

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 8 August 2021
Services: Across the diocese
Series: **God's church** - 1 Corinthians
Title: **What's with the head coverings?**
Passage: 1 Corinthians 11:1-16
Outline:
 Preliminary – cultural context – then and now

Men and women

- 1. Gloriously different**
- 2. Wonderfully interdependent**
- 3. Both praying and prophesying**
- 4. A certain 'order' in relationships**

We live in a world totally confused about

men and women and their **roles**,

the nature of **gender**,

whether girls and boys growing up are impacted more by **nature** or **nurture**

not to mention the whole area of gender **dysphoria** which impacts a small number of people with very **serious** and **far reaching implications**

so it's **fascinating** to turn to chapter 11 in 1 Corinthians and discover that there was as much **confusion** around these matters in the **1st** century as there is in the **21st**!

but **before** we turn to the **text** I just need to do a little **preliminary thinking** with you about the **cultural context** of the passage and our **own** **cultural context**.

Without a doubt there are aspects of **1st century culture** – AND 1st century **Jewish** and **Christian sub-culture** – which we will never **fully** understand simply because we **weren't there** and don't have enough **information**.

We can only glean **some** of the cultural things by what we read here... we're kind of reading **between the lines**. //

But we do know that **wives** were seen more as something you **own** rather than someone you **love**...

We know that women didn't **learn** – didn't attend **school** – which is why Jesus saying to Martha that Mary had chosen the **better** thing – by sitting **learning** at Jesus' feet – was very **radical** and completely **counter-cultural**!

We know that women didn't **speak** in the synagogue... which is why the reference in **this** passage which we'll come to in a moment that women were both **praying** and **prophesying** in church – was – so **radical!!** //

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And the other thing to say about the cultural context is that the roles of men and women were seen **VISIBLY** and **expressed visibly** by the way men and women **dressed....** and by the length of their **hair** – by women wearing their hair **UP** not **DOWN**... and men having **short hair**...

Even in our **own** culture we look back at the last 50-60 years and see how men and women were **way** more **distinctive then** they are now in terms of dress etc... women rarely if at all would wear **pants** or **trousers**... often – wore their hair **up**... women – **long** hair – men **short**...! /

Even **today** – there is **still** cultural baggage around **men and women**... and **expectations**... just last week the Norwegian women's handball team was fined for **NOT** wearing bikini bottoms and a British **Paralympian** was criticised for inappropriate clothing because it was deemed his running briefs were too **short**!

So we are still dealing with cultural expectations around men and women and their appearance and their dress.

all sorts of **cultural specific stuff** going on here in **Corinth** – and in the **background** – was stuff associated with the **temple prostitutes**... who wore **their** hair **down**.... As a sign of their – **availability**! ///

So having laid down some **preliminary** thinking for us... here is what we going do today – a slightly **different** approach because instead of taking you through **passage** by **passage**, I'm going to deal more with **topics** and **issues** that arise **from** the **passage**... and I hope that you'll see how they arise from the passage.

...and along the **way** – we'll hear some things which would have been absolutely radical to the **FIRST** readers, and other aspects which are actually more **radical** to **US** // ... and I hope along the way you'll gain some understanding and appreciation of what is being said, even if we don't grapple with every detail of the text.

Men and women

- 1. Gloriously different**
- 2. Wonderfully interdependent**
- 3. Both praying and prophesying**
- 4. A certain 'order' in relationships**

First then:

1. GLORIOUSLY DIFFERENT

As I said from the outset, we might not be able to **fully comprehend** all the **cultural issues** here... but if **men** were to wear their hair **short**, and **women** their hair either **up** or **covered**, it seems that in the church at Corinth, this **wasn't happening**!

So there was a **confusion** around gender **identity** which the Word of God sees as **inappropriate**.

The call is for **men** and **women** to be seen **distinctively AS men and women**.

The **reason**?

It is around the fact that men and women were created by God to **BE different**... and **that** difference ought not to be **blurred** or **hidden** or **denied** – but seen – expressed as **obvious** and **apparent** - as something to be **celebrated**.

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There is something **beautifully complementary** about men and women that **together** they reflect the **image of God**. That's why our **differences** ought not to be denied.

We see a glimpse of that **design** in our biological and physical make up as men and women come together to make **love and create life**. That of course is not the **totality** of how that is expressed or known, but it is **significant**.

So... Christians in Corinth were to reflect the **reality** of the **difference** between men and women – in their case by women **covering their heads** and **men NOT covering their heads**.

Now **our** cultural **context** is **different** – women don't cover their heads in **our culture** – (although some small religious **groups do...**)

The challenge for us comes from **OUR** culture which wants to dictate that there is **NO** difference at **all** between **men** and **women, boys** and **girls...** from the push which wants to stop using male and female **pronouns...** that wants remove **single sex bathrooms...** single sex **schools...** that wants to remove reference to **gender** in **job applications...** and wants us to live life as though there's absolutely **NO DIFFERENCE** at all between **men** and **women...**

...and if we as Christians today are to think through the **implications** of this passage for **our** context... I think it means **pushing back** on that **social construct** which says there is no difference between **men and women** – but **RATHER** – to **celebrate** that God has made us so **beautifully** and **wonderfully different...** and in church, to do **nothing** which **blurs** or **ignores** those beautiful **differences...** //

Which brings us quite nicely to the fact that men and women are:

2. WONDERFULLY INTERDEPENDENT

Have a look with me a v11 – *Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman.*

The first thing that was **not** good after the creation of the world, was for the man to be **alone**. This is not some sort of biblical imperative for **everyone** to be **married**, but that it's man and woman **together** reflect the **image of God**; - we can't do it **alone**.

Man is not **independent** of **woman**. **Woman** is not **independent** of man!

In Paul's culture in which women were valued so **little**, this was a **radical** thing to say.

Yet strangely, in a culture **today** in which it's radical to say that men and women are **different**, to say that in some way that we **need** each other, is **also incredibly radical**.

Not only are we missing **out** by not appreciating our **differences**, but when we deny that we **need** each other, we're **limiting** how we display the **glory of God**.

It means that any form of making fun of the **opposite sex** is completely inappropriate.

It means making serious **effort** to **value** the **diversity** of **man and woman**.

It means finding ways to express **difference** in ways that don't diminish our **equality**.

It means intentionally serving the Lord **together**, because we know we're **interdependent**.

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It means in the life of the church – **valuing** and **celebrating** the contribution of both **men and women** – as **unique** – as beautiful - as those contributions **are!** //

Which again is a wonderful way to lead in to the reality that...

3. BOTH MEN AND WOMEN WERE PRAYING AND PROPHEYSING

Did you notice that? This was **radical then!!**

Have a look with me at v5 – *every woman who prays or prophecies with her head uncovered dishonours her head...*

We jump immediately to think the head covering issue – but what we **should** be noticing is that women were actually **praying** and **propheying** in the **church gathering!** //

That was really quite **extraordinary!** And Paul not **once** hints that there was anything **wrong** with **that...**

Praying – they were publicly **speaking TO** God

Propheying – they were publicly speaking **FOR** God – that is, they were bringing the **Word of God** – bringing the **gospel** – to bear on people's **lives** – **building up, comforting, consoling...**

The fact that **women** were **doing** this given the **cultural context of the day** – and the background of **Judaism** where women would **never** have had an up-front role in the synagogue and in fact were separated by a **screen** – is **incredibly radical...**

Why is this **permitted?**

Because the Word of God is teaching that both men **AND** women should be **involved** – should be **contributing**.

Not **cancelling** their **difference**, nor **obliterating** the **other**, but also **demonstrating** their **interdependence**.

If men and women **beautifully complement one another** – then **both** are welcome to **pray** and **prophecy** in the **congregation** – for we **need** the contribution of **both** - all for the **glory of God**.

Well that brings us finally to something that I think it quite radical to **our ears today** – namely that in regards to men and women that there is:

4. A CERTAIN 'ORDER' IN RELATIONSHIPS

Now – I've left this to the end because I wanted you to see those **other** matters first... in case this **distracts you a bit** – then at least you've already **heard the rest** 😊 //

But **this bit**, is actually the **foundation** of which the argument in the rest of the passage stands... as it is **BECAUSE** there is an order to relationships that the **differences** between men and women ought not to be **blurred over!** //

So let's look at v3 - *I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ... and the head of the woman or 'wives') is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

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So before you get **side-tracked** in your thinking – **remember** what we've **already seen...** that **men and women** are **beautifully different...** the men and women are **wonderfully interdependent** - and that **men and women BOTH pray and prophecy** in the **church gathering...**! So the fact there is an **order** in **relationships** doesn't **threaten** or **change any** of **we have already established!** //

So – let's be **totally clear** – men and women are **equal** in every way – equally **valued** – equally **needed** – **equal** before **God** – equally **sinners** saved by **grace and equally heirs of eternal life!!** //

So this 'order' in relationships doesn't imply **inferiority**, does infer a **questionable value or lesser value of women...** doesn't mean that one is **down-trodden** or anything like that – although friends it is tragically **true** to say that due to **man's sinfulness**, passages such as this have been **twisted** and used to justify **terrible domestic abuse** even among **God's** people – and even amongst **clergy** families. That reflects a **massive massive misunderstanding, twisting, distortion of God's word** and is totally **inexcusable!** ///

No this 'order' is rather about spheres of **responsibility...** and **servanthood**.

The **best** way for me to explain this, is by reminding you of the letter to the **Ephesians** when it expands on the relationship between **husbands and wives...** do you recall?

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

We don't get how **radical** this would have been to the **original** readers...what? Love wives **sacrificially?** – **generously?** – laying down our **lives** for them as Christ laid down his **life** for us? – what are you talking **about??!!** //

It was a **radical** thought which challenged the **culture** of the ownership in regards to wives!

So... please don't get **distracted** by the '**order in relationships**' stuff so that you **miss** what it actually means in **practice...**

Husbands... you're not the **boss**; you're not in **charge**; you're not **OVER** your wives; she is **not** just there for you to tell her what to **do**; whatever else the fact that there is an '**order**' to in relationship means, it means that in **your house**, you are head **SERVANT!!** // You're

YOU set the pattern of **love**, of **kindness**, of **thoughtfulness**, of **generosity**, of **sacrifice....** Just as **Christ OUR head**, has done for **us!**

So let me bring things to a close:

Men and women – wonderfully **different** – this ought not be blurred or distorted – let's **celebrate** and cherish the **differences.** //

Men and women – wonderfully **interdependent** – we **need** each other – and the **unique differences** we bring to the **world** and to **relationships** and to the life of the **church!** – again – let's **celebrate** all that God has given us as we **depend** on one **another....** //

Men and women – **both contributing** in terms of **praying** and **propheying** in the Christian **gathering** – **uniquely contributing** because of their **complementary differences!** – let's **celebrate** – all that men and women bring **with their differences** – to the life of God's **church!** //

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And **men and women** – yes – although there **IS** an **order** in **relationships**... that might be radical for our ears to hear – but let's grapple with what it might mean because whatever **else** it means – in means in terms of **husbands** and **wives**... that husbands are to **love** their wives **generously** and **sacrificially** – even as our **Lord Jesus Christ** has **so loved us** and laid down his **life** so we can be **forgiven** and **reconciled** to the **Father**...

Husbands – will you **love** your **wives** like **that**?