

February 2, 2020

Dealing with Divisions

Shepherd's Grace Church

2 I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. ³But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, ⁵but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. ⁶For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. ⁷For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. ⁸Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. ¹⁰For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹²For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

17 Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸For, to begin with, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. ²⁰When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. ²¹For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. ²²What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!

23 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves. ³⁰For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we

would not be judged. ³²But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

33 So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. (1Corinthians 11: 2-33)

To accurately put this passage in context there are two factors that must be considered today. First of all, it is Super Bowl Sunday. That fact may seem insignificant to those reading this message 5 or ten or even fifty years from now, but on this day, on today it is top of mind to nearly every person living within 500 miles of Arkansas City. You see, this is the first time in fifty years that the Super Bowl is being played with the Kansas City Chiefs as one of the participants.

Many, if not most of the people in our congregation have never seen a Super Bowl game with the Chiefs as a participant. Most, if not all people in our congregation are aware of the cultural phenomena that is Super Bowl Sunday. Even people who never watch a game are aware of the cultural significance of Super Bowl Sunday.

They are aware of the commercials. They probably have their favorite commercials. Over the years, corporate campaign slogans have been born out of Super Bowl Commercials. Slogans like "Where's the Beef," or "Dilly Dilly!" have inspired t-shirts and speech writing endeavors that have for a time, changed the direction of society.

The fact that the Chiefs have not made an appearance in this cultural icon for the past half-century has been a torturous bane on the existence of nearly every Chiefs fan. Chiefs Kingdom has long had the reputation as having the best fanbase in the National Football League. The stadium is the loudest stadium with the most consistent sell-out record in the history of the league.

The team has not just endured the longest streak of Super Bowl non-appearances of any team in the league. The team was the first team to appear in the first Super Bowl and appeared again just four short years later in only the second win by an American Football League team, a win that propelled talks of merger and provided impetus for the change in status of a league widely regarded as inferior.

Some might argue that the Chiefs appearance 50 years ago changed the very fabric of sports society in the United States. They might argue that the Chiefs win ushered in a new era in American Society at large.

Today, with their half-century delayed appearance, the Chiefs bring their tomahawk chop and their warrior-like chants to the front of national prominence. They bring their somewhat controversial name with all of its argument of political correctness to the front of the room. They bring their drums and their chants and their noise and they put their culture and tradition center stage while for just a few hours, the world stops!

The second element of context that should be considered today is the context of worship itself. This is the second week of a 5 week sermon series entitled *Dealing with Division*. The series comes at the end of a protracted and divisive impeachment where arguments

have taken place largely along partisan lines and decisions have been made by votes of razor thin margin.

This series takes place in the face of strong wills and opinions and in the very real questions of unity. It is intended to seek God's plan for unity even in the face of division and it is offered as a reminder that Jesus did not come to bring peace but to bring contention.

Contention, difference of opinion, advancement of direction through compromise and dialogue is essential to the elevation of God's Holy Spirit in our world. Contention brings awareness for new ideas and thoughts. It brings opportunity to think, dream and devise direction that is inspired not by what we thought we knew but instead by what we might yet be able to learn.

In a sense, these two contexts collide on this day, this Super Bowl Sunday where in this part of the country, we are certain of a Chiefs victory yet in other places, the 49ers fans are equally certain. At the end, there will be a winner. There will be a loser. There will also be a certainty that there will be other games and other opportunities to find victory. The test today, for the two teams is about today, not forever. The winner and the loser will be forever remembered as participants and long after the game is over, stories will be told but winners and losers will go on. They will do more. They will aspire to greater heights.

The context of our worship and of this message engages both the culture of the game and the nature of our argumentation. Difference and division are in part and of necessity an element of our culture. The framework of our society here in the United States however, has been one of supporting differences of opinion while willingly creating an environment of compromise. The phrase we have built our culture on is that "All people are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

This foundation is not based on human innovation, but rather on God's provision. That provision comes to all people, for in Christ there is no longer slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male nor female but all are one in Christ. It is from this perspective that Chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians helps us deal with differences today.

These differences are not amongst political adversaries or football fans but rather among men and women. Paul wants the people of Corinth to know that the differences are real but are not to be a source of division. He begins in verse two by acknowledging what some would understand as a polite and respectful relationship with the leaders of the church at Corinth.

The problem is that this relationship does not exist. The people have not always remembered Paul and his teachings. They claimed a relationship with Paul or Appolos or Cephas or Christ when Paul's teaching was that only Christ saves. The people had ignored Paul's teaching and aligned with humans or lorded their affiliation over humans as if one relationship was superior to others. (See Message of January 26, 2020)

Paul's greeting was tongue in cheek and was a reminder that the people had ignored his instruction provided from his several other letters. (Professor Warren Carter estimates that there may have been as many as 5 letters to Corinth by Paul. This 1st letter represents only portions pieced together of what are remnants of at least 2) The truth is that the people did not always remember Paul's instructions and on several points Paul needed to provide instruction.

The first point Paul wanted to make is that Christ is the head of every man. I believe Paul was intentional in referencing "Man" here. He wanted to establish a difference between men and women. He went on to say that men are the head of their wife. Finally, that God is the head of Christ.

Paul was not trying to establish a hierarchy as much of our culture has wanted to argue for centuries. If he was, he would have said God is head of Christ, Christ is head of man, man is head of woman. Instead he wants to establish a reality that has been accurately taught in scripture.

Before you get mad at me and think I am suggesting a male superiority, I beg you to listen further. I am not going to provide the lesson in Greek or Hebrew that allows me to speak to you from this position but at the end of the sermon, I will share with you the sources of my conjecture so that you may do the research for yourself and draw your own conclusions if you like.

I think, however if you listen to the logic of the argument, you will arrive at the same conclusions God has revealed to me. First, Christ is the head of every man. Paul seems to start in the middle but he really starts at the beginning with this claim. Paul is claiming as a precursor to John's gospel which will come about fifty years after this letter, that in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the Word was God. All things come into being because of the Word. (John 1: 1-3)

When Paul says that Christ is the head of everyman, he is saying Christ is the origin of every man. In Hebrew and in Greek, the word for head is translated as origin. Just as the origin of a river is the headwater, so the origin of the person is the head. Christ brings all creation into being and so, is the origin of all men.

Scripture then speaks to the origin of woman. Woman comes from man or originates out of man. As God works in creation, God makes one thing first and then another and then another. So it is with the creation of human beings. God makes man from dust of the earth and then creates a helpmate for the man by making woman from the rib of the man. (Gen. 2.) Just as Christ is the origin or head of the man, so too is man the origin or head of the woman. The woman is not inferior to or subservient to the man. The woman simply and logically originates from the man.

The apostle then goes on to say that in addition to coming into being from man, the woman also comes into being for the man. They come into being for each other but one comes first and another comes second. There is no hierarchy to their origin but there is a purpose. They exist not one to be dominated or manipulated by the other but so that they could provide companionship and lend strength to one another.

Paul makes the case that they are equals as he reminds us that their relationship is intertwined. Woman does come from man but man also comes through woman. One can no longer exist or perpetuate without the other. He then makes a greater point. ALL THINGS COME FROM GOD! The woman may have originated from man initially and the man may now come through the woman but God is the creator of all! It is God who is the head! It is God who is the source! There can be no other.

In today's world, division exists between male and female because we have forgotten the one to whom all praise belongs! It is God who deserves the praise and the glory for the wisdom God brings to creating them in His image and in His likeness! Male and Female!

How does Paul make this point? By the head coverings. Corinth was a cultural center in Paul's time. It was home to two major seaports and great agricultural economy. It was also a place where many peoples and different religions came together. It was in effect a melting pot.

The people of the city were exposed to many peoples of different skin colors, ethnicities and religious practices. The people of the city were exposed to different methods and ways of worship. Just as today, there were many cultural customs and norms.

In today's world, in the not to distant past, it was common for every person to dress up to go to church on Sunday. Men wore suits and ties. Women wore dresses, hats, and gloves. Children had faces washed and shoes shined. Pastors wore robes and stoles. These were the patterns of worship in the culture in which I grew up.

I loved this culture and enjoyed getting dressed up to go to church. My brother Steve, however did not. I remember laughing and pointing as he got into an argument with mom and dad every Sunday about why he couldn't just wear jeans and t-shirts to church. His argument...does God really care what I am wearing!

As I think back on the argument now, I know my brother was just baiting my mom. He knew he could get her so mad that she would eventually give in. Mom said, "God may not care, but the other people who see you do! They know you are my son and my son is not going out to church looking like that!" Steve's retort, "Should I be going to impress them or to worship God!" and mom had no comeback!

Today, of course, we know that society is not the judge of what we wear to worship. People come dressed comfortably and as a result, they can be more comfortable worshipping God. Some sitting in the congregation this morning will be wearing Kansas City Chiefs apparel and will be thinking of their allegiance to their team while they still recognize their allegiance to God and worship.

If you could see me and what I will be wearing, you would see a red shirt (Not Chiefs) a gold tie and a black suit finished with red shoes! I made my choice to support my excitement for the game but at the same time, dress in a way that I feel most comfortable going to church.

Paul's point is as mine. There should be no division based on what we wear! There should be no division based on the car we drive or the house we live in. More importantly, there should be no division based on gender!

Again, tongue in cheek, Paul says that men should pray and prophesy without covering their head and women should only pray and prophesy with their heads covered. Our culture has wanted to point fingers and accuse Paul in this letter as necessarily creating divisions between men and women.

Today, I want to say to you that this is a foolish argument. Yes, Paul says that men and women may dress differently because in the culture in which they live, in Corinth that is the custom and the tradition. Customs and traditions should be considered. People should be made to be comfortable and if the person at the head of the church, the person speaking the origin of the message has to wear a covering on her head or no covering on his head in order to get the attention of the people hearing the message then that is exactly what that person should do.

That is exactly what that person...male or female, slave or free, Jew or Greek ought to do!

Paul's argument is based on what was common practice for the people of the day. You see, God does not care about our solemn assemblies or our offerings or our sacrifices. God is concerned with our hearts. God's desire is that justice roll down like water and righteousness like an everflowing stream! (Amos 5: 21-23)

Paul's argument is...if we are paying attention...that women have a place in the church! Women have a place in the prophesying of God's word! Women have a place in providing a Word from the Lord. The covering they have as they share this word is the inspiration of angels, the same angels providing inspiration to the male prophets of the day!

The division we want to create is man made...not God made! In God, all are equal and all are one...and not even Paul made. He makes this point in verse 16. If anyone should contend with the culture, the Church has no such rules. The church only has a message and that message is God's love for all people!

That message brings us to the point that Paul really wants to make. God doesn't care for our assemblies and our sacrifices because they are the source of our division. Our assemblies and sacrifices do promote the power of some people and the way they would exercise it over others.

Paul says that when we come to worship we come with the full intent to divide! Part of the culture of our Church past in this country was to dress in our "Sunday best." When we do that, some have Sunday better than others. They drive their best cars, park in the very best parking spaces, sit in the pews where they will receive the greatest attention and write their checks in the presence of others so they will see the full measure of what it means to "truly give."

Part of the reason we have been judged by people not attending worship as hypocrites is that the haves do not make the have-nots feel very welcome. It was really no different in Paul's day. The worship service in Corinth always included the "Lord's Supper." The supper was different in that culture than it is in most of ours today. In those times, the supper was a full meal. There was supposed to be a sharing but instead, those who had brought and took and ate their fill and drank more than they should without any consideration for the poor, the homeless, the helpless who were part of their service.

This reality was part of the reason Luke (some 25 years after Paul's letter) put the words of the Magnificat (Luke 1: 40ff) in Mary's mouth. Those words found Mary rejoicing because at the coming of Messiah or Christ, the rich would be the ones sent away empty while the poor would finally eat their fill.

Paul's lack of commendation for the people of the church at Corinth was on account of their lack of regard for those who were not in power. It was not the women, it was not the men, it was the body which was to represent Christ which was not representing Christ's interests but their own.

Paul could not commend this action and would not. Instead, he reminded the church of what they were about to receive. On this morning, I remind you as well. On the night he was betrayed...on the night he was handed over and wrongly accused taking the blame for all of us who were rightly guilty, he invited all who were with him to come.

He took bread and broke it. "This is my body," he said. It will be beaten, battered and broken for you. It will take the punishment that is rightly yours, all of yours! It will take the sentence of death instead of you. Share this body. Become this body. Remember all I do for you and do this for others. As often as you do, remember me!

He took the cup. He blessed it. This was an ordinary cup...well...not really an ordinary cup. This was the third cup in the celebration of Passover. It was the cup of redemption. As he blessed it, he said, take this and drink it. This is the cup of my blood. My blood will replace the old covenant of senseless sacrifice with a real and true sacrifice. This is the cup of the new covenant...a covenant of "hessed," a covenant where power in the world is replaced with power in eternity. My power will save you from your sins. This is my covenant and it will never be broken! As often as you drink it, remember me.

He invited all. In him there were none excluded and all were welcome. There was no longer slave nor free, Jew nor Greek, male or female. There were none who were gay or straight. All were welcome. All were sinners and He took on the sin of the world so we might once again be able to stand in God's presence upright and worthy!

Paul taught that power is not intended to divide, but to be used for the service of all! It is this message that reminds us as we deal with division to look past traditions, sexism, sexuality and realize that all of us are sinners. All of us deserve death. Not one deserves other than death. All sins condemn us but only Christ redeems!

Perhaps today, when we come together on this culturally iconic day, we should recognize that there is more that brings us together than divides us. Paul knew it two thousand years ago but somehow, over the ages, we have lost sight of his traditions and

teachings. Perhaps today we should come together, say Go Chiefs!, and give the praise and glory to God as a people who now know that God made us male and female and in God's image and likeness God created us...he created us for each other that we might be stronger for each other...that we might love one another! Amen!