

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar

Have you ever stumbled onto a conversation and heard a statement that you totally took out of context? Like you walk up to your friends and the last sentence uttered on its own was harsh or uncharacteristic? In a flash you immediately put your own perspectives and preference on that statement and you take it out of context. Usually you think they are talking about you! Feels awkward when you get it wrong...

Same feeling when someone waves and you think they are waving at you, but they are waving at the person next to you, but you've already waved back and feel real silly...

Today we are approaching a section of Scripture that has suffered much of the same problem - readers bringing their own perspective and laying it over what is written. We do this with a lot of our Bible reading though don't we? Our first question is 'what does this have to do with me?' I suppose that is not the worst question we could ask, but a better way is to ask 'what's the context - what is happening?' and 'where is Jesus in this?'

John Calvin: "The sole means of retaining as well as restoring pure doctrine is to set Christ before our eyes."

When we look at it and say "what is Paul saying about Christ" in this correction? We might get a different view.

The goal of worship is fidelity to Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

This is a doozy of a text; so what is the point? Is it about authority? About praying and prophesying? About hair length? The Greek words seem to be a jumble and there must have been some 'inside baseball,' something Paul and the church in Corinth knew that we don't.

Our problem is that we are on the outside looking in, with these difficult words as our only clues. Hence we must forever be content to "look through a glass darkly" and learn what we can in the midst of admitting how little we know.

Context: While this may seem like a whole new topic and thought for Paul, when we view the context, the surroundings of this section, we get a fuller picture and can mine some value for us today.

Paul has just moved through the proper Christian response to living in an idolatrous culture - of freedom in the face of false religions. There is a theme of setting aside rights for the good of others and to glorify God, and it is clear that believers should not be found in the temples of these false gods. Free to eat meat offered to idols, just never in that idol's house.

The opening sentence (keeping the traditions he has taught) most likely serves to introduce the whole of chapters 11-14 which continues the conversation on worshiping with order and the right heart in community with other believers, sharing our common ground as those in Christ. And it all comes before the backdrop of the unique perspectives of the Corinthian church - the spiritualized church, wrestling with real issues of how to pursue Christ together, appropriately.

We don't fully know all that is going on but what we do know is something was happening that was out of order. This is corrective, Paul is saying don't do this do something else. The two verbs "pray and prophesy" make it certain that the problem has to do with the assembly at worship.

Two ideas we see forming here; Me-Centered Worship is Shameful, and Fidelity to Christ is the Goal.

1) Me-Centered Worship is Shameful

This statement seems a little harsh but given the language of honor and dishonor, words that could easily be translated shame, it is appropriate.

Paul wants the church to understand what we can label a right order of relationship. Christ is the head of man and the head of a wife is her husband, as the head of Christ is God. So in this Christianity, with its freedom and equality there are still roles in relationship that matter and that are distinctive from culture.

Now some translations render what we see as husband and wife as man and woman, but that kind of misses what seems to be the point for Paul. This is not all men are over all women, this is specific to the covenant relationship of marriage. And being "head" may not be what we have assumed as an authority...

Paul uses the word "head" metaphorically at the beginning to set the literal problem into a larger theological framework. What is not immediately clear, especially to the English reader is the sense of the metaphor "head," and the nature of relationships that each of the clauses intends.

"Paul's understanding of the metaphor, and almost certainly the only one Corinthians would have grasped, is "head" as "source," especially as "source of life...." Thus Paul's concern is not hierarchical (who has authority over whom), but relational (the unique relationships that are predicated on one's being the source of the other's existence). Indeed, he says nothing about man's authority; his concern is with the woman's being man's glory, the one with whom he is not complete." Fee

The marriage relationship then has appropriate roles that unpack and help reveal the source of life for believers. It is meant for glory - think of it in the context of what has just come before, a

call to glorify God in all things. The relationship of husband and wife, in worship points glory to its appropriate place.

Here the wife is not subordinate to the husband, but necessary for him. She exists to his honor as the one who having come from man is the one companion suitable to him, and together they exist to the honor of their true source, Christ.

We see it elsewhere that marriage is a mystery unveiled to reveal the glory of the gospel, of sacrifice, love, and fidelity. It also reveals how the Trinity relates - God the Father as head of Christ the Son - refers to the incarnational work of Christ. God is the source of Christ, who through his redemption became the source of “every man.” The ultimate source of all things is God himself.

1 Corinthians 11:11-12 “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.” (ESV)

They need each other to be whole. Women and men (wives and husbands) have authority over themselves but (just like setting aside freedom for others and glory) they avoid shame by right roles in relationship (cultural expressions).

The problem is that there is individual expression going on that brings questions to these relationships. This is the thing that needs correction.

Women are praying and prophesying - in the public gathering of the church - which is awesome, because in Judaism they were separated by a sheet and couldn't worship with the men let alone pray publically. The problem is they are doing it with their heads uncovered. Now we don't know for sure what is meant by this covering. Is it a shawl over their heads, is it long hair, is it hair braided and done up... are they simply letting their hair hang loose in their “freedom?”; there are many opinions, but it is out of the ordinary form of worship that is common in the churches.

Men are covering their heads, with either long hair or part of their toga maybe even a shawl - going against what is the tradition, the right roles, when praying and prophesying.

It is a “me-centered,” “my-expression” attitude in worship that is dishonorable, shameful.

We do have a clearer understanding how this type of behavior would have been perceived in the culture at large - and given that Paul has just discussed perception and the conscience of others, it makes sense that we pay attention to it.

There is evidence that in the pagan temples men were covering their heads while participating in idol worship. It went with a mysticism that was prevalent in Corinth, because you became

unrecognizable, shadowy. Prayer shawls and phylacteries in Jewish don't appear until later (some think in response to the uncovered reality of Christian worship) so it would be abnormal in the church. A man praying or preaching with his head covered would send a confusing message to those around him - is he an idol worshiper? Can we worship both Christ and idols?

For women, uncovered heads would have a stronger public stigma. Wearing your hair down in public would have been a sign of availability.

An outward expression that you were not committed. And this is not a subtle sign like not wearing a wedding ring, this is like walking into a singles bar with the clear intention of taking someone, not your husband, home. The common punishment of women caught in adultery was to shave their heads - for all to see they were tainted and unfaithful - the shameful thing to do.

So a wife worshiping with her head uncovered in this context, dishonors her husband, and a husband worshiping with his head covered shames his metaphorical head, it dishonors Christ. Their actions disregard relationship by breaking down the distinctions. By doing so they are putting themselves above the One they are meant to glorify.

Their self-expression is missing the point and dishonoring the "true source." Paul uses the imagery of infidelity to steer us to honoring Christ.

He is saying no, don't do this! Avoid shame, dishonor that is "infidelity" to Christ in worship.

2) Fidelity to Christ is the Goal

This is continuing Paul's consistent call to keep Jesus, Christ and him crucified central to the life of the believer, the existence of the church and now the worship of the church.

Church you have been doing good with the traditions, the ways of life and worship I have left with you, but remember, Jesus is the source. Stay faithful to him.

By following the normal expression of relational roles they are honoring, glorifying Christ. They are giving no appearance of mingling worship. They are giving no appearance of infidelity.

We can't miss that for women headship doesn't stop at the husband, it all flows to the true source, Christ. As our source, we are meant to desire to honor him alone. In how we relate to one another and in how we worship him.

Imitation is still in mind here, that we would follow Christ and his example - specifically in **how he becomes our source**.

It begins with a life of obedience, defeating temptation in the wilderness to put himself before God the Father. And it culminates in a garden with Jesus praying that the Father's will be done. Heading to that place, and to the cross, Jesus prays for God's glory.

John 17:1-5 “When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, [2] since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. [4] I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. [5] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” (ESV)

John 17:25-26 “O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. [26] I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (ESV)

Jesus goes to his death honoring God the Father, in a world confused and looking in all the wrong places for answers he makes known the love of God. Setting aside his rights to lift high the Father's name.

He becomes our source by giving himself for us. In the simplest of terms...

Galatians 1:3-5 “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, [5] to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (ESV)

Lost in our sinful self-seeking, Jesus pours out his grace on us by dying in our place, freeing us from the bonds of evil and infidelity, and granting us his peace. A life of bringing glory where it belongs, to our source.

As gospel-formed people, because he is our source, we can set aside our preference, our priorities, all of it, to worship him.

If Paul asked me to update this text for modern minds it would be this brief - "You don't have to get your way or be weird because you are free in Christ. Being faithful to Christ, over the lure of highlighting yourself is where we are meant to be in worship."

In the same direction as giving up rights and restricting freedom for the higher purpose of glorifying God, so too do we give up our “who's first routines” and make Jesus the center of our worship and life together.

In humility before our head, Jesus, we can live our roles in relationship to highlight him.

“This is the true self-denial to which our Savior calls us, the acknowledgement that self has nothing good in it, except as an empty vessel which God must fill, and that its claim to be or do anything may not for a moment be allowed. It is in this, about and before everything, in which the conformity to Jesus consists, the being and doing nothing of ourselves, that God may be all.”
Andrew Murray (Humility)

A community conforming to Christ, imitating Christ... glorifying him in worship.

The goal of worship is fidelity to Christ.

How might we respond to this correction, or warning from Paul?

Come to the Source - Perhaps you are in this place this morning and you don't recognize yourself in Galatians 1 as those delivered, given grace and peace in Christ. Believe in him, turn from your life of self-glory-seeking and surrender to his authority, realize he is your head, live for his glory.

Repent of Me-Centered Worship - For us our dishonorable actions are not in how we do our hair or what we put on our heads. But they are in how we pursue our preferences and make ourselves a priority above Jesus in our worship and in our lives. The desire of our flesh to be noticed, and coddled as if we are the object of worship. Using all the right words but making us the prize... Give that up. Whatever form of self-seeking is yours, lay it at the feet of Christ.

Be Faithful to Jesus - Seek to glorify him, to make him known. Keep Christ as the center, the purpose and priority of worship - and all of your life. This is the Christian life, a life united to Jesus and we find our faithfulness in recognizing who we are in light of Christ giving himself to deliver us from evil.

Every life is better with Christ as its center, but that means Christ must become, more and more, the animating center of all you do and say—that's union with Christ.

“union with Christ displaces us from the center of our own lives. It tells us we can discover who God created us to be only through living in vital union with his Son. It tells us the work of Christ for us cannot be separated from the person of Christ in us. Otherwise, we run the risk of loving his benefits more than we love the Benefactor.”

“Union with Christ says that the one who made heaven and earth dwells within you. He not only holds the lever of change, but he also promises that when you abide in him, through faith and obedience, his living water will flow out of your life. He is the fount—and from him flows every blessing.”

The goal of worship and of life is fidelity to Christ. Oh that we can live this, empowered by the Spirit, with living water flowing out of our lives, highlighting the goodness of Jesus.

As a church we are intentionally entering a season of asking for this exact thing. The elders are calling it **Revision 2017** and beginning March 1 we are going to corporately spend forty-plus days waiting on the Lord asking for spiritual renewal for us as individuals, as a church and in our community.

We will seek the Lord for confirmation of the vision of who we will be as a church into the future and for revival in our lives and in our neighborhoods for the glory of Christ. We will host weekly prayer gatherings in the communities we each call home and will have specific emphases each week as we pray and worship Jesus together. I hope you will plan on participating.

And it all starts with this as the goal, fidelity to Jesus. That we would exist and function for his glory. That we would live in our union with Christ and that our world would be forever changed by him. That he would help us be faithful to him.