

Made in God's image

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is from Genesis chapter 2, starting at verse 4, and this can be found on page 2 of the Church Bibles. Genesis chapter 2, starting at verse 4.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

When no bush of the field was yet in the land, and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground.

Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[1 : 18] A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilla, where there is gold.

And the gold of that land is good. Delium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush.

And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helper fit for him. So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

[2 : 28] And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the livestock and to the birds of heaven and to every beast of the field.

But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. And while he slept he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman, and he brought her to the man. Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. So the second reading is taken from 1 Corinthians 11 verses 2 to 16.

[3 : 27] That's found on page 1153 of the church Bibles. Again, 1153 and it's 1 Corinthians 11 verses 2 to 16. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ. The head of her wife is her husband. And the head of Christ is God.

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.

It's the same as if her head was shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short.

But since it's disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he's the image and glory of God.

[4 : 35] 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.

That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, if 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. And all things are from God. 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's a disgrace for him? But if a woman has long hair, it's her glory. For her hair is given to her for a covering.

If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. Tim, thanks very much for reading for us.

[5 : 46] Please do keep 1 Corinthians 11 open, page 1154. We prayed already, so can I ask you to turn then to the back of the service sheet to the talk outline as well.

Now we're picking up our sermon series in 1 Corinthians this morning. And I've put the aim of the talk on the outline. It is to see that male headship and gender distinctives reflect the Trinity, are built into the created order, and should be worked out in the life of the local church.

1 Corinthians 11 is one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament. Many condemn the Apostle Paul's teaching on men and women here as simply unacceptable in the 21st century, patriarchal, hierarchical, and misogynistic.

Even many churchgoers, I think, are surprised to discover it is in the Bible, simply because they never hear it. The Church of England's lecture, the set readings, the Church of England gives, don't cover these verses.

In other words, you and I not only need to be convinced ourselves about what the Apostle Paul is saying here in this chapter, we also need to be able to explain it to others. So let's dive in.

[7 : 12] The context, we're picking up the series. So the context, as we'd expect, is at the end of chapter 10. I'll just turn back to chapter 10, verses 31 to 33, which summarizes, you'll remember, the previous section, chapters 8 to 10.

So chapter 10, verse 31. So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

And that same language of not giving offense and that same assumption that the outside world is looking on and observing what goes on in the local church is here in chapter 11.

So it's there in verses 4 and 5 in the word dishonor. It's there in verse 6 and verse 14 with the word disgrace. And verse 13 in that little phrase, what is proper. Now, it's very clear, I think, that in the church in Corinth, women exercise public ministry.

We can see that in verse 4 and verse 5. Every wife who prays or prophesies will need to wait until chapter 14 to see what prophecy is.

[8 : 27] But nonetheless, it's clear that women in Corinth were exercising public ministry. And that, in a nutshell, summarizes how completely revolutionary the gospel, the message of Jesus Christ had been in the first century.

In Galatians chapter 3, verse 28, I put it there on the outline, the Apostle Paul declares, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

In other words, men and women in Christ are completely equal in status. Indeed, across the world, the gospel has hugely raised the status of women.

And in many countries around the world, it is the biblical teaching on the equality of men and women that is most sharply countercultural and needs to be heard most urgently.

But it seems that in Corinth, that freedom was being exercised in the wrong way, in a way, to use Paul's words, was dishonoring, in a way that undermines God's pattern.

[9 : 36] And therefore, what the Corinthians need to hear is not that men and women are equal full stop, but that men and women are equal but different.

They are complementary. And just as in some societies, it's the message of equality that is countercultural, so in 21st century Western society, it is this message on the difference between men and women that is so sharply countercultural.

So then, male headship and gender distinctives, first of all, reflect the Trinity. Have a look at verse 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.

They tell you straight away how Paul brings us straight back to the biblical pattern. The head of Christ is God, the head of a man is Christ, and the head of a woman is her husband, where the word head speaks of a position of authority.

I guess in a sense we would expect it to, as in a head teacher of a school, for example, in a position of authority. I wonder if you've seen the template for the new five-pound note, which has been pictured in the papers over the last couple of weeks.

[10 : 48] It's made of plastic, I gather, so that it lasts longer, and has a picture of Winston Churchill on the front. And by the autumn, millions of these things are going to be in circulation across the country based on the template.

And in a similar way, the template for the relationship between husband and wife is the Trinity. God the Father and God the Son, both equally God, but the Father is head, and the Son submits, and he does so without losing any dignity, and without in any sense being inferior.

Just as the husband is head over his wife, who likewise willingly submits to him, and does so without losing any sense of her dignity, and does so without in any sense being inferior.

Now I want to spend a little bit of time on this, because there are those who suggest that in the first century, the word head meant something rather different. And rather than being an authority, it meant more source, as in the source or head of a river.

So notice, will you, in verse 10, that Paul explicitly uses the language of authority. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head. So he uses specifically the language of authority.

[12 : 09] Just as elsewhere in the New Testament, headship also denotes authority. So just keep a finger, will you, in 1 Corinthians 11, and turn on a few pages to Ephesians chapter 1, on page 1175.

Ephesians chapter 1, on page 1175. Ephesians chapter 1 is talking about the resurrection of Jesus, and the position that Jesus now has, as the one who was raised from the dead, never to die again, the position that Jesus now has in creation.

So Ephesians chapter 1, verse 21, he is now far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

And he put all things under his feet, and gave him as head over all things to the church. Can you see there, at Jesus' head, he is the one with all power and all authority in the universe.

That is the template. How is it worked out in marriage? Well, flick on to Ephesians chapter 5, well known to many of us, I guess. Ephesians chapter 5, verses 22 and 23.

[13 : 27] Wives, submit your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its savior.

And then Ephesians 5 goes on, doesn't it, to paint a beautiful picture of the ideal of the husband's, his headship, his loving, sacrificial leadership, and the wife's respectful submission to that.

So then back to 1 Corinthians 11, men and women are equal, but with different roles, whereby the husband leads, but is not more important than his wife, and his wife submits to his leadership, but is not less important than he is.

Now, I'm very conscious that certainly in the non-Christian world, that simply sounds like doublespeak, rather like George Orwell, for those who had to read Animal Farm at school, where all animals are equal, and some are more equal than others.

And certainly in our society, unless you have the same role and same function, you cannot be regarded as equal. Equality, in our society, means there should be no difference.

[14 : 42] And certainly to submit in our culture is basically to lose. So what I've done, I've put some verses on the outline there, do look them up later, we're not going to look them up now, but they show how Jesus himself submitted willingly to his heavenly father and how he delighted to do so.

So the first one, John chapter 6, verse 38, Jesus says, for I've come from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. Mark chapter 14, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays, yet not what I will, but what you will.

And tellingly, in 1 Corinthians 15, in those verses there, we see that Jesus' submission continues into the future. It continues all the way through into eternity.

In other words, male headship does not mean the Apostle Paul has had a low view of women because he didn't have a low view of the Lord Jesus.

Within the Godhead, the son submits to the father, yet the father and son are completely equal in status, in dignity, and in worth. So too in marriage, the husband is the head with authority over his wife.

[16 : 04] He is to exercise that authority sacrificially, modeled on the sacrificial laying down of his life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet both are equal in status, dignity, and worth.

Equal, but different, complementary, and the men. Now, of course, that is unwelcome in our 21st century Western culture because our culture loves to blur, doesn't it, the distinctions between male and female.

It assumes, as I said, that to submit is to lose. But can we see how actually what this does is it mirrors something very beautiful within the Godhead itself.

itself? It is God-like to exercise authority rightly and it is also God-like to willingly submit to appropriate authority.

To dislike the pattern implies, I think, that we dislike a pattern that is intrinsic to the beauty and glory of God himself. So, first of all, male headship and gender distinctives reflect the trinity.

[17 : 16] Secondly, male headship and gender distinctives are built into the created order. Simon, can I ask you if you would mind opening the doors there just to keep the air flowing through? Thank you.

So, male headship and gender distinctives are built into the created order. Now, I wonder what you made of the headlines last month when a leading female American TV personality posted nude selfies online.

I wonder what you made of that. In an interview afterwards, the MP Harriet Harman described her as brave and pioneering. Now, personally, I found that deeply shocking from a senior figure in the political establishment.

I think it reveals, I guess, what, in a sense, we don't need to be reminded of, but nonetheless, it reveals the fact that our culture has completely lost the plot in terms of its understanding of what it means to be male and female, in terms of its understanding of sexuality and gender, the same culture where school children in Brighton and Hove are asked to choose between 24 different gender options.

Our culture has completely lost the plot. Now, the danger is, I think, that because we live in the culture, of course, we imbibe the culture, and therefore, what we see in our culture seems normal, and as our culture seems more normal, so the teaching of the Bible seems to become more and more alien to us.

[18 : 45] Whereas, in fact, you and I should breathe a great sigh of relief when we come to 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 Corinthians 11, 7 to 12, which we're about to look at, because what Paul does is he takes us right back to creation, to that reading which we had from Genesis 2, and therefore, of course, we are freed from culture to go back to the way in which God made the world.

Perhaps, I guess, many of us have had the experience, you're swimming in the sea, you're having a great time, it's a lovely, sunny day, you get out of your depth, mild panic sets in, you paddle hard to get back into the shore, and it's a wonderful, isn't it, great sense of relief when finally your toes hit solid ground, and you know that then at least you can walk in, even if you run out of energy to swim in, but it's a wonderful thing, isn't it, when your feet touch the bottom again.

So actually, it is a wonderful thing that Paul brings us back to the way in which God created the world to establish what it means to be male and female. It liberates us from simply drifting with the tide of our culture.

So have a look at 1 Corinthians 11, verses 7 to 10. Again, 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. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels.

[20 : 12] Now, we had Genesis 2 read earlier, both male and female, husband and wife were created in the image of God. But strikingly here, I think, in verse 7, is that man is described as the glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.

So, what is going on there? Well, that word glory means the same as honor. In other words, man is the image and glory of God. He is to honor God, to honor the role that God has given him as man and for those who are married as husbands.

Whereas the wife is the glory of her husband, in other words, she is to honor him in the role that she has been given as his helper. Hence, verse 9, neither was the man created for woman, but woman for man.

In that reading, in Genesis 2, Genesis 2, verse 18, God says, it is not good that the man should be alone. I'll make him a fit, a helper fit for him.

She is created for him. That word fit literally means one who is like opposite, one who is like, who is equally human, one who is equally made in the image of God, yet one who is opposite, with different complementary roles.

[21 : 33] In other words, male headship and gender distinctivity, you see, are built into the created order. It's worth saying the Bible does not teach that all women are to be subject to all men.

The Bible only requires men to submit to their own husbands and the elders or leadership of their church. Nor, of course, is submission a uniquely female responsibility.

Men, too, are to submit to the elders or leadership of their church, while church elders are to submit to Christ as under shepherds. All Christians are to submit to the government.

Children are to submit to their parents and so on. But the point is, you see, that role distinctives between men and women are not simply sort of accidents, if you like, of evolutionary biology.

In other words, you and I are not simply people in the sort of generic sense who happen to have male or female reproductive organs. No, we are men or women.

[22 : 38] Germaine Greer was right, although she got into hot water for saying so, that simply having a sex change operation actually does not change your gender because our gender is not a sort of thin veneer on the outside of who we are.

That's why in verse 13, Paul asks, is it proper? In verse 14, he says, does not nature itself teach you? Because generally speaking, even in unbelievers, there's a God-given sense of what it means to be male and female and that male and female are different.

But someone says, surely that will inevitably lead down the track to female oppression. Well, no, because in verses 11 to 12, headship notice is beautifully balanced with dependency.

Verse 11, 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 and all things are from God.

Men need women. Something that cannot be more powerfully expressed in motherhood. It's been said that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world and there is a great deal of truth in that.

[23 : 59] You and I should value motherhood. We should exalt motherhood. Something that at least a part of the feminist movement, of course, is totally opposed to and sees motherhood as an inconvenience to career or getting on with life or whatever it is.

We should value it and exalt it. So can we see that by rooting his teaching in creation, Paul is showing the principle of male leadership is foundational to the way in which God has created humanity.

Paul is not simply new. He is not simply reflecting, as people often say of the Apostle Paul, he is not simply reflecting the cultural prejudices of the first century.

Just think back to 1 Corinthians 7, for example, which we looked at a couple of months ago when he says that wives have equal sexual rights as their husbands. Completely revolutionary in the first century.

Paul's teaching on men and women is not governed by culture. It is governed instead by creation. So male headship and gender distinctions reflect the Trinity, are built into the created order, and thirdly, it should be worked out in the church.

[25 : 13] You'll know that Grayson Perry is one of Britain's most successful contemporary artists. He is also a well-known transvestite who regularly appears in public dressed as his alter ego Claire, as he did when he received the Turner Prize.

So here's a question perhaps you haven't thought about before. Would it be acceptable this morning if I was preaching to you wearing a dress? Would that be acceptable, perhaps a little bit unusual, or would it be dishonoring in some way?

We'll have a look at verses 4 to 6. verse 5.

There's much debate about what Paul is talking about here, whether he's talking about head coverings, perhaps a shawl or veil or something like that, or whether actually this is to do with hair, in other words having long hair or hair up in a certain way.

I think it's hard to work out precisely what the head covering was. Paul, interestingly, doesn't use the word hat, so I think we can say it's unlikely to have been a hat, although of course we should respect the consciences of those who think it is.

[26 : 45] In verse 15, Paul does specifically mention the length of hair. Hair length and the way it was worn was of great significance in the ancient world.

In Greek, Jewish, and Roman cultures, women grew their hair long and wore it up in various styles, and they did so in order to symbolize their submission to their husbands.

Conversely, in all three cultures, loose or disheveled hair or shaven hair was a sign of disgrace or a sign of sexual availability, while men with long hair were regarded as effeminate.

So Paul's point is that gender distinctions should be reflected in the life of the church. Now what I've done, I've put four implications of this.

I'm sure there are many more which we can chat about over coffee, if you could do that over coffee, but here's a starter. Here are four ways in which these principles can be worked out in practice in the life of Grace Church.

[27 : 55] First of all, the ministry of women should be encouraged. It's clear from verse four that women were active in public ministry in Corinth, praying and prophesying.

As I said, chapter 14 will tell us what prophesying is. We see elsewhere, of course, that women should not lead churches, nor should they preach publicly to the mixed congregation, as is happening now this morning to men and women together.

But interestingly, that is not Paul's focus here. Notice, you see, Paul is not talking about what women can and cannot do. I think it's been a shame perhaps when some use 1 Corinthians 11 in that way.

Rather, he's talking about the way they do it. They should do it in a feminine way which reflects who they are. In other words, we shouldn't get so caught up in the discussion about head coverings that we forget that actually the ministry of women is to be encouraged.

The next chapter, chapter 12, the Apostle Paul is going to say that everyone in the local church has spiritual gifts. Everyone should be encouraged to use their gifts for the building up of the local church.

[29 : 11] The New Testament provides many examples of women making important contributions to the work of the gospel which was completely revolutionary at the time in the first century.

And therefore, of course, we recognize and rejoice in the public and private ministry of women here at Grace Church. Secondly, the ministry of women should reflect their God-given role.

In other words, in a way that recognizes they are their husband's helper and are in submission to their husbands, those who are married. Now, in some cultures today, I take it that may mean wearing some kind of head covering.

Indeed, it may be regarded as a disgrace not to in some cultures today. Imagine if you lived in Malaysia or something like that. In our context here, I guess there may be significance, more significance in other things, other than head coverings.

Perhaps whether a married woman takes her husband's surname or whether she uses the title Mrs. or Ms. That might be more significant in our culture than head coverings.

[30 : 25] I take it too that her public ministry will also reflect her God-given role. So, for example, where her husband and wife lead in prayer together on a Sunday morning, then it's probably right, as Ben did this morning, that the husband is the one who introduces the prayers.

Similarly, in a growth group situation, while she may well lead the Bible study, I take it it would be right for him perhaps to introduce the evening, for then her to be able to defer to him when conversations get tricky or whether some need a clarification or something like that.

I take it too that wives need to ensure that they're encouraging their husbands to lead, which at times may well mean that they hold back in order to enable them to lead, to step forward to lead.

Perhaps to guard against the temptation to grab the lead. Or to behave as if men are ineffective and useless. Or to denigrate their husbands in public. I do think it's interesting that just, you know, I think it's quite hard to find many examples in contemporary culture where men are portrayed positively, isn't it?

You know, so often men are portrayed and depicted as being lazy or incompetent. And I take it we need to work hard to make sure that sort of culture doesn't enter the church.

[31 : 50] church. Thirdly, the ministry of men should reflect their God-given role. And that, of course, is the flip side of what we've seen already. Men take the lead.

The old joke that men turn the hymn, take my life and let it be, into take my wife and let me be, is too often too close to the truth.

Men, we need to be proactive in ministry. church, rather than taking a back seat, to lead in prayer, in public prayer gatherings, to lead as the church, as the lead pastor at home.

You are the lead pastor at home in your family. So easy, I think, for men to be so busy at work, so completely worn out by work, that actually there is no energy physically or emotionally to lead at home or at church.

Fourthly, appearance and dress matter. Verse 14. Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is a disgrace for him?

[33 : 03] But if a woman has long hair, it is her glory. For her hair is given to her for a covering. In every culture, there's an understanding, isn't there, of how men and women should dress.

This doesn't mean that women should only wear skirts and dresses, that they shouldn't wear jeans and trousers, but they should be identifiably feminine in a way which is widely understood.

Nor, I take it, should women use fashion, whether clothes or hairstyle, to kind of protest and rebel, if you like, against their God-given role.

For those who are married, their appearance should honour their husbands. Likewise, men should dress in a way that is identifiably male, not the sort of metrosexual kind of dressing which deliberately seeks to blur the distinctions between the two.

Because as we've seen, clothing and appearance, they're not neutral, are they? What we wear, the way in which we appear, it says something about ourselves, it says something about who we think we are, it says something about our beliefs, the way in which we want to project ourselves onto others' appearance and dress matter.

[34 : 24] So then, four suggestions as to ways in which these principles might be worked out in practice. I'm sure there are many others. It would be great over coffee to discuss that together and what some of those might be.

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.

Heavenly Father, we thank you very much that you're a God who speaks to us. We praise you for the way, and especially in our own culture, so confused about gender and identity and the roles of men and women.

We praise you very much for the way in which your word completely liberates us from that, as we look at your own character and headship and submission so beautifully templated for us in the Trinity, and as we look at creation, the way in which you designed male and female in the first place.

And we confess, Heavenly Father, when we so naturally simply want to drift with the culture in which we live, and we pray please for grace and wisdom as we work out these principles in practice, both here corporately at church, and also in our own lives.

[35 : 44] For Jesus' sake, Amen.