

Title: H3 (part 4) Hierarchy, Hats and Hair

Text: 1 Corinthians 11.2-10

Theme: Honoring God in every relationship consistent with who I am

Series: 1 Corinthians #46

Prop Stmt. Our genders are God-given, God-ordained relational categories that show the person and character of God.

My uncle Jim is a retired Presbyterian pastor from Iowa. Our family loves him dearly, but there were times, when I was growing up that he introduced me to aspects of life that I never knew existed. For example, one of his interests years ago, was in bagpipes. He used to bring these with him when he visited us in Ohio. My uncle would get these out, and would practice playing. We lived in a neighborhood, with neighbors (of course). I have never known bagpipes to be played softly. I frankly I wonder if it is even possible. My uncle would practice playing the bagpipes as he marched back forth in our backyard.

Now, men who play the bagpipes in a group are rather certain of their masculinity, even though these men wear kilts (which look an awful lot like a skirt, but you dare not call them that) and they wear head-coverings. If I learned how to play the bagpipes, (by the way, he tried to teach my son, who almost hyperventilated in the process), but if I learned how to play them well enough that you wanted me to play at a funeral and I showed up in the traditional Irish garb, you would consider that as part of the attire. If however, I showed up to preach this morning in a plaid skirt with matching blouse (I mean shirt) you would not be quite so amused. I could argue, what is wrong with it? Why is it okay for me to wear a kilt when playing bagpipes, but not to wear a skirt when preaching?

The answer is obvious! It is not the actual kilt, the actual fabric, the actual style that is the issue or rule, it is what that style is communicating is the real issue. This is what lies at the heart of this text that we are working through.

Due to the fact that this passage seems loaded with controversial topics, any of which threaten to draw the reader's attention away from the main point, I have attempted to clearly point out the big idea and then help us work our way through the interpretive challenges of this section.

So, again I put you in remembrance that, God is a perfectly complete and wholly sufficient, functioning three-person unity who made us to reflect His person, character and unity as we relate to each other, both in marriage and in the church. Our relationships are to be driven by our desire for the person, character and unity of God to be set on display in everything that we do. God made both genders and God gave roles for each gender in order to be a reflection of Himself. God even gave different responsibilities in the church to different genders and since rejecting those roles or blurring the genders is an affront to God, I need to dress in such a way that I am making it very clear in the church and to my world, whose I am and what I am, which ultimately determines, who I am. Therefore, if you are a man, be a man the way God wants you to be a man and make sure that you communicate that clearly to your world in a way that they will understand. If you are a woman, then be a woman the way God wants you to be

a woman and make sure that you communicate that clearly to your world in a way that they will understand.

We have already looked at, what does it mean for a man to cover his head? We noted that the actual language of the text does not make it clear if Paul is referring to a literal head covering (like a hat) or to a hair style that would be similar to something that women would wear. The NIV translates it has head coverings (v.4 and 7a) but keeps the long hair translation as an alternative reading (see the margin). Frankly, it really does not matter, since the issue is keeping the genders clear. Since women wore head coverings as a means to distinguish women from men, (in an era in which the clothing styles for men and women had many similarities) it would not be right in those days for a man to wear a head covering or a feminine hair style in worship because it would be confusing. Any style that blurs the genders becomes a problem. My loose paraphrase of verse 4 is this: If a man is participating in a worship service in a manner that is not consistent with his man-ness he is bringing shame upon Himself because he is living in denial of the person that God has made him to be.

Back in the late 60's and early 70's the boomer generation came of age in an era marked by Woodstock, Vietnam, Kent State riots and other factors of what became known as the hippie movement. Some of the hippies (men) grew beards and long hair. Therefore, it became trendy for guys to wear their hair longer. This passage became a soap box for people in the church to say, "You see, it is a shame for a man to wear long hair." And that started the never ending debate of how long is long. One side would say, "Well, Jesus had long hair." (Which was assumed since that is how his picture in all the church directories and S.S. classes portrayed Him). That was a good point until someone else realized that we really don't know how long his hair was, all we know is that he had a beard. I remember around that time, some S.S. curriculum began depicting Christ with shorter hair (but still a beard.) Since wearing a beard was considered to be invented by hippies, men in the church were frowned upon if they wore beards. One church I knew would not allow men to be in a wedding (groom or bridal party) if they wore a beard. I said to the pastor, "Jesus could not be in a wedding in your church." For years, that was a lightning rod issue in certain churches. How long is long? Honestly, I think that if more guys wore beards (which in most cases is a unique characteristic of maleness), then the actual hair length of the guy almost becomes a mute point. If a guy has a beard, then even if he has a pony tail down to his belt, it is not feminine. But, not all guys can grow a decent beard. Some should, since it can be very handy in covering up a whole lot of ugly, but that is not really germane to the text. Although I was a child in the church, I look back on those years with a sense of regret since I witnessed so much energy expended on issues that often completely missed the point.

The next interpretive challenge is also found in v.4 where we read that if a man prays or prophecies with his head uncovered, he dishonors his head. Another question for us then is: Interpretive challenge #2. What does it mean for a man to dishonor his head?

Since Paul is obviously referring to a man's physical head in the first occurrence of "head" in verse 4, is he referring to a man's physical head in the second occurrence, or is he referring to Christ, since Christ is the head of the man (v.3)?

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- 1) Head is a term that not only refers to the physical head of the man; it is used to represent the entire person. To dishonor one's head is to bring shame upon the entire person. When we say that a person is the head of the company, we saying that person represents, symbolizes, speaks for the entire company.
- 2) Corinth (though located in Greece) was a city established by Rome and had many Roman influences. Roman men wore head coverings when worshiping their gods as a way of devaluing themselves in the presence of these deities. Corinth was, as previously noted located in Greece, where men had made hair styles a very big deal. In those days, certain styles of long hair which mirrored the more lavish styles of immoral women were considered to be shameful.
- 3) Corinth had a strong honor/shame cultural element to it. This is more a part of the Asian culture today than what we have here. Public honor was a very, very important part of their relational environment. There was nothing worse for a man than to be shamed publicly.

Therefore, the wearing of a head-covering (which was culturally reserved for women) or the wearing of a feminine hair style by a man, was said by Paul, to be a very shameful act because it not only reflected poorly on the man and his man-ness, but ultimately it reflected poorly upon Christ who made the man and whom the man claimed to be a follower of. When a man is praying or prophesying in church, he is speaking to or on behalf of God. If the man is worshiping God in a false way, God is offended. So, in that sense, it matters how you dress when you gather with believers to worship. Worship is to be done in order to draw attention to God. If I dress in order to draw attention to myself, then I am seeking to do undermine the very thing that I am here to do.

Let's say that you were invited to a formal wedding. You decided that the reason why people were dressing up was because they were vain. They used fancy clothes as a cover-up for their shallow lives. You, on the other hand, do not hide behind fancy clothes. You are so comfortable with yourself and that you do not need to draw attention to yourself through opulent dress. So, in order to prove your point, you show up to the wedding in jeans, t-shirt and baseball hat. The obvious conclusion that everyone makes including the bride and the groom is that, you are so deep, so profound, so at home with yourself that you can dress down and we are all so grateful to be in the presence of such a self-actualized being. Is that the response? Of course not! The response is – what a jerk! What a self-centered, myopic, moron to flaunt his disdain for my wedding, or the culture of my wedding by drawing attention to himself by trying to be so different. You see, on the one hand, dress does not matter, and on the other it does.

Now, on to v.5 where we have 3 challenges:

- Interpretive challenge #3. What does it mean for woman to uncover her head? (and how would that dishonor her head?)
- Interpretive challenge #4. What is the deal with shaving your head?
- Interpretive challenge #5. What does it mean to pray and prophesy, and if both men and women are doing that in the church, how do you reconcile that with 14.33-35; 1 Timothy 2.11-12?

In all cultures, women can dress in a way that is respectful, or they can dress in a way that shows that they do not respect God, their husband (if they are married) or themselves. Our world preaches very loudly on this theme. It tries to tell women that your body is the ticket to your power. Use the attention that you can get from other men and use that to your advantage. In the Corinthian culture, if a woman wore a veil, a hood, she was sending a message that she was a respectful woman and that no man would dare approach her or proposition her in anyway. If she did not (v.5)...If she dressed in such a way (flaunting her hair was a cultural symbol of sexual availability) that she was sending a message that she was either potentially, or was actually sexually available, this would be highly shameful to her head. Again, this could have a double meaning. Not only would this be very shameful to the girl, but it would bring reproach upon her head (father, husband, ultimately Christ). That is the point that Paul is making. If a woman does not respect God, does not respect herself, does not respect her family, and obviously does not respect the church, then she would dress in a way that makes it clear that she is advertising herself. How could a woman worship God while dressing or appearing in a manner that communicates that she wants the eyes of other men upon her? What is the worship of God about anyway? Man (v.4) or woman (v.5-6) are not to seek to draw attention to themselves in worship, but to God.

Now, is it possible that some women were dressing this way in Corinth, who were not even aware of how their appearance was being perceived? Sure! It could be that some of the women in the church were exploring their freedom in Christ to the point where they were using that as an excuse to violate certain social norms and blur the gender lines. But, if wearing your hair in such a way that culturally communicated that you were a loose-living person, why does Paul then say (v.5) that for a woman it would be like having your head shaved? By the way, in v.6 Paul basically repeats what he says in v.5, which leads us to the 4<sup>th</sup> interpretive challenge of this section. What is the deal with a woman shaving her head?

There are a couple of ways to take this. A woman who was convicted of prostitution could be sentenced to having her head shaved. Prostitution had been a prominent part of the Corinthian culture, but during the NT era, it was not as socially accepted as it had been in the past. So, that is one factor. And that interpretation makes sense. If you are going to dress in a provocative way, you might as well shave your head and carry the shame that goes along with it. That is one way to take this, but I actually lean toward

another explanation. It was also common for a menial female slave to have her head shaved. Think about it. What would the goal be of a slave-owner, in having the female slaves, shave their heads? What does that accomplish? It is an attempt to wipe out the girl's individual personality. She is reduced to an object of function, a robot, a being who exists only to work, but a being who is not seen as or treated as a true person. It is a fundamental attack upon the girl's femininity. If a girl shaves her head, she is taking on an androgynous appearance. Since a girl's hair is part of the glory that God has given her, (v.15), to shave her head would be a fundamental denial of her own person. I think that is the entire point that Paul is making in this section. Women, are you really trying to dress in such a way that shames your God-given femininity? Are you attempting to deny who God has made you to be? Are you trying to take your gender and abuse it?

Lesbianism goes so much deeper than the activities associated with it. It is a denial of God's activity. It is a rejection of the work of God. Your person, your gender, your role, your position, your identity as a woman is a gift to you from God. Guard your woman-ness. Rejoice in your God-ordained gender. God made you in His image. He did not make the man, more in His image than He did the woman. The fact is, God made the woman in such a way, that she reflects certain aspects of the character of God in a more prominent way than men do. The differences between men and women are God-ordained so that together, we can present a more complete picture of God. Therefore, women, do not present yourself in any way that would either flaunt and therefore disrespect your woman-ness, or that would deny it.

We have two more interpretive challenges to work through, which we will tackle next week. But I will conclude with this.

If a man is participating in a worship service in a manner that is not consistent with his man-ness he is bringing shame upon himself (and by extension Christ) because he is living in denial of the person that God has made him to be. And if a woman is leading in a worship service but is dressed in such a way that she is communicating that she is sexually available!?!? She might as well be shamed, since she is denying the very person that God made her to be and is showing the height of disrespect for God, her family and herself. Again, if a woman flaunts herself, she might as well be shamed as a genderless, person-less slave! And since that is so serious, then she ought to take great care in how she presents herself before others.

The missing piece in the church of Corinth, was the fact that these people were using Christianity to advance themselves instead of honoring God in the humble and glad service of others. They turned communion into a time to gorge themselves on food and get drunk. They twisted the spiritual gifts in such a way that instead of serving others, they were trying to out do the others in plastic piety. The bottom line, is, they loved themselves more than they loved others. And that brothers and sisters, why right in the middle of this entire section, we have 1 Cor. 13.

Men, the greatest gift that you can give to your wife, your family and this church is to be a man like God has designed you. Use your strength to be consistent, true, and

dependable so that your relationships are secure. Your wife needs to be able to trust you. All children and others need to be safe when in your presence. Your word should be your bond. In short, you are to be a rock, a refuge, a taste of God.

Women, the greatest gift that you can give to your family, and this church is to be a woman like God has designed you. Use your skills, desires, talents and strengths to be a careful, faithful, persevering model of the personal love of God. You are a woman by God's design. You are not an animal, you are not a piece of meat to be bought, sold, or put on display as a power play. In short, you are to be a reflection of the tender and tenacious love of God.

Concl. – Christ is the goal, the hero, the only way to live these out.

Interpretive challenge #6. What on earth are angels doing here anyway?