

SERIES: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR A HEALTHY & HOLY CHURCH:

A Study in 1 Corinthians Applied To The Church Today

III. MAINTAINING PROPER DIET & EXERCISE

C.) TRAINING ETTIQUETTE (Instructions for Worship)

“PROPER DRESS” (1 Cor. 11:2-16)

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APPEARANCE: Wear tacky baseball cap through beginning of message.

INTRODUCTION:

Tom Landy, former Hall of Fame Coach of the Dallas Cowboys and a great man of faith in Christ, once had this to say:

“Most successful football players not only accept rules and limitations but, I believe, they need them. Players are free to perform at their best only when they know what the expectations are, where the limits stand. I see this as a biblical principle that also applies to life, a principle our society as a whole has forgotten; you can't enjoy true freedom without limits.”

We have recently been reminded of what Scripture generally says about the freedoms of choice that believers have in and through Christ, His salvation and His Spirit. The key verses we examined last week were:

1 Corinthians 10:23

“Everything is permissible,” but not everything is helpful. “Everything is permissible,” but not everything builds up.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory.

1 Corinthians 10:32-33

Give no offense . . . just as I also try to please all people in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

In His Holy Spirit-inspired charge to the 1st Century church in Corinth (and ultimately to us here today as well), the apostle Paul continues to apply these principles to three specific areas of worship and church community in which they had been falsely applying and abusing the principle of Christian Liberty.

The first of these specific issues is what we will be looking at more closely this morning and addresses the area of our attitude as expressed through physical appearance and gender. Yeah, I know, I'm already in trouble and there's no way out!

Before we look at Paul's words, it is important to understand that the specific example he points to refers to outward appearances and symbols that were very significant and important to that specific culture but foreign to our own. Therefore, the *specific* instructions here regarding physical appearance are not meant to be a universal requirement. However, the underlying PRINCIPLES that Paul concentrates on ARE universal and to be learned and applied by all of the faithful who desire to please the LORD in any time or place.

To properly distinguish and understand this, passage, then we must first . . .

I.) UNDERSTAND THE ENVIRONMENT

A.) Local Culture

- As in every other society, the one in 1st Century Corinth had certain rules, expectations and symbols concerning their appearances. Some of these had the purpose of distinguishing people by class, some by profession, some by slave or free, and some by gender.
- In this case, how one wore their hair and did or did not cover their head were considered the biggest and most important distinctions.
- Physical symbols were very important and, like today, the degree to which an individual did or did not confirm to these generally accepted and expected practices determined the others' assumptions about their character and the degree to which one was viewed as being a responsible part of society or a disruptive rebel against it.

B.) Church Culture

- As we have already seen again and again through this letter, the Corinthian Church had developed within itself a culture that in some key aspects differed greatly from that of the other Christian Churches throughout the Ancient Near Eastern world. Sadly, these differences were the result of an arrogant and rebellious attitude.
- **First**, the Corinthian Christians saw themselves as being “fully realized” and therefore “super-spiritual” people who had already attained the highest level of spiritual transformation and were therefore “like the angels.”
- **Second**, as a result of this, they began to see themselves, their knowledge, and their spiritual discernment to be superior to that of Paul, and all of the other apostles and prophets. As such, they claimed a right to make their own changes and additions to the teachings about living in and for Christ.
- **Third**, they considered all earthly distinctions (including and especially those of gender) as being null and void for them.

C.) Paul's Teaching

- Throughout this letter, the Holy Spirit-inspired apostle Paul has been starkly pointing out their errors in these regards, while reminding them of God's Truth.
- **The problem Paul addresses in the text we will now look at is that at least some of the women have begun, in public worship, to openly and intentionally disregard an accepted custom – the purpose and result of which is unnecessarily causing contention in the church and challenging (rebellious against) the accepted and biblical male-female distinctions. Specifically through their physical appearance in church, they are contentiously forcing a change that is not necessary or have any biblical or normative grounding.**

II.) GOD'S GLORY IN RELATIONSHIPS (vv. 2-3)

- Paul begins this section by praising them for all of the traditions and teachings that they have faithfully continued to practice and adhere to.

- “**BUT**,” he says, you need to know that there are others you are violating.
- In other words, Paul is telling them that they can't just pick and choose which Spirit-led teachings they will or won't keep and apply!
- He then points out the primary biblical principle that they have chosen to interpret, re-interpret or even ignore at their own leisure – and that is the expression of God's glory through our relationships.
- **God is glorified when – functionally – Christ is the spiritual authority over the man, the man (or husband) over the woman (or wife) and God over Christ.**
- The fact that this reminder begins with Christ over men and ends with God over Christ clearly points out that this hierarchy is one of function and voluntary submission and NOT referring to qualitative value or forced submission.
- It is in light of this issue and reminder that Paul now speaks specifically about their . . .

III.) **“DRESS” FOR GOD'S GLORY (vv. 4-12)**

- **First**, the intentional, repeated phrase “*prays and prophecies*” indicates that these instructions and principles are in respect to worship service.
- **Second**, notice that this phrase is equally applied to both “*every man*” **and** “*every woman*.” Both have a role in prayer and prophecy (speaking and teaching God's Word) during community worship.
- **Yet**, this is true within the framework of vv. 2-3: equal but different.

A.) **Physical Appearance (vv. 4-7)**

- The bottom line, according to Scripture, is that men should not appear like women and women should not appear like men – at least or especially in the assembly of worship.
- The specifics of what this entails will differ from culture to culture and time to time, but **the principle is universal that to confuse or negate gender differences is to dishonor God and therefore shameful.**
- This is not about conforming to others so much as it is conforming to God's created differences between men and women – physical, spiritual and functional.

B.) **Attitude Before God (vv. 7-12)**

- To willfully blur these lines and distinctions (however they may be recognized in a given culture) is therefore an act of open rebellion and independence within the worshipping community. This not only violates God's created will but also directly takes away from His Glory.
- These verses refer back to the created order God established from the very beginning, as recorded in Genesis 2. That this is so referred to here is evidence that neither the Fall nor redemption negates this created order and God-given roles.
- Don't miss **verse 12!** Scripture's whole point in this passage is to remind it's readers that men and women stand together in interdependence on the LORD for the purpose of His glory. Both are necessary and important to fulfilling this created purpose. Both are encouraged and expected to fully participate in worship. **Yet**, in order for there to be a genuine interdependence on the Lord and communal worship **that brings glory to the Lord**, it is necessary to concurrently respect and maintain God's ordained differences (natural and functional) between the genders. **Then, together and in unison they may be a community that glorifies God!**

IV.) **FREEDOM FOR GLORY (vv. 13-16)**

- Paul concludes the present teaching by appealing to the natural, God-given moral compass and spiritual conscience of each believer.
- Anyone is free to argue against these truths, but if you insist on doing so take careful note that your arguments are contrary to God's revelation, created conscience, and ALL other church custom and tradition in all other places up to this time.
- **By implication, then, such a one is asserting the desires and authority of the self over and above that of God, His glory and His redeemed community!**
- **You do have a choice, but be sure you know and recognize what it is that you are choosing!**

CONCLUSION:

The issue of appearance is not the point so much as it is the test. Appearance reveals attitude – our own and our influence over others. Our attitude, in turn, most determines whether or to what degree our actions bring glory or disgrace to God. Therefore, 'externals' such as dress and appearance are important – especially in the community of worship!

We have freedom to dress in or out of church any way we desire. That does not mean, however, that all desires or possibilities are equal. Some will bring glory to God. Some will bring Him disgrace. If our true desire is to glorify God in all things, then even when it comes to issues such as appearance we need to process our choices through at least two questions:

- 1.) Will this represent **humility** before God or **self-promotion**?
- 2.) Are our wills in this matter subject to **God** or to the **fashions** and influences or our world?

"Everything is permissible," but not everything is helpful. "Everything is permissible," but not everything builds up. 1 Corinthians 10:23

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