

Equal but Different for Good
1 Corinthians 11:2-16

"Idiots and dying dinosaurs to be ignored." That's what Chris Evans, once Captain America and now the voice of Buzz Lightyear, says about anyone who dislikes the same-sex marriage in Disney's latest film, 'Lightyear.'

In the last two chapters Paul has instructed the Corinthians about true liberty and freedom, teaching us that we are only really free, when we are also liberated or free from the very thing we seldom think of, ourselves.

As we've walked through 1 Corinthians, we have only glimpsed the dishonor and degradation that women endured in the first century European world. This was particularly true of women without noble status, which was the majority population.

Christianity brought a liberating ethic for women, making them equal to men in dignity, worth and purpose, as divine image-bearers of God. But Paul now warns the Corinthians that this new freedom does not eliminate the divine differences and distinctions between men and women.

Unlike Chris Evans, Hollywood, liberal politicians, and the 21st century common worldview, Christianity affirms two equal, yet different, and purposeful genders.

V 2 - Paul begins on what may be an encouraging note in an effort

- Paul had been in Corinth for 18 months, arriving in 49/50 AD and writing the Corinthians around 53/54, making it 3-4 years since he had been there.
- But, his letter has been stirred by the various departures from those traditions.

(Some commentators think Paul is insincere in v 2 and is sarcastic, but I think, when you compare it to v 17, that Paul is sincere in 10:2).

Two sins have generated the Corinthians troubles:

- 1 – They have thought too highly of themselves
- 2 – They have thought too little of God

To use Paul's language in this text, the problem is 'headship.'

This is a universal dilemma to which all humans are prone

EGO = edging God out

Romans 1:21-23 - For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming

to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

It is 'futile' and 'foolish' to do this. Why?

"The real truth is those people are idiots." There's always going to be people who are afraid and unaware and trying to hold on to what was before. But those people die off like dinosaurs," Evans said. "I think the goal is to pay them no mind, march forward and embrace the growth that makes us human."

Chris Evans

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/lightyear-star-chris-evans-calls-critics-on-screen-representation-idiots-2022-06-14/>

Much to the opposite of how Mr. Evans feels about us, we do not think he is an idiot, we do not want him to die, and we do not want to pay attention to what he says.

Contrarily, however, we think that obeying God awakens us, grows us, and make us 'good,' i.e., fully human, and disobeying God dehumanizes us.

The primary difference in our worldviews is that we start our thinking with God and unbelievers do not. God is the center of our world and all our thinking, emoting, behaving radiates out of that source.

Bottom line:

We were made for worship and
we will worship something.

First: The Problem and the Solution. v 3

If, 'headship,' – "Who's in charge here?" is the Corinthians basic problem, the answer is

V 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.

God
Christ
Husband
Wife

Paul's reasoning is founded simply and solely on the Godhead.

a) The 'ontological' Trinity – coexistent, coequal, coeternal

John 10:30 – I am the Father are one.

Headship does not mean superiority.
Submission does not infer inferiority.

Two important questions to ask in this context is: *"How is the Father the 'head' of the Son"* and *"How is the Son the 'head' of the husband?"*

Husbands, the way you lead your wife (and children) should reflect the way Christ leads you.

Does the husband have to lead? Yes, because God created him to do so, and holds him accountable to do so. Each member of the Trinity is equal in nature but different in effort.

b) The 'economic' Trinity

One fallacies of modern feminist movement is that for people to be equal they must do the same thing. But this isn't even true of the Trinity where the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equal. The Trinity teaches us that authority and subordination don't mean inferiority in person, dignity or value.

John 20:21 - *"As the Father has sent me..."*

John 14:26 - *"...the Helper, whom the Father will send in my name..."*

John 15:26 - *"When the Helper comes, who I will send to you from the Father..."*

Ephesians 1:4-5 - The Father planned our salvation

Ephesians 1:7 - The Son purchased our salvation

Ephesians 1:13-14 - The Holy Spirit protects our salvation

Summary: Our basic problem is rejecting God's headship. Rejecting God's headship messes up every human relationship, as the Corinthians have demonstrated.

3-4 - Personalities

5 - man and stepmother

6 - taking each other to court

7 - intimacy in marriage

8 - food offered to idols

9 - surrendering rights

10 - fleeing idolatry

Second: The Problem at Hand. vs 4-7

4 - Men are covering their heads when Christ is their head

5-6 - Women are uncovering their heads when their husbands are their head

Point: There is a difference between men and women that should not be eradicated.

Women in the Greco-Roman world, except Temple prostitutes, always covered their heads as a symbol of their marital relationship, much as married American women wear wedding rings.

"It was a custom, both among the Greeks and Romans, and among the Jews an express law, that no woman should be seen abroad without a veil. This was, and is, a common custom through all the east, and none but public prostitutes go without veils."

(Adam Clarke, 1760-1832)

Misunderstanding their equality with men, Corinthian Christian women were coming to church with their heads uncovered, like men. This dishonored their head, their husbands, in the same way it would dishonor Christ, if a man came to church with his head covered.

IMP: The issue is not the physical head covering. The issue is ignorance about freedom. This argument follows his previous thoughts on surrendering our rights to and for others.

Married women: *"Do you have to wear a head covering to church?"* No. *"Should you wear a head covering to church?"* Yes.

Married men: *"Do you have to wear come to church without a covering?"* No. *"Should you come to church without a covering?"* Yes.

This human mantra of, *"I've got to be me,"* is silly. Because we are dependent beings, we can't self-reflect, and we can't self-identify.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 - *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ¹⁰ "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."*

Psalms 139:23-24 - *Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*

It is easy to see where some of our friends want to require women to wear head coverings in church, but the issue is not head coverings, it is equality, liberty and preferring one another. Paul is just using the head-covering dilemma in the Corinthian church to teach the truth about equality, liberty/freedom and preferring one another.

6 – Middle Eastern cultures shave women's heads as punishment

7 – Men don't cover their heads because they are God's glory

8 – Women do cover their head because they are their husband's glory

9 – Adam was not made from Eve, but Eve from Adam

10 – Angels, who report to God, are God's emissaries, present at church worship

a) Positively

1 Peter 1:12 – “...things into which angels long to look.”

It is as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and the church members in every land are the actors. God himself has written the play, and he directs and produces it. Act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold. But who are the audience? They are the cosmic intelligences, the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.

(John Stott, 1921-20010)

b) Negatively

Isaiah 14:12-15 - *How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' ¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.*

Of all beings, angels know the kind of trouble ego can get you into.

11 – Even though Paul recognizes the creation order, he also understands that we are all dependent on one another

12 – Because, after Adam and Eve, we all come from each other

Third: Summary Comments. 13-16

v 13a – Since the Corinthians claim to be wise, they should be able to figure this out

v 13b – Even men and women in Judaism pray with their heads covered

v 14-15 – He is once again referring to cultural norms, but even Paul had long hair for a season – Acts 18:18

v 16 – It's not worth the fight. Don't start one.

*Brothers, pay more attention to the length of your sermons
than the length of someone's hair*

Anonymous

Fourth: Jesus and Gender Difference

a) Significantly, none of these reasons are culture dependent. The order and manner of creation doesn't depend on culture.

But, having rejected the idea in a difference in roles between men and women, our culture now rejects the idea of any difference between men and women.

But both creation and the Trinity emphasize that equality and difference.

We cannot say, "Paul said this just because of the thinking of the Corinthian culture or the place of women in that culture." The principles are eternal, although the outworking the principles may differ according to culture.

Genesis 1:27 - *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

The male and female genders both represent God, and both are required to best image God.

In Genesis 1, you see pairs of different but complementary things made to work together: heaven and earth, sea and land, even God and humanity. It is part of the brilliance of God's creation that diverse, unlike things are made to unite and create dynamic wholes which generate more and more life and beauty through their relationships....the creation and uniting of male and female at the end of Genesis 1 is the climax of all this.... That means that male and female have unique, non-interchangeable glories...

Sam Allberry

- b) Never before in the history of the world has gender identification become the primary means by which people attempt to self-identify (and the world has been around a very long time)

But gender differences are rooted in creation and, gender sameness, as Paul alludes to in our text, undermines the Trinity and the Gospel. I've already demonstrated how it is tied to the Trinity and creation. But what about the Gospel?

- a) God is unique from creation and that includes us.
- b) God must be unlike us to save us. (What do I mean by that?)
 - If God was like us, he *couldn't* save us because he would be a sinner
 - If we were like God, we *wouldn't need* saving, because we would be holy.
- c) If God is like us, or we are like God, the Gospel implodes.
- d) The Gospel requires that God be distinct from us.
- e) Just like gender differences are rooted in creation and reflect the Trinity, so gender differences preach the gospel.

Fifth: Applying the Text

1 - Paul wants us to live out our God ordained gender roles in synch with God's order of creation.

2 – He does not want us to use our freedom to blur these distinctions.

3 – These distinctions enable us to best reflect God, serve him and his church and world.

Conclusion:

Cultural norms will change but gender identity is forever rooted in the Trinity, creation, and the Gospel. We should rejoice in these differences and maximize them to honor God and bless others.

Community Group:

- 1 – What are the results in Corinth of thinking too highly of ourselves and not highly enough of God?
- 2 – What results of that mindset have you seen in the world?
- 3 – Why do people look for something to worship?
- 4 – Read the text
- 5 – In verse 3, on what does Paul base his argument for authority and submission?
- 6 – Based on the Trinity, how does headship not mean superiority or submission not mean inferiority?
- 7 – What was the basic problem Paul is addressing in this text?
- 8 – Who is the head of husbands?
- 9 – Who is the head of wives?
- 10 – How is this not authoritarian?
- 11 – Why can't human beings self-identify?
- 12 – How does the creation affirm gender differences?
- 13 – How does the Trinity affirm gender differences?
- 14 – How does the Gospel affirm gender differences?
- 15 – How can 21st century American Christians apply this text?