Text: I Corinthians 11:2-16
Title: "Dress Codes and Gender Roles"

INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles this morning to I Corinthians 11:2-16. It's summertime and hot outside and this is a hot passage. This morning we're going to talk about "Dress Codes and Gender Roles." If you Google I Corinthians 11, your computer will explode. It's very controversial.

> This is one of the most complicated passages in the Bible. Scholars debate this and are in disagreement as to what it means. Part of the problem for us today is that the first letter to the Corinthian church is Paul's answer to several questions that were posed to him by the leaders of the church. The problem is that we don't know exactly what the questions were. We've got the answers, but we're not told specifically what the questions were. And that's what makes this passage difficult. But the Holy Spirit has inspired this and with His help I think we can get to the truth that God wants us to have today.

Let me read the whole passage and get your thoroughly confused, and then we'll come back and see what it has to say to us in our contemporary situation … and these truths are so very badly needed in our culture, and in the church. I'm not sure how far we'll get today, but let's get started.

> Read I Corinthians 11:2-16.

Now there is nothing new under the sun, as Solomon says. And our culture today, or at least some parts of it, have nothing over the culture of Corinth, as bad as we think things are today. In Corinth, women were shaving their heads, getting tattoos, women dressing like men, and men dressing like women. There were people who wanted to change their gender. Homosexuality was everywhere. Weird stuff! But there's nothing new under the sun.

1 Corinthians 11:2 (NIV) - I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

This may have been one of a few back-handed complements that Paul gives the Corinthian church. In praising them, he's also reminding them of the answer to their question … hold to the teachings as I have passed them on to you.

> It may be that the reason they were so confused by this in the church is that they were listening to and watching their culture more than they were listening to and watching the Word of God, and what he had taught them.

Now we've talked about this before, but when it comes to gender issues there are basically three main groups:

- There's a <u>radical feminism</u> that basically holds to the opinion that there are really no differences to men and women and everything men do, women should do and vice versa.
- And over on the other end is a kind of <u>macho chauvinism</u> that says that men are better than women. Women are really not on the level with men. This view believes that women are not

smart enough or strong enough to take on the big jobs, so they should stay at home and bake cookies and serve tea. (Don't throw anything! I'm just explaining what some believe.)

- But neither of these views can come from an honest, straightforward reading of Scripture. Instead, what I believe the Bible teaches is what is called Complimentarianism. Men should be men and women should be women. God made us male and female. We are different, and we need each other … we compliment one another.

  ILLUSTRATION – I can use my hands as an example. I am right-handed, and I tend to use my right hand for things that require strength or steadiness. You may be left-handed and the same would be true for the use of your left hand. But just because I'm right-handed doesn't mean that I can live without my left-hand. I would be handicapped without this hand. So they compliment one another. They are the same in some ways, and different in others, and they compliment one another.

Let me extract from these verses some timeless principles that will guide us in the gender war that happens in society, and often in churches. Now one of the challenges we'll have when we get into these verses is that we have to be able to recognize the timeless principles that guide every culture and society, and also to recognize the expressions of cultures that may differ from one society to another. And you'll see what I mean as we get into this.

PRINCIPLE #1 – THE TRINITY IS OUR PATTERN FOR RELATIONSHIPS (v.3).

1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV) - Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Now we need to read and study the Bible as a whole, not just fragments of it. If you just zero in on one fragment and draw all your conclusions from that, you will come up with error. So before we get to I Corinthians (1st century), we need to go back to Genesis (creation). Genesis 1-2 is very important for our world view about a number of things, including this matter of gender roles. So let's be reminded of what God did.

Genesis 1:26 (NIV) - Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Notice God said, "Let *us* make man in our image, in our likeness…" That's important. God refers to Himself in the plural "us." That tells us something about the Godhead … it is Trinitarian. What that means is that there are persons within the Godhead (Father, Son and Holy Spirit); and they each have roles that compliment one another.

So mankind was created in the image of God. Keep that in mind. It says it again in …

Genesis 1:27 (NIV) - So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

So there you see that male and female are different. Duh! Nothing could be more self-evident.

ILLUSTRATION –Anyone who has had exposure to babies and children can tell you that boys and girls respond differently to the world right from the start. I saw this with my granddaughter Caroline when we gave she got her first baby doll for Christmas last year, she knew exactly what to do with it. Give the girl a doll and she will cuddle it. The boy will make it a projectile or weapon. Give them two dolls and the girl will have the dolls talking to each other, while the boy will have them engaged in combat.

So men and women are different, but they are equal. They are both made in the image of God. Just like the three Persons of the Godhead are all equal, but have different roles.

Now the roles are that man is the <u>head</u>, and the woman is to be his <u>helper</u>.

Genesis 2:18 (NIV) - The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Now some women rebel against that thought of being a helper. But I remind you that in the NT the Holy Spirit is called "the Helper" by Jesus. The Spirit is fully God, and fully equal with the Father and the Son, but He was a supporting, helping role in the Godhead. So it's not a put-down to call the woman the helper.

Also, the Bible says that woman was taken out of, created from, man. She was taken from the side of man. She is not out front, like the feminist teach; not behind like the chauvinist teach, but along side. A helper, friend and partner alongside her husband. Again, the name "helper" which is given to the Holy Spirit is a word that means "one called alongside another."

And God looks at this arrangement and says, "Ah, this stinks. This is a mess, but it's the best I can do." No, He looks at this arrangement, at His creation, and says, "It is good … very good."

So God's design and order in Creation is like the right hand and the left hand. The man (husband) is to be the head, and the woman is to be the much-needed helper.

What happens is that in Genesis 3, everything gets messed up. Sin comes into the picture. It goes from being "very good," to being "very bad." And what happened in Genesis 3 is that there erupted a gender war between men and women.

So here we are in this world with gender conflict, feminism, chauvinism … women who do not trust men because they've been abused by them, and men who are either violent or indifferent. So you can see that because of the Fall we have this big problem. But the Gospel has a "fix" for all of this, and it is spelled out in the teaching of the NT. And that brings us back to I Corinthians 11.

OK, a man and a woman are in a relationship. The question is, where to do they look for a model for their relationship. The answer is that they look at the nature of God … specifically the Trinitarian nature of God.

So as we look at God, we see that God is one God, expressed in three Persons … Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are all equal, and they share the same attributes … omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. Question: Is there authority in the Trinity? Answer: Yes.

Jesus Christ submits to God the Father. I Corinthians 11:3 says that "the head of Christ is God." We see this in the Gospels.

John 6:38 (NIV) - For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

John 8:28b-29 (NIV) - I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

> In the Garden Jesus prayed, "Father, not my will, but Your will be done."

So Jesus at one and the same time claimed to be equal to and one with the Father, and at the same time acknowledged that He submitted to the authority of the Father and came to do His will, not His own will.

So what in the world does this have to do with marriage and gender roles? Remember, we are created in God's image. And God, in creating male and female, mirrored the relationships within the Trinity. Are men and women equal? Yes, absolutely. But within that is there authority that is to be respected? Yes. It was no disgrace for the Son to submit to the authority of the Father. And women should not think that it is a disgrace or a put-down for them to submit to the authority of her husband.

So again, v.3 says … "**The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.**

Now the word for "head" there is hotly debated, as some of you know. There are some who say that the word "head" doesn't mean "one in authority." But the best way to interpret the word is to mean "one in authority."

> So when it comes to authority you have God the Father, then Jesus Christ, then the husband and then the wife. So this means that as Jesus submits to the authority of the Father, the wife submits to the authority of the husband.

Now I can just hear a man gloating, "Great, I like to be the boss. I can tell my wife to do anything I want her to do." No, it doesn't work that way because the man's authority is not ultimate.

> What if a husband asks his wife to do something that the Scripture absolutely forbids her from doing? Should she do it or not? She should not do it because the husband is not the ultimate authority. He is under the authority of Jesus Christ and the Father.

So the best thing that could happen for a woman is to be married to a man who understands that he is under the authority of Jesus Christ and God the Father. Guys, we have to take that seriously. Forget being the head of your wife if you are not being submissive to the authority of Jesus Christ.

So for the man, this means that the husband should take seriously his responsibility to lead, love and care for his wife, just as Christ does that for the church.

For the woman, this means that as the wife she should be like Jesus in respecting the authority that is over her … just as Christ respects the authority of the Father.

ILLUSTRATION - Liz Curtis Higgs was one of the best-known DJs in America, and, in fact, she a "shock jock," as they say. Howard Stern was the A.M. show, and Liz Curtis Higgs was the P.M. show. And one day Howard Stern said to Liz, "You know, you need to clean up your act." Now, that's pretty bad when Howard Stern has to tell you to clean up your act.

> Liz was also a feminist … a radical, militant feminist. She had been hut by so many men, she became a militant feminist. But she had a girlfriend who happened to be a believer, and she kept inviting Liz to church. And one day Liz accepted the invitation for just one visit to church.
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> And at church that week, it just happened that the pastor was teaching on the passage in the Bible that says, "Wives submit yourselves to your husbands." Now that's not exactly the way to get off on the right foot with a radical feminist. And it made her angry. But she continued to listen, and she heard the teaching for men that they should love their wives as Christ loved the church and died for her. Who is asked to give their life up here? The husband.
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> When Liz heard that part, she leaned over to her friend and said with a little cynicism, "I'd gladly give myself to any man if I knew he would die for me." And her friend leaned back to her and said, "Liz, there is man who loved you enough to die for you. His name is Jesus Christ. That's how much he loves you." Shortly after that Liz dropped her guard, committed her life to Jesus Christ. Today she is a well-known Christian author and speaker who has spoken here in our church. Many of you have read her books.

CONCLUSION

As I was studying and preparing to preach this passage, an incredible sense of responsibility fell over me. I didn't read this passage and think, "Great, I can go home and boss Nan around and make her do what I want her to do." No, that's not what hit me. What hit me was, "What a responsibility is on my shoulders! The way that Jesus cares for and tends to me, I need to care for and tend to my wife."

How did Jesus show assume His headship over the church? Did He abuse her and was He mean to her? No. He loved, nurtured and cares for her. And that's the way husbands should love their wives.

How did Jesus show His submission to the authority of the Father? That's the model for women.

It's all about Jesus.

ILLUSTRATION – Billy Graham's wife, Ruth Graham passed away recently. I read a statement that Billy Graham released just after Ruth slipped into the coma a day before she died. Billy said, "I cannot imagine living a single day without her by my side. I am more in love with her today then when we first met over 65 years ago at Wheaton College." Last week I happened to be in a meeting with one of Billy Graham's associates who had just come from Ruth's funeral. He told of a tender moment when each of the children, at the end of the graveside service, placed a rose on the Ruth's casket. Then Billy Graham walked up to do the same, but he kissed the rose before he placed it on the casket.