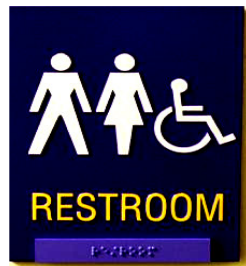


1 Corinthians 11:2-16

The Gender Wars

I was reading an article that dealt with gender issues. The thrust of it revolved around Emerson College appeasing Homosexual and Lesbian groups when it came to transgender identification. The complaint to the college was that it needed to be more sensitive to students who were trying to figure out which gender they identified with the most as an individual. So Emerson followed the lead of Taft College and replaced some of the signs on their bathrooms. Here's what the signs looked like.



The dean of the college was pleased to inform everyone that now students will not have to struggle with identifying with a gender when it comes to going to the bathroom. Apparently, some students found the decision about using the bathroom very difficult. Imagine struggling with the following dilemma. "Should I go to the men's bathroom or should I go to the women's?" Such a dilemma the university found caused unneeded anxiety for those struggling with transgender identification. Now they were free to be themselves and not forced to choose "which" bathroom to identify with. If on Monday they found themselves identifying with the female gender; and if on Tuesday they felt more masculine in nature they were free to use the same bathroom, no restrictions.

You might find this story kind of humorous. But Emerson is just an example of what happens when a sub-culture claims that gender roles are a product of cultural bias. The male female roles become blurred, obsolete, and outdated. The burden is then placed on the individual to define their gender.

But it is not just Emerson College that has issues with gender identification; this also occurs within the church. To be honest—many Christian women have a problem with how the female is traditionally viewed in the church. Terms like "submission" and "headship" cause women to struggle with the Bible, with their husbands, and ultimately with God. In the 1960's and 70's, some mainline churches rebelled against the traditions of church history and stressed dual leadership in the home and also began to ordain women as elders and pastors, despite clear guidelines against this practice. Inevitably this became a slippery slope because it paved the way for homosexuals to be pastors and key leaders in the mainline churches. In the end, this is what happens when we disregard what God has taught regarding gender roles. As we read through verses 2-16 we will encounter some gender issues regarding men and women in the worship service. Now since our worship services are different than those during the time of Corinth—our challenge will be to pull out principles that are applicable to all genders and are timeless. Okay here we go, verse 2-3.

1. Men and Women are to Respect Godly Authority.

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.

It's important to note that being under authority does not only apply to women; it applies to everyone, including Christ. This is apparent from the pairs listed. Christ is the head of man. Man is the head of woman. God is the head of Christ. Thankfully in Paul's wisdom he used Christ to clear up this issue. Some men might take this verse to mean they are above women both ontologically and functionally. But the ontological argument is dispelled when one considers Christ. It is obvious to Christians that Christ is not inferior to God the Father. In fact, they are one and the same. However, functionally, Christ in his earthly ministry was subordinate to the Father.

This verse has caused quite a bit of controversy because no one likes to be told they are to be in subjection to anyone. Consequently, scholars have been divided when it comes to the definition of the Greek word translated as head (*kaphale*). In general, the word can either be translated as *source* or *head*. If the word is indeed *source*, then Paul's point is that in the created order, Christ is the source of man because he created him; man is the source of woman because she was created from his rib; and God is the source of Christ because the Holy Spirit caused Mary to conceive. Those that argue for this position state this passage has nothing to do with authority—instead it deals with respect for your source. I'm not sure how much that changes the point of this passage; but it probably makes one feel more respected

The other view is that *kefalh* refers to headship or the leadership of the man. This simply means that there is a pecking order when it comes to authority in the church and the home. Man is to submit to Christ. The wife is to submit to her husband. Christ is to submit to the Father. The implication is that regardless of gender, everyone is to be under submission. Here's why this is important.

Some husbands may think that their wife must do what they want because they are to submit to their authority. I have heard stories of husbands insisting that their wives watch pornography with them. The wife objects and the husbands use the submission line of argumentation. "You have to watch porn with me because you are to submit to my leadership." Now, anyone with common Christian sense would realize that pornography involves lusting after someone who's not your spouse, which makes it adultery according to the teachings of Jesus. Consequently, the man has to be in submission to Christ. Ladies, if husbands insist you do things you know are wrong, and they use the submission line, tell them they are also to submit—submit to Christ. If they argue with you—don't submit to them—submit to your Savior.

That is the beauty of submission here. It is not one sided. Man submits to Christ, wives submit to their husbands, and Christ ultimately submits to the father. Submission should lead to harmony—not oppression. The trinity is the perfect example of harmony. The Father, the Son, and the Ghost don't oppress each other—they complement each other. Each has a role that builds up the other. Okay, here's principle #2.

2. In a Corporate Setting We Should Not Seek to Draw Attention

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.

A little historical background is helpful here. In the Corinthian culture; women came to church wearing a head covering, which indicated two things generally. First, it was usually a sign of respect for the husband. What I mean by that is that they would let their hair down only for their husband, not for others. Quite simply, wives did not want to draw attention to themselves. They did not want other men to stare at them and lust after them. In that sense, their beauty was reserved exclusively for their husband's eyes. Head coverings were like the wedding ring of antiquity. The second reason for head coverings is a little more complex. There were actually women who felt they did not have to follow the cultural norm of wearing a head covering; and this caused all kinds of problems, especially with their husbands and in general, the male population. Men let's think about this: Would you rather have a woman share a word with the church and lead it in prayer with a head covering or without one? If you said it doesn't matter—you are lying; repent. If you said without the head coverings—you're just a typical male who is unashamedly visual in nature. You see when women let their hair down they were bringing attention to themselves. This was not a good thing for their husbands if they were married—nor for the men who directed the affairs of the church. That is why Paul insists by not covering wearing head coverings—they dishonor their head, which is a reference to their husbands or in a general sense, the men of the church. You might think that is ridiculous. But you need to understand the culture.

Generally all women would wear head coverings in the Mediterranean world. The lone exception would be those that were prostitutes. The thought of women sharing in the church without a head covering conjured up these immoral images, which took the focus off of Christ. Paul said this was a dishonor to their heads. Curiously, he said if a woman insists on not covering her head then she is to shave her head. In that culture, wives that were caught in adultery were forced to shave their heads so that the general public would know she was an adulterer and a disgrace to her husband. It was not a pretty thing to have your head shaved or your hair cut short. Interestingly, there is also literature which states that Lesbians also would cut their hair short in order to give the appearance they were masculine. In general it was a disgrace to have your head uncovered. You were either thought of as a prostitute or a Lesbian. Boy has the culture changed today.

Some of you ladies might think, that is just ridiculous. It gives the impression that women are second-class citizens. I would respond by saying that women are not second class at all—but that was just one of the rules of the early church that was established by Paul so there would be reverence for God and respect for the husband in the church. Today, there are Christians who feel that women have been oppressed throughout the church. Some even feel that just as the head covering is no longer an issue in our culture; women in subjection to their husbands or male leadership in the church is a thing of the past. In general, there are two categories which show how the church has traditionally viewed gender roles.

1. The Egalitarian View (Feminism view)

This view states men and women are equal in the church and there is no position restricted to the women. This is the view of most mainline churches and some evangelical churches. The churches that are egalitarian in nature will have female elders and pastors. There is an interesting book called *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*. In it the author argues for a redemptive hermeneutic (or trajectory). What this means is that at one time in the Bible, women were in subjection to the man—but as culture evolved, this became less of an issue. Just like slavery is no longer practiced by most of culture—women in subjection is also a thing of the past because we have evolved. It is an interesting concept—the question is whether it is a biblical concept. The danger with such a hermeneutic is that it opens the door for churches to hire gay clergy and ultimately to legitimize polygamy. But that issue aside, this view feels that passages involving headship and submission have been widely misinterpreted primarily because the literal interpretations of these passages do not take into consideration the culture and context. In the end, because men and women are made in the image of God—this viewpoint sees men and women equal in both function and essence. Consequently, in some homes women lead their families; and in some churches women are appointed elders to lead the church. Proponents of this view would sight women who led men in the Bible like the Israelite judge, Deborah.

2. The Complementarion View (chivalry view)

This view states women and men are equal in essence (ontologically) but that God has assigned males to exercise leadership in the home and the church. The primary example is that of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Although Eve was the first to sin, ultimately, it was Adam who was responsible for it. He was the one God instructed not to eat of the tree. He was the one God approached after the transgression. Curiously, in Romans Paul says everyone is under the sin nature not because of Eve—but because of Adam. Through one man he says, came sin to all man (Romans 5:12). Likewise, this view states God has assigned roles in the church, like elders and pastors, to be limited to males. Now the complementarion does allow for women to be involved in the church. It does encourage women to exercise their spiritual gifts. At Northside we encourage women to use their gifts. Women can be involved with leading in worship at the church. If women are qualified we wouldn't have a problem with women teaching classes here in theology, languages, arts, etc. One more note: The attendees do not have to be women and children only. We also like women to sharing their testimonies or stories with the church and lead us in prayer. The only area we draw the line is when it comes to being an elder or preaching in the corporate service because those are area the Bible assigns to the men in the church. The essence of the complementarion view is that men and women compliment each other and thus give us a picture of a healthy church that works together by using the gifts God has distributed to us.

In short, God has assigned men as elders in the church to run and govern it. Paul's instruction that women wear head coverings was an example of a male exercising his authority to bring order and reverence to the church. He did not want the wife or women to draw unnecessary attention to themselves and dishonor their husbands. Head coverings were a symbol that showed honor to the men in the church. In case you are thinking this is still chauvinistic, Paul clarifies something important to both men and women. This leads me to the third principle.

3. As Men and Women, We Need Each Other

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.

I really like this passage. Doesn't this just showcase the wisdom of God? In case men get prideful and gloat that the women came from the man's rib—God made it so that the woman would be the one to give birth to man. God could have done it the other way of course, but this would have probably led to even more chauvinistic pride. So just as woman was created from man—so woman gives life to man. Paul's point is simply that we must not think we don't need each other. We must not live our lives independent of each other. This is where the gay lifestyle misses the mark. Men and women were never meant to be independent of each other. In the creation account everything God initially creates he describes as good, the sun, the moon, the animals, mankind, etc. However, there is one instance where God refers to something as not good. He says, it is not good for man to be alone. The woman was created to bring companionship and a partner to help them through life.

I find it curious that in many gay courtships, one partner usually models the male; the other the female. I believe that despite their alternative lifestyle, there is a desire to maintain the gender roles in their relationships for balance. The male wants someone that is a nurturer and feminine by nature, the female wants the security of someone to protect her like the man. Ultimately, the reason this stuff has gone so off course is because men and women have either had horrible role models when it comes to gender or because they don't like themselves and are rejecting their femininity and masculinity. Things get crazy when gender roles get blurred, both in society and the church.

Now some of you may have noticed that Paul says that men by nature should have short hair. You might think well that definitely is not true. But here's Paul's point. Men should be men and women should be women. In the Mediterranean culture you had dudes struggling with gender issues as well. Some wanted to be feminine; they wanted to be pretty boys. I suspect that may be why Paul tells men not to wear head coverings. Women on the other hand, had long hair, which was to their glory. Now some of you might be thinking, Jesus had long hair. I would argue you have been tainted by various paintings of Jesus. In fact, if you look at some of those paintings you would probably conclude that sometimes Jesus has a beard on his hair, other times, he has blue eyes, other times, he was a blonde hair, and there are pictures of a black Jesus holding a child with daisies in the background. Unfortunately, all these pictures share one common trait. They make Jesus appear to be feminine. Jesus did not take a Nazarene vow—he lived in Nazareth. He probably had short hair and he looked manly. Anyhow, let's land the plane now. Paul expects men to look like men, not women. I remember growing up one of my friends saw a blond babe walking down the road. He gave her a cat call. She turned around and said, "Up Yours" with a middle finger. That was when we discovered she was a he. Okay he is the final principle.

4. The Principles Behind Gender Identification are Timeless and Divine

16 If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

Here Paul responds to those who might think Gender Roles are a cultural creation. He simply says for those who wish to be contentious the church has no other practice. There was no getting out of it. Women were to honor their husbands by wearing the head coverings. Women were to place themselves under the authority of the church. For whatever reason God chose men to be the head of women; for whatever reason he chose men to direct the affairs of the church. He did not have to—but that was His choice. This has been consistent throughout history. Since creation God chose Adam to be the representative over his wife. God chose men to be the significant leaders of Israel. God chose men to become the priests. God chose men to be His prophets. God chose men to be the disciples of Jesus. God chose men to be His apostles. There is no trajectory hermeneutic here. Gender roles do not change with an evolving culture. God has chosen men to lead their families and to direct the affairs of His church. The problem of course is when men either abuse this privilege or they simply remain passive in their leadership abilities. In the end, everyone is under authority.

Now today, head coverings are really not an issue in the church culture—though some churches still adhere to this rule. So how can these principles apply to our lives today? Here are some practical ways. First, dudes should be dudes, women should be women. Men regardless if you have a big beer belly and no hair—you are still God's glory. So don't dress feminine or act feminine. Be a man, not a pretty boy! Women, God has given you beauty and a nurturing spirit. Don't cut off all your hair and rebel against your femininity. Embrace your God-given sexuality. Secondly, men, you must lead in a godly manner. Don't try to oppress your spouse because the Bible says your wife is to submit to your authority. As you lead your life—don't forget you also are under a headship, the headship of Christ. Furthermore, don't lead passively. That was Adam's mistake. He allowed Eve to make the decision to sin and he did absolutely nothing but allow it to happen. Lastly, women, be modest in your dress in a corporate setting. Don't lead a portion of the worship service with clothes that draw attention to you. You may think it is okay to wear midriffs and low cut shirts as you lead worship or pray. However, you will only cause men to lose focus and they might go home lusting after you. You want to bring glory to God and your husband if you are married.

In the end, men and women are both made in the image of God. We are both image bearers. Let's make sure we honor God by embracing our gender and sexuality.