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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

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RELATIONSHIPS DEFINED BY THE TRINITY

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

INTRODUCTION

Biblical Christianity has always recognized that God is eternally triune. This means that there is one God, eternally existent in three distinct Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These Persons within the Godhead are equally eternal and unchanging. When the 3rd Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, inspired the Scriptures, He carefully distinguished between these three Persons who comprise the one true God. Although these Persons are essentially equal and inseparable, they are distinct from one another. The Son is not the Father and the Holy Spirit is not the Son, etc. While this revealed mystery remains impossible for us to fully grasp, it does have some immediate applications to how we live each day.

The clearest application is that God is not a loner; He lives in relationship to other persons. Not only that, but those relationships are characterized by perfect love. This is why Scripture says that God is love (1 John 4:8). The Father loves the Son and the Son is the beloved. The Holy Spirit is the love flowing between the Father and the Son. This is why Scripture teaches us that if we have genuine love within us, then we have the Holy Spirit within us (1 John 4:12-13, 18).

We, being created in God's image, are not to be loners. We are created for others; primarily for God and then for other persons (1 John 3:1; 4:7). In short, we are to glorify God by learning to live in a community of loving relationships. If these relationships are ever to become what God intends, they must be regulated by the Scriptures.

Now this brings us to the context of 1 Corinthians 11:2-14:40. The Corinthians were not obeying the Apostolic traditions taught by Paul in at least 3 areas of corporate worship (v2): (1) the roles of men and women, (2) the Lord's Supper and (3) the application of spiritual gifts. In each of these, their relationships were out of order. That is why Paul concludes this entire section with the statement, *But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner (14:40)*. There was a sort of disorder which characterized the Corinthian worship gatherings and Paul writes to correct these problems. He begins by reminding them of the proper roles of males and females within their public gatherings.

1. THE TRINITY DEFINES MALE AND FEMALE ROLES IN PUBLIC WORSHIP (11:3)

Paul begins this reordering of the Corinthian church by laying down a fundamental principle that orders all relationships; male and female relationships are to reflect the way the Persons of the Trinity relate to one another. Two specific applications can be made at this point. One, the Persons of the Trinity are essentially equal in nature and being. The Son is equal to the Father in his essence and nature. The same is true concerning the Spirit. Secondly, the Son did not grasp that equality, but joyfully submitted to His Father (Philippians 2:5-8). Jesus submits to His equal. The Spirit exists to glorify His equal. Therefore, the most obvious application is that two persons can

be essentially equal and one joyfully submits to the authority of the other. Submission does not mean inferiority. So if our relationships are to reflect the glory of the Triune God, wise authority and joyful submission must characterize the relationships between men and women. This is the point of verse 3; relationships have a proper order. There is a proper way man is to relate to Jesus. There is a proper way a given woman is to relate to a given man. And all of these relationships are rooted in the way Jesus relates to His Father.

2. THESE ROLES ARE SPECIFICALLY SEEN WHEN MEN & WOMEN PRAY AND PROPHECY (11:4-6)

The idea of relationships ordered by God must be demonstrated in tangible ways. Theory is not enough; God's truth must become incarnate. In Corinth, this applied to how the men and women prayed and prophesied in their public worship gatherings. Men are to participate in worship in a way that is obviously masculine and women in a way that is obviously feminine. For women, this meant wearing a head covering, probably a shawl of some kind. This is not an Islamic veil which hid her beauty, but some type of shawl that would enhance it. The point is that in the Corinthian culture, pure and godly women identified themselves with some type of culturally recognized covering. In addition, she should have long hair because this was typical of femininity in that culture. Men, on the other hand, were not to dress like the women (v4); to do so would be a disgrace. Just as it would be disgraceful for a woman to dress or behave as a man (vv5-6). Paul is not only forbidding the women from having a masculine appearance, but also an immoral appearance. It was slave women and adulteresses who had been caught in their sin who often shaved their heads. If the women ignore these instructions by adopting a masculine appearance which denies male headship, they not only disgrace themselves, but the men that God placed in authority over them. So when a woman participates in public worship she must be extraordinarily careful not to usurp male authority.

So men were to look and behave in ways the surrounding culture recognized as masculine. The women were to look and behave in ways the surrounding culture recognized as morally pure and feminine. Both men and women had active parts in worship [praying & prophesying] yet, the necessary distinctions remained central to their worship of God.

Certainly the outward appearance was to reflect the inward attitude of the heart. The men were to be in submission to Jesus (v3). That means they were to be responsive to His Spirit and the women were to be responsive to the men as they submitted to Jesus. In all of this, the proper order of relationships was to be acknowledged as they looked to Jesus' example of living responsively to His Father.

3. GOD DEFINED THESE ROLES WHEN HE CREATED THE WORLD (11:7-10)

Verses 7-10 provide the motivation for the preceding commands. God formed these male and female roles at creation. Man, made in the image and glory of God was not to cover his head while praying or prophesying (Genesis 1:27). Woman, made in the image of God and as the glory of man was to cover her head. Woman is the glory of man because she originated from man (Genesis 2:22-23). So in this limited sense, man is the source of woman.

Secondly, in properly recognizing God's created order, the Corinthians were to recognize that woman was created for the man's sake (v9). Man was given dominion to rule the earth and woman was to assist him so that he could fulfill that mandate. Man was not created to assist the woman, rather it was the other way around. Both were created in God's image, but distinctly

different roles emerge from the beginning. These roles are to be recognized, remembered and honored every time the local church gathers in corporate worship. Even the way we dress is to communicate these timeless truths. Even the angels, who cover their heads in the presence of God (Isaiah 6:2), learn about God's created order as they observe obedience to these commands (v10).

4. THESE DIFFERING ROLES DO NOT TEACH INEQUALITY (11:11-12)

The working assumption of sinful persons is that submission must mean inequality; that is foreign to the nature of our Triune God and His inspired text. This is the biggest hurdle we have to get over if we are going to obey this text. Paul helps us with this problem in verses 11-12. The Apostle reminds us of the necessity of men and women in their respective roles. Men and women need one another and they need to properly relate to one another as created beings. Man is the source of woman, but since Adam, every man has come from a woman and all of this is designed by God to remind us of our need for both males and females.

5. THE PRINCIPLE OF MALE HEADSHIP MUST AS PART OF GOD'S CREATED ORDER MUST BE DEMONSTRATED IN THE JOYFUL SUBMISSION OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN PUBLIC WORSHIP (11:13-15)

Again, Paul returns to the behavioral applications of the principle that the Triune God is 3 distinct and equal persons who joyfully fulfill different functions within the Godhead and they do all of this in a perfectly loving manner. Paul does this through a couple of rhetorical questions. Regarding women, the clear answer to verse 13 is that it is improper for a woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered. This is how female submission played out in first century Corinth. Shawls as head coverings demonstrated to believers, unbelievers and observing angels the reality of what it means to be under authority. In verses 14-15, Paul reiterates that even our appearance naturally communicates the differences between men and women. Again, Paul is not laying down legalistic regulations for hair length. He is however teaching us that men should gladly look different from women and women from men.

6. THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON DISTINCT MALE AND FEMALE ROLES IS TRUE FOR ALL PEOPLE, IN ALL TIMES AND IN ALL PLACES (11:16)

The expression of feminine submission may change through the ages, but the truth of male headship remains. Paul reminds the Corinthians that these are his teachings for all the churches. The need for godly male leadership and joyful feminine submission is required for all people, in all times and in all places.

CONCLUSION

If I could possibly try to summarize what Paul desired for the Corinthian congregation and the Holy Spirit desires for GRBC, let me list a few characteristics which the community should easily discern when they come into our corporate gatherings:

1. Mature male leadership of families and this weekly gathering [that means male leadership that can pray publicly and speak the truth of God as well]
2. Joyful female participation [praying and exhorting] characterized by modesty and submissiveness [responsiveness is the key idea behind submissiveness]
3. Serious praying and biblical exhortation [weighty subjects such as the Trinity are not to be ignored]
4. All of this will present a God-centeredness that brings the weight of His glory upon the gathering