

Sunday, February 14, 2016

“Declaration of Interdependence”

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Contemporary Contact

Welcome back to Messy Church...The “living room” church we’ve been visiting in Corinth (not a “show room” church). (*Explain why I’m “out of order”, and which area of the church’s life we’ll be visiting today.*)

As we read 1 Corinthians 11²⁻¹⁶ it will be immediately apparent that we are stepping into the middle of a long-distance conversation between Paul (in Ephesus^{16:8}) and his diverse church in Corinth (1 Cor. 12¹³ Jews & Gentiles, slaves & free, rich & poor; cf. 12² “when you were pagans”; 12⁶ “Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth”).¹ Since we hear only Paul’s side of the conversation, we are forced to do a certain amount of educated guesswork about what the Corinthians were saying and doing and what they had written to Paul in their letter to him.²

As we read this passage it will also be immediately clear that we are stepping into a culture, or cultures (Jewish, Roman, Greek, rich, poor), that are quite different from our own Western culture (i.e. in the sense of customs and practices). At times, serious errors in translation and interpretation have been made because people did not take the time to understand the gap between the cultures of the Bible and the cultures of later Bible readers (e.g. Nathan’s group studying the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Mt. 20¹⁻¹⁶; reading Jeremiah’s prophecy that “a nation from the north will attack her/Israel”^{50:3} as Russia instead of Babylon!!).

The scriptures must be interpreted in their historical and cultural context. We must take the time to understand what was meant then, so we can understand what they mean now. Or as my former NT professor Dr. David Ewert so memorably put it,

¹ As Fee notes, “Although there were some Jews in the community [e.g. Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus], very little in the letter suggests a Jewish background. At least three texts that speak of their former way of life explicitly indicate that they were former idolaters and therefore chiefly Gentiles (6¹⁰⁻¹¹; 8⁷; 12²). Other items imply the same: e.g., the whole matter of going to the temple feasts in 8¹-10²²)...” 1 Corinthians, p. 4.

² See 7:1. See Richard Hays for a “sample” of what the Corinthians might have written to Paul. 1 Cor., p. 182-3.

“The message of the Bible is for all times, but it has come to us in ancient clothing. We want to retain the living Word of God. To do so, we must take careful account of the Bible’s ancient dress. Then we can faithfully reclothe the biblical message, putting it into forms with which we are familiar.”³

That is a good summary and illustration of the task before us. **Read 1 Cor. 11²⁻¹⁶**

Structural Contact

A) The Problems

- 1) Historical and Cultural Distance – The first principle that should be applied in a passage like this is that of honesty: give the historical and cultural distance & differences so evident in this passage we should not pretend to understand more than we do or make hard and fast rules based on scriptures where our understanding is limited.^{Hays,190}
- 2) Diverse Applications – Secondly, read the literature on this passage and you’ll discover very diverse applications. These verses have been, and are still used by some groups, to:
 - a) Set rules that women in all places and all times should have their heads covered in public worship.
 - b) Set rules about the length of a woman’s hair and the shortness of a man’s.
 - c) Segregate men & women in church services.⁴
 - d) Establish rules on who should be the “head” in the home
 - e) Limit what roles women may or may not do in the church.

Are any or all of these legitimate implications and applications of this passage? Why or why not? We’ve got our work cut out for us!⁵

Paul’s Response

A) An Argument From Culture and Shame (v.2) –

Before Paul begins to correct the Corinthians he first commends them for remembering him and the “traditions” which he had taught them. The Greek work translated “traditions” (*paradosis* = *that which is handed down*)^{EDNT,3:21} was used for the

³ David Ewert, How to Understand the Bible (Herald Press, 2000), p. 126.

⁴ https://www.apostolicchristian.org/uploaded/bookstore/bookstore_downloads/0705_Separated_Seating.pdf

⁵ The challenges include “head” (vv.3-5); “having down the head” (v.4); “uncovered” (vv.5,13); “glory” (v.7); “authority over head” (v.10); “because of the angels” (v.10); “such a custom” (v.16).

formal passing on of a fixed Christian tradition (oral + written) that went back to Jesus.⁶ It reminds us that “Paul did not *create a movement*, he *joined one!*”⁷

One of these fixed Christian traditions was of course, the regular celebration of the Lord’s Supper (see v.23). Another was the free and full participation of men and women in public worship⁸ which is described in this chapter as “praying and prophesying” (cf. “*Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church*”—14³⁻⁴; cf. “singing”^{Eph.5:19-20}, “scripture reading”^{1Tim.4:13}, etc.).

Yet the “But” in verse 3 indicates that things were not quite as Paul thought they should be and he argues for the need to correct a particular behavior in their public worship that he describes as dishonoring^{v.5} and disgraceful^{v.6}. The visible problem is clear: there are women in the church at Corinth (Some? Many? Most?) who are out of step with cultural conventions^{vv.4-5} and standard practices in other churches (v.16). It is also clear what the standard practice ought to be when praying and prophesying in public worship: a woman “should cover her head”^{v.6} and “a man ought not to cover his head”^{v.7} otherwise they are being dishonoring^{v.5} and disgraceful^{v.6}.

But why it is so dishonoring and disgraceful is not clear to us (any males here today with a head covering? Any females here today without a head covering?—do we find either of these shocking or disgraceful?). Paul wants his readers to understand that:

“the head of every man is Christ,
and the head of the woman^{NIV} is man, (or the head of *a wife* is *her husband*)^{ESV}
and the head of Christ is God.”

What does Paul mean by this?

⁶ “The evidence best supports the position that Paul both knew and used elements from a narrative understanding of Jesus, shared by himself and his readers.” Luke Timothy Johnson, The Real Jesus, p. 119. See also chapters 1-3 in Lee Strobel’s book, The Case For Christ.

⁷ “The text before us is the earliest reference we have to the formal passing on of a fixed *Christian tradition*.” Kenneth Bailey, Paul Through Med. Eyes, p. 297.

⁸ As many commentators like Craig Blomberg have noted, “The next three topics Paul addresses all deal with behavior in worship. They include what men and women should or should not wear on their heads (11:2–16), proper conduct during the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34), and the use and abuse of spiritual gifts (chaps. 12–14).” 1 Corinthians (NIVAC), p.

Some think that “head” in this passage is used in the sense of “authority” (i.e. Head of state). Others think it has the sense of “source” or “origin” (i.e. head of a river). The arguments over the meaning and implications of each have been long and intense and complex (is the key issue women overthrowing God ordained male authority *or* is the key issue women overthrowing God ordained gender identity and distinction?).

“One of the keys to understanding verses 3-10 is to recognize Paul’s play on the word “head.” The main point of this paragraph is the claim that what one does or doesn’t put on one’s physical head either honors or dishonors one’s spiritual head.” (Blomberg, 208; cf. Hays, 184)

So from the context it appears that Paul is not addressing an issue of authority⁹ (i.e. he doesn’t say, “stop being rebellious or insubordinate”; v.10 in some translations is misleading since “a symbol of authority is not in the text) as much as he is making a point about interdependence (i.e. stop shaming yourself and others).

What you are doing doesn’t only disgrace yourself (v.5), but all of the others who also have their reputations tarnished by your behaviour. As commentator Anthony Thieslton notes, “The *kephale* of a family is the one who represents its ‘public face,’ the representative contact person who focuses its identity.”¹⁰ Thus, “Paul seems concerned to shift the problem [yet once again!] from one of individual freedom to one of relational responsibility.”^{Fee,501} Thus,

To display the literal head inappropriately attired in worship is to bring shame upon one’s figurative “head” (vv.4-5). If this seems odd to modern readers, we might well remember that analogous customs persist in our social world. For a man to show up at a formal dinner—or in church—wearing a baseball cap would be widely perceived as rude and irreverent. In ancient Mediterranean culture such a breach of etiquette [and attention seeking]^{Thieslton} would bring disgrace not only on the perpetrator of the act but also on the “head” to whom that person was responsible [or representative].¹¹

⁹ “From the outset, it is clear that the issue is gender *distinctions*, not gender *subordination*. The women and the men are doing the same things” Kenneth Bailey, Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes, p. 300.

¹⁰ Anthony C. Thieslton. 1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary (Kindle location 2373).

¹¹ Richard Hays, 1 Corinthians, p. 184.

= shameful for her, for her husband, for her congregation, for Christ (for angels?)

A woman ought to bring glory (i.e. honor) to each of these by her appearance, not dishonor and disgrace. The women who were removing their head coverings (or letting their hair down in worship) were consciously discarding a widespread and traditional and cultural mark of discretion and gender distinction (hair cut off & bald was a blurring of gender lines...androgyny or cross-dressing; uncovered head or letting her hair down in public was a case of indecency or overexposure).

- e.g. if one of our wives or daughters was leading in worship wearing a dress that was too tight and too low-cut it would be embarrassing to ____?
- e.g. Superbowl...overshadowed by the half-time show. Why? Because as one headline put it, “No Stunt’s too Shameless for Beyonce”¹²

“Judge for yourselves” Paul says in verse 13, the need for “proper” attire and behaviour is true isn’t it! In other words, use some common sense! If anyone wants to unnecessarily flaunt accepted cultural conventions in this matter, the bottom line is that as the collective churches of God, “we have no other practice”. In other words, “Please do not fight over a problem that has an easy solution.”^{Bailey,306.}

Implications & Applications (followed by “talk back” ...explain what & why)

1) Be Christ Honoring (distinctly male and female vs. “gender-bending”)

- a) Presentation – of ourselves in public and in public worship (attention getting?). Present yourself (dress, hairstyle) in a way that honors the God who created us as male and female (how we present ourselves sends messages—to God & others).

“Our dress and outward appearance should appropriately reflect our gender identity....In a time of rampant confusion about gender identity in our culture, Paul’s teaching on this matter is timely for us.”^{Hays,191}

“To the extent that people’s grooming or dress deliberately flaunts authority and social convention, such actions cannot be condoned by Christians, because it gives us an unnecessarily bad reputation among non-Christians. No doubt some of this

¹² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3445116/Queen-cynicism-No-stunt-s-shameless-Beyonce-accused-trying-look-white-week-posed-heroin-black-power.html>

occurred in the 60s and with punk. But wise Christians, like wise parents, will choose their battles carefully. We should not get overly upset by a person's outward appearance when there are more fundamental theological and ethical issues to be concerned about in our society.^{Blomberg, 221}

- b) Subordination? – “Any honest appraisal of 1 Corinthians 11²⁻¹⁶ will require [us to face] ...the patriarchal assumptions imbedded in the structure of Paul’s argument (verses 3 and 7-9).”^{Hays,192} Some interpreters argue from these verses that women are, by their very nature, subordinate to men, and even go so far as to say that only men bear God’s image directly and women indirectly (i.e. through men).¹³ They take the phrase that “the head of Christ is God” to mean that Christ is a hierarchal relationship to the Father (subordinationist christology). This is very troubling & misguided theological ground to be on.¹⁴
- c) Participation – A healthy God-honoring community needs to model men and women working together in complementary and interdependent ways. Paul promotes his teaching about head coverings for women in his day
- “not in order to restrict their participation in prayer and prophecy but rather to enable them to perform these activities with dignity, avoiding distractions for people whose cultural sensibilities were formed by the social conventions of the ancient Mediterranean world. Anyone who appeals to this passage to silence women or to deny them leadership roles in the church is flagrantly misusing the text.”*^{Hays,191}
- d) Interdependence (vs. independence) – *as spouses, families, congregation, denomination*

There has been a strong ongoing theme of independence in the Corinthians¹⁵ that has already repeated surfaced in the previous issues Paul has dealt with in this letter. (“I follow _____”, “I did it my way”, “I have my rights”, etc.) And it surfaces here yet again in their corporate worship, with people making their own declarations of independence (e.g. women coming dressed however they want to worship regardless of how shocking it is to others, some people are having their “own private

¹³ See references in Two Views on Women in Ministry (revised edition), p. 102 n.157.

¹⁴ Speaking of the Son’s “functional subordination during the incarnation” (e.g. Millard Erickson, Christian Theology, p. 698, 735—e.g. the world’s fastest sprinter entering a three-legged race) is appropriate, but to speak of the Son as being ontologically subordinate is very troubling and misguided.

¹⁵ “The Corinthians’ tendency to see themselves as virtuoso spiritual soloists is nowhere more evident than in their behavior in worship: Paul recalls them repeatedly to perceiving worship as a corporate action of the community that requires complementary participation by all.” (Richard Hays, 1 Corinthians, p. 182)

suppers”^{v.21} during what is supposed to be the Lord’s Supper, some speaking in unintelligible tongues—having their own private worship experiences—throughout the corporate worship service).

We need one another. We were made to complement one another in marriage, in the family, in the congregation, in our denomination, with other Christian denominations.

- Time for “talk back” (i.e. questions—e.g. “because of the angels”, corrections—e.g. “mixed marriages”, push back—“drinking illustration”)

-----extra notes-----

The biblical doctrine of “the husband is the head of the wife” is certainly related to the issue of abuse and domestic violence – especially by abusers hiding in the church. It is related, because wicked people take the good Word of God and twist and distort it to their own evil ends. Whatever Scripture means by the husband being the head of the wife, and wives submitting to their husbands (Ephesians 5), we know that it is GOOD, just as Christ being head of His bride, the church is good. On these things, all Bible-believing, Christ-loving genuine Christians agree. The question of course is, just exactly what does Scripture mean by these doctrines? It surely does NOT mean what the abuser takes it to mean.¹⁶

Paul implies that this principle applies even to God in relation to Christ, and to Christ in relation to God. Christ's ministry involves witness to God; God's work involves the empowerment and vindication of the Son. Hence complementarity and mutuality in relationships is not an optional or marginal issue. It belongs to the very fabric of reality as God wills it to be.¹⁷

“Because of the angels” – Paul’s fleeting reference to angels in verse 10 is completely obscure, because nothing else is said about them either before or after this comment. Among the *many* guesses proposed by commentators¹⁸ (propriety, avoid tempting them, in like manner, out of respect) the suggestion that presence of these heavenly “dignitaries” in their midst calls for dignified behavior^{Hays,188} has much to commend it and would simply add more weight to the main point Paul already makes.

¹⁶ <http://cryingoutforjustice.com/what-headship-and-submission-do-not-mean/>

¹⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton. 1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary (Kindle location 2471).

¹⁸ Ewert¹¹⁸ describes 5: (1) “observe the rules of propriety in the presence of these representatives of heaven”, (2) women improperly dressed will tempt angels, (3) like angels who veil themselves in God’s presence—Isa. 6², (4) in respect for their “leaders”—Rev. 2-3, (5) angels, in Jewish thought, were the guardians of this created order.