

XIX. Headship Issues

September 17/19, 2013 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Aim: To understand the God-given relationship between husbands and wives and to respect the God-given differences between male and female roles.

Paul next turns his attention to the area of public worship. From this point until the end of chapter 14, attention is given to inadequacies in congregational worship. Evidently, the Corinthians had three major concerns relating to this vital area: the conduct of women in worship (11:2-16), the administration of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and the use of spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40).

In chapter 11 Paul addresses two departures from his teaching since he left the church three years earlier. These teachings he calls 'traditions' (11:2; cp. 11:23), a technical word the rabbis used for blocks of teaching they would hand over to their disciples. The first 'tradition' relates to man-woman relationships within the assembly of believers. The second 'tradition' was the procedure to be followed in remembering the death of the Messiah at the thanksgiving meal. These two 'traditions' relate to life within the church meeting. When it is understood that chapters 12-14 also relate to the gathering of the believers it can be readily agreed that chapters 12-14 belong with chapter 11, forming one block of teaching. Thus to the topics of 'wisdom' (1-4), 'the holiness code' (5-7), 'temples and sacrifices' (8-10) we now add 'life together in the church' (11-14).

A. The Headship Debate

1. Passage Introduction

This passage is considered by many to be not only the most difficult passage in this letter but the most difficult in the entire New Testament. The difficulty of interpreting this passage is compounded by the fact that this topic is one of the most hotly debated in society in general.

It should be obvious that many of the things troubling the church today would not be problems at all if they were not problems in society. The church has to be sensitive to the trends of society and address itself to those concerns, but that doesn't mean she should simply parrot what her society happens to be saying at a given moment. Today's church seems to be doing exactly that. There wasn't a gay rights movement in the church until there was one in the world! There wasn't an abortion rights movement in the church until there was one in the world! And there wasn't militant feminism in the church until there was one in the world!

This passage is controversial. Many condemn its teachings as 'patriarchal' and 'hierarchical' and therefore essentially irrelevant and unhelpful to the modern world.

2. Preliminary Questions

Three preliminary questions must be answered in order to understand the passage.

a) Men and Women

First, is this passage primarily about 'men' and 'women' or about 'husbands' and 'wives'? 'Man' (*anēr*) can mean 'male' or 'husband' and 'woman' (*gynē*) can mean 'female' or 'wife.' Greek has no separate words for 'husband' and 'wife.' From context, this passage points

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primarily to a ‘husband and wife’ situation, rather than to simply a ‘man and woman’ one. It is clear that the marriage of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 is the background of this passage. Paul’s insistence that ‘woman is *for* the man’ (verse 9) but also that ‘the man is *for* the woman’ repeats exactly the reciprocal husband-wife obligations of 7:3-5 and firmly establishes that Paul is writing primarily about ‘husbands’ and ‘wives.’

b) Head

Second, what does Paul mean by ‘head’? Scholars have debated whether ‘head’ (*kephalē*) means ‘head over’ or ‘source of’ (e.g., the head or source of a river). In this passage, Paul’s use of ‘head’ points to a hierarchical meaning. Paul is using the imagery of top down authority, of Christ as *head* to every man, of a man as *head* to his wife, of God as *head* to Christ (verse 3). To be sure, there is some reference to the ‘source’ idea in his words, but this is given as the basis for the hierarchical teaching that God is head of man and man is head of woman.

The Greek word *kephate* means firstly the physical head (as of a body); secondly, and metaphorically, a person in authority (as in the head of state, or of a school); and thirdly, and even more metaphorically, a source or origin (as in the head of a river). Here in 1 Corinthians, Paul is clearly using one of the two metaphorical meanings.

If the word ‘head’ is understood as meaning an ‘origin’ or ‘source,’ then God would be the ‘source’ of Christ, when He sent the incarnate Son to be the Savior of the world; Christ is the ‘source’ of man, both as Creator and Savior; man is the ‘source’ of woman, in the sense of Genesis 2:22-27, where woman is said to be ‘taken from the man.’ There are difficulties with this interpretation, however. It seems to ignore the fact that Christ is the ‘source’ of woman, as well as man, since they were both created in God’s image, in equality (Gen. 1:27). Also, it contradicts the emphasis in Genesis, supported also in the narrative of the Fall, that the order of Creation suggests a more hierarchical chain of responsibility (God-man-woman).

The much more common interpretation, throughout church history, has been to view the verse as teaching a relationship of authority/responsibility in the context of headship. This is not to be understood as a matter of inherent superiority, so much as one of different functions. A similar situation exists within the Persons of the Holy Trinity. There is an equality of the three Persons within the Trinity but it is an equality that allows for the role of the Son in His work of salvation to be subordinate to that of the Father (cp. 15:28). This is certainly a more consistently biblical interpretation of headship than the suggestion that Christ originated from, or found His source in, the Father, in that there was never a time when the Son was not (cp. John 1:1). This interpretation is further supported by the apostle’s use of the term ‘head’ in the famous passage on marriage in Ephesians 5.

c) Head Covering

Third, is Paul speaking about the ‘covering’ of the head (e.g., by a hat or veil), or is he referring to a woman having her hair ‘bound up’ and ‘covered’ rather than ‘uncovered’ and ‘let down’? Probably it was the latter, ‘hair up’ or ‘hair down.’ Paul likely is referring to the arrangement of a woman’s hair, not the wearing of hats or veils.

What was the head covering? It was something to cover the head, not a veil to hide the face.

In Greco-Roman culture women typically had long hair and men short hair. A woman whose hair was cut very short was probably passing herself off as a man. It was a matter of shame for a woman to be of ‘mannish’ appearance by being shaved or shorn (verse 6). Thus the length of

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hair at that time denoted a person to be a man or a woman. Paul said that long hair dishonors a man, whereas a woman's long hair is her glory (verse 14-15). Part of Paul's concern in this passage, then, is to preserve among believers a visible distinction (consistent with that culture) between men and women. Here Paul is seeking to uphold the Creator's creation of the polarities of human sexuality (cp. Dt. 22:5).

3. Historical Context

Before we immerse ourselves in the details of this passage, we need to try to grasp something of what was going on in the church of Corinth. In the society of that day, men and women wore similar styles of clothing. The main difference in the dress was that the women wore a head covering. Almost all the women of Corinth wore this head covering. The only women who didn't were the mistresses and prostitutes.

In Corinth hair length was a mark of 'male-ness' or 'female-ness,' a distinction Paul did not wish to see blurred within the church community. Hair that was neatly up and covered was a sign of decorum and dignity for all women married and single, but in all probability, a particular cultural symbol of wifely domesticity. Among the women who wore their hair down were ecstatic, out-of-control priestesses speaking prophetic oracles at the temple of Apollo at Delphi (to the near northwest of Corinth).

It is evident from this passage that women in Corinth were now praying and prophesying in the church with heads 'uncovered,' with hair down (verses 5, 6, 13). In so doing they were presenting themselves as if unmarried and so were dishonoring their 'heads,' that is, their own husbands as well as other men (verses 3, 5). This was a dramatic departure from the 'tradition' Paul had handed over to the Corinthians and the practices that were followed during his time with them.

Evidently, the thing that was causing problems in the church was that some of the women were either not wearing the head covering to church, or they were removing it during the service. Those who argue the former speculate that there was something of a feminist movement going on in Corinth at the time and that the women of the church were leaving their head coverings at home in order to declare their liberation. Those who argue the latter suggest that the women were getting caught up and carried away by the excitement of worship and were throwing the head covering aside.

There is no need for us to make a choice between these alternatives. The result was the same in either case: Christian women were appearing in worship services as if they were immoral women! This, of course, caused the men to be distracted, and distraction of any kind is a mortal enemy to true worship.

Paul could have simply told the women of the church to wear their head coverings and washed his hands of the whole matter. Instead, he gives himself to a detailed explanation as to why the head covering was necessary. It is obvious from what he says that the head covering was, in that culture, vitally related to the headship of the man.

4. Modern Application

At its most superficial level the passage has been used often to exhort Christian women to wear a head covering in worship, or even in private prayer. But there is much more at stake here.

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The prostitutes and immoral women of our day are also characterized by a certain kind of dress. We may rest assured that if one of these women should put in an appearance at one of our services it would have a disrupting effect on our worship. This isn't to say we shouldn't allow such women to come to church. But the women who belong to our church and have her best interests at heart will surely try to spare us from the distraction of dressing like immoral women!

What Paul has to say about this problem, then, arose not from some dislike for women and a desire to keep them in their place, but rather from a deep concern to safeguard Christian worship from anything that would spoil or diminish it. Can we identify with the apostle at this point? Do we have a zeal for worship? Are we jealous about our worship services? Do we detest those things that disrupt worship and detract from it? Do we understand that true worship requires studied concentration from each of us?

B. The Headship Principle (1 Corinthians 11:2-3)

1. Apostolic Commendation (11:2)

²*Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.*

Paul begins on a note of praise, commending them because they had remembered what he had taught them when he first established the church at Corinth. This is demonstrated by the fact that they are continuing to hold on to the instructions (or traditions) that he delivered to them.

'Precepts' (*paradoseisi*, from *paradidōmi* – 'to hand over') were binding customs delivered to the infant church by Paul during his first visit to Corinth (Acts 18:11).

'Traditions' (*paradosis*) means 'that which is passed along by teaching' and is used in a negative way in the New Testament when it refers to man-made ideas or practices (as in Mt. 15:2-6; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8). But the term is also applied to divinely revealed teaching, as here and in 2 Th. 2:15.

The basic problem in the Corinthian church did not concern doctrine but morals, not theology but life-style. They were orthodox but not pure. They remembered and believed the cardinal truths about God's nature and work, but they did not live godly lives. And so Paul praises them for their strengths before he again begins to correct their weaknesses—in this case their misunderstanding of male-female roles and relationships.

2. Apostolic Instruction (11:3)

a) *The Apostle's Desire (11:3a)*

³*But I want you to understand that...*

It is on that basis, therefore, that Paul now wants them to deepen and increase their understanding, or as the opening phrase of verse 3 puts it – 'But I want you to understand.' There are implications of the gospel's teaching that they may not yet have grasped, and ignorance of them was resulting in malpractice in their congregation. This is what the apostle now sets out to correct. It all revolves around the issue of headship.

b) *The Apostle's Teaching (11:3b)*

...the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

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The principle of subordination and authority pervades the entire universe. Paul shows that woman's subordination to man is but a reflection of that greater general truth. If Christ had not submitted to the will of God, redemption for mankind would have been impossible, and we would forever be doomed and lost. If individual human beings do not submit to Christ as Savior and Lord, they are still doomed and lost, because they reject God's gracious provision. And if women do not submit to men, then the family and society as a whole are disrupted and destroyed. Whether on a divine or human scale, subordination and authority are indispensable elements in God's order and plan.

The key to understanding 11:3 is the recognition of a common denominator – subordination – within three primary relationships, each of which is manifested in the church. Firstly, there is the bond that a believer has with his Savior; secondly, the oneness that a man's wife has with her husband; thirdly, the union between Christ and God the Father. A believing man is one with Christ (cp. 6:17), yet is under His authority. Equally, a woman enjoys the same spiritual privileges as does a man and, if married, is one with her husband (see chapter 7). But she is under his authority as his dependent. Finally, Christ, although one with the Father, became His servant (cp. 15:24; Phil. 2:7). Because of this principle of obedience, manifest alike in creation and redemption, Corinthian women should take care how they appear in the congregation.

Clearly, there is a chain of relationships being explored, in which one person is related to another by the concept of headship: God to Christ, Christ to man, and man to woman. The critical assertion of these three statements is the center one, 'the head of a woman is the man.' From this will spring his following argument. Paul, however, must locate this assertion within a broader theological context. Thus he begins, 'the head of every man is Christ,' and he ends, 'the head of Christ is God.'

(1) Christ and Man

In the first statement, Paul carefully uses the word *anēr* (male), rather than *anthrōpos*, which means 'man' in the generic sense of humanity, 'man and woman.' Christ is uniquely the head of the church as its Savior and Lord (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15; Col. 1:18). But in His divine authority Christ is head of *every* human being, believer and nonbeliever (cp. Mt. 28:18; Phil. 2:10-11).

(2) Man and Woman

The issue of headship leads to lots of debate, both then and now. The problem is that we take man's headship over the woman to mean two things: women are inferior to men, and men are entitled to treat them as inferior. Nothing could be further from the truth. First, headship doesn't mean the woman is inferior to the man. Paul needed to use only one phrase to blow that idea out of the water. He says, 'The head of Christ is God.'

In context, Paul's middle statement is not simply about men and women, but about husbands and wives. Paul is thinking of a husband's headship in marriage. The headship of the husband is one of sacrificial, self-giving love for his much cherished wife, based on the example of Christ's saving sacrifice of His body, based on the example of Christ's saving sacrifice of His body, the Church (Eph. 5:25-32).

Some women obviously are even superior to some men in abilities, intellect, maturity, and spirituality. God established the principle of male authority and female subordination for the purpose of order and complementation, not on the basis of any innate superiority of males. A church may have some women who are better Bible students, better theologians, and better

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speakers than any of the men, including the pastor. But if those women are obedient to God's order they will submit to male leadership and will not try to usurp it—simply because it is God's design.

In light of this, we can conclude that the headship of the man doesn't mean that the woman is inferior to the man. The woman's submission is to be like Christ's: a voluntary subordination of an equal in order to ensure the smooth function of church and home.

If men and women are equal in value and worth, the man has no right to interpret his headship to mean he can run roughshod over women. Instead, he should see his headship as a role that God has given him and understand that he must answer to God for how he uses it. Paul says, 'The head of every man is Christ.'

(3) God and Christ

The New Testament teaches elsewhere that Christ is the 'head of all things' (Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10) – that is, of the created world and of all men and angels – and that he is the 'head of the church' (Eph. 4:15-16; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). In 11:3, the description of our Lord as 'the head of every man' refers to a third facet of Christ's authority.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is God Himself and is, therefore, equal to God in every respect (cp. John 14:9-10). Paul is not talking about headship in the sense of personal worth but in terms of function. In order to work out the plan of redemption, Jesus, who was equal to God in every respect, voluntarily submitted Himself to the Father (Phil. 2:5-8). The Son was and always will be equal in *being* with His Father. Yet He was and always will be under the headship of God His Father.

Jesus made nothing clearer than the fact that He submitted Himself to His Father's will (Jn. 4:34; 5:20; 6:38; cp. 1 Cor. 3:23; 15:24-28). Christ has never been-before, during, or after His incarnation—in any way inferior in essence to the Father. But in His incarnation He willingly subordinated Himself to the Father in His role as Savior and Redeemer.

Paul inseparably ties the three aspects of the principle together. As Christ is submissive to the Father and Christians are to be submissive to Christ, women are to be submissive to men. You cannot reject one part without rejecting the others. You cannot, for example, reject the principle of woman's submission to man without also rejecting Christ's submission to the Father and believers' submission to Christ. The authority and submission in each of these cases is based on love, not tyranny. This is not a matter of relative dignity or worth but of task and responsibility.

C. The Headship Example (1 Corinthians 11:4-6)

By his next words Paul takes us inside one of the meetings typical of churches established by him in Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. These assemblies were led by presbyters among whom were those who taught and catechized the congregations in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, but also in the oral 'traditions' like those Paul mentions in this chapter (cp. Gal. 6:6). Alongside the teaching offered by presbyters and formal liturgical elements (e.g., a benediction, a *eucharistia*, 'thanksgiving' or 'grace') the proceedings also allowed free and extempore ministry of 'prophesying' and 'praying' by those gifted to do so. Whereas presbyters (also called *episkopoi*, 'overseers') who taught were men (1 Tim. 2:11-3:7), there was also free

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exercise of other gifts open to both men and women. The people as a whole, both men and women, were now gifted by the Spirit and gifted in various and diverse ways (1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31; 13:1-4). ‘Prophesying’ was the Spirit-inspired application of the gospel, the oral ‘tradition’ and the Scriptures to the life of the gathered people.

In the most general sense, ‘praying’ is talking to God about people, including ourselves, and ‘prophesying’ is talking to people about God. One is vertical (man to God) and the other is horizontal (man to man), and they represent the two primary dimensions of believers’ ministry.

But this free exercise of praying and prophesying by (some of) the women of Corinth had now been expressed in ways that subverted the order of man-woman relationships established by God for the present age. He does not forbid women ‘praying and prophesying,’ but he reminds the men and women concerned of the theological guidelines within which such ministries are to be exercised. Paul is ever the teacher of godly principles rather than the legislator. Having laid down those principles, he does not instruct them (or us) what to think, but *how* to think.

1. The Principle Applied to Men (11:4)

⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head...

With the principle of headship established, Paul, in verse 4, begins to comment upon the aberrant practices that existed in the congregation at Corinth. He starts with a general application. There is a distinction between the sexes that should be exemplified in public worship. A man should not pray or prophesy (i.e., vocalize in worship) ‘with his head covered,’ or literally ‘with the head down’ or ‘having down from head,’ which could refer to a veil. Here the apostle is possibly making use of wordplay. Such behavior ‘dishonors his head,’ that is, in terms of verse 3, dishonors Christ, the head of every man, rather than dishonoring the individual’s physical head.

The significance of covering the head is that it displays subordination. If this is overlooked, Paul’s teaching is illogical. But if it is borne in mind, all that he writes makes sense. If a man ‘covers his head’ in worship, he signifies his subordination to someone other than Christ. Because as a man he is subservient to no created being, the action is a contradiction in terms; he ‘disgraces his head,’ who is Christ.

For men the governing principle is: ‘the head of every man is Christ.’ Paul points to two levels of meaning when a man has his head covered. Such a man dishonors his own head, but more to the point he dishonors his ‘head,’ Christ.

The context here implies that in Corinth such a head covering would have been completely ridiculous for a man and completely proper for a woman. It seems that Paul is not stating a divine universal requirement but simply acknowledging a local custom. The local Christian custom, however, reflected the divine principle. In Corinthian society a man’s praying or prophesying without a head covering was a sign of his authority over women, who were expected to have their heads covered in these ministries. Consequently, for a man to cover his head would be a disgrace, because it suggested a reversal of the proper relationships.

2. The Principle Applied to Women (11:5-6)

⁵...but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.

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a) *Women*

Verse 5 states the opposite with regard to ‘every wife.’ For a woman to pray or prophesy ‘with her head uncovered dishonors her head,’ that is her husband. This is because she has taken the place of a man, a stance contrary to the plan of creation. The theological justification for this has to wait until verse 7, but at this point Paul is concerned to affirm the normal, common practice and to alert his readers to the contentious nature of any deviations from it.

The closely related principle is: ‘the head of a woman is the man.’ In Greco-Roman culture the men were ordinarily short haired and presumably uncovered and the women long-haired but with tresses arranged up and in some way covered. By praying and prophesying with hair down and uncovered the women appear to have been the ones who were departing from the apostolic tradition. Of course, the length and arrangement of hair in itself was and is of no theological importance. But such hair arrangement can make a statement about a woman’s relationship with her husband. A woman could be saying, ‘I am praying and prophesying in my own right, as if I am now unmarried, no longer subject to my husband as head.’ In short, she could be saying that with the Spirit, who enabled her to pray and prophesy, has come the new age in all its fullness when there will be no marriages and therefore no submission. Perhaps the Corinthians were influenced by Jesus’ words that in the age of the Kingdom people would be unmarried, like the angels (cp. Mark 12:25). But Paul is saying that such thinking is *over-realized* eschatology. The present age continues and with it God’s ordering of husband-wife relationships.

b) *Dishonor*

He develops the concept of dishonor, or shame and disgrace, at the end of verse 5. ‘It is the same as if her head were shaven.’ The Talmud indicates that a Jew considered a woman with a shaved head extremely ugly, and Chrysostom records that women guilty of adultery had their hair shaved off and were marked as prostitutes. To have one’s head shaved was clearly a shameful thing for a woman to have to suffer, as verse 6 makes clear, but the uncovered head is equivalent to the cropped or shaven head, and equally disgraceful. The sole implication is that the woman who shortens her hair makes herself out to be a man, an act of exposure that cannot be right.

The background to the notion of ‘shame’ may be Genesis 2:25 where the husband and wife were naked but ‘felt no shame.’ Paul uses exactly the Greek word (*aischros*) found in Genesis 2:25, which however is exceedingly rare in the Septuagint. In the marriage bond there is no sense of shame in one aspect of life, nakedness. So let a woman feel no ‘shame’ at her husband by denying in the public meeting the cultural symbol of her submission in marriage to him, her hair arranged up and covered. We must note again that Paul does not resolve this pastoral problem by forbidding the ministry of women in praying and prophesying.

c) *Summary*

The cultural significance of a woman’s covering represents the submission of a godly woman to the male leadership of the congregation, or of a godly wife to the headship of her husband. Its absence should well be interpreted as a rebellion against that situation, in contrast to the mistaken view that was probably present at Corinth, namely, that it was a further privilege of the believer’s gospel freedom. Perhaps Paul is asking, not for a veil or hat, but for the long hair to be worn up, on the head, as a sign of living under her husband’s authority, as was the custom in that culture for all respectable women. The apostle provokes the ladies to appear as dignified sisters in the Lord.

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Women may pray and prophesy within the boundaries of God’s revelation, and with a proper sense of submission. And it is critical that their deportment in so doing reflects God’s order. Certainly they must not appear rebellious against God’s will. Paul’s point in verses 4-5 is that, whenever and wherever it is appropriate for men and women to pray or prophesy, they should do so with proper distinction between male and female. Every man should speak to or for the Lord clearly as a man, and every woman should speak to or for the Lord clearly as a woman. God does not want the distinction to be blurred.

This opening section affirms a role for women in the congregation, both in prayer and prophesying, which is neither restricted nor forbidden. The very fact that it was happening at all is a mark of the new found freedom these women now enjoyed in Christ. But these legitimate activities must not obscure the differentiation of the roles of men and women that God has built into His creation order.

D. The Headship Theology (1 Corinthians 11:7-12)

Having made the practical application plain, the apostle now supports and bolsters his argument theologically. In order to do this, he argues, not primarily from the cultural norms of the first-century Greco-Roman world, but from creation itself. Covering the head appears to have been a customary symbol of subordination in Corinthian society, as in much of the ancient world. But the principle of male headship is not a matter of custom but a matter of God’s order and creation and should never be compromised. Underlying verses 7-10 is the marriage of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:20b-24.

1. Image & Glory (11:7)

⁷For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.

God formed the man Adam from the dust and breathed life into his nostrils (Gen. 2:7) as one who bore the ‘image’ of God (Gen. 1:26). The second term ‘glory’ is governed more by the language of Genesis 2, where we learn that man was created first and reflected God’s glory in his role as the vice-regent of creation; he was God’s representative and ‘head’ of the created order. Paul is apparently reflecting on the ‘brightness’ of the man’s role tending God’s garden in Eden and his naming of the animals that God brings to him (Gen. 2:8-20a). For Paul, however, it is ‘glory’ not ‘image’ that is the focus of his attention.

The principle that covering the head indicates reverent submission becomes explicit. Since the term ‘glory’ does not appear in Genesis, it is likely that Paul introduces the word to expand on ‘image’: the first man, as a created yet godlike being, reflected the splendor of his Maker. Whether married or single, the believing man is invested with dominion to the exclusion of the believing woman. Like Adam, he is glorious, remaining the ‘image’ of God in a way that no woman can (Gen. 1:27a; 5:1; 9:6): he does not bow to any other created being, his helpmeet not excluded. It is for this reason that he must display no sign of submission, appearing before the Lord as the man whom God has made.

A man is the glory of God and a woman is the glory of a man. How is a woman the ‘glory’ of a man? It is because, as the Genesis passage teaches, the woman whom God brings to man in marriage brings him so much joy. His days of loneliness are past. What the animals could never be for him, this beautiful fellow human of opposite sex is, his glory. Adam’s love song (Gen.

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2:23) when confronted by God's gracious gift to him is but the first of millions of love songs in all cultures inspired by the beauty of a man and a woman in one another's eyes.

Woman was made to manifest man's authority and will as man was made to manifest God's authority and will. The woman is vice-regent, who rules in the stead of man or who carries out man's will, just as man is God's vice-regent who rules in His stead or carries out His will. The woman shines not so much with the direct light of God as with the derived light from man. Man is both the image and glory of God, while woman is only the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and not the image of man, and the glory of man, not the glory of God.

Paul ponders Genesis 2:20-25 when he says that the woman is the glory of man. A woman, whether married or single, must display submission: with a covered head she appears before her God as a glorious daughter of glorious Eve.

2. Order & Purpose (11:8-9)

⁸For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

While the woman shares that role equally and fully as a human being, nevertheless in her relationship to man there was a differentiation, which was indicated by the two facts of her being created from the man and being created for the man as a helper suitable for him. This explanation is made clear in verses 8 and 9, where the sequence of woman's creation (verse 8) and the purpose of her creation (verse 9) are spelt out. As the man 'glorifies' God by fulfilling the headship role assigned to him by the Creator, so the woman 'glorifies' man by recognizing him as her head.

She is not intellectually, morally, spiritually, or functionally inferior to man. She is unique from him. Her role is to come under the leadership, protection, and care of man, and she is to be 'a helper suitable for him' (Gen. 2:20).

Man's headship was not based on man's fall into sin but on God's creative act. Man is given the role of headship because God designed it to be so. Paul points out that man was made first, then the woman was made from the man and for the man. God put this order in creation because it pleased Him to do so.

3. Authority & Angels (11:10)

¹⁰That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

The sign of a husband's authority was that his wife's hair was up and covered. 'Symbol of authority' is one word (*exousia*) in the Greek and means 'rightful power' or 'authority.' The covered head was the woman's authority or right to pray and worship, since it demonstrated her submissiveness.

Many commentators have suggested that the 'authority' a woman ought to have on her head is to indicate her own submission, to her husband or to the male leadership of the church. This might be her long hair put up, or a covering. But the words 'a symbol of' have been imported by the translators into the text, and the Greek word *exousia* ('authority') is usually active in meaning – having, or exercising, authority. On the basis of this more normal, active sense, recent commentators see the 'covering' as symbolic of her own authority, or freedom, to be a woman rightly fulfilling her God-given role in the congregation, in prayer or prophesying. In doing this

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she submits to male headship, as the man submits to Christ's headship. Thus, she 'glorifies' man just as the man 'glorifies' God, in that both fulfill their proper functions under Christ, the Head, within the church, which is His body.

The basic meaning of 'angel' is 'messenger.' The angels are God's messengers and ministers who represent God and who are present when the people gather in worship. These angels would clearly be offended by, and opposed to, any challenge to the created order, as determined by God, or any deviations from its principles. It is proper for a woman to cover her head as a sign of subordination 'because of the angels,' in order that these most submissive of all creatures will not be offended by non-submissiveness. Furthermore, the angels were present at creation (Job 38:7) to be witnesses of God's unique design for man and woman, and would be offended at any violation of that order. They need to see that the woman who prays or prophesies does so under the authority of her husband, that is, by the appearance of her head. In that culture, the license for her ministry for the Spirit-gifted woman was her hair arrangement. In subsequent situations such as ours the 'sign' of that authority will probably be different, perhaps the wearing of the marriage ring. Whatever the case women should continue to look like women!

The angels want to see Christian women enjoying both the freedom and the dignity that the gospel has brought them. But this will only come about by such women fulfilling their God-given role and not usurping that of the men. It is arguably the most tragic legacy of the Fall that since Eve took the initiative in assuming her husband's role, as leader of the partnership, and Adam apparently only too willingly acceded, mankind has connived at the same skewing of the roles in the long history of humanity's rebellion against God's norms.

4. Interdependence & Submission (11:11-12)

¹¹Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹²for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

What is Paul so keen to guard against here? 'In the Lord' (that is, in the church, the body of Christ), 'woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman.' Independence is out; interdependence is in. The argument again looks back to creation itself for its theological justification. The Creator's design was that man and woman would be mutually dependent. The force of Paul's line of argument is that this created order, ordained by God, provides the natural way in which men and women are to live in relationship to one another and that none of the freedoms of redemption negate the priorities of creation.

'Independent' conveys a poor impression of Paul's word (*chōris*), though it is not easy to improve on it. By it Paul means that in Christian marriage a man and a woman are closely knit together. If they are 'one flesh' in human terms how much more truly united are they 'in the Lord' in spiritual terms. She is his glory and she bears his authority, yet they are inseparably one.

Paul reminds them of their equality and mutual dependence. Man's authority over woman is a delegated authority and a derived authority, given by God to be used for His purposes and in His way. Man, as a fellow creature, has no innate superiority to woman and has no right to use his authority tyrannically or selfishly. Male chauvinism is no more biblical than feminism. Both are perversions of God's plan.

Men and women have different roles but not different importance. Women are equal to men in the world, in the church, and before God. That is God's wise and gracious harmony and

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balance—difference in roles but equality in nature, personhood, work, and spirit. He created both for His glorious purposes. Women are not to be teachers of men, but they are usually the most influential shapers of men.

Subordination is not inferiority. Born-again men and women are equally the children of God enjoying exactly the same benefits, although not exercising the same functions in the church.

E. The Headship Application (1 Corinthians 11:13-16)

1. Corinthian Self-Judgment (11:13-15)

¹³*Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered?* ¹⁴*Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him,* ¹⁵*but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.*

Paul now appeals to the Corinthians' instinctive sense of propriety. Although this is a secondary argument, that from Genesis being primary, the apostle is aware of a continuum between revelation in Scripture and man's awareness of what is fitting (cp. Rom. 2:14-15). He has already challenged the Corinthians in a similar manner (cp. 10:15); again, an appeal is made to them to exercise common sense, but this time with regard to feminine deportment in church.

The principle of authority and subordination is not only given by God in His divine revelation but is self-evident from His creation itself. The cultural practice of a woman's covering her head as a symbol of subordination is a reflection of the natural order. The Greek word (*komē*) for 'long hair' can mean both long hair and a neat hairdo.

Paul reminds them again, implicitly, that the uncovered woman's head represents an unwillingness to accept her different female role from that of her husband, or from the church's male leadership. In appearing like a man she seems to be moving towards the usurpation of his role in worship, and probably in many other areas as well. Similarly, for a man to appear as a woman, with long hair, is against the very nature of things. Thus, in most cultures, gender differences are established and indicated by differentiation in clothing and in appearance, especially in the hair. Refusal to accept these norms is usually an indication of difficulty in accepting gender differences, or one's own gender definition.

2. Ecclesiastical Practice (11:16)

¹⁶*If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.*

There is no room for negotiation or for compromise on these creation-redemption principles. While the cultural symbols may change, the principles do not. The Corinthians must not seek to innovate.

In summing up his argument, we note that Paul has established that women are to be submissive to men because of the relationship to the Godhead (v. 3), the divine design of male and female (v. 7), the order of creation (v. 8), the role of women (v. 9), the interest of angels (v.10), and the characteristics of natural physiology (vv. 13-15). That is why he declares that neither God, represented by His apostles, nor the faithful congregations of His church will recognize any other principle or follow any other pattern of behavior. The argument is utterly convincing. 'If you want to find a sympathetic ear to your dissent,' he says, 'you won't find it among the apostles or in the churches.'

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3. Modern Interpretation

Paul is reasoning from Genesis, rather than from the social milieu in which he moved. His perception is that the historic order of creation, rather than Greek and Corinthian custom, defines the interrelation and attire of men and women in the churches.

What about head covering then? If women are voluntarily to subordinate themselves to men, does this mean they are to still wear head coverings? No! Why not? Because the head covering doesn't mean in our culture what it did then. The absence of it then identified a woman as immoral and disrupted the church. The absence of a head covering doesn't do either of these things today. In other words, we have to distinguish between what is culturally dated and what is eternally valid. The head covering was culturally dated, but the principle of man's headship is eternally valid.

In modern cultures where the wearing of a hat or veil does not symbolize subordination, that practice should not be required of Christians. But women's hair and women's dress is to be distinctly feminine and demonstrate her womanly loveliness and submissiveness. There should be no confusion about male and female identities, because God has made the sexes distinct—physiologically and in roles and relationships. He wants men to be masculine, to be responsibly and lovingly authoritative. He wants women to be feminine, to be responsibly and lovingly submissive.

As with meat that had been offered to idols, there was nothing in the wearing or not wearing of the head covering itself that was right or wrong. It is the rebellion against God-ordained roles that is wrong, and in Corinth that rebellion was demonstrated by women praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered. Dress is largely cultural and, unless what a person wears is immodest or sexually suggestive, it has no moral or spiritual significance. Throughout biblical times, as in many parts of the world today, both men and women wore some type of robe. But there always were some clear distinctions of dress between men and women, most often indicated by hair length and head coverings. It is the principle of women's subordination to men, not the particular mark or symbol of subordination, that Paul is teaching in this passage. The apostle is not laying down a universal principle that Christian women should always worship with their heads covered.

This passage gives all Christians plenty to think about. Do we give the public worship services of the church the priority Paul gave them? Do we take care not to identify ourselves as immoral people? Are we willing to submit to the authority of Scripture? Or do we resist and resent when its teachings rub us the wrong way? Let's make it our chief concern to honor and glorify God.

What do we learn from this passage? First, in whatever culture we find ourselves it is important that distinguishing marks for men and women are expressed. Paul clearly cherished sexual differences as God-given and to be appreciated with thankfulness. Second, Paul is concerned that wives acknowledge their husbands as 'head.' Third, there is no basis in this passage or in any other for the idea that women as a gender were under the headship of men as a gender or that women in general were to be subject to men in general inside the church. The 'headship' and subordination passages all relate to husbands and wives. Fourth, it is clear that women as well as men exercised the gifts of Spirit-inspired praying and prophesying within the community of faith, provided they did so under the headship of their husbands. That freedom, however, did not extend to assuming the role of presbyter-teacher within the congregation, which was restricted to men (1 Tim. 2:11-3:7).

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The limiting of women's leadership within the congregation was not based on any implication about male superiority or female inferiority but on the distinctive role of the husband in marriage and family life (Eph. 5:22-33). At the same time, we have in this passage where women pray and prophesy a basis for the voice of women to be heard in the church.

For next time: Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.