

7 Principles For Worship That Pleases God

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Introduction: I am an unapologetic complementarian when it comes to gender and gender roles in the Church and the home. I believe “The Danvers Statement On Biblical Manhood And Womanhood” (1987) and The Nashville Statement On Human Sexuality And Gender Roles (2017) faithfully reflect biblical and theological truth found in the Bible. Among their affirmations and denials, we find the following that are relevant to the text before us.

- 1) Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (D).
- 2) Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order... (D).
- 3) WE AFFIRM that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflects God’s original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing. WE DENY that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome (N, article 4).

4) The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal. 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:11-15) (D).

5) Redemption is Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.

1. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; Tit. 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

2. In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). (D).

6) WE AFFIRM our duty to speak the truth in love at all times [Eph. 4:15], including when we speak to or about one another as male or female. WE DENY any obligation to speak in such ways that dishonor God's design of his image-bearers as male and female (N, article 11).

Such statements will sound counter-cultural (and they are!) in a society awash in so many confusions about gender and sexuality. When we have a Supreme Court justice who cannot define the word “woman,” we have a serious issue in our culture. And we should not think the church is immune from this confusion. This problem existed in the 1st century church, and it is making inroads in the 21st century church as well. Paul tells us that “God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33) and that in his Church “everything is to be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Such principles are not intended to stifle excitement, exuberance and even spontaneity in worship. They are, however, intended to provide divinely ordained parameters and patterns that will build up the body (1 Cor. 14:26) and provide a positive witness to unbelievers who attend our services (1 Cor. 14:23-25). First Corinthians 11:2-16 beautifully complements these principles as it provides a trinitarian lesson for the proper roles of men and women in corporate worship. Seven principles are set forth for our instruction.

I. We must honor the principle of divinely ordained authority 11:2-3

Paul will need to say some tough things in these verses, so he begins with a word of affirmation, “Now I praise you (*ESV*, “commend”) because you remember me in everything and hold fast (*ESV*, “maintain; *NASV*, “hold firmly”) to the traditions just as I delivered them to you” (v. 2). Paul begins tactfully wanting to establish good will as he addresses headship and proper decorum in

worship, an area where the Corinthians were deficient. The traditions that the church held fast are not specified, but they probably included “the basic facts of the gospel, plus some training in conduct” (Vaughn, *I Cor.* BSC, 111). Further, as Taylor notes, “The traditions were not Paul’s own but rather those handed down to him (11:23; 15:1-3)” (*I Cor.*, NAC, 257). The basics of the gospel were not Paul’s creation. He simply passed on, as we must, the good news he had received. Paul then, in verse 3, lays down the basic theological truth that will serve as the foundation for the remainder of this section. “But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman (*ESV*, “the head of a wife is her husband,” *CSB* marginal reading is similar), and God is the head of Christ.” Immediately we are struck by the repetition of the word “head.” It appears 9 times in the Greek New Testament in this text. Sometimes it refers to a person’s literal head (vv. 4a, 5a, 7, 10). However, at other times, the word is used symbolically for having authority over another. Schreiner is helpful when he writes, “the notion of authority is the most likely contextually.... The most important evidence here is the parallel in Ephesians 5:23” (Schreiner, *I Cor.*, TNTC, 222). We should also note, because of what we read in the context of this text, “wife” and “husband” is the most likely meaning and best translation. The issue of male headship is taught to apply to the home and church. Scripture nowhere teaches male headship in general with

application to the whole of society. And, the issue is one of function not essence, assignment not nature. We know this because men and women, husbands and wives, equally bear the image of God. They are equal in essence and essential being. Further, and more importantly, Christ the Son is equal in essence and essential being to God the Father. This is classic and biblical Trinitarianism. Now, there is one caveat and that is at the beginning of verse 3. Christ, as Son of God, is essentially superior to man (husbands) as well as superior in spiritual authority over him. That truth is also clearly taught throughout the whole of inerrant and infallible Scripture. So, to summarize our foundation verse by way of paraphrase, this is what Paul is saying: We must understand that the spiritual authority over every man is Christ, the spiritual authority for a wife is her husband (or a father for an unmarried daughter) and the spiritual authority of the Christ (God the Son) is God (the Father). There is no inferiority in being submission to your divinely ordained head. It is for our good and the glory of the Triune God.

II. We must honor the principle of proper social expectation

11:4-6

These verses address the specific situation that demands Paul's attention, proper adornment in public worship. In an honor/shame culture this would be extremely important as many missionaries around the world could testify.

Though most commentators argue the issue is whether one should wear a hat

(men) or a veil (women), and the text could certainly be applied to cultures where that is an issue, I am persuaded by the argument of my friend Chuck Quarles that the issue is different and more acute. I will quote him at some length to get the proper context. He writes: “Paul’s construction does not refer explicitly to an article of clothing. The only time he mentions a “head covering” is in vs. 15 in the statement that God has given a woman long hair “instead of” or “in place of” a head covering. When this statement is combined with the numerous references to hair length and shortness in vv. 5, 6, 14, and 15, it appears that the issue is the length of the hair of men versus women, not the wearing of an article of clothing though Paul’s rationale could apply by extension to that (i.e. if an article of clothing is worn on the head in worship, this should be reserved for women exclusively). “Having down the head” refers to hair hanging down the back of the head. Paul says that men should not have long hair covering their head, but women should have long hair covering their head in worship. Notice that Paul addresses the hair length of both men and women. It appears that not only were women adopting the very short hair length that was characteristic of men, but men were also adopting the significantly longer hair length that was characteristic of women....

The Corinthians consistently blended together elements of the Christian faith with practices from their pagan past. Some members of the church continued to

participate in the idol feasts of the pagan temple (1 Cor. 10:7, 14-22; 2 Cor. 6:14-18). Some were turning the Lord's Supper into the kind of drunken and gluttonous feast they had celebrated in pagan temples. Some misunderstood prophecy and tongues as ecstatic utterances like those practiced in the pagan temples. Confused interpretation influenced by their pagan background likely influenced the practice addressed in 1 Corinthians 11 as well.

One of the most prominent religions in Corinth was the worship of Dionysius. In Greek mythology, Dionysius was conceived through Zeus's union with the human woman Semele. In one account, Dionysius was a male god who had been raised as a girl in order to protect him from Hera, Zeus's wife, who was determined to kill him. Dionysius dressed as a girl, kept long flowing locks, doused himself with perfume, walked with a feminine gait, and imitated the female voice when he spoke. His worshippers described him as androgynous, both male and female, and would celebrate Dionysius's gender confusion by their own gender reversal. In the worship of Dionysius (which was mixed with the worship of Demeter in Corinth according to McRay's *Archaeology and the New Testament*) men would wear feminine clothing and long hair, and women would wear men's garments and wear men's short hair style, sometimes even having their heads shaved. Archaeologists have discovered vase paintings from Corinth depicting Dionysius worship that show some female worshippers would

go to shocking extremes to make themselves fully male. Thus, men would masquerade as women and women as men and similar practices appear in the worship of Cybele, Demeter, Artemis, and Diana. Paul may well have taught in Corinth what he taught in Galatians 3:28, in Christ “there is no male and female.” But in context, that means that both male and female Christians are the seed of Abraham and are equal heirs of the promise. It most certainly did not mean that we are to seek to undo the distinction between male and female that was part of God’s creation ordinance. Yet the Corinthians apparently latched onto the mantra, “no male or female,” and interpreted that against their pagan background and consequently incorporated elements of pagan worship into the Christian church. By interpreting Christian claims against their own pagan background, they perverted and distorted the Christian faith. That is the almost inevitable result of using our own past experience as the primary guide to biblical interpretation.” (Confusion at Corinth: Biblical Interpretation, Sex, and the Glory of God.” Unpublished notes).

Now we have the proper context to understand Paul’s meaning in these verses. “Every man who prays or prophesies [the later to be equated with Holy Spirit inspired speech, not the authoritative teachings of the elders; see 1 Tim. 2:12], with something on his head [giving him a female appearance], dishonors his head” [who is Christ!] (v. 4). A man should look like a man! And verse 5,

“Every woman who prays or prophesies [Paul affirms that women may do this when the church gathers for worship; see Acts 2:17-18; 21:9] with her head uncovered [giving her a male-like appearance], dishonors her head [her husband], since this is one and the same as having her head shaved.” In fact, if you want to shame your husband, act like a pagan and flaunt your so-called freedom, then just go ahead and cut it all off. Shave it off and look like a bald man! (*a reductio ad absurdum* argument). “For if a woman doesn’t cover her head [with long hair], she should have her hair cut off.” (v. 6). However, this is obviously absurd and shameful. Indeed, “it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved.” A woman should look like the glorious female God created her and designed her to be! Therefore, “let her head be covered.” Bottomline: men should look like men and women should look like women. There should be no gender or cultural confusion. What a critically important word for our day!

III. We must honor the principles of glory, creation and purpose 11:7-9

Paul appeals to Creation’s order and design in these verses for proper conduct in worship. Like his Trinitarian argument in v. 3, there is a timelessness to his argument. What he says is true anywhere, any place and any time. He begins by again affirming that, “A man should not cover his head” when he prays or prophesies in worship (v. 7). Yes, it is shameful (v. 4), but he should also

remember “he is the image and glory of God.” And “so too, woman is the glory of man.” Further, “man did not come from woman, but woman came from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man” (vv. 8-9). Now, let’s be clear what Paul is saying and what he is not saying. First, what is he not saying? Paul is not saying that a woman is not in the full image and likeness of God. He is not saying a woman is inferior to a man. He knows Gen. 1:27 very well! The key to these verses is the word “glory.” As Gardner points out, “It is notable that Paul does not say in v. 7c that woman is the “image” of man” (*1 Cor.*, ZECNT, 491). So, what is he saying? The greatest thing in all of creation that brings glory to God is man (humanity). Of all the things God brought into existence nothing brings him glory like man. Similarly, the greatest and most magnificent thing that ever came out of a man is a woman. My friend Andy Davis puts it like this, “What is the greatest thing that ever physically came out of a man, not any of his works, but woman... The crowning achievement of man... is woman” (“Headship, the Trinity, and Headcoverings,” Part 2, 10-13-19). Further, as Gen. 2:18 teaches, God made the woman as “a helper corresponding to [a man]”, someone that perfectly fits and complements him. Again, all of this points to the essential Christo-centric nature of true and authentic worship. Gardner again is our helper: “Whatever the reason for the head covering in terms of social mores at the time, Paul’s

point is that this created difference between husbands and wives has not changed simply because people have become Christians. The created order should still be respected. In this way, as worship takes place, it is ultimately only Christ to whom glory is given” (492).

IV. We must honor the principle of angelic observation and submission 11:10

Verses 2-16 are not about our rights but our responsibilities in worship. Why even the angels know and understand this! “This is why a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (v. 10). Now, just because the angels know what is going on here does not mean we do! As David Garland wisely and humbly notes, “No interpretation [of v. 10] can be held with great confidence” (*1 Cor.*, BECNT, 524). Still, some basic biblical facts can at least help us grasp the main idea Paul is seeking to make. First, angels, like us, were created to glorify God. Second, angels delight in worshiping and serving God. Third, angels gladly submit to the authority of God in all things. Fourth, angels attend our worship services and observe what is going on. Fifth, they celebrate when we worship properly and are disappointed when we don’t. Therefore, we should be sure to worship in a God-glorifying way because our fellow-servants the angels, who minister to us (Heb. 1:14), want to join us in humble, proper worship that focuses on Christ and honors and glorifies our heavenly Father (cf. Isa. 6:2-3).

V. We must honor the principle of interdependence

11:11-12

I believe Paul was aware of the fact that his argument to this point could be open to misunderstanding, and so he moves to make sure his meaning is clear. There is no superiority of men over women or women over men. There is a divine design of both complementarity and interdependence. “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, and man is not independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman” (vv. 11-12). The first woman (Eve) came from the first man (Adam) as Gen. 2 makes clear. However, ever since the original creation act every man (and woman) has come from a woman, a mother. A woman coming from a man was a unique one of a kind event never to be repeated. Now, since then, there is a beautiful and necessary interdependence in procreation, parenting, marriage, and church! We stand equal before God and in need of one another. The fact is we cannot exist without the other. We cannot flourish without the other. Schreiner summarizes well Paul’s intention in these two verses: “Paul wants to avoid any thought that women are ontologically inferior; thus, he emphasizes the interdependence of men and women in the Lord. Women came into existence through men, but men come into the world through women. The first woman was from the first man, but now all men come into the world through women, that is, through their birth

via a mother. A difference in function between men and women does not negate the equality and value of the two sexes” (*I Cor.*, 235-36).

It is important to note how Paul begins and ends his argument in verses 11-12. It is “In the Lord” (v. 11) and “all things come from God” (v. 12). Thiselton is on target in explaining Paul’s meaning when he writes, “Paul almost certainly means to say that gender differentiation is decreed in creation, expressed in societal convention, and not abrogated in the order of the gospel...in the gospel differentiation is determined more explicitly by a principle of mutuality and reciprocity” (*I Cor.*, 842). God is the origin and source of all of this, and it is for our good and for His glory. This should especially be on glorious display when we gather together for worship.

VI. We must honor the principle of nature

11:13-15

Paul has appealed to theology proper (God), social convention, and creation.

Now he appeals to nature and common sense. The latter, unfortunately, is often in short supply. Paul begins with a rhetorical question, the first of 3. Question number 1, “Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman (*ESV*, “wife”) to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (v. 13). Of course, the expected and proper answer is “no,” it isn’t. Question number 2, “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him?” (v. 14). Debates about

what is too long and too short are of little value, especially in missiological contexts where cultural norms vary. The point, however, is crystal clear. Men should look like and be easily recognized as men and women should look like and be easily recognized as women. There should be no gender blurring or gender confusion. Question number 3, “but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?” (v. 15). Yes! Long hair on a woman’s head honors her, “it functions as something that distinguishes the splendor of the woman” (Fee, *1 Cor.*, NICNT, 583). She testifies and gives witness to the goodness and rightness of God’s good creation in distinguishing the differences between a male and female. Therefore, Paul can conclude, “for her hair is given to her as a covering.” God himself is the implied agent of this act. God himself gives long hair to a woman as an appropriate sign of respect for and submission to the divine ordering. Such a covering honors her head, her husband, and it also glorifies her Creator, her God. Attention thus is directed where it should be directed in worship: on God and not on us.

VII. We must honor the principle of common practice

11:16

Paul brings this section to an end with an appeal to the fact that his instruction is not just for Corinth. This is the way it is done everywhere in all the churches. Paul is direct and leaves no room for debate! “If anyone wants to argue about this” (*ESV*, “inclined to be contentious”), then let me set the record straight.

“We have no other custom (*ESV*, “such practice”), nor do the churches of God” (v. 16). When it comes to corporate worship, there are non-negotiable guidelines and parameters. No questions. No debate. Men acting like redeemed men and women acting like redeemed women is one of those areas. Wiersbe wisely notes, it is essential to rightly worship and rightly honor God. “In my ministry in different parts of the world, I have noticed that basic principle of headship applies in every culture; but the means of demonstrating it differs from place to place. The important thing is the submission of the heart to the Lord and the public manifestation of obedience to God’s order” (*Be Wise*, 127).

Conclusion: Gender confusion and perversion pervades our culture. It pervades the worlds of education, media, and sports. It should not find a home in the church. God’s good design should be on public display among those who have been redeemed by Christ and transformed by the power of the gospel. Bi-sexuals, homosexuals, lesbians, and transgenders should know we love and care for them. One way we do this is by modeling and telling the truth. It may not be the popular thing to do, but it will be the right thing to do. Afterall, Jesus teaches us in John 8:32, “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” There is a real freedom in Christ. There is real freedom to be who God created you to be in the gospel!