



Honoring Gender Identity

Introduction:

Today's text deals with the fraught question of the relational dynamic between men and women. It is going to challenge us to lay aside some of our cultural pre-conceptions, to disable our knee-jerk aversion to the concepts of authority and submission, and to trust that all scripture is indeed God-inspired and profitable for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). When we do so, we will discover that God has purposely designed our gender identities to be distinctive and complementary, each with an inherent capacity to relate to God and others in a way that brings glory and honour, and that recognises the dignity of the other sex. We will also come to appreciate that this model of divinely-ordained authority and submission is by no means random, but has been eternally established within the Godhead himself, as is demonstrated to us in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Today's Scripture Text

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Sermon Points

#1. Christians are called to conduct themselves in an honorable manner

(Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, 11:1 and 11:4-6)

Paul's main concern is that Christians should conduct themselves in a manner that is honorable towards God and towards one another. This we are to do by imitating Christ, in reliance on his transformative power in our lives.

- ♣ In 1 Cor. 11:4-6, in what way were the Corinthians behaving in a dishonorable manner? Whom were they dishonoring by their conduct?
- ♣ Do you tend to try and 'do better' in your own strength, or have you allowed Jesus to be the transforming agent in your life? What does that look like for you?
- ♣ How can we ensure that our consciences have a true perception of what constitutes honorable conduct?
- ♣ *Personal Reflection Question: Where in your life is your conscience pricking you, regarding your conduct as a Christian? Bring whatever that may be to the Cross in repentance, and pray for Christ's transformative aid in your life.*

#2. Invested in our gender identity are appropriate responsibilities we should discharge

(Read 1 Cor.11:3, 7-9 and 11-12; Ephesians 5:25-27; John 3:17 and 5:19-20; Mark 10:42-44)



We instinctively balk at the concepts of authority and submission because of the way in which our fallen world has twisted and subverted them, resulting in the kinds of abuse and oppression of which we are all too aware, be it in the domestic setting, societally or politically. However, Paul here sheds light on what God intends the relationship of authority and submission to entail – it is to be a loving interplay of servant-heartedness and mutual respect, that is honorable and dignified, bringing benefit to others and glory to God. We learn that the differences between our genders are part of God’s intentional design, each benefitting the other, and each endowed with the capacity to honour God in distinct ways.

- ♣ In what way does the creation account in Genesis 2 establish the pattern for the relationship dynamic between male and female?
- ♣ In your own experience, under what circumstances does submission not entail inferiority?
- ♣ What does Ephesians 5:25-27 teach men about how they should exercise their authority as the ‘heads’ of their wives?
- ♣ Based on the way in which authority and submission are played out in the relationship between the Father and the Son, how can we reprogram our own relational dynamics to reflect what we see in the Trinity?
- ♣ 1 Cor.11:11-12 teaches us that men and women are not independent of each other, but rather inter-dependent and complementarian. This means that our differences do matter, even though our society increasingly seeks to blur the lines of gender identity.
 - Can you say that you have embraced the distinctive characteristics of your own gender, as a way of honoring God, yourself and others (or is this perhaps a problem for you because of life experiences)?
 - What are some of these characteristics?
 - Can you suggest some ways in which these characteristics can be leveraged in your church family, marital home or other relationships, to bring honour and flourishing to a person of the opposite sex?

#3. Invested in our gender identity are appropriate differences we shouldn’t erase

In verses 4-5 and 13-15, Paul talks about practices regarding head-coverings in the Corinthian church. What we need to take from this is not a list of do’s and don’ts, but rather the principle that our physical appearance should honour our gender identity. Quite simply men should look like men, and women should look like women – when we stray from this, we dishonour God, ourselves and the opposite sex.

- ♣ Why is it dishonoring to God to ignore what ‘nature’ tells us men and women should look like?
- ♣ Do you think this is an area in which it is important for us to push back on our culture? Why or why not?