Small Group Summer Series - Maintenance Required - Autonomy - 1 Cor. 11:2-16

Review

Intro

Read 1 Cor. 11:2-16

Whenever we come to this passage of Scripture, it is very easy to sweep it under the rug, either as irrelevant or so contested we can't really put too much emphasis on it.

Illustration - Head coverings in the conference. This isn't relevant because we don't wear head coverings.

Today we come to one of the most hotly contested passages of Scripture in the entire Bible, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. From debates on gender roles in marriage, to the church, to head coverings, even the theology of the Trinity! This is partially because it is a difficult passage to interpret, but I think that there are some other cultural underpinnings that cause this to be difficult as well. Mainly, with how privatized we are about marriage, gender roles, and the church.

The impression you could give in the modern day church is that there are so many debates surrounding gender roles in marriage and the church that we really have no right to speak into them and disciple them. Beyond that, our family lives have become so individualistic that we bristle whenever we hear a pastor or Bible passage about the family. And this really gets to the heart of the passage, because it isn't just about head coverings, but about how marriage and gender roles operate in the church body.

And I think it is helpful to remember the context. The church at Corinth had some major issues with immorality, even things the Gentiles thought were abhorrent. Beyond that, it seemed that they were even willing to take their liberty in Christ to a bad conclusion, which would compromise their testimony to unbelievers and to the church of God. In all of these things Paul is pastorally walking them through what it means for the commands and love of God to rule the day, not their sin or liberty.

Big Idea - For all the believers in this church, Paul wanted them to operate within the authority and gendered roles that they had been given. Not because women aren't equal to men or even

because they can't even speak in church (more on that in a moment), but because that is how God designed it in the Garden of Eden. He makes a creation argument.
Vs. 2-6 - God's order of authority is where Paul starts off in this passage of Scripture. And he does not mince words! He says that the head of every woman is man, and the head of every man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God. Now, it is worth mentioning right off the bat that the Son of God is not lesser than the Father in His deity, but our Lord was in submission to His Father in His humanity. Regardless, the point of the passage is that women are under the authority of men. And I want to be clear, the major thrust of this passage, as we will see, is within the context of a marriage, but it does affect the church. We know that when it comes to the office of the pastor, deacon, and preaching that role is designed by God for men.

And it also must be stated that Paul states elsewhere and in this passage that men and women are equal before God in that they are made in His image, but He has designed us for different roles and purposes.

This leads us to the major issue that Paul wants to address, which is the issue of head coverings. He actually starts off with the men, that it is a dishonor to have their heads covered while they pray or prophesy. In this culture many men in the assembly would cover their heads with their best toga while they prayed, and it was seen as a sort of status symbol. But you can just think of the words of Jesus in Matt. 6:5, "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." This shatters the notion that Paul is some sort of bigot only focused on women. These men were using the assembly to exalt themselves, which is a massive problem.

This then goes into the issue of head coverings on women. Paul says that it is a dishonor for women to pray or prophesy in the assembly without a covering on their head. Now some people debate whether what they are talking about is hair is the covering itself, or that a woman should have a covering on her hair. I tend to believe the latter, mainly because of where Paul says that if her hair is not covered then let it be shaved. If hair is the covering itself it would be odd for Paul to say let's cut hair that's already been cut. But even beyond that, within the historical context we know that in the Roman world it was customary for women to wear head coverings. Hair was seen as a very private matter between a husband and wife. Women who did not wear head coverings, even in Rome, were seen as making themselves sexually available.

Illustration - You could almost think of this as a husband or wife taking off their wedding ring to purposely attract attention.

And what was happening in the church is that women were praying or prophesying with their hair uncovered. Now I want you to notice that Paul is allowing women to speak in the church. This isn't teaching or preaching from the pulpit, that is reserved for pastors and men.
But that specific role does not mean that women are not allowed to speak at all in the congregation. But the issue was that they were speaking without coverings on their head. The problem with this was not that these head coverings were magically making them holy, but the issue was how that looked! The social convention at the time saw that as promiscuous behavior, which was already a problem at Corinth! Now, it is very clear how this affects the church! Even the gentiles saw a problem with this! Here is this new gathering of believers, and the women seem to be flaunting their availability, which is obviously a problem for the testimony in the community.

But not only is Paul concerned about how this looks to unbelievers, but also how this is affecting the marriages in the assembly.

Read vs. 7-16 - Again, the main concern was with marriages in the church. Obviously, if your wife was doing something that was promiscuous in that culture, it showed dishonor to her husband, who God had designed and ordained to be the leader of the home. Right off the bat, Paul roots this in creation. He says that the woman was created for man, not the reverse. He then says the woman ought to have power on her head, which just means the authority of their husbands. Now, again this is not to deemphasize the intrinsic equality of men and women. Paul and Genesis teach both are made in God's image. Even in this passage Paul emphasizes the mutual equality of men and women in verses 11-12.

But in the creation account, God created Eve to be a helper for Adam. Genesis 2, "18 And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him…21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; 22 And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. 23 And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. 24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." The word help is often used by God throughout the Scriptures for God's divine intervention on the behalf of His creation. That God creates Eve for Adam and that Adam names Eve shows his God given authority and leadership in his marriage with Eve.

And that is what Paul is arguing in this passage, and it shows the central issue of this passage. Because women were uncovering their hair, which was socially unacceptable, it showed a lack

of submission to their husbands. This could have arisen out of an attitude of liberty in Christ to flout social convention, or it could have come from a genuine attitude of infidelity. Both these are present in the church in Corinth.

Application

And what this reminds us is that our marriages are a public matter, not only for the church but also for the world. How God designed marriage, with the headship and sacrificial love of the husband and the submission of the wife matters when it comes to the body of Christ. It also deeply matters for our public testimony!

Illustration - Traditional, faithful families have the happiest marriages and lowest abuse out of any demographic in the US. (Pearcey) Christians that are nominal have the highest rates. Which shows how this affects our public testimony!!

A happy, healthy marriage that operates under the plan and economy of God is powerfully effective within the church body. But a home that is biting, divisive, unloving, unsubmissive, not only harms that family it also harms the church! We are so private with our marriages and our homes that we rarely think about how this affects how others see us in the church or how our actions affect the church. We don't really think about this till a divorce happens, infidelity abounds, or disunity in a marriage hurts the church family.

Husbands, you are called to love and lead your wives like Christ. But if you are lazy, not leading your home spiritually, not loving your wives, but are just an angry dad that outsources spiritual leadership to the wife you are harming your home and the church. I can't tell you how many homes I have seen hurt because of unloving husbands who won't spiritually lead.

Wives, if you are not living in submission, serving your husband, putting him first, honoring and respecting him, you are hurting the church. If you don't allow your husband to disciple and train your children, if you don't lean his way but are always offended when he gives input, if you are just focused on you rather than how to serve like Jesus, you are hurting the church.

We don't really notice how much this affects a church till it is dysfunctional.

But Paul isn't just concerned about marriage differences, but also gendered distinctions in general.

Read vs. 13-16 - And Paul concludes by using another example to show how social customs can deeply influence the testimony of a church. If a man has long hair, it is a shame to him. But if a woman has long hair, it is her glory. Now, I do think this is, in part, a statement in the context of Corinth. A woman's long hair was seen as her glory, therefore it should be covered. And in the Roman empire it was seen as unacceptable for a man to have long hair.
But Paul also does talk about how this is from nature, which shows that in God's design long hair on a man is seen as unacceptable, and the long hair of a woman is her glory. That this is found in the customs of Corinth shows that you cannot use this to teach women shouldn't cut their hair, or that men can never have longer hair in any culture. The emphasis of Paul is that gender distinctiveness matters.

While we want to be careful and avoid stereotypes of gender, like all boys like blue and girls pink, or bad standards like older churches saying that a woman wearing pants is automatically masculine, there is something to be said about making sure men and women stay distinct in the body of Christ and in this world. God created you to be a male or female, and in our culture today I think it is wise for us to emphasize the differences between us!

Now, as I said, it is good for us to avoid stereotypes. But within the church body gender distinction matters! Paul has two things in mind, creation order and culture. As a male, as a female, you are called by God to be holy according to creation and culture.

This is emphasized with the hair of men and woman. Within culture that blurred distinctiveness, and compromised holiness, therefore it was unacceptable.

This leads us to the final concern of Paul, which is the argumentativeness in the final verse.

Practically, this means we are called to be holy and pursue Christ as a man, and as a woman. I think we have done a great disservice to our church with making this only about stereotypes. But now more than ever in our day we need to have a healthy idea of what it means to follow Christ in the gender He gave me!

Within the church, while God has given specific roles, the Bible has laid out many ways that we can serve God as men and women. Within our lives as believers, there are many distinct strengths of our genders we can use in service to the Lord. Within our lives, we need to be sensitive to our cultures to never blur distinctions. Now, this can be abused, and it has been in the past. Within our hearts, we should be open to the teaching of God, and not be argumentative to His Word or in His church. And that is primarily what Paul is concerned about,

is that this was causing strife. How dare you tell me what I can and cannot do in my marriage? In my dress? In my life?

In conclusion, your gender and marriage are not some private thing, they matter for public holiness.