

Baseball Caps in Church?

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

- [0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 17th of October 1999. The preacher is Phil Muleman.
- His sermon is entitled Baseball Caps in Church and is from 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 2 to 16.
- Our gracious God, we pray that you would open our hearts and our minds, help us to understand your word, help us to be obedient to it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.
- Well, open your Bibles to page 932. The other week, I was up near Blockbuster Video just up the road.
- I wasn't getting a video, I was up there. And I saw a young guy with blue hair pulled up in spikes, wearing a singlet, long daggy shorts, or were they short daggy lons?
- [1 : 12] I don't know. And he had on a pair of monstrous boots. He also had numerous body piercings on his face and in his ears and who knows where else.
- Now, you can't help but notice someone when they are groomed and dressed in this manner, can you? And you often see, or sometimes you see, women dressed in the same fashion too.
- Now, how would you respond as a Christian if a male or a female, dressed as I've described, came out to the front of our church to read from the Bible or to pray or to play the piano?
- How would you respond? Perhaps for us guys, let's take it a little bit further. The girl that comes out to pray or whatever has on a miniskirt and a tight or a loose singlet.
- How do you respond? It's a tough question, isn't it? And as a Christian, you don't want to seem discriminatory or prejudice, but at the same time, what's going on up the front is challenging your whole way of thinking.
- [2 : 33] Perhaps you're not sure why it challenges your way of thinking, but it does, because what is happening is a huge distraction for you. So distracting that you can't concentrate on the prayers that have been prayed, the Bible passage that's been read, the music that's been played.
- Well, I'll tell you what I would do. I would go and tell my vicar about it. You could come and tell the curate, but he'd just go and tell the vicar, so just go and tell the vicar.
- Sorry, I didn't mean to point the finger. Well, if this sort of thing happened in our church, then it would create a cultural problem of dress code for many of us, and I think that we would need to work through the issue.
- And that's the kind of problem, in a sense, that is happening here in Corinth. The Apostle Paul has heard of some problems in Christian worship with the Christians in the city of Corinth, and so he attends to it.
- But he begins this whole attention span of this passage of head coverings and so on at verse 2 by commending the Corinthian Christians for not only remembering him in everything they do, but also for maintaining the traditions that he had passed on to them.

[3 : 59] Now, these traditions that he had passed on to them were the basic Christian fundamentals that the Apostle Paul had taught while he was there with them in the city of Corinth for some 18 months.

Any growing Christian community is going to grow because it too teaches the basic fundamental truths about the Christian faith. Not so much about what it means to be an Anglican and why we sing certain hymns.

There's a place for that, probably just before a confirmation service. But that's not so much what he's teaching. Rather, he's teaching the essentials that we teach people about.

That is what we believe as Christians. He's teaching them about judgment, about sin, about repentance, and about the God who created you and me and who freely offers us salvation through Jesus Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave.

And we as Christians, as a church, need to keep on proclaiming the same fundamental Christian traditions as Paul did. So that's why we run courses that explain the Christian faith, such as the Alpha course, such as the People of God course for baptism preparation for baptism couples.

[5 : 16] And that's why we run a discipleship course, so that people know how to become a Christian. And that's also why we run training courses on how to share your faith, such as Evangelism Explosion or Everyday Evangelism, so that others from this parish can take up their part in proclaiming the Christian gospel with their families, with their friends, with their workmates and so on.

So Paul commends the Corinthian Christians for their part in maintaining these traditions that he has passed on to them. And now he moves on to this hot potato of public worship and the behaviour of men and women involved within it.

To help us think about this in a balanced way, it's important for us to understand the culture to whom the Apostle writes to. And that is, he's writing to the Roman first century world.

His audience is a group of small Christians made up of Jews and Gentiles who have converted to Christianity. Now the dress pattern for men and women of this era is that they dressed in a similar way except for the head coverings or the veil which the women wore.

That's possibly how you distinguished them, I'm not sure. In that culture, slaves also had their heads shaved as did women who had committed and been convicted of an adulterous act.

[6 : 54] so their heads were shaved. Now we don't know why Paul specifically addresses this issue of head coverings. Other issues in this letter he deals with because they had written to him and asked him for his advice on such matters.

But it doesn't seem that they wrote to him about this specific issue. So he's obviously heard about it from the people who've brought the letter to him or something like that and he decides it is an issue and it needs to be discussed in this congregation.

So he does and he does in these verses. Now notice two things here in these verses from 2 to 16. First of all, as I've said a moment ago, Paul is writing to Christians.

So the message that he is proclaiming is for Christians. Secondly, women are welcome in public worship. That's a great and liberating thing.

It's not a Jewish temple that Paul is writing to where women kept on their own and they were kept out of sight behind a screen and men perhaps prayed with their heads covered. It's far from that because now with this onset of the Christian gospel there has been huge steps forward in welcoming women into worship with men and their husbands.

[8 : 14] Galatians 3 verse 28 says, There is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male and female.

For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Well the presenting issue that Paul deals with then is how these Corinthian Christians ought to conduct themselves in worship.

Should women wear head coverings? Well they don't in a sense as Christians we're free from those sorts of things. We're freed up from those sorts of things.

But we're also reminded that we might be we might have great freedom as Christians but we're also reminded a couple of weeks ago in chapter 10 that we are there to serve God who is the freedom giver.

So we are there to serve God and be obedient to him. Now Paul goes on to offer some practical and theological practical advice and theological advice to these gathered group of Christians.

[9 : 26] On the practical side he advises that men and women turn up dressed for public worship just as they would dress in their normal day to day living. So in that culture that means that a woman should turn up with a head covered with a veil on her head.

Paul also argues theologically that the man and the woman should come to worship in submission. Let me read to you verses 3 to 6.

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. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head.

But 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. For 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. Now there is order here in what has been written and it is a divine sense of order.

[10 : 44] We are talking about God Christ the man or the husband and the woman and the wife. And the husband is no more powerful or no more superior to his wife than God is superior to Christ.

Christ. Now as Christians we know that God and Jesus are one and the same. Virtually every week we say the creeds where we acknowledge God's oneness in Christ Jesus.

God and Jesus are one and the same. They are co-equal. But in Christ we see that Jesus chose to submit himself to the Father.

Philippians chapter 2 is a great passage where we see the oneness of God and Jesus but we also see Jesus submitting himself to the will of the Father.

Jesus was in heaven and he descends to earth so that he might become one of us and submits to the will of his Father to be obedient to death on the cross.

[11 : 53] And in doing so God raises him and he is glorified but Jesus submits to the will of the Father. So the logical extension to that then is that the man and the woman are equal but the wife should choose to submit herself to her husband.

Now many people today have difficulty with the word submission. The feminist argument would say that we are all equal the man has no headship over me.

Well I agree with that. I do. But it's important that we understand the meaning of the word head which appears many times in these verses from 3 to 6.

Now the Greek word for head can have several meanings and it's been an issue of debate and still is amongst scholars today. And I understand the word head to mean this to mean the source of origin as in the head of a river.

So for example the Yarra River has its origins or its source way up in the mountains somewhere and then it fills up and it expands and empties out into Port Phillip.

[13 : 11] Do you understand? So I take the word head to mean the source of origin. And so I think that to extend that Paul's argument here is starting right back at creation.

He's going right back to the beginning of time, back to the stories that we have in Genesis. So you could say God is the head of Christ if you like or you could say God is the source of origin for Christ and Christ as the creator is the source of origin or the head for man and that man is the source of origin or the head for woman.

Why do I say that? Because in Genesis 2 verse 22 we look at the creation story of God creating man and then he sees that it's not good that man is on his own.

So what does he do? He causes Adam to fall into a sleep, takes the rib out of his side and out of that rib what does he do? He creates woman. So the source of origin for woman comes from man.

And that is if you like the fundamental order of relationships that's what the word head means in this context. God, Christ, man, woman.

[14 : 28] And it's this order of relationships that is reflected in Christian worship. What does that all mean? It means that it's important to come to public worship in the right spirit and this may impact on our outward conduct as well as on our inner spirit.

And there ought not be any distractions because in Christian worship we are demonstrating openly the essence of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

And that is he has set us free to serve him and to worship him. And this freedom must be visibly demonstrated. God so in Corinth then it was a distraction for the Christian community to worship God if a woman in public worship did not have a head covering on because it wasn't the normal cultural practice of the day.

It was considered a disgrace as verse 5 tells us. She may as well have had her head shaved representing either an adulteress or a slave.

Now her head may relate to her physical head but also it relates to her source of origin. So by wearing a head covering it was a sign of submission for the woman.

[15 : 52] Similarly for the male to have a head covering on or to have long hair as verse 14 tells us was also in this culture in this context considered to be a disgrace.

At the end of verse 4 we're told he disgraces his head. he disgraces his physical head but more importantly his source of origin God.

In submission to God Paul says that the man should not have his head covered. Now why were they to do this? As I said in order to submit to God and also in order that they the Christian man and the woman the husband and the wife may bring glory to God may bring glory to his name.

Verse 7 tells us why man should not have his head covered. That is man is the image and reflection of God. Verses 8 and 9 tell us why the woman should have a head covered.

That is the woman was made from man and woman was made for the sake of man as the Genesis account tells us. For this reason then a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head.

[17 : 08] And in the last three words of verse 10 it would have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels. What does that mean? Paul probably means by these words in verse 10 that there is more to worship than we in the congregation can see.

Perhaps there are good angels there. There's a bird in the church. Now the angels observe and the woman must be unseemly before them.

So in the culture of their day a woman wore a head covering in order to bring glory to God. Our common worship together as well is done in order to bring glory to God.

If God alone is to be glorified in the worship of the church then it is the joint responsibility of the man and the woman to do all within their ability to make that happen.

And we should therefore avoid distractions which hinder people worshipping God. But more importantly we should come in a spirit or attitude of submission to God, both the man and the woman.

[18 : 25] Now while there's been a level of submission displayed in this passage so far, that is Christ submits to God, man submits to Christ, woman submits to man, we now see, we move on in verses 11 to 12 and see that there is the interdependence of the man and the woman.

Up to verse 10, Paul has been arguing strongly for the woman to be submissive to the man and for that attitude to be displayed publicly whenever they gather for public worship.

Now in verses 11 and 12, he argues that the woman and the man or the husband and the wife are one in Christ. They are totally bound up with each other.

They are inseparable and they are interdependent. Now that's true physically, isn't it? Let me read to you the first part of verse 12.

For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman. I can't be born unless there is a woman there sort of thing.

[19 : 37] And the same process goes for all of us. But it's even more true in the Lord because both man and woman owe their existence to God.

Sure, we are born from a woman, but the last part of verse 12 says, but all things come from God. The source and the origin of all things and all people is God.

Neither man nor woman is an independent being. And Christian worship is best expressed when together men and women, husbands and wives, visibly give God the glory of their interdependent lives.

We are created male and female. That's a great thing. And it was all a part of the plan of God. Go read the Genesis account again.

Neither is superior to the other. They need each other. But we are different. And the fact that we are different is not a bad thing, despite what some people might want to say.

[20 : 50] And so we ought to celebrate as Christians our differences, rather than try to compete with one another. And that's the kind of essence that Paul, I think, is drawing out in verses 13 to 15.

It's natural that we be different. So, men and women, vive la difference. Celebrate it. Part of our problem in society, I think, is that we have stereotypes some of the roles men and women have.

And it is true that some of those roles that have gone on in society for perhaps years and years and years need to be revised and in some cases even rejected.

As creator, however, God intends that men and women should have different but complementary functions. Let me read to you. Each human being is to give glory to God by being what God intends him or her to be.

The man is to be truly masculine and the woman truly feminine without allowing stereotypes of either to dictate our perceptions, but rather basing our understanding of what it is to be fully human on the perfect model of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 14] This principle will make us chary of going overboard on the modern theme of unisex. The fullness of Christian worship can be experienced only as each man and each woman created for God and redeemed by God allow their humanness to be expressed according to God's pattern.

Now how do we conclude all this? In our own church today we need to ensure that worship is done in a right attitude which reflects our freedom in Christ and also our submission to him and to each other.

1 Corinthians chapter 14 verse 40 says that we need to do that in worship decently, that is in a fitting way and in order. And we will look at some of those issues when we get to chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians.

But particularly related to this passage I want to say that we need to ensure that what we do brings glory to God and recognises that all things come from God.

Our culture in most Christian churches in Australia does not say that women need to have a head covering on their head in order to be involved in public worship. I would suggest that in some instances it would be a distraction for a woman to come in here with a big bowl of fruit on her head.

[23 : 49] It would be a distraction to some of us. Whereas once it was considered a disgrace for a man to have long hair. That's not so much an issue for us today, is it?

We hardly blink about it or blink at it. So men, if you have long hair, don't rush out and get it cut short. Similarly, there are plenty of women who have short hair in our culture today and I don't consider that a distraction for women to have short hair either.

They don't disgrace themselves either by cutting it short. The haircuts of our day are a lot different to the haircuts of the first century Roman world. The haircuts of the 1990s are a lot different to the haircuts of the 70s.

Thank goodness. Well, what sort of things would we consider distracting in our worship today? Perhaps it is someone who deliberately dresses provocatively or in a way that seeks to draw attention to themselves so that the focus of our worship is taken away from God.

And that, I think, is a real possibility that people do dress in that manner to draw attention to themselves. Or you may be able to think of other ideas and other things in your own sort of situations.

[25 : 13] Now, I'm not saying that women ought to wear dresses that come down to their ankles and that men ought to wear suits when they come to public worship.

For many of us, that's just not our culture. It's not the way I was brought up. But I would want to suggest that we need to exercise care for our Christian brothers and sisters by dressing in a way that avoids distraction for others who come to worship God.

In other words, don't dress in a way that draws attention to you. Rather, dress normally and naturally so that people's attention is focused on God and bringing glory to his name.

But before we start pointing fingers at those things we look down upon and those things that we look down upon and those that we think are dressed inappropriately in public worship, let me offer a word of caution.

Remember that the focus is on all of us coming to worship, to worship God in submission to him and to one another. Sometimes this may challenge our comfort zones.

[26 : 33] Maybe we will have to accept others who don't look or dress the same way as us. Let our focus be on coming to public worship in the right spirit and attitude rather than on pointing fingers at others who might be different to us.

Let me finish by saying that God wants us all to praise him, to worship him as men and women. He wants us to celebrate our interdependence upon each other and more importantly upon God.

But he also wants us to celebrate our differences as men and women. We shouldn't be ashamed that we are a man. We shouldn't be ashamed that we are a woman. And finally, each of us should recognize as Christians that before God, each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made.

All things come from God, as the end of verse 12 tells us. Knowing that, then I think that each one of us has something to contribute, something wonderful to contribute when we come together in public worship.

Let's pray. Father, it's very hard to preach awkward passages. And Lord, I pray that we go away with a better understanding of this.

[28 : 08] Lord, we pray that we would celebrate our differences as men and women. We pray that we would also recognize that we are interdependent upon each other. And more importantly, that we are dependent upon you.

Father, we pray that as a church that we wouldn't point fingers, that rather that we would come to worship in the frame of mind of seeking to bring honor and glory to your name, whether it be leading or whether it be participating.

Help us to avoid those areas where division comes in, but help us as well to be true to the gospel claims. Help us to never give up seeking to proclaim the traditions that Paul passed on to the Corinthian Christians in this church.

Help us to make those traditions clear and the gospel truths and imperatives made known to all who make it onto this place and wherever we may be seeking to serve you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 23] Amen.