**HEALTHY CHRISTIANS FORGE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS**

**(1 Corinthians 11:2-16)**

I routinely spend much more time preparing for a Sunday morning message than I do a Sunday evening message, and the reason for that is obvious—more people come on Sunday morning than on Sunday night. This week, however, I spent far more time preparing for tonight’s message than I did for the one this morning. The reason will become clear as we look at the passage.  
 Our text is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. For years this passage has been wrongly used to subjugate and even defend the mistreatment of women. As we work through this text, I want to show you that it teaches quite the opposite of how it is often taken.

Let’s begin by reading out text. There is a lot here. We won’t get to some things, and I won’t have an answer for everything that is mentioned. Let’s start out with the big picture. We have been focusing on healthy churches and healthy Christians. The big idea I want to stress is that healthy Christians forge right relationships.

That word forge is important, by the way. It is not enough to simply have right relationships. We want that, of course, but we want more than that. It is easy, and it is common for a right relationship to go bad and become a relationship that is toxic and definitely unhealthy. That is why our relationships need to be forged. When you forge something, you put it through the fire, and when something goes through the fire, it comes out stronger.

Our text will teach us that healthy Christians have at least five relationships that are right. They are what they should be. When we are not rightly related to these five, we can’t be truly healthy. As we go through these five, I want you to do a little health check and see how you are doing regarding each one. Let me ask five diagnostic questions.

1. **HAVE YOU FORGED A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRUTH?**

Look at v. 2. Paul has spent much of this letter taking the believers in Corinth to task. He has pointed out error after error. Here, however, he commends them. He gives them a pat on the back.

On my birthday, Ruth Ann called the kids. They sang “Happy Birthday” to me. Afterwards, I thanked them and told them they did a good job. I heard Gemma say, excitedly, “We did something.”

Paul is telling the Corinthian believers, “Hey, you have done something.” Actually, there are two things they were doing. He wrote, “You remember me.” Basically, he was thanking them for sending financial support.

Second, and even more importantly, you are maintaining the traditions. From what I can tell, Paul meant something different than what we mean we talk about traditions. There are all kinds of traditions you will find in churches. Much, if not most, of what we do in church today is because it is traditional, not because it is biblical.

I have a book in my office entitled, *Pagan Christianity?* The subtitle is *Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices.* There is nothing in the Bible that says we should worship in buildings with steeples that are outfitted with pews and hymnals. There is nothing in the Bible about the pastor preaching from a pulpit. There is nothing about having a choir and having Sunday School. When the early church observed the Lord’s Supper, they didn’t pass out fingernail-sized bits of bread and tiny cups of grape juice. Even the idea of coming to a worship service to hear the pastor preach a sermon isn’t exactly biblical. All of those are traditions that have been handed down generation after generation for centuries.

That is not what Paul had in mind when he used the word that is translated as “traditions.” The word could be translated as “teachings.” Paul passed along apostolic teaching, and for the most part, the Corinthian Church held to the truth that Paul taught.

John MacArthur pointed out, “The basic problem in the Corinthian church did not concern doctrine but morals, not theology but life-style.”

It is possible to believe the right thing and not live the right way, but you can’t possibly live the right way if you don’t believe the right things.

What Paul shares with them in these verses is going to help them forge right relationships. The first one is being rightly related to the truth.

Folks, truth matters. We need to know it so we can live it. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul talked about putting on the Christian armor so that we can withstand the attacks of the devil. The fist piece of armor Paul mentioned is the belt of truth. If we don’t have truth in place, we won’t have any of the other pieces. It all starts with truth. If you don’t have truth, you are a sitting duck. You are a casualty waiting to happen.

1. **HAVE YOU FORGED A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD?**

Look at v. 3. This is the key verse. Everything that follows stems from this verse. Let’s spend a moment on the first phrase, “The head of every man is Christ.” Paul says clearly, “I want you to understand this. I want to get this down plain and simple.”

Does that mean Christ is the head of man but not the head of a woman? That is not his point, and we will get to what it means that the husband is the head of his wife in a moment.

I want you to catch what it means that Jesus is our head. There is debate as to what Paul means when he uses the word head. Head does have two meanings. It can mean “authority” or it can mean “source.” When we talk about the headwaters or a river, we are talking about the source of that river.

Some people claim that is what Paul means. Jesus is the source of man, and man is the source of the woman. It is true that Jesus is the agent of creation. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:16, “For by Him [Jesus] all things were created . . .” And it is true that woman was created from a rib taken from Adam.

You could say that Jesus is the source of man and man is the source of woman, but I don’t think that is Paul’s meaning. That breaks down when you get to the third statement of v. 3. We can’t say that God is the source of Christ. Scripture is clear that God the Son is not a created being. There was never a time when Jesus was not. We read in John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus, the Son of God is co-eternal and co-equal with God the Father.

If head does not mean “source,” then it must mean “authority.” Jesus is the authority of man. Let’s consider how Jesus exercised His authority. Turn to Matthew 20:25-28. The setting of this passage is when the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked that appoint her sons to sit on Jesus’ left and right side when assumed His throne. When the other disciples got wind of this they were upset. They were probably mad because they had their eyes on those positions for themselves.

Jesus took that opportunity to talk about leadership. He was saying that a true leader is the one who serves. That is where we get the idea of servant leadership. As our Head, Jesus sacrificially served us. He lovingly died for us. He gave His all for us. Jesus doesn’t stand over us, wagging His finger. He doesn’t bark out commands. He supports us from underneath.

On the night before Jesus was crucified, he washed the feet of His disciples. He served them. Paul may have had that story in mind when he penned Philippians 1:5-8. Listen to what he wrote of Jesus . . .

**5**Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus,

**6**who, existing in the form of God,  
did not consider equality with God  
as something to be used for His own advantage.   
**7**Instead He emptied Himself  
by assuming the form of a slave,  
taking on the likeness of men.  
And when He had come as a man  
in His external form,  
**8**He humbled Himself by becoming obedient  
to the point of death—  
even to death on a cross. (HCSB)

We are told in John 13, where the story of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples is found, that Peter was very uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus serving him like that. He said to Jesus, “You shall never wash my feet” (13:8). Jesus responded, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me.”

To be rightly related to Jesus, we must let Him wash us. As long as we maintain, “No. That’s not necessary. I’m just fine the way I am,” Jesus can’t and won’t do for us what we most need. Let Him be the sacrifice for your sin. That is why He came. In love He came to ransom you.

The way in which Jesus is our head informs how a husband is to be the head of his wife. Yes, it does involve authority, but it is a different authority than the world envisions. What Paul says here in 1 Corinthians is further informed by what he wrote in 11:1. The husband should be a head of his wife the way in which Jesus is our head. That bring us to the third relationship that needs to be right.

1. **HAVE YOU FORGED A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SPOUSE?**

So, what does it mean for the husband to be the head of his wife? Husbands, you are to lovingly sacrifice for your wives. You are lovingly to give of yourself to your wife so that you can help her to become what she was meant to be. You won’t Lord it over her. You will come underneath to support her.

This is so opposite of what the world thinks. Many have used this passage to justify the mistreatment of their wife. This passage does not mean you can boss your wife around and make her wait on you hand and foot. The responsibilities you have toward your wife and going to be far weightier than hers will be towards you.

We have lost something in our culture in recent years. We are a different society than we used to be. I have read books about the sinking of the Titanic. You have probably seen movies about it or about other ships that were sinking. There is always that scene where the lifeboats are being boarded. The call goes out, “Women and children first. Women and children first.” It was just a given than a man would give up his life to save the life a woman and certainly a child.

That is no longer the expectation. A few years ago, my family and I went on a cruise. The first day aboard the ship we had a lifeboat drill. Nothing was said about women and children first.

Where did previous generations get the idea that a man would sacrifice himself to save others? It came from the Bible that taught that as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it, so should a man love.

Now, if a husband is to love his wife as Christ loves us, how is the wife to respond to her husband. She is to respond to her husband as Jesus responds to His Father. Do you remember what Jesus said to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane? He didn’t want to go to the cross. He didn’t want to die such a painful and humiliating death. He agonized about that decision, but in the end, He said, “Not My will, but Your will be done.” He honored His Father.

On that night before His arrest and before His crucifixion the next day, Jesus prayed, “I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave me to do” (John 17:4). Later in the same prayer, Jesus said, “I have made known to them Your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which You have loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (17:26).

If Jesus was about honoring His Father, and if a wife is to relate to her husband the way that Jesus related to God, then it stands to reason that a wife should seek to honor her husband.

By the way, if a husband is sacrificially loving his wife, that wife will have no problem honoring her husband.

One husband confessed:

For the first 15 years of my marriage, I was a terrible husband . . . I loved my wife very much, but I hadn’t yet learned how to show my love. I had a lesson to learn, and God used a vacuum cleaner to teach it.

I learned many things about vacuuming one day. First, I learned that our cat was terrified of vacuum cleaners. That kept me entertained for about an hour.

As I vacuumed in one direction, a stripe would appear. Going the opposite direction would create a stripe of a different shade. Entranced, I striped the whole room. Then I went crossways, creating a checkerboard pattern. I got so carried away that I dusted the furniture and straightened the entire house.

I was once again embedded in the easy chair, working on my crossword puzzle, when Diane came home. She struggled through the door with a bag of groceries under each arm, kicked the door shut with one foot, and then took in the house with an expert glance. Her mouth dropped open. Slowly the bags slipped from her grasp and dropped to the floor. “Who did this?” she asked.

“I did,” I said. Without warning, she attacked. Diving on me before I could get out of the chair, she smothered me with kisses and hugs, showering gratitude on me for helping her. The kisses grew more passionate. We broke the chair. It was wonderful!

The vacuum cleaner taught me an important lesson that day. Love is expressed with more than just words.

Fellas, if you love your wife with words and actions, watch out! You may have to get the furniture repaired. Not only will she honor you at home, she will honor you outside the home. She will speak well of you to others.

1. **HAVE YOU FORGED A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF?**

Beginning with v. 4, things get complicated. Paul talks about covering one’s head. Let’s read vv. 4-5. One thing is crystal clear—both men and women are expected to pray and to prophesy. The problem is not that woman is not to pray or prophesy. The problem is how she should do it. She should do it with her head covered.

Much debate has gone on about what Paul meant. Some say he was saying that she should wear a veil or a fabric to cover her head. There is much to support that. It was a common practice in that day for women, especially married women to wear something on their heads when they were in public. I have read that the only women who didn’t do that were prostitutes. Accordingly, a wife would obviously dishonor her husband if she didn’t wear a head covering while praying in public.

Others say, “No, Paul was dealing with hair length. A woman should wear her hair long and a man his hair short.” I also read that temple prostitutes would often shave their heads; so, for a woman to cut her hair short would dishonor her husband.

There is a third interpretation I have heard that I support. Regardless of exactly what Paul meant by head covering, he clearly is saying that a woman should look like a woman, and a man should look like a man when either she or he stands to pray or prophesy. Both should be unambiguously identifiable as either a woman or a man.

Haven’t you come across individuals who when you saw them, you just weren’t sure what sex they were? Some women dress and act like men. Some men dress and act like women.

A person should fully embrace his or her gender. If you are a woman, thank God He made you a woman. Be who God made you. If you are a man, thank God He made you a man. Be who God made you to be.

If you aren’t sure who you are, take off your clothes and look in the mirror. That should clear things up quickly. Accept the gender God has assigned to you.

To have a right relationship with yourself, you must not take on the roles God did not mean for you to have. One cause for marital conflict is that one or both parties are trying to do things that were not meant to do or they are not doing what they are meant to do.

When that is the case, more often than not, the man has abdicated his leadership role, and the woman is attempting to fill that void.

Pastor Timothy Keller and his wife Kathy Keller wrote a book called [*The Meaning of Marriage*.](https://www.amazon.com/Meaning-Marriage-Facing-Complexities-Commitment/dp/1594631875/ref=sr_1_1?crid=1MFPENVLY4JTJ&keywords=meaning+of+marriage+timothy+keller&qid=1552441635&s=gateway&sprefix=meaning+of+marriage%2Caps%2C211&sr=8-1)In their book, Kathy Keller gives an example in which each struggled to assume their proper role. Here is what Kathy wrote:

In the late 1980’s, our family was comfortably situated in a very livable suburb of Philadelphia where Tim held a full-time position as a professor. Then he got an offer to move to New York City to plant a new church. He was excited by the idea, but I was appalled. Raising our three wild boys in Manhattan was unthinkable! Not only that, but almost no one who knew anything about Manhattan thought that the project would be successful. I also knew that this would not be something that Tim would be able to do as a nine-to-five job. It would absorb the whole family and nearly all of our time.

It was clear to me that Tim wanted to take the call, but I had serious doubts that it was the right choice. I expressed my strong doubts to Tim, who responded, “Well, if you don’t want to go, then we won’t go.” However, I replied, “Oh, no, you don’t! You aren’t putting this decision on me. That’s abdication. If you think this is the right thing to do, then exercise your leadership and make the choice. It’s your job to break this logjam. It’s my job to wrestle with God until I can joyfully support your call.”

Tim made the decision to come to New York City and plant Redeemer Presbyterian Church. The whole family, my sons included, consider it one of the most truly “manly” things he ever did, because he was quite scared, but he felt a call from God. At that point, Tim and I were both submitting to roles that we were not perfectly comfortable with, but it is clear that God worked in us and through us when we accepted our gender roles as a gift from the designer of our hearts.

Not only do healthy Christians forge a right relationship with the truth, with the Lord, with their spouse, and with themselves, there is one more.

1. **HAVE YOU FORGED A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH?**

Look at v. 16. Church members ought not to pick fights within their church, and one church ought not be contentious with another church.

If you are inclined to be contentious, leave the church and go attend city council meetings. We don’t need people who are looking to be upset about something.

Already in this letter, Paul had much to say about unity. Paul had to address unity because the church in Corinth was not united.

A fractured church is a terrible witness to the community.

I have been to Baptist churches in small towns where there was no need for more than one Baptist church, but unfortunately, there was more than one. The reason there was more than one is because some people couldn’t get along. There were some people who were inclined to be contentious rather than inclined to be content. As a result, the church split, and the witness of both churches was severely damaged.

The Christian life is all about relationships—our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationships with one another.

Relationships take time. They take attention. God uses our relationships to grow us. The fact is, we don’t stumble into healthy relationships. They don’t happen automatically. We must work at it.

I am convinced that the healthy of your relationships is a reliable indicator or you own spiritual health. If your relationships are healthy and strong, you are healthy and strong spiritually. If your relationships are suffering and struggling, you will suffer and struggle spiritually.

So, how healthy are your relationships? How are you doing in your relationships with the truth, the Lord, your spouse, yourself, and the church? Give those relationships the attention they need and deserve.