

“God’s Good Design: Men & Women”

12 September 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship

Hymn of Preparation: This I Believe (The Creed)

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Sermon:

Sometimes a passage of scripture is difficult to understand, and we must wrestle with it in our minds and sometimes it is difficult for us to accept, and we must wrestle with it in our wills. 1st Corinthians ticks both of those boxes.

My bible reading on Friday as I started to write the sermon in James 3:1 said, *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that those who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says he is a perfect man....”*

I certainly do not want to be in error or to hurt or upset anyone. My task is to teach you as best I can what the apostle Paul says is essential for the churches of God, and as he says in v.16, *“we have no other practice- nor do the churches of God”*. So let us pray and ask for God’s help.

When a passage is difficult it needs to be put in context of the preceding verses and the flow of the letter.

Context of the passage:

- (v1) Paul says **follow my example as I follow Christ**. What is their example? Paul has sacrificed his right as an apostle and worked, he has given himself 100% to the church over the 1 ½ years he has ministered to them, he has taught faithfully the scriptures and the gospel. However, when he sets out the principles of dealing with others whom we disagree with he always advocates an **ethic of love**. His desire is always to have people united and so **following the apostle is following Jesus’ authority**.
- This passage is set in the context of a section that runs from 11:1 to 14:40, and the summary ending says, *“but everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”* The instructions given in this section are about **order and decency in worship**.
- Lastly, they are about **distinctives and diversity** and how we celebrate this and maintain unity. This section is about male and female distinctives, next week we will look at those who are rich and poor and then we look at gifts and how they are used within the body.
- (v2) Paul is **positive** about the church of God in Corinth. They remember Paul well and they hold to the teachings (traditions) that he gave them. They are a church which cared for Paul and listened and followed the basic teachings of the Christian faith which he had outlined for them. That is good and now he wants them to realise (v3) something else concerning worship and gender roles, something he has become aware of either from the letter they sent to him or directly informed him from those

who have travelled to Ephesus from Corinth such as those from Chloe's household.
(1:11)

Foundation text (v.3):

"The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." This is the foundation text. Our understanding of this affects how we work out the implications Paul draws. We need to understand what is meant by "head" and if he is speaking of man and woman as the NIV says or husband and wife as the ESV prefers. Much has been written on this and as I read the commentaries, I read different views and interpretations. I found the commentary written by Claire Smith helpful, outlined in her book *God's Good Design*.

Head

The word head in this passage is used both literally, for example in (v.5), *"it is just as if her head were shaved"* and metaphorically as in v.3. Does the metaphorical meaning of head in v3 means source, as in origin as we might say this is the source of a river? Or does it mean authority? Authority is a strong word, it can have negative associations! However, in the bible it is spoken of in terms of responsibility and care, or authority used in love and wisdom. Like the authority of a parent, a good headteacher, and Jesus himself. If you chose the first then the text is about where man, woman and Christ came from, if you chose the second then it is about the relationship between God, Jesus, man and woman.

My understanding of the biblical view of head here is that it means authority or what is often called headship. Authority exercised with love and wisdom. Why?

1. The Greek texts mainly use the word literally but when used metaphorically or figuratively it is always as authority. There is real doubt if it was ever used as source or origin.
2. Paul's use of it in Ephesians 4:15, 5:23 on the relationship between us and God and men to women in marriage is about leadership or authority.
3. Source leads to theological error in thinking about Jesus, if Jesus is sourced from God the Father, then it leads away from the understanding that Jesus was begotten of the Father as in John 1:1. This leads to the theological error called Arianism which questions the deity and eternal nature of Jesus. Commonly held by the JW's!
4. The Bible's teaching models headship within the Trinity in John 1:1; 1st Cor 15:28 and accepts the reality of equality with hierarchy.

This understanding of the Trinity helps us picture the relationship advocated here, one of equality with hierarchy and this is the reason Paul uses v3 as his foundation text of the relationship between God the father and Jesus the son and between men and women.

Man / Woman or Husband / Wife?

Now we must also be clear about whether Paul is speaking about men and women or husband and wife, for in Greek the same word is used of both. Therefore, you decide which interpretation to use by the context.

1. (v3) the foundation statement must be about man not husbands and wives and so it would be strange to switch its use in the subsequent verses.

2. When he appeals to creation in the later verses the implication is again that he is speaking generally and not specifically about husbands and wives. (v7 and 12)

So, 'head' speaks of authority, responsible, caring wise leadership and the text refers to man and woman generically in v3 and it is important for us to stop and think through a few things before moving on.

- Keeping in mind the example of the Trinity and what is said in v3, we can say two people are equal and yet be distinct and have distinct roles assigned to them. This point is often strongly contested by our society. Yet we hold to the truth that God and Jesus are equal, but they each have distinct roles. Jesus the son willingly honours his Father by obedience to bring glory to him. That is a principle the Bible teaches here in v3.
- As a summary statement the focus here is on headship, loving leadership, and not submission. There is a reciprocal action in men to Christ, women to men, Christ to God the Father, but the focus is on how each brings honour to the relationship. (Example in marriage of Pat Hume, the wife of John Hume)
- The contexts where this is worked out in scripture is limited to worship and marriage.
- Other scriptural passages such as Proverbs 31 tell us clearly of the ability of women in business, leadership, creativity, home making and to these things well.

This passage is about the interdependence of males and females in their distinctive ways fully participating in the worship of God together. It is about loving leadership and honour of each other, it is about order and decency and distinctive roles specifically applied in the context of worship to what each should do with their heads when they pray and prophesy.

“Prophesying” We will return to this in Chapter 14. There is also much debate about what this is, and I am simply for times sake going to say what Annie did for us several months ago was what I consider to be prophesy, she spoke powerfully from the scriptures of Acts, shared in the context of worship in consultation with the leadership of the church. It was a blessing to us, important, valued and enhanced our worship. Positively this passage is about women praying and speaking in public worship.

Head Coverings

Culturally head covering remains controversial. We have a picture of different kinds of head covering. The 20th anniversary of 9/11 reminds us of the conflict that can occur and marks a robust debate about Islamic head coverings (Burka / Hijab).

Are women forced to wear the covering and therefore have their authority challenged, or if they choose to wear a head covering for reasons of modesty or religion are they attacked and ridiculed?

We do not know exactly what Paul is referring to and lots of ink has been used in many different explanations, a garment, an attitude, or a hair style. As I have read about the culture of that time and place it appears, the dress of men and women were not dissimilar and what marked out a woman was a head covering. Also, a married woman would have been known to be married by the wearing of a veil. In contrast the woman associated with the pagan worship of Aphrodite didn't wear a head covering and kept hair short or shaved. Short or shaved hair was not a sign of honour or decency. Which added to Jewish law outlined in (Numbers 5:18) that an unfaithful wife was shamed by having the priest loose her hair in public (hence the idea in some Christian circles about hair being tied up) you can

appreciate that head covering made a woman distinctive, indicated marriage and hair style made a public statement about status, role and even honour.

Paul recognises that culturally there are distinctives on how men and women dress and indeed wear their hair. For women, the wearing of a head covering was important to identify them as women and married. It appears that some of the women in Corinth wanted to throw away these distinctives in worship and it blurred their gender identification, and married status. It challenged the headship principle of men and husbands, it was distracting, and didn't respect the biblical themes outlined and even the cultural norms of the day.

Paul defends the position on head coverings by an appeal to:

Headship (v.4-6)

Creation (v.7-9, v.11-13) Highlighting order; woman created from man and for man, to be his helper, in that sense her glory comes from man. No matter what culture you find yourself in, the order within the Godhead and in creation counts. However, in v12 we are told that order should not lead to superiority because man is dependent on woman as the creation order of birth clearly states. Men and women are made in the image of God and both are made for each other, are dependent on each other, need each other, and each is a gift to the other from God.

Angels (v.10) ????? We will have to ask the apostle about this in heaven or it will be revealed there! Is it because they accept their place in worship and in the created order. Is it because they cover their faces in worship or is it as Paul says in 1st Cor 4:9 they observe what we do!

Nature *v.14-15) The essence of what God requires. Some things are innate, a given and accepted, such as adults should care for care for children, that is child abuse is so abhorrent in all cultures. Stated positively Paul says it is universally accepted that a woman's hair is her glory! (Raducanu vs Fernandez, US Open tennis final)

Universal practice (v.16) It's the same in every church. In every church we believe, different sexes have different responsibilities and there is distinctiveness in gender. There are creation, redemptive and theological reasons why this should be the case and you cannot be different from the other churches.

What are the lessons for us?

1. God has created a world of order with responsibility of one part for another. He has created the distinctives within gender of male and female and each relate to the other in responsibility and care in leadership and in a response that accepts and honours that leadership.
2. This distinct way of relating is essential to bring about the full breadth of relationships and service, and the distinctiveness is important and to be respected.
3. In worship and marriage both sexes are to be participating in prophesying and praying and working together for the unity and good of the church.
4. This was the example of Jesus, and we are to follow it. (Philippians 2:6-11)
5. In our culture we may ask what signs or clothing show male leadership or married status? A few suggestions given tentatively (and not always true in every culture): Wearing a wedding ring and taking the name of your husband are steps in that direction. Responsible leadership acknowledges and honour given to the head.

6. How can we encourage men to lead in a responsible and caring way? It is men who need to step up, to take responsibility and to lead!
7. Gender distinctives are emphasised in this passage and this is a foundation to be held to as our culture explores increasing gender fluidity.
8. A united church worshipping God is the picture Paul has with everyone participating, in ways that honour God and his creation and redemptive mandates and that are clearly seen within the Trinity, to the honour and glory of all.
9. We need to work hard to express this within the church of ARPC keeping our gender distinctives in a God honouring way. Let us keep working and speaking to one another about this.

Praise: By Faith

Missionary Update: James & Heather Cochrane (Porto)

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: O Church Arise

Benediction

Discussion Questions:

- What do you think it means to honour someone? What do you think it means to honour God?
- How might we honour God when we gather together as a church?
- Men and women are different/distinct, but not independent. How is (or could) this truth be displayed in your relationships generally? How is (or could) this truth be displayed in our church family?
- What is the equivalent of head coverings and hair length in your culture/context? How might this be applied practically?