

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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[0 : 00] Happy Mother's Day to you all. If you're new to Trinity or if you're new to Christian things in general, we're glad you're here.

Let me invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 with me. That's page 969, I believe, in the Pew Bible. What we've been doing here at Trinity in the morning service is walking through, teaching through the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians written by the Apostle Paul.

In our text this morning, we come to a new section of this book, and this section deals with the topic of worship. Along the way, Paul's been responding to various questions and issues going on in the church of Corinth.

If you've been here over the past months, you'll remember that in chapters 1 through 4, he dealt with factions and divisions in the church. Then there were questions about sex and singleness and marriage that he dealt with in chapters 5 through 7.

Then there were questions about freedoms and rights and how to interact faithfully with their cultural surroundings. That was chapters 8 through 10. And along the way, it's all been pretty practical, relevant stuff.

[1 : 08] And now in this next section, starting in chapter 11 and going the whole way through chapter 14, Paul's going to deal with issues related to their worship gatherings. What happens when they come together to worship God on Sundays?

And if you look ahead to chapters 12 and 13 and 14, that's kind of the biggest chunk of this section. That part deals with spiritual gifts and the need to build each other up rather than just show off through the exercise of those gifts.

Before that, at the end of chapter 11, we'll look at the Lord's Supper and the underlying issue of class divisions in the church. How are the rich and the poor alike being welcomed to the one table of the Lord?

But that's all in weeks to come. This morning, we kick it all off in the beginning of chapter 11 by talking about corporate gathered worship and the importance of gender.

How do we honor God and one another in our times of gathered worship when it comes to being male and female? Now, the benefits, one of the benefits of preaching through a whole book, section by section, like we're doing in 1 Corinthians, is that it keeps us from shying away from hard topics like this one.

[2 : 33] But it also lets you know that when these trickier topics come up, we're not just trying to ride some weird hobby horse. The elders did not sit down and say, you know what we really ought to preach about on Mother's Day?

The Sunday with the third highest church attendance of the year? Gender and worship. That would be awesome. Let's do that. No, the conversation went more like last summer, actually.

Hey, there's a lot of great practical stuff in 1 Corinthians about living out the gospel together. Let's walk through that as a church. So we divided it up, put it on the calendar, and this is where it fell.

Happy Mother's Day. But there's no doubt that this is a timely topic. Culturally, we are all asking very deep questions about these things, about gender, aren't we?

And I think the benefit of this cultural moment to the church is that it's requiring us to come back to Scripture with fresh eyes to get a richer and deeper clarity and vision of what it really means to be male and female as members of the body of Christ for the sake of the world.

[3 : 51] It's challenging us, actually, in a good way, not just to settle for how we've always done things or to settle on our gut reactions or to just go with the flow of culture, but it's actually challenging us to really listen afresh and to really open ourselves up to the biblical vision of what God intends for His glory and for our flourishing when it comes to being created male and female.

And I think what we see in our text, what we're going to see in our text, when it comes to gender and worship, is that there must be both freedom and form.

In fact, more freedom and more form all at the same time than most people on all sides of this issue are comfortable with. After all, freedom and form and order kind of seem like they're at odds with one another, right?

Well, freedom and form seem to be at odds with one another, that is, until you think about pretty much anything of lasting beauty. Think of a jazz musician who plays with untrammelled freedom. Yet that same musician knows that there's a deep form that she or he has to respect, the progression, the scales, the rhythm, these forms that every great jazz musician has mastered and embraced.

[5 : 27] And the freedom, together with the form, results in what? In beauty. Find one album in human history that's better than Miles Davis' Kind of Blue, and I'll give you \$20 on the spot.

Can't be done. Maybe Tom could find a different one. I don't know. Or think of an athlete. The ones who play with the most effortless freedom, the ones who are on the cutting edge of the sport, those same athletes are also the ones who have mastered and entrenched themselves in the very fundamentals of the game.

They embrace the forms, and they respect them and know them inside and out. They're the ones who are shooting a thousand shots in the gym every single day. Freedom and form equals beauty. We know this. And that's, I think, what we're going to see here in our text. So let's dive in. 1 Corinthians 11, chapter 11, verses 2 through 16.

Chapter 11, verse 2 through 16. Paul writes this. Now, I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

[6 : 41] 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. 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, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is 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 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.

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. Judge for yourselves.

[7 : 48] Is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Lord, does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is a disgrace for him? But if a woman has long hair, it is 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. I wonder if you've ever been walking down the street and overheard someone talking on their phone. You're walking behind them, and you overhear just one side, their side of the conversation. And you might hear something like this. Yeah, I'll bring the meat. No, it's purple with dinosaurs on it. Well, look, if you want to give her that much money, that's your decision. Of course, I already told you, I'll bring the meat. And as you stroll along, you think to yourself, what in the world is this conversation about?

Are they planning some sort of carnivorous dinosaur-themed birthday party for a five-year-old girl? What are they talking about? Well, to a certain extent, that's kind of what we're doing this morning.

[8 : 59] We're listening in on one side of a conversation. Reading this letter of the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth, written to real people in a real place at a real time long ago, is sort of like listening to just one side of a phone call.

In order to understand it, we sometimes have to do our best to fill in both sides of the conversation. And most of the time, in reading the New Testament letters, most of the time, through a careful reading of the text, and through studying the social and historical and literary context, most of the time, we can do a really good job of doing that.

And as a result, we can say with a fairly high degree of confidence what's going on in most passages. But, every once in a while, we come across a detail or a reference or maybe even a paragraph that just is not as clear.

Of course, it would have all made sense to the original audience. They were the one talking on the other end of the line. But for us, we simply have to make our best educated guess using all the information we have, try to capture the big idea or the big picture of what's going on and readily admit that there are some details that we're just not 100% sure about or maybe even 75% sure about or maybe even 25% sure about.

And it goes without saying that our text this morning is one of those where there's a lot we're just not sure about. There are a number of details in this text we've just read that we need to make some educated guesses about, but we need to hold those guesses with a pretty open hand.

[10:39] In this sermon, I'm going to say probably and most likely and maybe a lot of times. But what we'll see is that there are some central themes that are pretty clear.

So we'll spend most of our time this morning talking about what's clear and not get too lost in the weeds of the finer, more obscure details that come up along the way. And I think that as I've been sort of sitting with this text for a number of weeks, there are two things that we see pretty clearly. And surprisingly, almost every commentator I read has agreed. I'm going to tell you what they are, I'm going to show you where they come from in the text, and then we'll talk about how to apply them today.

And both of these things, in both of these things, Paul is concerned, above all, that we honor God and we honor one another in our corporate worship. Did you notice how often Paul uses language of glory and honor or shame and dishonor in this text?

He wants our times together to honor each other and in so doing to honor God. So, first clear principle is this.

[11:55] We honor God and we honor one another in our corporate worship when we empower the participation of both men and women in the body.

When we empower the participation of both men and women in what's going on on Sundays. Okay, where do we see that? Well, let's start at the top.

Paul begins in verse 2 by commending the Corinthians for the traditions he's passed on to them. The traditions here would have been the sort of body of Christian beliefs and practices that the apostles would have taught in all the churches and that we now have preserved for us in the New Testament.

And on the whole, Paul says the Corinthians are doing their best to maintain these and he commends them for it. Which goes to show that even in some pretty messed up places you can probably find something to praise, right?

The Corinthians had a lot of things that were mixed up but Paul still finds something to sort of encourage them about. Then in verse 2 he says, but, but I want you to understand.

[13:02] In other words, here's an area where I need to help you gain a little more clarity. He's moving from commendation to instruction. He's not rebuking them, he's not correcting them, he's not upset with them here.

He's just like a good friend, like a good pastor going to help him hash some things out. And the issue at hand seems to revolve around the issue of head coverings.

You see that in verse 4 and 5. Men, it seems, should pray and prophesy with their heads uncovered. Women, on the other hand, should pray or prophesy with their heads covered. Now, first little exegetical issue.

It's possible that the language in verse 4 and 5 could be referring not to head coverings but to hairstyles. If that's true, then verse 4 would be saying something like men shouldn't have hair that comes down from their head.

That is really long hair. In that case, I would be doing great for this passage. In verse 5 in that reading, women shouldn't let their hair flow down loosely.

[14:08] That is, they should keep it neatly tied up. Okay. Commentators go both way on this thing. We can't be 100% sure which one it is, but I think that probably, maybe, we can make more sense of the passage as a whole if Paul has in mind some sort of actual literal garment or head covering.

It seems in the first century that most women and particularly married women in public would have worn some sort of shawl or scarf over their heads.

It was a sign in that culture, and we all know clothing carries a lot of significance in a culture. It was a sign in that culture of respectability, of decorum, even of modesty, and it also sort of functioned as a sign of respect or deference for your husband and for your family household.

Okay. Now, perhaps one of the things that we don't appreciate enough is how radically and wildly liberating the gospel was in the first century.

In the passage that Mary read for us earlier, we heard Paul saying that you are all one in Christ, that there's no more Jew and Greek, there's no more slave or free, there's no more male and female.

[15:30] When it comes to your status before God, when it comes to being included in His kingdom, those distinctions don't bear weight. Though we are all sinners, though we are all morally bankrupt and bent, the gospel is that through faith in Christ, all of us are reckoned by the Father as righteous and as loved and as valued and as important as the very Son of God Himself.

Paul says we've put on Christ. And whether you're Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female, you are all the fully adopted heirs of a king through faith and faith alone.

And that makes Christianity totally different than any other religion that would have been out there, either for the Corinthians then or really for you and us now.

because every other religion basically says what? If I become the right sort of person, then I can be accepted by God.

If I do this or become this or perform this, then on the other side of that there's perhaps acceptance. But Christianity comes along and says, no, God accepts you by grace through Jesus.

[17:02] and as a result of that, you can finally start to become who you were meant to be. You actually want to obey and love and serve Him.

Acceptance leads to the change. And once you get that difference between those two things, you start to realize how liberating Christianity actually is.

and so, it's no surprise that some of the men and women in Corinth in the first century were probably thinking something like this.

Given this newfound identity and freedom that we have in Christ, when we gather for worship and particularly when we pray and prophesy, should the women among us continue to wear their head coverings?

I mean, if we're all one in Christ, if we're all equal heirs of the kingdom, should we even have that sort of attire anymore? Sure, we might have to wear it out in the marketplace, but what about in the church?

[18:12] What about here in this new community that Christ has created? Are we free from those things in the body of Christ? Christ? Now, before we take a look at Paul's answer to that question, notice the fact that Paul does not even bat an eye at the fact that women are praying and prophesying in the gathered assembly.

In fact, a lot of commentators think that part of Paul's commendation in verse 2 includes the fact that at Corinth men and women were participating so freely in the gathered worship of the church. After all, hadn't Joel chapter 2 foreseen the very day and hadn't Peter himself quoted that text at Pentecost? That the days were coming when God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.

It seems abundantly clear from 1 Corinthians 11 that men and women were praying and prophesying in the gathered assembly. And Paul has no issue, no problem with them doing so. Now, we'll get into the head coverings issue in a minute, but I think it's worth just sitting with that observation for a little bit. Paul assumes the fact that men and women were going to offer public prayers when the church gathers.

[19:47] Paul assumes the fact that men and women were going to offer public words of edification and encouragement when the church gathers, which is what Paul means, by the way, by prophesy here.

Turn over, actually, just a couple of pages to 1 Corinthians 14 verse 3 if you're in your Bible.

Chapter 14 verse 3, just a couple pages over. 14 verse 3, here's how Paul defines what he means by prophecy.

Ready? The one who prophesies speaks to the people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. Now, when we hear the word prophecy, we think almost exclusively of what?

Weirdos predicting the future, right? But really, what Paul has in mind when he uses the word isn't so much foretelling something, but forth-telling, speaking forth words of upbuilding and encouragement and consolation to the church, to brothers and sisters.

There's nothing weird or spooky about it. And also, by the way, we know that what Paul meant by prophecy in the New Testament church in the New Testament era was very different from prophecy in the Old Testament.

[21 : 09] Old Testament prophets operated under the direct inspiration of God. When they spoke, they could say, thus says the Lord. But, it's very different in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, prophecy, again, words of upbuilding, encouragement, consolation, these kind of prophetic words were almost always weighed and discerned by the leaders of the community.

They didn't treat the function of prophecy in their midst like direct inspiration, like Old Testament prophecy. They treated it like human speech that was intended to do good, that was hopefully infused with scriptural wisdom, but might also stand in need of correction and improvement based on a fuller understanding and application of God's Word.

Whew! Okay. Getting a picture of what prophecy is here in the New Testament and what Paul uses it. And all that is to say that Paul assumes the fact that men and women would be offering such public words of edification and encouragement and upbuilding and consolation when the church gathers for its corporate worship time.

Now, you might be thinking, wait a second, I thought Paul was the guy who told women to be silent in the church.

[22 : 38] He's the bigoted misogynist, right? Paul. We're talking about the same Paul here, right? Yes. We are talking about the same Paul, not all those labels.

Bracket those for a second. How can Paul be telling women to pray and prophesy in this text and men? But then tell women to be quiet in other texts.

What is going on? Well, okay, the text that you're probably thinking of are 1 Corinthians 14. We're going to get to that in a few weeks. And 1 Timothy 2. Greg just taught about that in Sunday school this morning. And when you look at those texts in context, you realize that Paul isn't saying there that women should never, ever speak ever in the church.

What he's actually saying is that the office and the responsibility of giving final say as to whether a prophecy or a teaching aligns with the apostolic gospel and the ones who will be especially accountable to Christ for that task when Christ returns, the ones who are especially accountable and responsible for ensuring the sound doctrine and teaching of the church, he's saying that that role is meant to be reserved to a group of qualified men, a group that elsewhere Paul will call elders or pastors or overseers.

But those leaders are not meant to squelch the participation of women praying and prophesying. Rather, they are meant to empower it.

[24 : 16] In Ephesians 4.12, Paul says that one of the jobs of those pastor teachers, the elders, is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

And that means equipping all the saints, men and women, for the work of ministry so that we might grow up in every way, Paul goes on to say in that passage, into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

When we're using our gifts mutually for the upbuilding of the body, then we're growing into the fullness of Christ. Well, what would the application of this principle look like for us today?

You know, friends, when I think about our corporate worship times together, I would love to see more of us, men and women, sharing words of encouragement, consolation, and upbuilding from up front.

Right now, when someone comes into membership, like Sierra this morning, or when they get baptized, or when they're sharing about a recent ministry experience, we get some of this, don't we? And it's really good.

[25 : 27] It's really encouraging. God uses it in our hearts, in our community. But what if we were sharing more of what God was teaching us in our life?

And sharing it in a way that was edifying and in a space that was edifying for the whole body? You know, one of the joys of being a pastor is that I get to hear so many great stories of God at work in your lives.

You sit down with me, you pull me aside, and I know you're doing this with the other pastors and elders too, and you tell me these incredible things that God is teaching you. How you learn to love your antagonistic coworkers by dwelling on Jesus' command to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

And lo and behold, it worked. How you learn to trust God's promises in the midst of unemployment that He'd never leave you nor forsake you. How you learn that Christ was an all-sufficient friend in sorrow when your relationship crumbled apart and you felt like you were all alone.

Friends, what if I were to ask you one day, would you consider sharing that on Sunday with your church family for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation?

[26 : 53] And of course, many of you are thinking, I could never do that. Speak in front of 300 people? He's crazy. Okay, it's intimidating. I get it. I still get nervous every time I get up front.

That's normal. But, friends, what if we worked together to change the culture here at Trinity where the regular personal sharing of encouraging words was the norm?

Call it whatever you want. A testimony, a prophecy, a missions update, I don't really care. What if every Sunday we would expect to hear not just one of the pastors give a sermon and fulfill that teaching role that God's given us, as central as that is, and it will remain.

But what if we also expected to hear a message of encouragement from one member, at least from another member of the church as well? It's built right into our order of service.

It's sitting right there before the offering, waiting to be grabbed. I think this would make our times all the more richer together.

[28 : 03] Don't you? Of course, there are other opportunities for doing this, right? Not just on Sundays. Small groups, one-on-one meetings, over lunch, after church, over coffee.

Each of these becomes a venue, a space for the Holy Spirit to work through prayer and encouragement, through the mutual giving and receiving of our gifts of love and service, as we say in our membership vows.

So, if speaking in front of the whole church gives you cold sweats, start there, in small group, with your circle of friends. But friends, let's be praying together that Trinity will become a place where we empower men and women to participate and contribute to mutually edifying one another in our gathered times together, where all of our gifts get cultivated and released so we can grow into the fullness of Christ.

Well, let's keep moving. That's the first point. mutual participation, freedom. Yeah? Here's the second point. We honor God and honor one another in our corporate worship when we embrace the created distinction between men and women in the body.

When we embrace the created distinction between men and women in the body. Okay, remember, the presenting issue at Corinth was probably something like this. When we gather for worship, and particularly when we pray and prophesy, should women continue to wear their head coverings?

[29 : 47] Or can we remove them as an expression of our freedom in Christ and of our kingdom equality with our brothers in the Lord? And Paul says, no, you should keep them on.

Why? Because in the first century context, the head covering on a woman, as we said, communicated respectability and modesty in general, and for the married woman in particular, it communicated a sense of respect and honor for her husband.

Imagine, friends, how distracting it would be if the first thing I did when I stepped into the pulpit was take off my wedding band and put it on the pulpit, or maybe stick it under the pulpit, or if I came out not even wearing one.

Even if I was doing that for some strangely good reason, what would it actually communicate to most people off the street? Well, it would be distracting and weird because taking off your wedding ring would seem to communicate that you're not married anymore, or at least that you're leaving your marriage commitment behind you or putting it aside for the time being.

And the reality is taking off my ring would actually dishonor my wife and detract and distract you all from the worship and honor of God. Now, for a woman to take off her head covering in the first century, the effects would have been very similar.

[31 : 17] Not only would they be taking off something that was part of just identifying as a woman in that culture, not only would taking it off have been seen at times as something promiscuous and provocative, but they would have also been taking off something that communicated respect and honor to their husband.

And so, by removing the head covering, they would actually be, as Paul says, dishonoring their head, not only their own selves, but also their husbands.

And all of that, which is Paul's big point, all of that would actually dishonor God and distract from worshiping Him, which is the point of why you get together in the first place. Paul goes on to say that, look, if you're willing to communicate that you've cast off your status and identity as a woman and a wife, then you might as well just shave your head, he says in verse 6.

That seems kind of strange. Again, it seems that in the first century cultural context, a woman would have her hair cut off as either sort of some kind of penalty for adultery or some kind of sign that she was forfeiting her identity as a woman.

And of course, the women in Corinth didn't want to go that far. That's not what they were trying to do. But Paul is saying they'd be communicating just about the same thing by doing this socially significant thing of taking off their head covering.

[32 : 33] So, if you're not going to go the whole way, keep it on. Okay. Why is Paul so concerned that the women in Corinth maintain a practice of dress that in part signifies their femaleness and in part signifies the headship of their husbands?

In verses 7-10, Paul explains that our engendered being and the headship principle actually goes back to God's creative intent for humanity.

Now, these verses are notoriously difficult to interpret, especially the end of verse 10 about the angels. I mean, come on.

You are all thinking that is the hugest non sequitur I've ever read. My guess is that that has something to do with the church displaying God's glory to the heavenly places.

Check out Ephesians 3-10. That's all I'm going to say about that. I'm done. You want to talk to me more after that afterwards? I'd be happy to. I can give you eight pages on what other people think that is. That's what I think it is.

[33 : 48] But on the whole, big picture, it seems that Paul is saying that the order of creation in Genesis 2 with Adam being formed first and then Eve does delineate a headship principle that gets embodied in the home through husbands and wives and ought to be embodied in the church in the office of the elder.

Now, verse 7 sounds really, really odd to us, right? Is Paul saying that women aren't created in the image of God and just created in the image of man?

No, that's not what Paul's saying there. Paul wholeheartedly affirms in other places that both men and women are equally created in God's image.

Rather, I think what he's saying in verse 7 is he's just making a point about the order of creation from Genesis 2 and the following verses 8 and 9 make that clear. He points out in verse 8 that in the original creation story Eve was made in a distinct way from Adam, from him, out of his side. And then in verse 9 that she was made to complete Adam, to be, as Genesis says, his strong helper, his ally, his completer in ruling creation.

[35 : 01] So, in this sense, Paul says, the woman communicates something about man as well as something about God. Being made in God's image, she reflects God's glory.

Yes, that's Genesis 1. But seen through the lens of Genesis 2, the woman, because she's made from man, also communicates something in addition about the glory of man.

In other words, her created excellence communicates something about God's excellence, yes, but also something about the created excellence of her partner, the man.

Now, I get it. It's really hard for us to hear those verses and for them not to sound really grating or maybe even demeaning for women, but that wasn't their intent.

You see, for the woman to communicate something in addition about the glory of man, on the one hand, doesn't define her whole reason for existence as if that's the only thing that God created women to do, and on the other hand, this doesn't in any way communicate any intrinsic inferiority to the man.

[36 : 21] Eve wasn't of any lesser value or dignity or importance in God's creative purposes. In fact, in verses 11 and 12, Paul's actually really careful to uphold and preserve the woman's dignity.

These verses actually kind of serve as an important qualification in Paul's line of thinking lest he be misunderstood or misapplied. Just as Genesis 2 delineates a principle of headship, so the rest of the biblical account, Paul steps back and says, delineates a principle of at the same time interdependence and mutuality before the Lord.

Yes, woman was made for man, but now man comes from woman, and both man and woman are equally from God. God. But why in the world would Paul want to preserve such a convoluted and complicated line of thinking?

On the one hand, equality of value and interdependence and mutuality. We get that. On the other hand, diversity of role and headship. Okay, we understand that.

We're a little less comfortable with that. What we can't do is the almost impossible thing of holding them together. Why? Why even try?

[37 : 42] Why is Paul even worried about that when it's so hard to hold together, when it's so hard to work out and practice? Why is he so careful to try to preserve that in the life of the church? The answer is actually found in verse 3.

All of this reflects something about the nature and glory of God. Just as the Father and the Son are equal in essence and glory and attributes, so the husband and wife are equal in essence and glory and purpose.

And a lot of times attributes. But, just as the Son freely comes under the headship of the Father, so wives freely come under the headship of their husbands.

And notice that headship here isn't what we commonly think. This sort of headship is not some kind of self-serving authoritarianism that belittles other people to make itself look great.

Isn't that what we often think about a head? A head of a department? He's the useless guy who just makes you fill out TBS reports, right? No.

[39 : 08] Real, biblical headship is self-giving responsibility that aims to build up the other that's entrusted to your care.

Because, you see, just as Jesus was the model of submission showing us that submission does not mean a loss of dignity or value or purpose or beauty. So, Jesus was also the pattern of true headship.

He is the head of the man and the husband, Paul says. And Jesus himself said that he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And as Paul will later say, husbands are to love their wives the way Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. friends, that's biblical headship.

That's authority biblically speaking. A self-giving stance towards the other that wants to see them flourish.

[40 : 14] A love that bears pain and loss so the other can know glory and gain. That's headship. Now, of course, people have done all sorts of evil and wrong things under the guise of male headship.

And we want to actually stand alongside the hurting and the broken and condemn those things as well. Those abuses have actually propagated a lie not just about what headship is but about who God is, you see.

real, true, biblical headship isn't oppressive, it's life-giving. So, you see, what's at stake in all of this for Paul in being male and female and the beauty of that distinction and even in embracing a principle of headship between husbands and wives, all this is really about being a picture, a reflection of God's own triune life and love to the world.

world. It's about honoring Him and displaying Him before a watching world as each member takes up their part in the dance that God has assigned.

not because one is intrinsically better than the other. There's no hint of that in the biblical texts but because God ordered it so and according to His own wisdom, He promises to make His glory known through it.

[41 : 55] And so, Paul tells the Corinthians to keep wearing the head covering because in their particular historical context, it communicated a glad embrace of the created goodness of being male and female and the distinction and role that each had in displaying God's glory.

And he ends in verses 13 through 16 by appealing to nature and by appealing to the common practice of the church. His appeal to nature real briefly in verses 14 and 15 is basically that if common experience tells us that men and women are different, for example, in their hair, in most cultures, men and women have different hairdos, then by analogy, it's fitting for men and women to have different symbolic attire communicating their maleness or femaleness, hence the head covering in the first century.

And in verse 16, Paul appeals to the broad practice of other churches. If anyone is contentious about this, Paul wants them to know that this isn't just his own private opinion, but in fact, none of the other churches of God have any other practice than the one Paul too is helping them to understand.

Now, for us today, in our time and in our place, friends, head coverings don't communicate anything like what they did for first century Corinthians, right?

So, there's no use in asking whether we should wear a head covering today. They've lost all their symbolic significance and there's no threat of undermining the created goodness and givenness of gender by not wearing one or by wearing one.

[43 : 38] But even if we need not wear head coverings, the hard issue, I think, is still the same. do we gladly embrace the created distinction of being male and female?

Of course, different cultures will have different signs and signifiers for communicating this distinction in healthy ways, but are we willing in our time and place to do so?

To gladly communicate our maleness and our femaleness to one another into the world. I think this works out in three ways.

First, in general, to embrace being male and being female and to see this distinction as a created good that's worthy of being maintained so that people will see the diverse glory of God in our life together.

Of course, there are all sorts of stupid stereotypes about what maleness ought to be and femaleness ought to be, right? Just because you can crush a beer can on your head and shoot a rifle doesn't mean that you're being a man.

[44 : 51] Was that our next men's ministry event? Sorry, guys. What counts is the character of Christ, you see. And of course, sometimes we get confused about our gender.

Sometimes we feel uncomfortable in our own skin. And friend, if that's you, let me encourage you to seek out a good Christian friend to talk to.

Don't cover it up and hide it up. Find someone you trust and let them walk with you through those questions that you have. You don't have to wrestle through that alone.

God's love and love and love and love and love and love and love and love and love the process of seeking to honor God as men and women means putting Christ uppermost in our identity.

To seek Him and to seek His ways and to let His Spirit and His Word permeate every part of our lives in the unique person that God created each one of us to be.

[46 : 00] That, I think, is the true path toward living into our maleness and femaleness together. To see Christ and let His Spirit then work it out in beautiful ways in our midst.

Second, if we're married, there's a call to further embrace not just the created goodness of being male and female, but the further distinction of role that God gives specifically to husbands and wives.

To embrace that role of loving headship and supportive submission. Okay, I know when you hear the word submission all the bells go off in your head that that's like an evil thing.

So, I've thought about other words I could use to sort of describe what I think the Bible is saying when it says that we ought to submit to one another and submit to God and submit in all sorts of ways.

And yes, wives submit to their husbands. I think it's an honoring deference. An honoring deference that wants to build that other up just as the husband responds with an honoring self-giving that wants to build the other person up.

[47 : 18] But this is something that maintains for husbands and wives. Nowhere in the Bible, I think, are women in general called to submit to men in general, you see. That's why the ESV actually helpfully translates the words men and women in our text sometimes as husband and wife.

The actual Greek words kind of can say either thing. But in the context here of headship that this passage brings up, it's clear that Paul's talking about the relationship of husbands and wives in the covenant of marriage.

So, friends, in your marriage relationship, if you're married, do you see that relationship as integral to your discipleship to Jesus?

That it's not something you can leave behind or take off at the door of the church. It's not something that's actually transcended because you're a member of the kingdom.

Rather, part of what it means for you to live as a new creation and bring honor to Christ is to live as faithful husbands and wives, displaying the unique ways that the character and glory of Christ play out in each one of you.

[48 : 33] Christ, who after all is both the head who laid down His life for us and the Son who freely submitted to the Father. Third, last, in the context of the local church which the Bible often pictures as an extended household, do we gladly embrace the headship principle here as well in that the office of the elder, the office entrusted with that self-giving responsibility to preserve sound doctrine and care for the flock is reserved for qualified men whom the congregation acknowledges and appoints.

Okay, I know that just opened up a huge can of worms and I've already gone over time. What? Okay. Listen to Greg's Sunday school class from this morning and come next week.

But you know, the reality is that many of us have just seen that done so badly that the thought of gladly embracing it seems impossible. I get that. I've seen it done badly in some of the churches I've been a part of.

And perhaps for other of us we're not 100% sure in our own minds how these biblical passages actually kind of line up. We're still figuring things out.

Friends, let me say this, that wherever you land, let me encourage you, let me encourage us to keep seeking the Lord together, to keep being patient and forbearing with one another as a church family, and to keep praying that we'd all know best how to understand and apply these texts and principles together.

[50 : 26] But to conclude, I hope we're at least getting a glimpse of the interplay between freedom and form that Paul's laying out in this passage. You see, on the one hand, freedom of men and women praying and prophesying mutually in the gathering, of the other assembly, both bringing their gifts to bear for the upbuilding of the body, empowered to do so, and at the same time form this created order where male and female are distinct and in certain relationships have distinct roles to play in displaying God's glory and manifold grace to the world and even to the heavenly places, as I think the end of verse 10 alludes.

And friends, as we pursue this freedom and embrace this form, may we begin to see more and more of the beauty of the glory that God has for us.

And may He be honored above all. Let's pray. God, we need Your help.

Lord, we confess that when we come to texts like this, we're often confused, so we pray You give us understanding. And God, as we think about this great and glorious thing of being created male and female and called together into Your family, Lord, give us the grace and wisdom and courage to live out the biblical vision.

God, help us not to rest in old answers. Help us to bring our questions honestly to You and Your Word. And Lord, help us to know and trust You. Lord, if You would give up Your own self for us, then surely we can trust Your ways and Your words and Your work.

[52 : 09] Lord, if You have given Your own blood for us on the cross, how will You not graciously give us all things? Lord, how could we not see Your words not as a recipe, for disaster, but as a recipe for our glory and for our good and for the good of the world?

God, give us the boldness and the humility that we need to walk in Your ways. In Jesus' name, Amen.