



Cover Up?

No. 26
Series: 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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Text

² Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. 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. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵ but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶ For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. ⁷ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹ 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. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

Introduction

This is actually a great text for a Christmas sermon. I'll let you see if you can figure that out as we go through it and I'll come back to the notion at the end.

But I'm guessing that your first thought upon hearing this text is – *What the...?!?!?* You're wondering (1) if this means that Christian women today are supposed to wear a literal head scarf, or at least Christian married women, or at least during church services. And (2) if not (or even if so), what is the underlying principle, what is this really saying about men and women? (1) Is this giving a kind of church dress code for all time? (2) What's the point?

Let me just give you my conclusion on those two questions up front, so that you're not left wondering about that and trying to figure that out while I'm going through it. And then I'll try to walk you through the text and show you Paul's logic.

So first off, is this the Sunday that IBC comes out and says, "From now on to come here women will need to start wearing head coverings?" No. I don't think that is the necessary application of this text for us today. Why? It's not because I don't take the Bible seriously. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, enduring, authoritative Word of God. So why do I not feel comfortable standing up here and binding everyone's conscience with a command for women to start wearing a piece of cloth on their heads?

One reason is because it's not totally clear that this is what the text is talking about. Look at v. 4 – “Every man who prays or prophesies *with his head covered...*” is literally in the Greek “having down from the head.” And so “this might refer to long hair rather than to some external covering like a veil or shawl.”¹ If you look further down at vv. 14 and 15 you'll see that Paul is clearly talking about hair length there. Perhaps that's what he has in mind throughout this whole section? He even says at the end of v. 15 that a woman's long hair “is given to her for a covering.” So maybe the covering isn't cloth, but hair. So that makes me hesitant to say that women must wear some kind of veil or headdress. It's not 100% clear that this is what Paul is talking about in this text.

Another reason why I'm unwilling to say this is a mandate regarding headgear is that things like clothing are extremely culturally defined. It's hard to know exactly what certain fashion choices communicated in Paul's day and how they might communicate something totally different today or in a different context. And it seems odd to me that Paul would be locking us into a precise prescription regarding something culturally defined like dress, especially in a letter where he's just expressed a highly culturally flexible and adaptable approach – *to these people I become like one of them so I might win them, to those people I became like them so that I might win them... I become all things to all people* (cf. 9:19-23). I don't think that he's now locking Christians into one particular cultural expression.

And then thirdly, based on Paul's heavy emphasis in this letter on Christian freedom (e.g. 9:1-5) and his cautioning against legalism (e.g. 10:25-30), I'm hesitant to stipulate what people should or shouldn't wear and then have to get into questions about length and how much hair can show for it to count as covered and can the covering be colored or have patterns on it (do hats count?) and when exactly does it have to be worn... That gets into legalism land very quickly and I think the NT is more about principles than precise prescriptions on cultural matters like this.

So it's not clear that it's about fabric in the first place, clothing is a highly culturally conditioned expression, and Paul's allergic to legalism. For those reasons I'm not comfortable requiring head coverings.

All that being said, if someone's conscience compels her to wear a head covering of some kind, I wouldn't try to stop her. I can't say it's unbiblical, unless it's seen as her righteousness.

So there you go. That's my take after reading a good bit on this and studying the text. I'm just stating it up front that I'm not convinced that this is a timeless mandate for the absence or presence of a certain kind of head garb.

Then that brings us to the second question – so what *is* this about? Can we just ignore it? Why's this here? What's Paul getting at? What's the underlying principle that *is* transcendent truth? He has something he's concerned about and trying to communicate and it's preserved in Scripture for us too for a reason. Paul's not legalistic, but he's also not licentious – anything goes, you do you! So what sin does he see creeping into the Corinthian church that we should also be aware of?

I don't think it's simply a dress code violation. It's deeper than that. It's ultimately about gender confusion. Paul's deeply concerned about a distortion of God's good design that androgynizes people. This passage teaches clearly that men and women are equal in value and worth. But it also teaches clearly that men and women are distinct in role and function. Men are to take responsibility. Women are to respond well to that.

And these fundamental distinctions will show up in appearance. In short, what we're going to see today from this (admittedly tricky) text is just this: **in the church men and women should look different.**

Let's pray and then we'll look at the where, the who, the why, and the what...

Where? In Church or All the Time?

Where, who, why, what? Where is the setting that Paul is envisioning as he's addressing head coverings? **Men and women should look different in the church.** And he has primarily in mind here a church worship service.

11:2 marks a shift in the focus of this letter. "Now." "Now let me start to talk about something different..." "Paul has been talking about how the members of the church were exercising their rights and liberties in the world – outside of the context of worship. Here Paul begins to talk about how the members of the church should exercise their rights and liberties within the church – in the context of worship. There is a shift from the life of the church in the world to the life of the church in the church. In chapters 11 – 14 Paul addresses a number of different issues in the life of the church such as head coverings, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, prophecy and tongues, and orderly worship."² That's what we're getting into now in 1 Corinthians.

It will become even clearer as we progress through chapters 11 – 14, but it seems that Paul is imagining a church worship service scene in these verses that we're looking at today. Where do we see that? In vv. 4 and 5 he's describing two specific activities – praying and prophesying. Praying could be private or public. But prophesying... We'll get into more details of exactly what that was in later weeks (there's too much other controversial stuff to cover today), but suffice it to say at this point that prophesying "required an audience."³ And so it seems that Paul is envisioning a church service, perhaps even certain elements of the liturgy.

If Paul is talking about not wearing or wearing a particular piece of cloth, then it would seem that it must be worn (or not worn) only during church or maybe even only during certain activities in the worship service, not all week long and when you're out in public. If he's talking about hair length, he could be referring to a woman wearing her hair 'up' at church, but it would start to have implications that spill over into one's life Monday through Saturday because you can't grow long hair while you're getting ready for church on Sunday morning (unless, I guess you put on a wig?).

If Paul's primarily getting at a principle that is put on display clearly in a gathering of the church, then it would have implications for Sundays and for how you carried yourself consistently at home and work the other days of the week. I think that's what Paul means – a general comportment of Christians that will show up obviously in corporate worship. But worship gatherings are not just one-hour-a-week religious rituals. They are visible expressions of who we are as a community 24-7. Our Lord's Day meetings should be demonstrations to the world of what God's redeemed humanity looks like. And so when unbelievers come in and observe us it should be obvious that there's something different about us, even in the way that men and women engage and interact and honor the Lord.

They should notice that we're not like a mosque, where men and women are quarantined from each other, where women are treated as second class citizens, quiet and

covered up so that you can only see their eyes. Notice that Paul assumes that women will be participating in the worship service, praying and prophesying out loud right along with the men. And yet, they should be doing it in a distinct way. So if a Muslim came into our service, he should notice right away that we're different than a mosque *and* we're different than the public high school or university nearby. Men and women here are observably distinguishable and joyfully complementary. And that can't be just a show that you put on for a religious service once a week. It must be the culmination of an all-of-life worldview.

Who? Husbands and Wives or Men and Women?

So that's the where – in the church most immediately... but with implications for all of life. Now the who. Who is Paul talking about here? The difficulty in determining this comes from the fact that in Greek there are not different words for 'husband' and 'wife' than the words for 'man' and 'woman'. It's *aner* for man/husband and *gyne* for woman/wife. Context determines. The presence of possessive pronouns like 'his' or 'hers' are helpful to indicate it means 'wife' or 'husband'.

But here it's vague. Is Paul talking about husbands and wives in particular or men and women in general? So, for example, look at v. 3 – “[T]he head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband.” This is the ESV's interpretation. There actually is no possessive pronoun 'her' in the original text. It literally reads – “Every *aner*'s head is Christ, and the head of *gyne* is *aner*.” It's the same with every instance of 'man', 'woman', or 'wife' in the rest of this section. So is Paul saying that every woman is to submit to every man?

I think looking at Paul's teaching in other places like Ephesians 5, he would say that there is a unique relationship of headship and submission not between every man and every woman, but between a husband and wife. A single guy in this church is not the head of my wife, to whom she is expected to submit. So it seems that sometimes here it may be appropriate to translate the words 'husband' or 'wife.' But not every time. For example, v. 12 can't be saying that husband is born of wife. That's weird. Context has to control and it's not always clear.

If Paul is merely talking about a piece of cloth, then we'd really want to know if he means for it to be worn by married women only or all women. But if he's trying to get at a deeper principle, it becomes less important to parse out what applies to men and women in general and what's for husbands and wives specifically. I think what Paul's getting at is that there is a fundamental posture and presentation that is appropriate to men and one that is appropriate to women, an essence of masculinity and femininity that should be observable in men and women in general and that then makes it fitting that when a man and woman get married, the man should be the head and the woman would be under his authority. It's not like men and women are totally interchangeable and then suddenly there's some differentiation that must appear out of nowhere when two of them get married.

Why? Because of Tradition (v. 2)

So **in the church, men and women should look different.** That's the main point. Now why? Why should Christian **men and women look different?** Paul gives six reasons.

The first is an argument from tradition. He begins – “Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.” The Bible is not anti-tradition. It just trumps tradition. Tradition is fallible. Traditions can develop over time and deviate from truth. Tradition (the living faith of the dead) can become traditionalism (the dead faith of the living). We shouldn’t buck all traditions, but we should test them against Scripture and not just do things because that’s what you do.

What does Paul have in mind here when he commends the Corinthian church for “maintaining the traditions?” He’s most likely referring to verbal instructions that he had given them previously when in person with them. Paul’s way of doing things, passed on orally, carried weight. The problem with oral traditions is that they can get compromised as they’re passed on over time. Have you ever played the game of telephone? Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics place Tradition on the same level as Scripture. And this is problematic. Praise God that we have objective, written revelation, documenting and codifying the apostolic teaching that’s necessary for us for all time! That’s what 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is for us. But in it we see a nod to the importance of tradition, always subjugated to Scripture, of course.

When it comes to female head coverings in worship and men not wearing hats, it’s not universal, but this has been a widespread practice down throughout church history until the last few hundred years. That is an argument in favor of taking this passage to be about literal head coverings and to be binding – it’s how many people have taken it for a long time. But it’s an argument from tradition. It can’t be given *no* weight. But it also can’t be given absolute authority.

Where I would lean-in more to the argument from tradition is on the underlying principle. “Traditional gender roles” describes something even more widespread and universal until very recently. Throughout church history the acknowledgement that men and women were distinct and that this was reflected in cultural expressions of appearance is hard to deny. Throwing that out because of an anti-traditionalist streak would be unwise.

Why? Because of Theology (vv. 3-6)

Paul starts with tradition, but that’s not his strongest argument. In vv. 3-6 he appeals to a theological rationale, to the way that God himself operates.

“I want you to understand,” Paul says, “that the head of every man is Christ” – men are not above authority themselves but must submit to Christ. That’s an important point. Then he says, “[T]he head of a wife is her husband.” Here I think translating the words as wife/husband makes the best sense. This doesn’t mean that wives don’t have to or get to submit to Christ too. It just means that there is an ordered relationship of authority between a husband and a wife. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 5:22 – “Wives, submit to your own husbands, *as to the Lord*.” So submitting to your husband is part of your submission to the Lord if you’re married. And then catch this: Paul adds – “and the head of Christ is God.” That’s where this gets profoundly theological.

Ontologically, that is, in the essence of their being, the Father and the Son are completely equal, unified in will, of the same substance. But in what theologians call the Economic Trinity, the way the Triune God works in human history, there is an ordered relationship. God the Father initiates and sends the Son to take on human flesh. Jesus

Christ – God in the flesh – submits to the Father in every respect, honoring him, obeying his commands. Total equality. No denigration of Christ, but God the Father is his head.

Paul says this is analogical. It provides us with an analogy for how a husband and a wife can be equal in substance – they share the same humanity – and there is no superiority or inferiority, but there is at the same time a distinction in role and function. The husband is the head. Do you follow this theological argument? The husband has the position of head over his wife but he is not ontologically better than her. What Paul's saying here is that you can't say people have to be identical in role to be equal in dignity. The Economic Trinity disproves that because Jesus is equal in deity to the Father and shares the same worth, but executes a distinct role.

There are the theological underpinnings rooted in the operations of God himself. Verses 4 and 6 give the practical outworkings. "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head," that is, brings shame on Christ. How exactly? It's not entirely clear. I read some people who said that pagan practices at the time called for men to pull their togas over their head when they were at the idols' temples. Maybe Paul is warning against imitating pagan practices. Others said that men wearing long hair at that time signaled homosexuality. I can't say for sure, but what can be said is that any outward display by a man that indicated an abdication of his role as the man to submit to Christ and lead his wife dishonored Christ. Men should look the part of the man.

And women should not play the part of the man. Verse 5 – "but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head." Some commentators said that married women in that culture wore head coverings as a sign of submission to their husbands and Paul is warning against a kind of Christian feminism that takes freedom too far and flouts that convention. I read others who said that for a woman to let her hair down (instead of wrapping it in a bun having it up) was a way of saying she was loose morally, that she was available. And that would definitely bring dishonor to her husband. Again, I don't think we can figure out the cultural background with certainty (there are a lot of other possibilities), but the point is clear – women should signal that they are women and that they are committed to their husbands, not in competition with them.

Insisting on going bareheaded or letting her hair hang down seductively, Paul says, "is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head."

Why? Because of Creation (vv. 7-9)

So **in the church, men and women should look different.** Why? Because of tradition, because of theology, and the next reason is because of creation.

Starting in v. 7 we read – "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." This is a clear allusion to the Genesis account of creation. Paul is fond of this argument (cf. 1 Tim. 2:13). He's saying there's something significant to the way God created men and women in the beginning that establishes an ordered equality.

Some would object to him – "Men and women are both made in the image of God" (cf. Gen. 1:27)! Paul knows that. He agrees. Notice that he doesn't say, "Man is

the image and glory of God, but woman is the image and glory of man.” He doesn’t say “image” in the second part of that sentence. Woman is made in the image of God too. But in the Genesis account it’s clear that Adam is given a responsibility as the head of the human race. And Eve is made to be his helper, to support him in his role. She was formed second and from Adam. Therefore, her role was to bring honor to her husband, not to resent him and fight him and try to tear him down, but to encourage him and support him and want him to succeed in his mission to bring glory to God. It’s a beautiful design, broken by the fall, but able to be redeemed in the church. “We bring glory to God as males or females (as we were created), not as androgynous hybrids who seek to hide or deny our gender,” as one person puts it.⁴

So Paul cites tradition, theology, and the creation order as reasons for why **in the church men and women should look different**.

Why? Because of Angelic Observers (v. 10).

The next reason he gives is not one that we would normally think of, but it’s interesting to think about. Paul says that **in the church men and women should look different** because of angelic observers. Verse 10 – “That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” The ESV supplies the word “symbol.” That’s not in the original, although that very well might be what is meant – some way of symbolically indicating that a wife is not trying to usurp her husband or a woman is not trying to eradicate any hint of any form of patriarchy. But look at that peculiar last phrase – “because of the angels.” What does that mean?

Some have said that the angels are human messengers there to check in on the Corinthian church. Some have suspected a potential repeat of Genesis 6 where supposedly fallen angels took human form to have sex with the daughters of men. Both of these proposals miss the point. We should assume that ‘angels’ refers to the class of spiritual beings that surround and serve God in the heavenly realm. And Scripture tells us that they do his bidding in our realm when called upon, but when not active they stand back and watch on with great anticipation as the grand plan of redemption plays out. They’re fascinated by it from their vantage point.

1 Peter 1:12 tells us that angels long to look into the gospel. And in Ephesians 3:10 Paul tells us “that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” Angels are watching us right now. They haven’t seen the end of the movie already. They know it has a happy ending, but it’s full of twists and turns. And Paul appeals to this angelic audience when he calls the church in Corinth to live out of God’s good design for gender. Gender is part of the fabric of God’s plan for the ages – Christ and the Church. It’s part of the cosmic story. To obscure that is a great mistake, like thoroughly messing up a dress rehearsal of a play when some dignitaries are in the box watching.

Why? Because of Nature (vv. 11-15)

The fifth reason why is because of nature. Paul makes an appeal to natural law. It’s similar to his appeal to the creation story, but a little bit different. He kind of already argued this way at the end of v. 6 when he talked about how it’s disgraceful for a woman to have a buzz cut. But he makes this line of reasoning obvious in vv. 11-15.

But before making an argument from nature against male-female indistinguishability he makes an argument from nature for male-female interdependence. It's actually a quite forceful statement that prevents any of this talk about headship and primogeniture from turning into misogyny and chauvinism. Do you see what he does in v. 11-12? "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman." Yes, Adam was created first and Eve was made from Adam and so there is a male headship baked in to the world. But ever since then, every man comes into the world through a woman. Women are indispensable! No man can say he doesn't need women! He wouldn't exist without them. What a beautiful thing. Men and women are not at odds, but are equally necessary parts of a whole, beautiful picture.

And then don't you just love how Paul tacks on – "And all things are from God." God is the Ultimate Giver of life and breath and everything good. He is the truly indispensable one, sovereignly ruling over the whole thing. The Writer of the script, the Painter of the picture.

Now in vv. 13-15 Paul gets back to arguing that men and women should look different and he makes the argument from nature. "Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering." Does not nature itself teach you? Paul seems to think that there's something in the way men and women are made that teaches us a lesson (cf. Rom. 1:26).

Arguments from nature (when they're not explicitly restated in Scripture) are harder to make. We might look at Paul's argument here and have questions. But there are biological, physiological differences between men and women in general that point us towards heterosexuality and male headship, from the shape of anatomy to median height and strength differences to hormonal effects... These differences are to be leaned into and accentuated, not blurred or hidden.

And Paul seems to think that hair length is part of this. Men almost exclusively are the ones who deal with baldness. It's called 'male pattern baldness.' It's not that rare. I was in a meeting with some pastors recently and the three guys sitting across the table from me all had shiny heads. Then another walked in and sat on my side and I thought it would have been funny for him to sit in that line. But how many women have you seen who had shiny heads? For a woman to have long hair is considered in almost all cultures to be an aspect of her beauty. Yes, there are exceptions. Some classes of male warriors were known for long hair. Samson in the OT was a famous biblical figure who was known for long hair, but he was a Nazirite, a special thing where a man usually grew their hair out for a particular period while under a vow (Samson was unique in that his Nazirite vow was for life). But even here the exception proves the rule. It wasn't normal. It's generally understood across cultures that men have shorter hair than women. It's a natural way of displaying gendered distinction.

Why? Because of Universal Practice (v. 16)

God says in this section of Scripture that **in the church men and women should look different**. Why? (1) Because of tradition, (2) because of theology, (3) because of

creation, (4) because of angelic observers, (5) because of nature, and then finally (6) because of universal practice.

Verse 16 – “If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God” (cf. 7:17). Finally, Paul says, if someone wants to be contrarian and push the boundaries against gender distinction, he or she should know that this isn’t just something that he was saying to the Corinthian church because of some special reason there, but wasn’t saying to other churches. No, Paul taught complementarianism in Corinth, and he taught it in Ephesus, and he taught it in Thessalonica and Derbe and Antioch and Philippi and in Jerusalem and Rome and in every church. It’s not a localized reality for certain places because of something about that place. **In every church men and women should look different** for reasons that transcend time and place and culture and go all the way back to the way God designed things at creation to reflect something of his own Trinitarian relations.

What?

That’s the where, who, and why. But you probably still have questions about the what. What exactly does this look like for us today? What exactly does it mean for **men and women to look different**? The principle is very clear: equal participation, observable differentiation. But the what is hard to nail down. We have to figure out how the creation order applies to our current cultural order.

I’ve already stated up front that I don’t think this has to mean that women wear doilies on their heads. So what does it mean? It means that men dress and groom themselves in a manner that is culturally masculine and modest. Nobody should have to wonder about your gender or feel like you’re trying to be edgy or working out some inner angst. Neither should they really notice your fashion at all, but your vibe should be: traditional, responsible, respectable man. I’m afraid I can’t specify much more beyond that without becoming legalistic, but I think that is fairly good guidance.

Women should likewise pick fashion and fix their hair in a way that is unequivocally feminine and yet not flashy. Your appearance should express a glad acceptance of your femininity that fits as a complementary counterpart to masculinity. It should come from a deep sense of security in your body as God made you and in your acceptance before God that is not seeking attention from men or trying to be one of them. Modesty is notoriously hard to define. You can’t measure it with a ruler. But one rule of thumb I’ve heard is: do my clothes cause people to look at my face. That’s somewhat helpful.

I do think that hair length still provides a generally culturally universal way of differentiating boys and girls. I have five daughters. We let their hair grow out and put bows in it. If I had boys, I would have kept their hair cut short and not put bows in it. But in short, whatever is a culturally appropriate way to say, “I’m a man,” or “I’m a woman.”

In the church men and women should look different. Different from each other. And different from the world. “I’m a godly man,” not a macho or angry or self-absorbed or some other worldly distortion of manhood. “I’m a godly woman,” not a sexually liberated, flaunting female.

Basically, the church should be a place where people can come and see the beauty of God’s good design. A place where people are joyful in their given gender because

they've been justified in Christ. Where they don't have to fight to carve out their identity because they are secure in their new one received by grace. The church should be a place where people see something that's not just superficial, but a reflection of a happy complementarity – completely equal in worth and value, and completely okay with playing different parts in order to point to a grander story.

One scholar commenting on this passage summarized things this way: “Christian women were [to be] worshipping side-by-side with the men of the community.... in a way that respected the proper decorum expected in the presence of God and his angelic attendants, such that the community's full attention was on the glory of God without being distracted by either human glory or shame.”⁵ We're not focused on our rights. We're not focused on our righteousness. We're mesmerized by someone else – the epitome of noble manhood: Jesus Christ. We are gathered here today to worship him in humble submission, not make a fashion statement.

And whether we're gathered or scattered as a church we want to be a community where those who are suffering from the effects of sin on gender – those who have been abused or abandoned by ungodly men, wounded by a domineering or doormat mom, those who are confused about their gender in various ways – can meet happily married couples who show hospitality, can meet men who are noble in their assertiveness, using their strength for the glory of God, can meet women who aren't trying to prove something and exhibit the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. And it can all be a tiny picture of the gospel.

Conclusion

Can you see how this passage is about Christmas? Christmas is a story of angels bending near the earth to bring God's messages and step back and watch the unfolding of God's plan with wonder.

It's the story about a noble man named Joseph who listened to God and led his family. But it's also a story about a pious and truly pretty young woman named Mary who submitted to God's will and played an indispensable role in the most feminine act of carrying and giving birth to a baby; who did not resent her role, but said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

And it's ultimately the story about the Father sending the Son to take on flesh to save us and Jesus gladly accepting the assigned task – fully equal with God, yet willing to take on the form of a servant and be obedient to the point of death on the Cross, to purchase and provide for his Bride.

The Lord's Table

The Lord's Table is a preview of what the Bible calls the wedding supper of the Lamb – the end time feast when Christ and his Bride, the Church will be united physically and happily ever after. Before that wedding day, Christ meets with us like a fiancé on a date, to share a meal with us and express to us his love.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, December 14, 2025. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

¹ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 210.

² Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 195.

³ Blomberg, 210.

⁴ Kim Riddlebarger, *First Corinthians*, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Powder Springs: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), 266.

⁵ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 531.