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Sermon Notes

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Headship, the Trinity, and Headcoverings, Part 1

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

We come this morning to one of the most talked-about passages in the book of 1 Corinthians... a passage that is famous for discussing “head coverings” for women

As we do, it is beneficial to remember how healthy and excellent is the food that comes from God’s Word:

Matthew 4:4 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

All scripture is healthy... beneficial... nourishing to the soul

This is especially true of its most controversial passages, the ones that Satan is most challenging in our day

I. Unchanging Biblical Truth in a Confused Age

A. God’s Word is Unchanging

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The word of God is eternal... it will never pass away! It is rock-like... a sure foundation for your souls, and for our church

Including its controversial passages... these teachings on gender roles will still be there in 100 years if Christ hasn’t returned

B. Our Age is Extremely Unstable and Confused

Ephesians 4:14 ...tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

C. BUT Just Because the World is Challenging Timeless Biblical Truth Doesn’t Mean We Should Abandon It!!

1. From the beginning Satan challenged God's Word
 - a. Questioning God's Word: "Did God really say??"
 - b. Contradicting God's Word: "You will not die!!"
2. This has continued through every generation
3. We need to hold steadfastly to the Word

II. Admittedly a Very Challenging Passage

A. Challenges in Our Culture

1. Our Culture's Struggle with Authority in General... like all humans
2. Our Culture's Attack on the Significance of Gender
 - a. I need not trace out comprehensively and in great detail the rise of feminism in recent American history... but it is clearly a part of the landscape of American culture today
 - b. It began in the 19th century (as early as 1840) with the women's suffrage movement, seeking to gain the vote for women... obtained with the passage of the 19th Amendment on August 26, 1920, winning for women the constitutional right to vote
3. Radical feminism
 - a. For the rest of the 20th century it expanded to radical feminism, questioning the significance of gender across the board
 - b. 1963, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*... women dissatisfied with traditional roles of wife, mother, homemaker
 - c. The women's movement was often characterized by open hostility toward men, and a strong "us vs them" mentality
 - d. 60s sexual revolution: The union of feminism with abortion rights came with the desire to have the same freedom to walk away from a sexual encounter that men clearly have
 - e. More extreme forms of this mentality began to include homosexuality as well... if gender shouldn't matter for voting or jobs, why would it matter at all?
4. The transgender movement is the most recent phase of this attack on gender

- a. It teaches that, while sex is biological and of two kinds—male and female—gender is subjective and self-defined
- b. It has reached the point of bizarreness in some pockets of our culture

A concerted Satanic attack on the basic biblical doctrine of gender

Genesis 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

5. The American Meritocracy, Finding Worth in Achievement

- a. America prides itself on being a “land of opportunity”
- b. The Declaration of Independence asserted that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights... life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness
- c. This was in contrast to the aristocratic system of England that they were rebelling against, where what mattered the most was who your father was, the social level into which you were born
- d. Perks—money, power, fame, pleasures—go to those who can earn them, regardless of their ancestors... MERITOCRACY, from a log cabin to the President of the United States
- e. But a darker side of this meritocracy is the not-so-subtle message that your worth as a human being is tied directly to what you can achieve... what you can accomplish as put on a resume or on a social media site
- f. Anyone who can achieve much is thereby worth much; but people who can't achieve much aren't really worth much
- g. People feel that a restriction on women in terms of role is a direct assault on their worth and value as human beings
- h. They hear this text and feel that it is essentially claiming the inherent superiority of men over women... which it is not
- i. So much anger over the years

B. Used as More Evidence of the Obsolete Nature of the Bible

- 1. They call it “patriarchal” and “sexist”
- 2. This is often cited, along with slavery, as clear indicators that the Bible is archaic, obsolete, worthy of being scorned

C. Challenges in the Text Itself

1. Paul's reasoning in these 15 verses is complex

2. Tom Schreiner's Survey

"First Corinthians 11:2-16 has some features that make it one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible. For instance:

- What does Paul mean by the word 'head' in verse 3?
- Can we identify the custom regarding the adornment of women in the passage? A veil... shawl... what?
- In what sense is woman the glory of man (verse 7)?
- What does Paul mean when he says that the woman is to have authority on her head (verse 10)?
- What does "because of the angels" mean (verse 10)?
- And finally, what does the word nature mean in verse 14?

D. The Difficulties in Bridging the Gap...

1. The task of biblical preaching is to take the unchanging word of God, written 20 centuries ago, and bridge the gap... explaining it in its context and applying it accurately to our day
2. However difficult those challenges, it is well worth the effort
3. Our culture has gone crazy when it comes to these issues
4. We have very much lost our way on the significance of gender

When a 12 year-old boy asks his father, "Dad, what does it mean for me to be a man and not a woman?"

Or

When a 12 year-old daughter asks her mother, "Mom, what does it mean for me to be a woman and not a man?"

Our society is LOST in answering those questions

We need to hear the Bible as it is... the unchanging word of God, a word which we desperately need to hear

E. Let Me Lay My Cards on the Table

1. A **timeless principle**, true for all centuries and all cultures... God has established male leadership in the church and at home, and women's adornment should be feminine and reflect that ordering
2. Paul roots it in the Trinity and in the creation order
3. BUT I do not think this passage is including specifics about what feminine adornment should be—long hair or head coverings; those are culturally defined and not tied to the Trinity and to creation
4. I propose to cover this passage in two sermons... this week, looking carefully at verses 2-3; next week, walking through the rest of the details

III. Paul's Praise for the Corinthians (vs. 2)

1 Corinthians 11:2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

A. Context

1. The Corinthians were having many difficulties in their church life
2. They were battling with factions and divisions; pride; scandalous sin, lawsuits, sexual immorality, marriage, meat sacrificed to idols
3. Now, Paul is addressing various issues in public worship
 - a. The role of women in public worship (chapter 11)
 - b. Problems with the Lord's Supper (chapter 11)
 - c. Problems with spiritual gifts, especially tongues and prophecy (chapters 12-14)

B. YET... He Actually ENCOURAGES Them Here!

1. He praises them for remembering him in everything!
2. The "remembering" means they were seeking to respect his role as an apostle and a messenger from Christ... obeying him; holding to the teachings that he had PASSED ON TO THEM from the Lord
3. Especially the gospel itself:

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

4. This shows a vital pastoral principle... even while he is strongly critical of many things in the Corinthian church, he still loves them
 - a. We have all heard of fathers that could never be pleased... they were consistently criticizing their children
 - b. Paul is a very loving spiritual father; where he can be encouraging, he will!
- C. BUT NOW... Paul has to address the issue, the topic at hand: Women's submission to male leadership as openly displayed in public worship

IV. The Timeless Order Revealed (vs. 3)

1 Corinthians 11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

A. What Does "Head" Mean?

1. Lots of debate over this
2. Some feminists have sought to remove any sense of submission to authority by saying the Greek word translated head "*kephale*" really means SOURCE... the point of origin
3. However, while the word may occasionally mean source, like the "head of a river", wherever Paul uses it to describe relationships between the genders or Christ's role with the church, it always means "one having authority over"

Ephesians 1:20-23 [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

This definitely is the picture of authority... Christ is the HEAD OVER everything for the church... ruling over Satan and demons and earthly powers, and over the church itself

NOTE: Christ's authority over the church is always for the benefit of the church; to serve it and care for it and protect it and raise it to full perfection in heaven; NOT TO DOMINATE IT

A lot of the problem we have with authority is how self-serving it usually is when done by sinners

B. Christ is the Head of Every Man

1 Corinthians 11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ

1. The issue here is AUTHORITY... and Paul begins by establishing the authority of Jesus Christ over every single human being, whether they acknowledge it or not

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

2. This will be made even more clear on Judgment Day that immediately follows the Second Coming of Christ

Matthew 25:31-33 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

3. Jesus as the Judge of All the Earth will evaluate every action ever taken by every human being
4. Jesus will also assign the final destiny—heaven or hell—to every human being that has ever lived

Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

5. It is at this awesome throne of Judgment, I believe, that Jesus' headship over all human beings will be made clear

Philippians 2:9-11 God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

6. So this is what Paul wants the Corinthians to understand... the HEAD OF EVERY MAN IS CHRIST
7. Next is the practical point he is making to the Corinthians about the relationships between men and women

C. The Head of Woman is Man

1 Corinthians 11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man

1. What does this mean? If head means “in authority over” as we’ve been asserting, this is teaching the leadership of men over women
2. Now the ESV, recognizing that the Greek words translated “man” and “woman” can also be translated “husband” and “wife” gives us this translation

1 Corinthians 11:3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband...

3. But in order to do that, they have to add a possessive: the head of wife is HER husband... but that word is not in the Greek
4. Also Paul is not addressing marriage here, but the role of men and women in corporate worship and in the life of the church publicly

1 Corinthians 11:4-5 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head

5. So this is teaching a general pattern of male leadership, with key examples being the church and the home
6. It is for this reason that the leadership of men throughout the Bible is basically unquestioned... men are kings, rulers, military commanders in the Bible; so it has continued generally since then
7. Modern people, under the influence of feminism, have acknowledged that this was true “back then,” but said it was archaic patriarchy and sexism that we have now grown out of
8. Now we have to realize how male dominated Greco-Roman society was back then; women were generally denigrated
9. It was Christ and Christianity which elevated women as equally created in the image of God, equally redeemed by the blood of Christ, equally heirs of heaven, equally indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and equally gifted with spiritual gifts
10. In Corinth, they began to use those gifts freely... but it seems too freely; Christ, speaking through Paul, wanted to maintain the order of creation that God set up from the very beginning
11. So, men and women are equal in those vital areas... but still having roles based on their gender

12. But lest anyone should think this headship and subordination is in any way demeaning, he gives the final headship statement

D. The Head of Christ is God

1 Corinthians 11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

1. This shows the eternal functional subordination of Jesus Christ to his heavenly Father
2. This has always been the case and always will be the case
3. The Father commands, Jesus submits
4. It was the Father's will from before the foundation of the world to redeem sinners
5. It was the Father's plan that his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, should enter the world as a human, live a sinless life, and die an atoning death
6. So we can say that Jesus knew from eternity past that he would die on the cross in obedience to the will of his Father

1 Peter 1:19-20 the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world,

7. It was the Father who sent Jesus into the world to do HIS WILL:

John 6:38-39 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

8. Every moment of his life on Earth, he obeyed his Father's will

John 8:28-29 I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me... I always do what pleases him."

9. In Gethsemane, he yielded to the will of his Father

Luke 22:42 not my will, but yours be done."

10. Jesus' willing death on the cross was the highest display of his obedience to his Father's will

John 14:31 the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

11. Even his own resurrection was done in obedience to the Father

John 10:18 No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father

12. This headship goes on now and will continue for all eternity

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 Then the end will come, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death. ²⁷ For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

E. Key point: The Son is exactly equal to God in his ESSENCE, while taking a subservient role

1. Jesus Christ is FULLY GOD

Philippians 2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped

2. Jesus shares equal glory with the Father as God

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being

3. THUS the headship of the Father over the Son is not offensive but merely FUNCTIONAL; the Son is every bit as much God and every bit as glorious as his Father; in ESSENCE they are ONE

4. But that headship is REAL... the Father never OBEYS the Son, but the Son obeyed the Father; the Son doesn't give all authority in heaven and earth to his Father, but the Father gave that to the Son

F. Therefore, the Headship of Man over Woman is Not Offensive

1. It implies no difference in essential worth or value

a. Women can be every bit as capable as men... or even more so; every bit as intelligent, clear-thinking, articulate, skillful, knowledgeable, spiritual, gifted as a man

b. The general headship of men over women in home and in the church is not based on superiority of being or essence at all

c. A functional role God established, for order and for his glory

V. Changing Cultural Expressions of the Timeless Order (vs. 4-16)

- A. Time-Bound Cultural Expression... head coverings... NEXT WEEK
- B. A Quick Survey of Where We're Going
- C. Central Question: Does Paul Establish Headcoverings as a Timeless Principle?
- D. My Answer: No... Headcoverings in Corinth Were a Cultural Expression of the Timeless Principle of Male Leadership
- E. Complex Exegetical Details Next Week

VI. Applications

- A. Stand in Awe of the Deep Truths We Have Covered Here!
 1. Stand in awe of the relationship between the Father and the Son
 2. Stand in awe of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ to his Father
 3. By that obedience, we sinners are saved from our sins
- B. Understand Our Basic Rebellious Hearts... rebelling against GOD
 1. Far more significant than rebellion of one human being to another
 2. Part of our salvation is to submit to Christ's Kingly rule in our lives

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

3. The "head of every human being is Christ!" Let's not rebel against what Christ has said
4. Part of this is to accept the messengers he has sent to speak in his place... that includes the Apostle Paul
 - a. Paul is not some ancient chauvinist and sexist establishing principles we have now in the 21st century finally outgrown
 - b. Paul here is speaking with the authority of Jesus Christ
 - c. We need to stop asserting our prideful independence and fit gladly into the place God has assigned to us, just as Christ yielded completely to his Father in everything

C. Roles in the Home and in the Church

1. The headship of husbands over wives and of male elders over the church is clearly taught in the New Testament
2. Gladly fitting into that pattern without resentment is what this text is calling from us
3. But along with that is recognizing that all authority in the Christian home and the church is SERVANT authority, meant to serve and bless those who are under it...
4. Just as Jesus showed us his servant heart by washing the disciples feet and by dying for the disciples sins, while also being the KING
5. Christian authority is loving, humble servant leadership that BLESSES the people it leads