to do.

Because of this, Paul admonishes them saying: "*Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered?*" <sup>14</sup> *Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him,* <sup>15</sup> *but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering*" (1 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Now to further reinforce his teaching, Paul challenges those who are disregarding it to "*judge for themselves*" by considering the natural order of things. What would observing the natural order of things tell the Corinthians about head coverings being a symbol of God's order? Paul explains that nature itself teaches them that only women have been given a built-in head covering, but men have not. In other words, generally speaking, throughout history, long hair on a woman not on a man was a display of her feminine beauty.

In light of this, how many of you know, we are living in a time, where the cultural norms that distinguished womanhood and manhood are being blurred. Even the most certain and obvious ways that we distinguish a man from a woman, namely one's physical anatomy, is being dismissed. In our society, many consider the distinctions between male and female as just a social construct. In fact, our society has embraced terms like non-binary. A non-binary person is defined

in our society as someone who does not identify as exclusively a man or a woman. Remember putting your feelings above the way God ordered creation does not lead to happiness and fulfillment, but confusion and chaos.

Now because of the disordered society we live in, to be a light in the darkness, the church needs to be intentional about maintaining distinctive elements that distinguish between masculinity and femininity. If there are certain hairstyles in our culture that are associated with the distinctions between femininity and masculinity, we should uphold them. If a certain kind of jewelry, or clothing, or makeup pertains to a woman, than a man ought not to wear it and vice versa. Where our culture has blurred the gender lines, we must be careful to maintain and clearly uphold them.

Now, as Paul wraps up his teaching on the cultural norms that demonstrate a man and a woman's submission to God's order, Paul concludes, *"If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God"* (1 Corinthians 11:16).

It appears that Paul anticipated that some would protest his teaching and continue the practice casting off their head coverings. To those who would contentiously insist on this dismissive practice, Paul says, *"we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God."*

## **Conclusion**

O brothers and sisters, we must not dismiss the God ordained distinctives that demonstrate to a watching world the loving headship of Christ in our lives. Whatever the culture is doing around us, or how it may protest, to shine brightly for Christ the church must honor God's order of things and reflect the culture of His kingdom.

May we by God's grace live such distinct lives under the headship of Christ before angels and the world that this confused and chaotic society can look to the church for the salvation that only Christ can give to the glory of His name.

