

REFLECTING OUR CREATOR**1 Corinthians 11:2-16****(Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16)**

INTRO: We took a family vacation trip to Washington D.C. and points south probably about 12 or 13 years ago. On that trip we especially enjoyed visiting George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, and Thomas Jefferson's home Monticello, both in Virginia. Jefferson, with his farming experimentation, scientific study, and writing, made visiting his home especially fascinating. His scientific and engineering mind that produced the collection of specimens and inventions are incredible. One thing we saw at Monticello is his Bible, which I had read about, but it was fun to see the actual item. Rather than tell you about it, I decided to take the modern easy route and tell what Wikipedia says about it which is short, accurate and sweet:

"Thomas Jefferson's Bible: The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth, commonly referred to as the Jefferson Bible, was completed in 1820 by cutting and pasting with a razor and glue numerous sections from the New Testament as extractions of the doctrine of Jesus. Jefferson's condensed composition excludes all miracles by Jesus and most mentions of the supernatural, including sections of the four gospels that contain the Resurrection and most other miracles, and passages that portray Jesus as divine." (End Quote)

It comes down to this, Jefferson took a New Testament and he cut out all the parts that he didn't agree with. Those parts that were contrary to what he saw as good science or what he just simply didn't like, he sliced out with a razor and he ended up with his cut and pasted book. It was just a book and no longer a Bible. You see, when you use just what you like or can agree with, it is no longer God's word – it's your own word. Putting it bluntly, God's word didn't mean anything to Jefferson, he only cared what Jefferson's word was.

So, if I was Thomas Jefferson, I would take this passage for today and I would just tear it out of my Bible. (Tear a page) Because this is one of those sermons that fits firmly in the category of I would rather have a root canal than preach the passage. Actually that's probably a bit radical, in truth it's probably a bit less controversial than we might think, but you get my point.

I have a friend who preached a series on all the passages he hated. His point was he didn't like what the scripture said in those cases, but it was still scripture. And because scripture is God breathed, and it is there to teach us how to live and to serve and to be holy. So, even when we don't like what a scripture says, and we would like it to say something else, or if we just don't even know what it's saying; it doesn't mean that we don't work on it and work on it until we do know.

It's like a jawbreaker. When I was a kid there was a kind of we called jawbreakers. It came in various colors and it was tasty and it looked like a gumball. There was one huge thing though, if you tried to bite into it and chew it like a gumball, it would break your teeth. I'm surprised they even make jawbreakers anymore, because the lawsuits that could come out of it would be crippling for a candy manufacturer. It's been eons since I had one but it was always good candy, if I didn't try to chew it. You could safely enjoy it by rolling it around your mouth and sucking on it until it was gone. You had to work through it slowly.

That's the way it is with some scriptures. They are scriptural jaw breakers. You can't just break into them, but you also can't spit them into the trash because then you'll miss all the good that you'll experience there. Sometimes scripture takes time and this passage is one of them.

I may be making a mountain out of a molehill, but one of the reasons this passage is difficult is because of the history it has with the Brethren in Christ. We at one time, like conservative Mennonites, German Baptist Brethren, and Amish, stressed an adherence to plain dress. There were expectations for both sexes but women had many more requirements. While men got away with plain coats and no ties and few other expectations, ladies were expected to wear cape dresses that concealed their form, had sleeves to the wrist, and a hem well below the knees. They also were required to wear a head covering, which varied from a full-fledged cloth bonnet on this lady in the cape dress to a mesh type like this. By the time the use of the covering was phasing out in the BIC, they had evolved to a variety of styles that ranged from scaled down mesh bonnets to something that for all the world looked like a doily like my mom would have put under a lamp. It's awful, but we boys called these coverings "sin strainers" showing that we didn't respect the discipline and desire for holiness it took for a lady to wear one.

The use of the head covering comes from this passage in 1 Corinthians 11. These 15 verses say much more than that, but Plain groups, including our BIC forbearers made what is practically doctrine out of this passage.

Now, most, if not all, BIC churches no longer require coverings, and they have also relaxed their teaching on modest dress, but there is still a fair amount of controversy, much of it from what Paul says here about men and women and their place before God, their relationship to one another, and to the church. This is understandable. The BIC have long considered ourselves, “People of the Book” meaning we firmly hold to what is our second core value, “We value the Bible as God’s authoritative Word, study it together, and build our lives on its truth.” This isn’t some novel you leave to gather dust on the shelf, or take it or leave it like Thomas Jefferson – it is God’s word.

We are also careful not to proof text which is when one takes a verse, completely independent of the verses surrounding it and makes doctrine or life decisions or commits sin based on what they find there. We interpret scripture together, in the light of the entire scripture. That’s a good thing to remember here as we look at this, and with it in mind, let’s look at what Paul is saying.

First . . .

Paul was establishing traditions

- In the first verse of our passage (verse 2) and in the last (verse 16) Paul makes this clear. He begins with praise, *I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you.* 1 Corinthians 11:2. Paul was training up a pagan people, very unfamiliar with ways of Godliness set down in scripture, by establishing new traditions for them. They are just that, traditions.
- In verse 16, Paul solidifies this with *If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.* 1 Corinthians 11:16. He is saying, “This is what works well, so you would do well to make it your practice too.” One could say, Paul is saying “That’s the way we’ve always done it before.” But it’s more than that. It’s been tried and tested and it works. Just don’t forget, its tradition and not doctrine. Here is my point, it is hard to get a doctrine out of what Paul says here. But we can certainly get guidance and that will help as we finish out this passage.
- Next . . .

There is a Creation Order

- Listen to verse 3 again, *But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.* 1 Corinthians 11:3. This has been misconstrued as subordination or subjection of women. It’s been used as a club by some groups to push women down and by others as an excuse to disregard the word of God. Paul qualifies what is meant by subordination by looking at God’s intention in created order and as he does he shows that man and woman are interdependent and utterly dependent on their Creator God and his redeeming Son. I love how F. B. Meyer, puts it, *No soul is complete in itself. The man is not complete apart from Christ, as the woman is not complete apart from man. As God is the head of the nature of Jesus on its human side, so must Jesus be the head of man, and the man of woman. But in each case the headship is not one of authority and rule, but of the impartation of resources of love, wisdom, and strength, without which the best cannot be realized.*
- Man and woman need each other but man was created first and we can see that in the beginning of Genesis, especially in chapter 2. Gordon Fee tells us, *“Paul stresses the new Christian principle of union in subordination. Although the woman is subject to her husband, and decidedly so in ancient days, his authority is significantly modified because of his own subjection to Christ. The principal does not interfere with the personal relationships of men and women to Christ.”*
- As we see in Genesis, Adam quickly discovers that by himself he is alone and incomplete. The animals have partners but he does not and he needs one who is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, one who is like him but different from him, one who is uniquely his own and his glory. That is why as he wakes from a deep sleep and finds her there he bursts into song. She was created for him but not to be subordinate to him, but necessary for him. She exists so that he might be complete and that together they might form humanity. We cannot survive without each other.
- That is what comes from Creation order. And further . . .

There is an appropriate way to worship, pray, and share God’s message

- When praying, Jewish men and women both used head coverings. I have a Jewish prayer shawl hanging in my office given to me by a friend. To cover one’s head in prayer for a Jewish man was to show his deep

reverence at approaching God. When Jesus died, the veil that led into the Holy of Holies in the Temple was torn apart. With that the veil was gone. Men no longer needed to pray with their head covered.

- In Corinth it seemed that something needed to be said about orderly worship and Paul is beginning here. Next he will discuss how he has no praise for them in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and into chapters 12, 13, and 14 he goes even deeper. Here he is saying that Christ Followers should not necessarily flout social conventions and make a big deal before pagans. Nevertheless, their worship, of course, must be based on biblical principles. In this case Paul appeals to the relative status of men and women in the created order and also modesty.
- Any study of this passage will point out that for a woman in Corinth (actually Greco-Roman society anywhere) to be unveiled in public was shocking in its social significance. This was because being shorn was the contemporary punishment for a prostitute. But the huge thing here, and how it applies to our history as BIC, is that modesty is a viable issue. Apparently the women in the Corinthian Church were praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered which was seen as immodest, not only for Christ Followers, but also for pagans. It was a bad witness.
 - The idea of witness brings up a brief aside: Paul makes a puzzling reference in verse 10 when he says *It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.* 1 Corinthians 11:10. Commentators struggle to try to explain this but none really succeed and so I will not either. It's one of those jawbreakers that we need to keep rolling around. But let me just say this, the angels are watching to be aware of your freedom and be covered. If nothing else, be modest because heaven is watching.
- And then notice that Paul is not forbidding women from praying and prophesying, and for that matter, preaching, he is simply saying they must do it with modesty. Your message will not be heard if your appearance is distracting. In fact, your appearance can actually be the message you are trying to get across.
- Finally, one thing that is very clear in this passage is how . . .

God has defined the differences between the sexes

- The passage Martha read earlier makes it unmistakable, *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.* Genesis 1:27.
- Both male and female are created in God's image – not just man. AND male and female he created them. This would appear to be unnecessary to point out, but the direction our society is taking is requiring that at least the people of God know that there is a difference between men and women. We are different from one another and we should celebrate it. Instead we have blurred the lines. I don't have time to remind us of all the ways this done, but the ever expanding acronym that is often shown as LGBTQ+ is a clear indication. God created human beings in two sexes, Female and Male, and any other variation that comes out of that is a human construct that is fueled by the lies of Satan himself.
- How does this apply to what Paul is saying here in 1 Corinthians 11? Well, this is it: In Paul's seemingly confusing discussion of the length and glory of hair, perhaps he is just saying, "Don't blur the lines. Men, be men. Dress like men. Groom like men. Act like men. Take your responsibility to serve God as men seriously and live as the male God created you to be. And women, be women. Dress like women. Groom like women. Act like women. Take your responsibility to serve God as women seriously and live as the female God created you to be." Whether you are a man or a woman, pray and prophesy appropriately as is suitable for your sex.

Conclusion: As you do, you will be truly reflecting our creator. Amen.