



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Title: Worship Concerns Pt 1

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Passage: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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Just a disclaimer as we get started today...some of you are going to be offended! The goal is not to offend. But some of you will be offended. If you find yourself in that place when we are done today, Andy Malcolm will be glad to meet with you and make it all better.

Honestly, this is one of the harder messages I've prepared for in this series and part of the reason for that is because there are multiple views out there and there isn't full consensus on everything Paul says here. When it comes to addressing things of cultural importance from the 1st century we can't fully know how all of this was thought of or received. So, I want to do my best to set the stage for what was happening culturally and historically so we understand what Paul is writing about as he addresses this issue with the Corinthian church. For a couple weeks now we've been talking about Christian liberty and showing love to people.

Our liberty, or freedom in Christ, doesn't give us permission to be unloving toward other people.

Let me set the stage a little and then let's read the passage together. If you have been with us during this study you will hopefully remember that one of the dynamics in the city of Corinth was the worship of Aphrodite. At the temple of Aphrodite there were said to be as many as 1,000 temple prostitutes. In this culture one of the primary ways you knew if someone was virtuous or promiscuous was what they did with their head and hair. A virtuous person, especially a married woman, would cover their head. You still see this in middle eastern cultures today. It was also a sign of submission. The head covering lets the people around you know that you are married and therefore protected- if they do anything to mess with you there can be trouble! Promiscuous women did not cover their head and often cut their hair short as a sign of their availability.

Something we don't fully get in our culture, because we have different dynamics and patterns of behavior, is that a woman's hair was also seen as a very sensual thing. Jewish men often didn't see their wife's hair let down until their wedding

night. We actually see a picture of that in Song of Solomon 4 when we get a glimpse into the wedding night of Solomon and the Shulamite bride.

:: Song of Solomon 4:1

¹ How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful!

Your eyes behind your veil are doves.

Your hair is like a flock of goats

descending from the hills of Gilead.

First, to the men out there- it's probably not going to work for you to tell your wife her hair looks like a flock of goats descending down the hills of Bays Mountain! But for Solomon, this is the first time he's seeing his bride's hair as he removes her veil. He let's her hair down and it's a very sensual thing in that culture.

Now we move to the letter Paul is writing and we see an issue in worship gatherings where Paul is addressing head coverings. If you were just at home reading this it may not make much sense to you, so I hope to bring some context around it today so we understand what the issue is and why Paul addresses it. Here's what I want you to know as we read the passage together:

This is an issue that is raising concerns about what is appropriate in worship. There are things dividing people in the worship of God and Paul is attempting to bring peace and understanding to the situation.

Earlier we read this passage together from the NIV, which I typically speak from, but this morning I am going to use the ESV because of one major area where I think it translates this passage more properly. The NIV is going to use the word "woman," while the ESV more appropriately (I think) translates the word "gynē" (goo-nay') as "wife." We'll talk about why that matters in a minute.

The other difficult area of translation for this passage is the fact that the word "head" can mean one of three things that scholars wrestle over.

"Head can mean...

- a. The physical head on your shoulders.**
- b. Head = authority (she is the head of her company; he is the head of the team)**
- c. Head = source (the headwaters of the TN River are the Holston and French Broad rivers)**

I'll try to make sense of that as we dig in to this passage today.

Here's what Paul writes:

:: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (ESV)

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.

The first thing I want you to notice in this passage is that
In God's Kingdom there is a natural order to things

In the same way there are structures and order in governments and businesses, and the military, there is a way God has ordered things in the family and the Church. Paul gives us this order in verse 3:

- The head of every man is Christ.

- The head of a wife is her husband. (This is why I don't like the NIV translating this word "woman" instead of "wife." Men are not the head, or authority, of women. A husband is the head of his own wife. Women do not act in submission to all men, but they do submit to their own husband.)

- The head of Christ is God.

This is an important conversation to have, especially in our culture today where the word “submission” is a nasty word: **Submission is mutual commitment and cooperation. While there must be lines of authority in marriage, there should not be lines of superiority.**

Submission isn't negative. We see this even with Jesus- who is God- yet was willing to put Himself willingly under the authority of the Father in order to carry out the plan of salvation. Man isn't superior to woman, but in the family and in the church God has given men roles of leadership with authority, or headship, over women.

- In the home the husband is the head of the wife. But when you read Ephesians 5 you see very clearly that role is not one of superiority but of servanthood. Paul very clearly instructs husband to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for the Church. We are called to give our lives up for our wives, not to Lord over them.
- In the church the two clear areas of male leadership are the role of Lead Pastor and Elder. Those two roles are designed for male leadership. Women can serve and lead in every other area of the church, and here at GFC we practice that. Women in our church serve as deacons, as LG Leaders, as Ministry Team Leaders, and in staff roles. But the role of Pastor and Elder are given to men in God's economy for how to lead the Church.

Every time in the New Testament Paul addresses this topic he goes back to the order of creation. The leadership role of men in the home and the church is not about importance or value, it's about created order. God set these roles, we uphold them.

Then Paul points to husbands in the church and wives in the church and addresses concerns he has about their worship gatherings and things that were causing divisions and distractions.

He tells men when they pray or prophesy they should not cover their heads, but when women come to worship and pray or prophesy they should cover their heads. This passage always gets particularly sticky for women- especially Western women in the 21st century! Why are women supposed to cover their heads in worship? Let me give you two things to understand here:

1. The principle understanding of women wearing a veil in this culture was to show submission to their husbands. When someone saw a woman in this culture wearing a veil, or head covering, they knew that woman was showing honor and respect to her husband. A woman who didn't wear a head covering in the worship gathering was openly demonstrating that she was acting against her husband or didn't recognize his authority.
 - We don't have a culture that demonstrates willing submission in that physical way. But I have seen this demonstrated by many women I respect greatly in different ways. One of those ways is when I ask a married woman to serve in some capacity in our church, I frequently hear

this response: “Thank you for asking me, I’m honored; let me speak with my husband about this before I give you an answer.”

- This can be a two way street. I often have people ask me to do something or support something financially and my response is, “Before I commit to that, let me talk with my wife.” I want to make sure we are in lock-step on decisions we make.
- Then when the occasional thing happens in our home that I feel one way and my wife feels another, she has often been willing to submit to my leadership in the home to make a decision, trusting that I am seeking God’s leadership in the decision.
 - o Illustration: Originally, moving to Kingsport wasn’t something Heather was excited about. We had just established our family in Arkansas a few years earlier, our kids were starting to get into school and we had just bought a house. But I felt strongly that God was calling us away from that ministry in order to join this one. Even though Heather wasn’t thrilled, she willingly followed my lead and didn’t make the move miserable! That’s the picture of a modern way a wife demonstrates her submission to her husband- it’s not a physical sign, it’s a posture of the heart.

Which leads us to the second point:

2. In Paul’s letter this was also an issue of modesty and indecency for the people of the first century.

- Remember that in the Corinthian culture the Temple Prostitutes did one of two things to make themselves known as being available and not under the covering of a husband: they cut their hair short or they wore their hair uncovered.
- When women began coming into the church and praying and prophesying with their hair uncovered it was a major problem. For the Jewish women it was a sign of indecency and for the men it was a major distraction. The modern day equivalent might be if a woman got on stage to lead worship in a really tight, low cut top. It’s going to be hard for most men to worship God in that moment because they are distracted by the beauty of the woman.
 - o Ladies, I know you hate that! But you just need to know men are wired much differently than you. Most men (not all) are more visually stimulated than most women (not all).
 - o Men, the fact that God wired us to be visually stimulated is not an excuse for you to lust after women.
 - o Illustration: XTreme Camp concert- Female musician in a very tight shirt was a distraction, so I had to leave the room.
- This goes back to the conversation we’ve been having for a few weeks now: Do I have the freedom to wear whatever I want? Yes. Does it cause others to stumble? If so, out of love, wear something else.

When Paul instructs the women in Corinth to wear a covering over their head, it wasn't a command from Scripture, but a charge not to bring division to the church over a petty issue that took people's minds off Jesus. This begs us to ask the question:

Are there things we do more for the sake of our liberty rather than our desire to love people and point them to Jesus?

Let's look together at verses 7-10 because this seems to be one of the more complicated parts of this passage.

:: 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.

- God created man and woman in His image. We are equal in every way, but we are diverse and have unique roles.
- Man was created first- this is one of those places when we talk about headship where we are talking about the source:
 - The source of man is God- Adam was created from the dust of the ground and God breathed life into him.
 - The source of woman is man- God took a rib from the side of Adam and fashioned the woman, giving her life.
 - So Paul points to the order of creation to say that wives should have the authority of their husbands covering them- not because they are less than, but because God chose this for the family and the church as he designed things in Creation.

Here's where Paul lands with this conversation, and I appreciate very much that the Holy Spirit led him here because this whole thing could get really messy and drive a wedge of division between men and women in the church. Look at verses 11-12.

:: 1 Corinthians 11:11-12

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.

There is an interdependence that God designed in our relationships as male and female, husband and wife. The first woman was made from man. Every man since then is born of woman! So men can't ever say, "We are better or more important," because we wouldn't exist without woman!

Then there are some closing remarks to be made here that are almost comical to us today because in the cultural conversation the issue of hair style isn't as big of a deal to us.

:: 1 Corinthians 11:13-16

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.

Alright, all you long haired men out there are in trouble! And all you short haired women are in trouble! And if you are a man with long hair married to a woman with short hair, I don't even know what to tell you! I'm kidding. Don't leave the church! First, Paul says it's a disgrace- not a sin! Second, this is another one of those places that has two approaches to looking at what Paul means.

- a. A man with long hair could easily be seen as taking on the role of the woman in the relationship and laying down his authority. It was a disgrace to give up what God entrusted to him in order to give his wife the place of leadership in the home. Men, we will answer to God for how our homes are led, don't hand over that responsibility of being the spiritual leader in your home to your wife.
- b. A man with long hair and a woman with short hair were signs of prostitution in the Corinthian culture. Paul is telling people when they come to worship they shouldn't demonstrate to others things that go against the ways of God. Sex is a gift designed for marriage between a man and a woman- taking that gift and putting it in another context is sin and doesn't have a place in the Church.

Then Paul says, "If anyone is inclined to be contentious, don't email the Pastor..." I'm just kidding. He says just know that this is not something we are only putting in place for your church; this is standard practice in all the churches where God reigns.

Church, our culture does not like these messages. But it is more important to follow God than to be approved of by the culture.

Wife, live in submission to your husband. This pleases the Lord and honors your husband.

Husband, sacrifice for your wife- being willing to give up your life for her. This pleases the Lord and honors your wife.

Church of Jesus, bring glory to our Savior in all we do. We answer to Him alone

Pray

Discussion Questions:

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

1. When you read this text what stands out to you?
2. What were the issues culturally that were causing issues Paul is addressing? (LG Leaders, in the message we discussed that the head covering was a symbol of submission and lack of head covering could also be a declaration of immodesty. Remind your group of this if they can't come to it on their own.)
3. How could these things cause problems in the church then and today?
4. What does Paul confirm about the roles of men and women and the value/status of men and women?
5. What do we learn about God from this passage?
6. What do we learn about ourselves?
7. Is there anything in this passage that challenges you in the way you need to live as a husband, wife, follower of Jesus?