

BIBLICAL INGREDIENTS FOR BEAUTIFUL WORSHIP

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Let's Begin

Worship is the glue that holds the church of Jesus Christ together. In the New Testament, the church publicly assembled to praise the Lord God. Indeed the Greek word for church is "ecclesia" which means "assembly" or "called out ones."

David spoke of God's presence as a thing of beauty. He wrote, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 27:2; cp. also 27:4; 90:17; 96:6, 9). How is worship beautiful? What makes for beautiful worship?

Chapter 11 gives Christians an idea about the ingredients required to make worship beautiful. No congregation on record experienced more division, difficulty, and doctrinal deviance in Paul's day than the Corinthians. We observe first-hand in the second half of chapter 11 the sad example of bad worship, rather than beautiful worship.

Thus, as we follow Paul's thought, we ask and answer the two questions below:

I. What Makes for Proper Worship? (vv. 1-16)

II. What Makes Poor Worship? (vv. 17-34)

I. What Makes for Proper Worship? (vv. 1-16)

As we have studied 1 Corinthians, we discovered the importance of constantly keeping the local flavor of the culture in mind. The Eastern context created an environment that put a strain upon men and women as they attended the church together. Hence, when Paul begins to speak about worship—beginning with the ordinances of the church—he immediately begins to reveal what makes for beautiful worship. Paul writes, "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (vv. 2-3).

The first Biblical ingredient for proper worship is headship. Twice in verse 3 Paul mentions the term "head." Occurring often in Scripture, the term "head" refers to authority. In fact, there is a three-fold authority revealed. Paul says, "the head of Christ

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is God." Jesus Christ is equal to God—equal in both eternity and power (Phil. 2:5-11). Recall the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

On the other hand, there are differences between the Persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—the eternal Godhead, the Holy Trinity. However, the differences do not affect their eternal equality of person. The Persons of the Trinity may possess differing functions but the Persons of the Trinity are nonetheless one Being.

Paul also says, "the head of every man is Christ" (vv. 3, 7). Jesus Christ is the head over all. Paul says elsewhere to the Ephesians, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (1:22). If Christ is not head—that is, possesses full authority over your life—Christ is not Lord in your life.

What Paul further states about headship has become very controversial. He states that not only is Christ the head of every man, but man is the head of woman (v. 3). He is not speaking about



spiritual authority (cp. Gal. 3:28). Men are no closer to God than women. In fact, experience affirms to me the exact opposite is frequently the case!

Paul is referring contextually to church authority (cp. 1 Tim. 2:12). No woman is to usurp authority in business or pastoral leadership. When this principle of authority is violated, chaos and confusion become the result in God's church. Conversely, when the principle is honored, peace, order, and beauty reign.

The Corinthian women were liberated by the Gospel Paul preached. Like what so often happens, they took their new-found freedom in Christ to extremes. They wrongly assumed since Christ died for their sins and they were pronounced righteous before God, they could live as they desired. In effect, Paul retorts, "Oh, no! You are still under Divinely- appointed authority."

Admittedly, the idea of headship in gender issues is not a popular position in many circles, even among conservative Christians. Indeed some appear to accommodate Scripture to the latest social or so-called "scientific" trends. Nevertheless, we are persuaded God's Word must never become a compromised document in any sense whatsoever.

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Another way to understand what Paul means by "headship" is *propriety*. Paul further writes, "Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with *her* head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man." (1 Cor. 11:4-7).

"Head" is used in two ways in this passage—*physical* and *spiritual*. Observe how Paul gives the readers a peek into a typical worship service in Corinth, which minimally included two elements. On the one hand, there was *praying*. Worshippers sought God on their behalf. Prayer can be performed silently. It can also be put to song or open speech. On the other hand, there was *prophesying*. To prophesy was to speak to men on behalf of God. Giving the "amen" offered verbalized support of the Word of God declared.

As Paul describes the Corinthian practice, he is noticeably disturbed by the apparel the Corinthians were wearing. Men wore hats while women ignored veils. Why would this be disturbing to Paul? Doesn't God look on the inside and not on the outside?

As we noted earlier, Eastern culture must be clearly kept in mind as we explore Paul's thought. For easterners, respectable women never appeared in public without a veil. Why? Veils were a symbol of modesty and submission. In fact, the only women who went veil-less were Corinthian prostitutes! In addition, the pagan temple prostitutes also cut their hair short, appearing in many respects like males instead of females.

Reflection Connection

Do you think more or less stress should be placed on appropriate apparel in today's church? Explain. How would you rate your own church when thinking about apparel?



Given Paul's obvious reservations concerning apparel, it remains confusing why some today think dress is not a consideration when thinking about worship. Again, dress tells what one is. For Paul, to dress similarly to prostitutes publicly pronounced one is a prostitute. If one wants to be regarded as respectable, one should consider dressing respectably. Our outward practice should never contradict our inward spirit. Were we meeting with the President of the United States, would we dress like we were doing Saturday cleaning? How much more we should consider our apparel when meeting with the King of Kings!

The second Biblical ingredient for proper worship is partnership. Men and women in church are involved in partnership, a partnership expressed in *creation*. Paul writes, "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man." (1 Cor. 11:8-9). The woman was formed out of man, deriving her origin from him. Hence, she and he were made for different roles and purposes. She was created for his benefit, to complement him.

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In addition, the partnership between man and woman is expressed in *submission* (v. 10). Paul insists a woman should possess a symbol of authority on her head. In those days it was a veil. In our day, the symbol of authority is no longer a veil. Nevertheless, a woman's apparel should reveal a submissive spirit. And, it should not go unnoticed that Paul places his instructions in the category of the moral (v. 7 "ought"). Hence, this is not an option to which Paul refers. Obligation is involved.

Finally, partnership is also expressed in *cooperation*. Men and women are mutually dependent in God's work. Each plays a vital role. Paul is clear, "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God." (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

The third Biblical ingredient for proper worship is trusteeship. Paul writes, "Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for *her* hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." (1 Cor. 11:13-16). Proper appearance and apparel are a testimony to the unsaved. In effect, Paul says, "lay down your Bible a moment and think with the brains God gave you!" Custom itself teaches what Paul had in mind. That is what he means when he rhetorically asks, "Doth not even nature itself teach you...?" Even common sense reveals Paul's point.

When believers go against normal standards of modesty and appropriateness they lose their testimony before the church and the world. It is better to be too modest than too loose. The testimony of Christ is at stake. Hence, wearing apparel which makes gender identification confusing remains unworthy of the child of God. A number of other unacceptable practices could be named



which dishonor the Head of the church and ruin a Christian's witness. And, the modern obsession with unisex is clearly a violation of Paul's meaning.

In summary, three principles easily stand together when speaking about proper worship. We should never lose our authority (headship), our ministry (partnership), or our testimony (trusteeship). God desires worship to be beautiful.

II. What Makes Poor Worship? (vv. 17-34)

A.W. Tozer once lamented the state of worship in the modern church. He wrote, "Today more than ever we Christians need to learn how to sanctify the ordinary. This is a blasé generation. People have been over-stimulated to the place where their nerves are jaded and their tastes corrupted. Natural things have been rejected to make room for things artificial. The sacred has been secularized, the holy vulgarized and worship converted into a form of entertainment." Paul takes the second half of chapter 11 and reveals clearly what makes for poor worship.

First, Paul notes the *presence of desecration*. He writes, "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not." (1 Cor. 11:18-22).

The Lord Jesus gave two formal ordinances the church was to observe—baptism and the Lord's Supper. Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? However, even with just two ordinances, we have historically shown a pattern of abuse. Paul warns the Corinthians concerning the desecration of the Lord's table. Why was desecration present? Initially, desecration was present because of a lack of communion (cp. 10:16). One place people should be able to come together in unity and fellowship is at the foot of the cross, celebrating the common Lordship of Jesus Christ. For Corinth, even being in the same assembly under the same Lord gave no indication togetherness was evident. Paul speaks of their "divisions" and "schisms" wherein one was hungry and another was drunk! He also mentioned "heresies." However, these deviant beliefs were not doctrinal but spiritual, a dividing up among themselves assuring each was on his own side of the aisle.

Nor was there comprehension concerning the Lord's Supper (vv. 20-22). The traditional love feast (cp. Luke 24:30-31) had degenerated into a time when the "haves" shut out the "have-nots," breaching the very spirit of communion. Ceasing to be the Lord's Supper, it became their own supper. The Lord's table—a symbol of unity in the body of Christ—itself became an exploitative event to make ugly, illegitimate distinctions in the body of Christ.

Second, Paul observes the *absence of explanation*. In their flurry to eat, drink and be merry, the Corinthians ignored the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Unless the symbols were empowered with content, the next generation of believers would fail to connect the spiritual dots. One lost generation could



jeopardize the spiritual health of the entire church on earth. Arguably, a partial reason our young people rebel against the faith is because we do not faithfully pass down to them the spiritual richness of the Christian symbols.

The Lord's Supper is a time of "remembrance." Paul explains, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

The bread we eat symbolizes the body He gave for us. He was clearly our substitute, bearing the pain and the penalty we deserved. We accept Him as we are spiritually nourished through His body. The juice we drink is a symbol of the blood He gave solely on our behalf. Our sin was the occasion which took our Savior to the ugly cross. However, it was exclusively His love for us that was the Divine motive behind it.

Partaking of the Supper is commanded until Jesus comes again for us. In fact, we actually proclaim the Lord's death by observing the Supper as we await His glorious appearing the second time. Hence, in our explanation we have both proclamation and expectation.

Third, Paul observes a *failure for preparation*. Thus far, we see bad worship desecrates the Lord Jesus, and does so by failing to explain the beauty of the ordinances God has given. Paul now speaks of another failure—a *failure to prepare*. Worship is not an event. Instead worship is an experience. One does not go to worship to be a spectator as one does a college football game. One goes to worship always as a participant, engaged in every aspect of the service. For such an experience, there is always a need to prepare.

How does one prepare to worship? First, one prepares to worship by *examination* (vv. 27-32). Paul uses the term "unworthily." Some overly sensitive people have been kept from worship because of misunderstanding Paul's meaning. The truth is, one will never be worthy to come before God. However, Scripture boldly says, "...Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. 5:12).

Once we understand our worthiness is because of Jesus, we may properly "examine" ourselves (v. 28). This is a somber time of self-reflection. This is a time to expose oneself to the surgical knife of God's Word. In fact, if one refuses to examine oneself, an open door to danger stands wide open for the child of God (v. 30).

In addition, when we prepare, we are preparing to "come together" with other believers. Five times in this section Paul uses "come together." When true worship happens, we do not think only of ourselves. Instead we think of the body of Christ. Worship is meant to be a family thing, a community experience. It's not that we cannot worship alone. Indeed we are summoned to enter our prayer closets and be alone with God to commune with Him there. However, we are also warned not to neglect our coming together (Heb. 10:25).

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul writes concerning women, "For this cause ought the woman to have power on *her* head because of the angels" (v. 10). The Greek term translated "power" is *exousia* which literally means "power to act, authority." Basically it is the right to exercise authority given one by another. Covering the head was undoubtedly a customary symbol of subordination in Corinthian society. But male headship itself is not related to custom but to God's order of creation.

Wrap Up

Worship is meant to be the most beautiful experience God's people enjoy. And, when we have our authority (headship), our ministry (partnership), and our testimony (trusteeship) in proper perspective, worship is proper and beautiful. It is when we allow desecration to take place through disunity, ignorance, and a lack of preparation that beautiful worship becomes bad worship.

