

Body Care

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Date: 28 August 1994

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[0 : 00] Two things I want to say, just beginning. One is, this morning, Ernie Eldridge completes at St. Chad's Church his ministry. He retires as of the end of this month.

And Ernie is the senior priest in the Diocese of New Westminster. He's been here longer than anybody else. Has been nominated at least once and maybe more times to be Bishop of the Diocese.

But he's a great man. And I just hope that he's very much in your prayers today. Just as you think of him and give thanks to God for his ministry.

Second thing I want to tell you is a little bit about Graham Eglinton. Graham Eglinton has two or three things that you should know before you consider whether you'll stay to listen to him at the end of the service.

He is certainly the most knowledgeable man in the matter of the prayer book in Canada. He is probably the, well he's a great gift to the church in Canada.

[1 : 08] And is recognized by, the church hasn't recognized that yet. But he nevertheless is a great gift to the church.

And his giftedness and his ministry in Canada is, I think, very important. And the opportunity to hear him is an important point. And I can't resist this.

He said, in addition to everything else, he is an Australian. So, can you do better?

Now I want you to look at 1 Corinthians 11. And it's very important that you read it.

And I would like to insult you slightly by telling you you probably haven't. Not that you haven't gone over the words. But that your hackles would be raised so quickly by reading this passage that you wouldn't read it, is what I mean.

[2 : 14] You would just get caught up in a surge of emotion. And indignation. And you wouldn't properly read it. So, one of the things I have in mind is to help you to read it this morning.

And make sure that if you want to be indignant about it, that you at least know what it says. And with that in mind, I'll ask that we pray together.

That we may be given that understanding. Will you bow your head? Our God and Father, as we have the enormous gift of your word written, and that all our emotion and all our spiritual life, all our intellectual life, all our capacity for reason, are fully engaged as we encounter your word written.

And bow our heads to your living word, even Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Now, we live in an age which prides itself on maintaining the tradition, that if there is a tradition, we must challenge it.

[3 : 37] That's about the only tradition we're left with at the moment, is that we challenge every tradition. When I was a child going to St. John's Church in another part of Canada, it was invariably true that every woman in the congregation would have a hat on.

And if she happened to get there without one, she would tie knots in four corners of a handkerchief and place it on her head. We seem to have departed from that as I look out at you.

It has nasty things to say about men with long hair. And it was a great moment in the history of St. John's when the present rector gave up his pigtail.

Which wasn't very good anyway. But it's, I mean, you can see that we live in a culture which infests the church with whatever is said, we will try the opposite to see if it works.

You know, that that kind of thing is part of the culture we have engendered at this point. Now, you know, there's some...

[5 : 15] Paul, if you look there, right there in verse 2, I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the tradition, holding to the teaching, just as I pass them on to you.

The tradition or the teaching refers to the essential content of the gospel. This book was written in 53 A.D.

And what he's referring to there is Essentials 53. That's a bit subtle for some of you, but I am. You can talk about it afterwards. That's what he's referring to, the essentials on which the Christian faith is based. And so he acknowledges that, he commends them for it, and then he goes on and launches into the passage.

Now, look at chapter 11, verse 2 to verse 16. That's the first part of the passage, and it deals with primarily the church's awareness of the headship of Christ.

[6 : 33] The headship of Christ, not in the sense of power and authority only, but in terms of the fact that we as a community derive from the headship of Jesus Christ.

We have no being apart from Jesus Christ as head. He is the head. In the sense that we enjoy the mouth of the Fraser River here in Vancouver.

One of the things that marks us as a community. This is a community that is built around the mouth of the Fraser River. But what we're referring to, what the Fraser River depends upon, is the headwaters far up in the northern interior from which all this comes.

So when we're looking at the church, we're looking at that which is contemporary to us and present to us, but which derives from the headship of Jesus Christ.

Christ is head. And so what the church has to do and has to work at is that if there is a non-Christian in this congregation this morning, that one of the things that he will realize by contact with you as a congregation, that you as a congregation and as a community are derived from Christ.

[8 : 15] That's who you are. The new life which is in Christ is the life that you have and the life that you share. You may share all sorts of biological features with anybody and everybody, but the community which we are as a church is a community which derives from Jesus Christ.

That's why Paul says, I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ. The head of every woman is man. In the same sense, not head by way of authority, but head by way of derivation. And all he's doing is repeating the Genesis story. It is not good for man to be alone. God created woman out of his rib.

That that's where woman comes from. And that's why it says, the head of every man is Christ. The head of every woman is man. The head of Christ is God.

So that's the structure of the basis of the structure of the community in which we live. And that's something we have to bear witness to.

[9 : 33] Now that's more difficult for us because we live in a society which on a t-shirt on the ferry boat last night, somebody advertised that they were afraid of nothing and no one.

They were in a sense totally caught up in the contemporary philosophy that man has risen up out of the mire and there is no limit to the attainments that are possible to him if he will only set his goal high enough and strive for them.

And he will smash every tradition. He will smash everything that stands in his way in order to achieve all the glory that belongs to man as he makes his way up out of the mire.

Well, this is a different community you're settled among this morning. This is a community which derives from God, is redeemed through Christ, and shares the life of Christ as members of the body of Christ.

It's very different. While he sees his life as exploiting all the potential of humankind, we are to see our lives, and I don't think you're going to like this.

[10 : 52] I hope you won't. So you'll think about it. But we derive our lives from learning to submit to the circumstances and reality of our own individual and personal existence.

That's what we have to do. That's why he says that what has got to be clearly manifest among you is that you are subject to him who is head, and that that works itself out in the circumstances of your relationships to one another.

And it's not hard to conclude from that. I mean, to see in that, that there are in the congregation men and women.

And men and women will read this passage in very different ways. And it will arouse very different emotional responses.

Some good and some entirely inappropriate and unwarranted by the scripture. And so what Paul is doing, and I think helping us in this, is to say that, in a wonderful and clear way, that men and

women are different.

[12:15] Sure, we are all one in Christ, and there is neither male nor female. Those kind of things are part of Paul's teaching. But the uniqueness of our sexuality and the difference of our sexuality and how we relate to one another is an important part of how the church works and how we learn submission one to another.

Well, that's what Paul is saying in these first 16 verses. I was thinking the other day about the problem that they're having putting together a jury to try O.J. Simpson.

And how very few people are... I mean, the supposition is that everybody knows too much about it and has already made up their mind about what's happened to be suitable on the jury.

And I think most of us are so entrenched by the culture we belong to, the society we live in, the values that are maintained by our society, that we're not qualified to look with any kind of clarity at this passage because we have prejudged most of the things that it says.

And so we can't hear the case. So I don't know whether we could get a 12-man jury out of you or not and send the rest of you home while those who can listen to this will listen to it because it's a very difficult thing, I think, to work through what it says in this passage and to figure out how Paul was encouraging that congregation in that Corinthian society because Corinthian is now an English word which refers to a kind of decadence, I think, that how you put together within a Corinthian society a Christian congregation and how that congregation in a world of great sexual confusion honors the sexuality of people and how that community learns to submit in one another and to one another to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

[14:57] That's one of the really big problems and we live in, as you know, total chaos on that. Our society does and the chaos has deeply invaded the church so that the church...

I mean, it's hard for a church in our society to demonstrate corporately the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord, as head.

And that's what Paul is concerned the congregation should do. Well, let me just point out some things about the passage to you.

what he does, you see, is he takes basically the Genesis story and from the Genesis story he derives a kind of theological statement, a theological statement which is verse 3.

The head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is the man, the head of Christ is God.

That's the theological statement that he derives.

[16:09] And then he goes on to try and say how you're going to work this out in your life as a congregation. If you were in the Salvation Army, you'd wear a...

the women would wear a Salvation Army bonnet. If you were a Roman Catholic nun, you'd wear a wimple. If you were a Mennonite, you'd wear a little lace cap. And we still have it observed very carefully in this church by the fact that I don't know that I have ever performed a marriage in this church in which the bride's head was not covered.

I mean, that's... that's too vestigial a remains for anybody to acknowledge that it has any biblical significance. But I'm sure that this is where it derived from originally.

And the fact that we veil our heads in mourning sometimes is part of it. So what you have is the scriptural story, the theological statement, and then the attempt by the congregation and Paul's leadership of the congregation to give expression to that in the relationship between men and women and in the mutual subordination submission that they make to one another and to the church as a whole.

So that's how Paul does it. If you look at 11 verse 13, you'll see how he wants you to incorporate this into your life. And this, I think, is the warrant for lots of Bible study groups in the congregation so you can take this home and work on it.

[17:53] That is advocated in verse 13 where it says, judge for yourselves. He says, don't take it on my authority to do this. You look at it for yourself.

You look at the scripture and what it says. You look at the theological principles and what they say. You look at our behavior as Christians in a non-Christian society and see how we behave and in what way the outsider would recognize that as an acknowledgement that Jesus Christ is head.

The one from whom we derive. The one from whom we have our being. So he encourages them in verse 13 to judge for yourselves. Decide among yourselves.

Work towards agreement on this issue. Work it through. So that I think, I mean, it almost looks to me like you could spend a whole year working on this because you have to get the scriptures

straight.

You have to get the theological perspective straight. Then you have to get the working out of it in the practical reality of your relationships to one another straight. And so he says, work on it.

[19 : 05] Then if you look in verse 14, you see another surprising statement when Paul says to them this, does not the very nature of things teach you?

I'm going to stop there, but you can read the rest of the verse. Does not the very nature of things teach you? So that there's a kind of logical, rational reason for this that you can see having accepted the revelation of God, articulated the theological principle, seen the necessity of giving expression to it in the community.

And it says, doesn't this make sense? It's a disgrace to you. In our society, he says, and that's where the rest of the verse comes in, when he says, if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him. And if you want to leave now, you can. No, no, don't. It's just that for their society and their culture, that was the way it happened.

I think that comes under, maybe comes under the struggle we're having in our society to try and work out what it means. I would think that it might be considered an act of non-conformity and an expression of the liberty that we have.

[20 : 46] Maybe it doesn't, but for the Corinthians, Paul was able to say that nature teaches you and that you need to look at that aspect of it.

So you see, you have scripture, theology, pastoral application. You have deciding among yourselves. You look at the parallel that there is in the culture you belong to, what nature teaches. Then if you look at 11:16, he says, the way to find the answer to this problem is not by being contentious about it. Do you see what he says there in 16?

If anyone wants to be contentious about this, there is, in effect, no place for that. So it's not a matter about which we are to be contentious, though I think we have a great capacity to be contentious about this as about many other issues.

And then Paul says, he says that look at it.

[21 : 55] See if it is an unnecessary practice. See if it's an unnecessary point of slavish conformity. Or see if it is that, how you give expression to the headship of God over Christ, the headship of Christ over man, the headship of man over woman.

I shouldn't have used the word over because Christ from God, man from Christ, woman from man is the way that it's expressed in this passage.

And then Paul concludes this first half of the chapter by saying that, do you see it in verse 16? We have no other practice. And that's Paul speaking perhaps on behalf of the Ephesian church from where this letter was written, perhaps among his own colleagues who were trying to work this issue through.

And he said that in general the churches of God conform to this, that this is a legitimate way of saying that God is over Christ, Christ is over man, man is over woman, and that that's something we want to acknowledge.

[23 : 26] So we have a wonderful diversity about how to hear and read and submit to this passage represented by a congregation like this this morning.

We still bow our heads to pray. You can't help but think that baldness is a gift from God. that keeps your hair short. Anyway, that's that. But you see, with the liberty of our emancipated lifestyle, that we, and caught up as we are in the assertion of our awesome independence and unlimited possibility of achievement, caught up in that, it's very difficult for us to understand that there are limitations and that the Christian life is not an exploitation of our potential, but a commitment in submission to God in the life that he's given us.

That's what Christian life seems to be. And so that's why he goes on then, you see, to the second chapter, and as he's talked about the headship of Christ in the first chapter, in the first half of the chapter, in the second half of the chapter, he talks about the body of Christ.

And that we are members of the body of Christ. And that that is the radical thing that ties us together in a commonness which is to affect all of us.

[25 : 34] And you see, the church in Corinth then was very badly divided, as you know from the first chapters, how badly divided it was.

And you know how society keeps breaking down into exclusive groups of one kind or another. We need a place to belong in which we can say, we are the right and you are the wrong, we're the left

and you're the right, we're, all those kinds of things happen.

Society breaks down. But he says the challenge for the church of Christ is to be the expression of the body of Christ to derive its life from sharing in the body of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ so that when you are incorporated into this new creation, you are sustained by Christ that he has provided the Lord's supper, the supper at which he is Lord, the supper at which he gives himself to us, the supper at which we in repentance and faith receive as the sacrament of eternal life, the body and blood of Christ.

So just as we are to acknowledge the headship of Christ, that he is the head from whom we all derive, so we are to acknowledge the reality of being members of the body of Christ.

It delights me in the peculiar, I mean, one of the stimulating things in reading this passage this week has been the peculiar proximity of these two halves of the same chapter.

[27 : 22] The first half we consider to be superficial to the extent which we would readily dismiss it and snort with indignation at it. The second half, which is the earliest account of the institution of the Lord's supper in the New Testament, is the point at which almost all churches agree that somehow that is central.

But I think that both half of the chapters are essential. I think if we're not going to derive that our being is from Christ, then the argument that we are the body of Christ becomes meaningless. and that's the argument that is developed in the second half of the chapter. Well, you have to remember as well that this whole chapter is written, just two chapters away from, though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, in terms of love being a form of submission one to another and submission to God, and this eloquent statement about it. So that we as members of the body of Christ can mean nothing without reference to the fact that Jesus Christ is our head.

I stopped there, mostly because I spent all my time preparing that much. And I wanted you to see the two in relationship to one another.

[29 : 00] and to recognize what a wonderful passage this is, and to recognize the responsibility that we are put under to try and work out in the chaos and confusion of our world, and the conflicting philosophies of our world, what it means means that we derive from God through Christ, and that we represent the body of Christ on earth as the church, and we derive our life from the body of Christ shared sacramentally in the bread and wine of the holy communion, and that's who we are, and that's who we're meant to be, and that,

I think, Paul is saying, is who the people outside the church should recognize us to be, those who acknowledge the headship of Christ and submit to be members of the body of Christ within the communion and fellowship of the church.

Amen.