

**Date:** September 10-11, 2022

**Title:** 212: *Counter-Cultural*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

Good morning again and welcome. Thanks for the wish of luck on the passage today. Welcome. Especially those of you in the Chapel, in Butler, the Strip District, Southpointe, and Online. Now, let me take a moment and pray. God as we jump into this passage in this series, I ask that you would speak God. If I've prepared things that don't reflect your word, I pray that you keep me from saying them. And if there are things that I could say that would benefit those of us who are gathered that I haven't prepared, I pray that you would prompt me and I would follow that prompting in these moments. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, you heard a little bit of the passage and one of the challenges of working through books of the Bible, which I believe is a good thing, is that it forces you sometimes to deal with the passage that nobody ever wakes up on Monday and says, what I really want to talk about is head coverings in the church, because that is a topic that few people would say, wow, that's just right. You know, that's what I was wondering about this week and what I really needed to understand.

We started First Corinthians back in January, and we've worked through a couple of different series. And today we're launching a new series. But I want to step back from the passage for a moment to introduce today slightly differently.

So, one of the advantages of aging is that as you age, you're able to have a longer perspective on events and things that happen in the world. And what I mean by that is that you're able to, when things start to change quickly, have a much longer view of the changes that are taking place and how they're impacting us. us.

So, here's what I mean. I grew up largely in the late seventies and 1980s. In that time period when I was growing up, one of the things that were true was that I never really consciously asked the question, am I attracted to boys or girls? It was just assumed that I would be somebody who would be attracted to girls and that's the way life was.

Now, I realize some of you would say, well, that just proves how heteronormative society was back then, and it's a good thing we've changed. Okay, I do understand that. But then you fast forward a few years and I have a few kids of my own and when my kids were growing up, there was pretty much a question should I be attracted to somebody of my gender or a different gender?

But one of the questions that my kids rarely asked was, am I a boy or am I a girl? And you fast forward a few more years and the questions that kids are asking and really being almost forced to ask today as they attend school, as they troll social media, or wherever they're at, is am I a boy or am I a girl? Am I one of another 100+ genders that are possible for me to be?

Now, you may say, okay, what does this have to do with head coverings? We'll get there in a few moments. But here's the other thing that's happened in culture. And again, this is something that you can see maybe a little bit over time, and that is in the eighties, nineties, 2000s, wherever you were born and grew up early, 2010s, even if you're really on the younger side here, what was generally true is you could hold a view and it could be different from other people. And you weren't considered really anything other than somebody who held a different view.

But what's happening with today's narrative around sexuality especially is we're putting people into classes and in the class, you are either assigned kind of the idea of being a victim because you're part of the minority class or you're the oppressor who is holding the victims down.

And so, the way that it tends to work today is this, and that is there are people who would either be part of the LGBTQ+ community, maybe different races, or different ways of looking at things. And these people would say we are victims because we've been oppressed. Now, they may not use that word. And then there's another crowd of people, and these people are the oppressors. And so, the idea is, you're either an ally or an oppressor toward the victims.

And the way that this generally plays out is if you're white, if you're a man, if you're cisgender, meaning you still identify as the gender that you were born with, the sex you are born with, if you are native-born, if you're able-bodied, or if you're Christian, you are automatically an oppressor. And the more of those you're not, then you fit in the victim category and the narrative is such, if you counter the narrative of people who are in the victim category, about what's going on, especially around gender and sex, the idea that you're assigned to sex at birth but your gender may be different, then somehow you are somebody who does not understand the times and are dangerous and oppressive to everybody else in the world.

Let me just give you a couple of examples of this. J.K. Rowling of Harry Potter fame was interacting with a situation that had happened some time ago. It was a woman named Maya Forstater who came out and said that she believed that sex was fixed and that your gender wasn't something that was fluid and could change, that it was fixed at birth.

So, this is what J.K. Rowling tweeted after that. She tweeted, "Dress however you please. Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who will have you but force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real." And then she said, "#IstandwithMaya." So, Maya lost her job because she said sex was real. J.K. Rowling tweets this out and says, I stand with Maya. Dress how you want, be who you want, sleep with who you want, and do anything you want, but don't force somebody out of their job for having a different opinion. And what quickly happened was the Twitter mob went nuts, and we're starting to pull Harry Potter books from all schools because now J.K. Rowling is an oppressor.

She's one of the people who's now an oppressor because she didn't support the narrative of the day. And soon people are saying Hogwarts is no longer a safe place.

All kinds of things like that were going on more recently. There is a video that a man released called *What Is a Woman?* And certainly, he had an agenda in this. And so, I'm not saying that there was no attempt at antagonism in this, but basically what he did is he went around to academic people, people who were performing, transitioning services for children. And he said, so tell me, what is a woman? What are you transitioning people to? What does it mean to be a woman?

And what's happened now is people have said that can't be. That's hate speech. That's terrorism. And what people are basically doing, even Eventbrite, the website that allows you to register if you wanted to show it, won't allow you to do it for that film because they're saying this is part of the problem in our society.

And you may say, okay, again, what does this have to do maybe with my spiritual life or with where we are today? Well, one book that I read a while back was called *Live Not by Lies* by a man named Rob Dreher, takes the title from Alexander Solzhenitsyn's work when he was writing about communist Russia, and he talks about some of the similarities between our age and that age. And even though that was hard totalitarianism, he says, we live in a time of societal totalitarianism.

And here's what he says. He says "What unnerves those who lived under Soviet communism is the similarity. Elites and elite institutions are abandoning old-fashioned liberalism based on defending the rights of the individual and replacing it with a progressive creed that regards justice in terms of groups to define good and evil as a matter of power dynamics among groups."

So, here's what I'm talking about. The power dynamic now is if you are here in any category of white, male, cisgender, able-bodied, native-born,

or Christian, you are automatically assigned an oppressor category to people who are in the victim category. Okay, so if you're a woman, you get at least one in the victim category, although what is a woman is to be determined, and you can either be an ally or you're just seen as an oppressor. And that is the dynamic that we're living in here today and part of what makes things tough.

Here's what's also tough. Nobody really wants to be part of an oppressor group. Nobody wants to be part of the patriarchy. Nobody wants to discriminate against anybody for anything. And so, to be lumped like that for any view that you might have or just any characteristic of yours is somewhat unnerving.

And not only that, we don't want to assume that old ways, what was true in the seventies and eighties, are in some ways superior to today. But we also don't want to assume that new ways are better than old ways. Certainly, there are some changes that are positive in terms of being aware of people and where they're living, but there's also some confusion that's set in.

And so today, because the text has us in First Corinthians 11, I do actually believe that this ancient text speaks to our current cultural condition. So let me just read this comment on it and hopefully, this will make some of it clear. Now, I realize that in 30, 40, 50, or 60 minutes, I won't be that long, that I cannot adequately address this passage and this issue. There's so much more to say. So, I know I'll leave some things out, but just hang with me for a few moments and I think you will see some benefit here.

Here's what he says. Verse two of Chapter 11, First Corinthians, "I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you." And there are some other places where he mentions these traditions and then he says this. "But 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. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or

prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.”

All right, everybody got it? Can we close in prayer? So, here are a couple of things that we have to at least grapple with. First, the word head has caused a lot of confusion for people over time and a lot of discomfort. And so, there's been a lot of ink spilled by different commentators over time about what it means. And there's a late way of thinking because, for generations, all the Greek lexicons would simply say head means authority. So, lexically, that's probably what that means.

But there are some who say, no, this means source and it makes the whole thing better when you read this. Because then if the man's the source of the woman, if the man was created first, then we understand it that way and that makes this passage easier to digest. I think the lexical evidence leans toward head meaning authority, but I think when you read this passage, you can see that there's an argument to be made that he's speaking to both authority and source right here.

Now, you can also, when you read this, understand that when he speaks of man and woman, the words behind those can also be translated as husband and wife. The ESV actually translates this husband and wife. That may help in understanding this, but it may not, depending on how you want to understand it.

Because then when Paul's speaking about head coverings, he's speaking about a marriage dynamic, not just a general dynamic of all men and women necessarily. And certainly, the Bible, when you read Ephesians and Colossians speaks about some marriage dynamics, about the husband being the head and the wife submitting, and the idea of a husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church.

And again, in our modern society, that's been hard for some people to understand or appreciate. Personally, I don't think this is that hard to understand because the call to the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church and to give himself up for it is a much higher command of selflessness than the idea of saying give deference or submission to your husband.

But that aside, part of reading this is to then say, okay, so what do we do with this headship, this authority issue that's here? Is this what Paul was primarily driving at, that women are to show authority that they're under the authority of their husbands or of men? Is that what's going on? Well, certainly that could be part of what's going on here.

Other commentators have said this was about discretion in that for a woman in the Middle East to take her veil off was akin to her walking around in skimpy clothes today. And so, the analogy that I heard somebody use was this. They said it would be as if the women were coming to church in their bikinis and that was kind of the analogy. And maybe if the men were doing the whole covering their head would be like in our day, men coming in Speedos. And you may say, you know, that might make church more interesting or it might repel me. I'm not sure. But that's kind of what was going on.

But I think there's something much more foundational going on here than probably either of those. Not saying that those are impossible interpretations. But part of what I think is going on here is that there's a leveling of gender that's taking place because the veil and the long hair and all that's going on in this passage with that are about distinct marks of gender in that society. And what people were doing, both men and women is they were throwing off the societal norms of gender when they were coming to worship

And Paul says I want you to celebrate your gender as part of your created being. This is what he's saying when he says this in verse seven and following. It says, "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not

come from woman..." Here's where you see the source idea. "...but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God."

Now, here's why I say that this is maybe about the leveling of gender. He goes back to Genesis one and two by talking about how man was created and woman was created. What do we know about creation? What we know is that God created the heavens and the earth.

And do you know the phrase that's repeated over and over in Genesis one and two? And it was good. It was good. And then we're told that he created man and it was good and that he created woman and it was good. So, God created two sexes, man and woman. And they are intended to be complementary, glorifying to God in their complementariness, and to bring about human thriving. And so, the church in Corinth was saying, we're rejecting some of these gender distinctions. We want to be genderless, at least in part.

And one New Testament scholar who takes this view is N. T. Wright, who has a lot of different views on a lot of things that I don't always agree with, but here's what he says. It seems clear that his main aim, he's talking about Paul in the passage, was that the marks of the differences between the sexes should never be set aside in worship.

Now you may say, okay, well, this seems far removed from me or from where we're at today, doesn't it? So let me just again quote from Rod Dreher, and he quotes George Orwell, his well-known book, *1984*, about the state, again harder totalitarianism. But he says this about kind of where we're headed in our culture. He says, "In the end, the party would announce that two plus two equals five and you would have to believe it." And what he's talking about here is he's saying when the state gains so



much control that they're able to dictate beliefs and you dare not go against it because you don't want to be without power in that culture.

And this is what Dreher says about it. He says, "In our time, we do not have an all-powerful state forcing this on us. This current dictatorship is more subtle. It's media. It's academia. It's corporate America. Today we're told that men have periods. That women standing in front of us are really him or men. Diversity and inclusion mean excluding those who object to ideological uniformity. Equity means treating persons unequally regardless of their skills and achievements to achieve an ideologically correct result."

And here's what he's driving at is he's saying today we're living in a time in which we're being told that sex and gender are separate and that you can live in any way you want as the gender you feel you are inside, even though the created order is different. And this is happening in our culture in all kinds of ways.

Here's another example. Just a couple of weeks ago, the New York Times ran an editorial talking about the myth of the maternal instinct and the author wrote about this and just said, in essence, the whole reason we have a maternal instinct in our day and age is because of the patriarchy that has taught women that their place is only in the home and not in the marketplace. And certainly, if you understand Christianity and Christian theology, women are not in any way ever told to be only in the home but to simply say there is no such thing as somebody giving birth and having an instinct of care is to, again, just level the idea of any kind of gender distinction in our world.

Bill Maher, who's a commentator on HBO and certainly not a friend of Christians, very critical of Christians, tends to be far left in all of his views and has dated some women, according to some has dated some men, I'm not really sure all that's going on there. But here's what Bill Maher says. And the reason I quote Bill Maher is that he's saying some things that are significant to be said and because he is either an ally or he's in

some of these groups, he's able to maybe say them in a way that sometimes others may not be able to say.

And what he talks about in one of his simple rants at one point is how as a society we have to not simply say because a person who's in one of these classes says something, that it ends the debate and there's a mic drop. And the reason he says this is because, in his words, we're experimenting on children today. Because what we're doing is when a child comes along and says, I think that I'm a different gender than what I was assigned at birth, the sex I was assigned at birth, will give kids puberty blockers and in many cases will even go so far as to do mastectomies, double mastectomy, called top surgery. We'll change genitals. We'll do all kinds of things. And he said we can't just say because you're part of an oppressed minority that we don't want to stop and ask a question about what's going on.

And sometimes I think even in the church, broader church, the way that this is approached is just to say I don't want to get in the middle of this. This is too controversial, too tough. What Bill Maher goes on to say, is that kids are fluid, period. He said, if we assign everyone their occupation when they were in their early childhood, he said we would have a world of cowboys and princesses. And then he says this. He says, when I was eight, I wanted to be a pirate. He says, I sure am glad that nobody assigned me peg leg surgery and eye removal.

Now again, he can say some things that maybe are harder to be said from other places, but here's what is, at least in part true. And that is this new ideology really is experimenting on kids and is dangerous. And not only that, I think it's anti-woman, anti-feminism even. You may say how. And the reason I would say that is because when you make an alliance of LGBTQ+ what you're doing is you're saying these are all the same and they're all the same in the sense that they're not oppressors. But the problem is that when you take away any distinction of what it means to be a woman, you're actually diminishing the value of a woman, not enhancing it. And that is exactly what's going on in our broader culture here today.

Now, again, you may say, okay, so what do you suggest? Because simply, if you say I'm a Christian and I believe and agree that God created male and female and it was good, you're going to be part of the oppressor class in our culture. But I'd like to suggest that the way forward is to reject the ally/oppressor narrative and to become what I'm going to call just a champion for God's way and for people.

And I realize that's kind of a cheesy word, but I use that because so often if you or I just simply say I'm either an ally or oppressor and I accept the narrative rather than saying that I love people, this is what the Great Commandments about, love the Lord your God, Matthew 22, with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Who are your neighbors? It's anybody else in your world. So, what Christians should be characterized by, is saying I love God and I love His truth. I'm a champion for what's true and what's right. But I also love people, even if they disagree with me, even if they call me an oppressor. And if that becomes true, then what you're able to do is you're able to say, I'm not just against something, but I'm for something.

And in fact, being a champion for this means going back to the created order and saying there's a beauty in how God weaves together the male and the female to create not just romance, but life and family and dynamics that are good and powerful and right and beautiful in our world. But again, we live in a world that will simply say, if you say that or believe that, that you are degrading to the people who are trans.

Now, certainly, there are some types of gender dysphoria that are physical and there are some unique situations. But the incredible spike of teenagers saying I'm trans, that's all out of proportion with historical data and worldwide data would indicate that this is more of a cultural phenomenon. And ultimately, when somebody decides to say, I want to be other than what I was created, we do harm to ourselves is what we do.

One of the things that I had hoped would be true of me when I was growing up is I always felt like I was six foot seven and I wanted to be

really quick and fast so I could play in the NBA. That was my dream. If you're listening not watching, I am not six foot seven.

So, let's just play this out. And I know if you hold to the ideology of our age, you'll say this is not a fair analogy. But, if I, when I was 12 years old, went to my mom and dad, went to my medical provider and we said, we just feel like Kurt's six foot seven, he should be six foot seven. Let's put him on hormones to make him grow. Do you think that would have messed with me at all? What if they had said, well, let's put little leg extenders on and he'll walk around on stilts so that he's taller. I mean, you would say that's kind of crazy. What if somebody who's six foot seven says, I just feel like I'm short, would you cut my legs off? Do you know what we'd say to the parents? That's child abuse.

If somebody is right-handed and says I want to be left left-handed, would you cut off my right arm? What would we say? We wouldn't say that's great. But if a child says, I don't think that I should have breasts, we'll cut off their breasts. That's part of again, missing the understanding of the beauty of how God has created us to be who we are and part of our future well-being as a society and as individuals is to be able to say how God made me is not a mistake. I have been made in the image of God and it is to His glory and for the good of the world, whether that's male or female, six foot seven or six foot five eleven, whatever it is, that's whether I have certain gifts or I don't have certain gifts.

Back to just why this matters. You may be saying, what does this have to do with 212 in my own spiritual life? Well, Carl Trueman wrote a couple of books about this. He's a professor at Grove City. One is called *The Myth of the Modern Self*, and the other is *Strange New World*. The *Strange New World* is a shorter version of *The Myth of the Modern Self*, so you don't need to read them both.

But he traces it historically, and philosophically, and he says, in essence, the myth of the modern self is that the only way for fulfillment is for me to be true to myself and to follow whatever it is I think I am internally. And he goes on to say that if you disagree with this current notion, especially

as expressed here and all of that, you will continue to find yourself on the outside of society. And therefore, there's an increasing urgency for why we must think about these things as a church.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn again quoted in Rod Dreher's book in 1974, penned his phrase *Live Not by Lies*. And what he said is that you cannot outrun the state or the forces that are trying to push you into something, but you can choose not to be its loyal subject.

And here's how this impacts spiritual life for you and for me. If you were to conceive of your spiritual life as a pot of water, and when you get to 212, there's transformation, the boiling point, then the things that we do that are fire, add heat to our bucket to make it boil are our practices.

So, participating in public worship, reading your Bible, being in a group, praying, or serving. These are all practices that help us get to the boiling point. But here's the issue. When we take something from culture, I'm just going to say this is water that's being poured into a bucket. And if you pour cold water into a bucket you're trying to boil, what happens? It takes way longer to boil. You may never get it up to its temperature.

When you and I, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, choose to embrace the narrative of our culture rather than God's design, what we're doing is we're taking the cultural narrative, and it's like throwing cold water into our spiritual life. Because what we're doing is saying, I'm not sure that God knew what He was doing or that God had a plan for how he was doing things. Or we know better in our current cultural moment, where we live and where we are.

I do want to talk for a moment to those of you who maybe are here, you're listening, who are saying, I do feel like I'm a different gender trapped in a sex body that was assigned to me wrongly at birth. And I just want to say to you, if that's who you are today, that God did not make a mistake in creating you and that aligning yourself with who God created

you to be will actually bring about greater thriving than resisting it and trying to be other. No different than if I was trying to be six foot seven.

I also want to say just to all of us who are gathered, and that is, it's really easy to take this dynamic of the victim, the oppressor, and the ally, even the champion, and to say because I'm on the right side of one of these, I'm a good person. I'm justified. I'm okay. As opposed to understanding the biblical narrative, which is all of us are sinful people who need a savior.

See, if you're one who says I'm one of these victim classes, then the real problem is the oppressors. I'm good, they're bad. Therefore, I'm okay if you're. If you're an ally, you say, I'm not like those oppressors who don't get it. I sympathize. Therefore, I'm good. I'm okay. If you're an oppressor by today's standards, then you're a person who says, I stand for truth. I won't be somebody who lives by lies, therefore I'm good. I'm okay. Or even if you say I'm a champion for God's way and for people. I love them both, God's ways and the people that God has created who don't even bend their knees to it. There's still a tendency to say, I am somehow, by the way I live, justified.

But the message of Christianity is you are not justified by a group that you're in or by what you do, but by what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf. And when that becomes your more dominant story, then you're able to say, the Creator and the way that He created me is good, and I'll live in his goodness and for the good of the world. And that's what it means to live not by lies. And living that way today will raise our spiritual temperature closer to that boiling point than if we just say, I'm going to step back from this whole debate because it's too complex, too acrimonious, or too difficult.

As a church, our hope has always been that we would be a place that brings the timeless message, the unchanging truth to a culture that is changing, to a culture that is saying we don't necessarily agree, but we would do it in a way that's compelling and loving. And this is an issue that is not going away and is something that our kids and you will face in

every context in which you live and move. And my prayer is that I and you will choose to say I'm a champion for God's way and for people to love.

God, we thank you that as we gather today, we don't have to accept a cultural narrative, but we can choose to live not by lies. And I pray that you would help us to see and savor the beauty of your created order and to demonstrate that and to live it in such a way that when people see the lives of people who call Orchard Hill their church home, that they would see people who are fully comfortable in their maleness, their femaleness, and have embraced their created design. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.