

Lake Cities Community Church
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March 6, 2011

“Theological Bridges”
Introduction to 1 Corinthians 11

Every year growing up our family took two-week family vacations with our pop-up Starcraft camper and family station wagon with the fake wood paneling. On one of those excursions we traveled around Lake Superior, the largest freshwater lake in the world. And I believe it was on that particular trip that I remember seeing the biggest bridge I have ever seen, even to this day. I remember our car pulling up to the great Mackinac Bridge – which connects the upper and lower peninsulas of Michigan. This bridge is 26,372 feet long – it is a five-mile long bridge over the waters of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, on the way to Lake Superior. At the time it was built in 1957 it was the longest suspension bridge in the world, and still today, 54 years later only two other bridges in the world have been built that are longer.

How many people do we have here today who love bridges? How many would rather not EVER be up on a bridge? Some researches estimate that as many as 10% of us have gephyrophobia – fear of bridges!

But even if bridges scare us – we recognize their importance; *because when we have to travel from point A to point B sometimes we sometimes discover* obstacles such as lakes, rivers, gorges, other roads, TRAINS and swamps. And because there are alligators in those swamps we need a bridge to elevate over the obstacle and then to descend safely on the

other side. As Simon and Garfunkel sang years ago, we need a – bridge over troubled waters.

Today we are moving back into our study of the great book of 1 Corinthians. And we are going to use the image of a bridge to prepare ourselves for chapter 11. Turn there with me – to 1 Corinthians 11. The Apostle Paul here begins a new section. You may recall, we are in the second part of this letter, chapters 7-16, where Paul is answering questions they have delivered to him. The first question had to do with marriage (chapter 7), and the second with meat sacrificed to idols (8-10). Now he responds to their third question¹ regarding worship practices. The Corinthians were struggling with several issues, one of which was how they went about the act of praying in public. Let's read a few verses to get a flavor of the problem – beginning w/ verse five:

1Cor. 11:5 But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. 1Cor. 11:6 For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. 1Cor. 11:7 For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. Jump to verse 13: 1Cor. 11:13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered?

That was what they were struggling with during their public worship.

Interestingly, what I found in India, was as soon as the prayers and worship started the head coverings came out on the ladies. They are taught this as little girls and it is a natural habit and reaction to prayer – to cover the head. But what about ladies here at Lake

¹ It may be that the questions came to Paul as with the other issues, or this may be a digression where Paul addresses problems that he has heard about.

Cities? Why don't you wear a head covering? Do the Indian believers have it right and we have it wrong? If Paul were here today, would he rebuke our church? Have you ever seriously considered these questions?

The issues continue in verse 14: 1Cor. 11:14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, 1Cor. 11:15 but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. I call chapter 11 - "Head coverings and haircuts." What in the world are we to do with passages like this? Should we begin measuring hair length before the service begins? If not - why not? Perhaps Paul has never seen a picture of Jesus with long hair? When Paul says, "long hair" what is his definition of long? Maybe we should just dismiss 1 Corinthians 11 as irrelevant to the modern world and move onto the next section? It is a sticky thing for us Christians when we come across passages like this one. And it is actually a serious issue, because critics of Christianity mock our faith because passages like this seem to be so out of touch with real life in the 21st century.

THEOLOGICAL BRIDGE

What we need is a theological bridge, because in our journey from point A to point B, we have discovered alligators in the water.

So, let's set aside, for now, the issues of chapter 11, and we will pick those up again next Sunday. Today, we need to be equipped to handle such passages through the beauty of bridges.

Let me explain... First, as we approach the Scripture we must recognize that there are two very different worlds. The first world is the **world of the text** – the world of the

original audience – the world that existed when David wrote his psalms and when Paul planted his churches. This is “Point A.” It is where we begin our journey. Here we ask the question: “**What did the text mean *back then*.**” This world no longer exists – it is past-tense. It is a world we enter into through historical study. We must understand what the passage meant back then to ever hope to see its application today.

The second “world” is the **modern world**. This is today’s culture - 2011 in the DFW Metroplex. Here we ask the question: “**What does this text mean today?**” Paul said: “**2Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.**” We believe in application of the Bible to today – that the world back then has continuing relevance to the world we live in today.

But sometimes a direct movement from the world of the text to the modern world encounters difficulty and challenges because *between* the world of the text and the modern world we have differences in language, culture, politics and geography. We are separated by over 2,000 years of time. We even have differences in redemptive history and progressive revelation.

And so in order to travel safely from the time of the Scripture to today’s world, we need the **theological bridge**. When we cross the theological bridge we ask the question, “**What does this text mean for all time?**” What is the truth that transcends time, culture, language and redemptive history – what is the theological principle that is rooted in our eternal God?

THEOLOGICAL BRIDGE EXAMPLES:

Now to understand this we will need some examples. Let's start with an example from the Law of Moses in Exodus 34:26 we find this command: **"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."** And if I came to you as the pastor and said, "Brothers and Sisters – God's word is clear – "You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk!" It is possible that someone might come to me and say, "Thank you pastor – because just yesterday our neighbor invited us to their annual baby goat slaughtering party at midnight under the light of a full moon, and I really wasn't sure how to respond! Now I know – thank you for that practical and timely word."

Unlikely. More likely is that we read something like this and we conclude that it has NO relevance to us today. Boiling goats is not really the issue it once was, and so this is no longer applicable. Jewish scholars have taken the passage another way and have used this verse as the basis for their dietary prohibition from mixing meat and dairy products; in other words: "You shall not eat cheeseburgers."

Let me suggest a better way – the theological bridge. Let's take into account that we are separated by time, culture and language and try to figure out what elements of this verse might be time-bound, and what elements might be timeless.

Well... what we know about the ancient practice of boiling a young goat in its mother's milk is that it was a pagan Canaanite practice, associated with idol worship, and may have been tied to fertility rites and sexual practices. Once a year there apparently was a big pagan festival – where Canaanites would boil young goats as part of their idol worship; and Israel was tempted to adopt their neighbor's practices. God is saying – "No, do not take their pagan rituals for yourself."

So, here is how the theological bridge works. Instead of going straight across to the modern world – we travel up the theological bridge – meaning we take into account these things **in order to see** what is timeless. For example here we might make this statement: **“God forbids His people from adopting the pagan practices of their neighbors.”** That is just as true today as it was back then. It is true in both the Old and New Testaments. Now, with that theology - we can come into the modern world with applications such as “Do not adopt your neighbor’s new age beliefs.” Or “Do not participate in horoscopes, astrology or psychic readings.” Now we are down to something practical. If we as a Christian look to horoscopes for guidance in life, we are very much offending God in the same way Israel did when they boiled young goats. Don’t adopt the pagan practices of the world around you.

Does this make sense to you? The theological bridge. We try to discern things that are time-bound and things that are timeless, in the theology of the passage.

Now certainly not all passages in Scripture are so difficult. When the Bible, for example, speaks against lying in the Old Testament, we can see theologically, that God hates lying, or lying is inconsistent with loving one another which leads us to, in the modern world – to not lie. The same would be true with stealing, adultery, murder and so forth. So certainly some commands in Scripture are easy to understand while others need more theological work and careful thinking. Studying the Bible is a little like cooking. If you are making standard regular food for your family like spaghetti, hamburgers or ramen noodles – it is all pretty straight forward. But if you are called to put together a lobster bisque with a gourmet salad and crème Brule dessert – it will take most of us a little time to get it right. Same with Bible study.

So we start with the world of the text – understanding what the text meant back then – next we do our theology to find the timeless truth of the passage, and then we move into the modern world.

One more example: In Deuteronomy 8:8 we read this description of the Promised Land, “A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil and honey.” This was a description to Israel regarding the land God promised to give His people Israel if they would obey Him. Traveling up the theological bridge we might recognize that “**God promises rich blessings for His people, when they obey Him.**” That is always true that God, and therefore, by way of application we might say with the authority of Scripture, “Obey God and you will be blessed!”

Now, if we take out the theological bridge, and attempt to move directly from the world of the text to the modern world, we might come up with different applications, such as God favors these foods above all others. Or, “Eat these holy foods and be blessed!”

Actually that has been done – it is called the Bible bar! Foods of the Bible! The website states, “The *Bible Bar* is a great way to control hunger pangs while still providing your body with the highest level of biblical nutrition. Also available individually or in a box of 6 bars. Contains the 7 foods of Deuteronomy 8:8. Nutrition God’s way.”



You see the point – if we do not do the proper theology, taking into account the historical, contextual elements - and see what is timeless about the passage, we can end up with all kinds of strange applications.

Now before we end, let me just say that what we have been talking about this morning is being careful students of God's Word. And it is vitally important, because the mishandling of God's Word in all kinds of passages, because of poor theology has led to cults, false teaching and confusion in the church. Poor handling of cultural issues and contextualization has given skeptics and enemies of our faith plenty of ammunition to use against us. **I am encouraging you this morning to go deeper in your study of God's word by going up onto the theological bridge when doing Bible study.**

APPLICATION / Conclusion

So, by way of application - your assignment this week is to read 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 1-16 and, if you can, do a little bit of work on the passage – see if you can find out any of the cultural background of this passage, maybe some word study of head covering or hair length. How can you do this? Most of the time we need help here – and there are excellent resources available that provide background information on tricky passages. I have brought this morning for you – several copies of resources I have that I would like to pass out and encourage you to take one, and read it this week in preparation for next week's message. Also, there are good websites, such as bible-org, or soniclight.org that provide free excellent bible study resources.