

MEN AND WOMEN IN WORSHIP
1 Corinthians 11:2-16
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Having shared his thoughts concerning the abuse of Christian liberty in chapters 8-10, Paul next addresses some concerns he had in the area of public worship at Corinth in chapters 11-14. We see this emphasis on worship addressed in the roles of men and women in worship (11:2-16), the purpose of the Lord's Supper in worship (11:17-34), and the use of spiritual gifts in worship (chapters 12-14).

I think we would all agree that we live in a church culture that is confused about worship. Worship in the church today is defined by the term "worship wars." There is a battle today in many churches over style of music. The consequence of this battle is that the Christian's entire mindset toward worship is often tainted. A congregation is thus branded contemporary, traditional, or blended (combination of traditional and contemporary). However, worship, when defined by music style alone, falls short of the purpose for which God created man. The danger is that worship is often defined by style or form alone, not content.

But even when content is addressed, I believe there is a greater danger that underlies these "worship wars," a battle that is relatively silent and often unnoticed. Greater in danger in this war than the style of music is the style of preaching. Preceding the battle over music style was a subtle but purposeful move from a God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-filled, faithful-to-Scripture exposition of God's Word in preaching to the real needs of sinful man to a more man-centered, Christ-belittling, Spirit-vacuous, culturally-driven motivational sermonette to the perceived needs of man who is treated as if he were merely sick. I believe that this biblical infidelity led to what we call the "worship wars" at present. Once truth is watered-down or altogether forsaken, then anything dubbed as truth by anyone can replace it. So it should come as no surprise to us that we do live in what David Wells has called "the wasteland."

Paul too was concerned about "the wasteland." That is why he wrote the letters to the churches that he planted and to the young men who would serve as leaders in those churches long after he was gone. His concern was that the church of the Lord Jesus Christ glorified Christ and Christ alone in all things. At the very core of glorifying God and Christ is how we exhibit that in our worship. Paul begins this section on worship by addressing a specific cultural concern in the church at Corinth, the practice of head covering of women in worship. However, we must remember that *while the practice that Paul addresses is cultural, the principle he teaches is eternal.*

I. The Principle of Headship (11:3)

Paul understood that the topics he would address in the next few pages of this letter would perhaps be a bit unpopular with some at Corinth. He would be touching on some hot points in the congregation. So Paul first commends them where they could be commended. In v. 2, he praises them for remembering him in everything and holding steadfastly to the traditions that they had received from him. Despite their immaturity in some things, whether it was in wisdom or disputes or in exercising Christian liberties, Paul commends them for respecting his apostolic authority and for seeking to live according to his doctrine at least in some areas. This is in stark contrast to v. 17, "**But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you.**" What follows there is a

strong rebuke on their mockery of the Lord's Table. Here, however, he is more complimentary in what he is about to address.

In v. 3 Paul introduces the subject of the relationship of men and women in the church, a subject that he has not addressed to this point. **“But”** denotes not a contrast to his praise in v. 2, but a transition from his praise to his discussion on these relationships. As we have already noted, Paul knew that this could be a point of contention not only in the church at Corinth, but with the body of Christ until the day of Christ's return. So before directly dealing with the practice of headship, he carefully lays out the principle of headship.

“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” Paul is concerned that they understand this principle of headship. Paul gives three specific relationships to set forth this principle: 1) Christ and man, 2) man and woman, and 3) God and Christ. Each of these relationships has one thing in common, expressed by Paul as **“the head,”** a term designating headship. For us to properly understand the dynamic of these relationships, it is important to know what the term **“head”** means. Some are of the view that **“head”** means “source,” much like the “head” of a river is its originating point. In this view, Christ is the source or originator of man, man is the source of woman, and God is the source of Christ. While one could press this scripturally, that does not seem to be the correct interpretation here. In every occasion that Paul uses the word **“head”** figuratively, it always means “authority” (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 2:19). So the correct rendering here is that Christ is the authority of every man, man is the authority of a woman, and God is the authority of Christ.

However, at this point one could interject the question, and rightly so, as to how God has authority over Christ. In what sense is God **“the head of Christ?”** Some may look at this and say that if **“head”** means **“authority”** then Christ is somehow inferior to God and therefore, in this analogy, woman is somehow inferior to man. Conversely in these relationships, God is superior to Christ and man is superior to woman. However, this is where our understanding of the “economy” or the “function” within the Godhead is important. We introduced this in our study on Sunday nights in the work or the function of each person of the Trinity in salvation. In our doxology that we will close with this morning, we sing of God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons, yet one God. It has been said that a better word to describe the Godhead is “tri-unity.” Without going into too much detail again here, there is a distinction in function or role in the Godhead, what we can call a subordination, and yet a unity, a oneness, in essence or being.

It is important that we see this distinction in function and being, in role and essence. There are some, notably feminists, who take Paul's words here and use them for their feminist agenda. Because they do not understand the relational aspects within the Godhead, they further misunderstand the biblical relationship of man and woman. Tom Schreiner addressed this well:

The relationship between Christ and the Father shows us that this reasoning is flawed. One can possess a different function and still be equal in essence and worth. Women are equal to men in essence and being; there is no ontological distinction (in essence or being), and yet they have a different function or role in the church and home. Such differences do not logically imply inequality or inferiority, just as Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply His inferiority. [*Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 128]

Calvin, commenting on Tertullian's work on the Trinity, wrote, "there is a kind of distribution or economy in God which has no effect on the unity of being or essence" (*Institutes*, 12.8). Louis Berkhof spoke directly to this issue as well, "There can be no subordination as to essential being of the one person of the Godhead to the other, and therefore no difference in personal dignity... The only subordination of which we can speak, is a subordination in respect to order and relationship" (*Systematic Theology*, 88).

So we see the importance of understanding this dynamic in the relationship in the Godhead as it relates to this passage and the relationship between man and woman. This is not a statement of inequality as it relates to the worth or dignity of a person. It is not teaching the inferiority of woman or the superiority of man. It is teaching that in the order that God Himself established, there is in function or role an authority in these relationships. There is equality in being, and therefore equality in worth and dignity, but a distinction in the roles each plays within the relationship.

Why have I labored so long to show this? Because it is pertinent for our understanding the rest of this text. Having seen this principle of headship, this principle of authority within a relationship, we turn now to the application of this principle.

II. The Application of Headship (11:4-12)

It is here that the cultural aspect of Paul's teaching comes into play. Having established headship, Paul looks at the cultural way that this headship was demonstrated in Corinthian culture in the practice of head coverings.

1. Practice of men (v. 4)

Paul writes, "Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head." The head covering, in this instance probably a shawl placed over one's head, was a sign of a person being under the authority of another human being. But this was not the case with men in public worship. In God's created order, those present with men in worship were either his equals or his inferiors. Therefore, to wear a head covering, to bear the sign of being under the authority of another man, would be to disgrace or dishonor his own "head."

Notice the play on the word "head" in this verse. On the one hand, we know that the first use refers to his physical "head" on which he would wear this covering. However, the second use is debated. Some would say that it also refers to the physical "head" and that the idea is one of disgracing one's self. Others say the second instance refers to the man's spiritual "head" and that the dishonor in this case refers back to v. 3. Hence, the dishonor is brought upon Christ, man's head. The man who covers his physical "head" in public worship disgraces his spiritual "head," Jesus Christ. I believe both of these views could be taken together. In Proverbs, Solomon wrote that a child who rebels against a parent brings dishonor both on the child and on his parents (Prov. 10:1; 17:25). That could also be the case here. A man who wore a head covering in worship would bring dishonor both to himself and, in doing so, to Christ as well. Paul's concern then is that man submit to Christ's authority alone.

In v. 7, Paul offers a second reason that man is not to cover his head in public worship, "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God." Here Paul reflects back to the creation of man that we have looked at in Sunday School over the past few weeks. Paul affirms that man is created in the image of God. That image was severely marred when Adam sinned, but the image was not totally destroyed or annihilated. All humanity

still carries that image of God even though it is severely tainted by sin. We still have what others have described as a “God-shaped vacuum” that longs for worship. The problem, as John Calvin pointed out, is that the result of sin is that our hearts are nothing more than “idol factories.” Therefore, a person is unable to worship God as He desires to be worshiped unless God by His grace intervenes in their life, changes their heart, and saves them. Then, and only then, can this image begin to be restored and hunger and thirst for God in worship.

But of interest here is that Paul not only says that man is the “**image**” of God, but also the “**glory**” of God. Again, the reference is back to the creation ordinance. Adam was given the express dominion and authority over God’s creation before Eve’s coming onto the scene. The picture is that man alone was given this place of authority over God’s creation and that glory was reserved for him alone as a reflection of the glory of God. The very essence of man’s worship is to reflect this “**glory of God.**” As Leon Morris points out, “When people worship God, this high dignity must be recognized; *the glory of God* is not to be obscured in the presence of God (by covering the head of its bearer)” (*1 Corinthians*, 151). So Paul’s exhortation to man in public worship is that he is not to cover his head because it would disgrace both himself and Christ, as well as cover the glory of God, which is the very essence of his worship.

2. Practice of women (vv. 5-6)

Paul then turns to women, and the situation, as you might have guessed, is different. Where the man disgraces himself and Christ by covering his head in public worship, the woman does so by *not* covering her head. However, the figurative head is different. Man dishonors Christ, his head, whereas the woman who participates in public worship with her head uncovered dishonors man, who is her head. The message she was sending in the Corinthian culture was that she was not under the authority of man. In this instance, it was an act of rebellion.

Paul then gives a cultural example to illustrate how serious an issue this was. Paul says, “**for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.**” The woman who had her head shaved was one who was known to be either a prostitute or an adulterer. Her head was shaved as a sign to others that she was a temptress and as a mark of shame to her, much like the scarlet letter “A” that young Hester Prynne had to wear as a public pronouncement of her adultery and to her shame in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. Paul says that the woman who would participate in public worship with her head uncovered is to be looked at in the same way, deserving of the same shame associated with the temptress, “**For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off.**” She was a disgrace both to herself and to man, God’s established authority over her. Paul concludes, “**but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.**”

As was the case with man, in v. 7 Paul gives a further reason that a woman’s head should remain covered, because she is “**the glory of man.**” Where man is the image and glory of God, woman is described as “**the glory of man.**” Paul does not mean that woman is not the image of God. The Scripture is pretty plain about that, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27). But while man is both the image and glory of God, woman is only the image of God, not the glory of God. Paul says that woman is “**the glory of man.**” John MacArthur speaks of this glory of man:

Woman is the glory of man. Woman was made to manifest man’s authority and will as man was made to manifest God’s authority and will. The woman is viceregent, who rules in the stead of man or who carries out man’s will, just as man is God’s viceregent

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 of man. [*I Corinthians*, 258]

According to MacArthur, a distinction is made here between the direct glory of God that man has and that was to remain uncovered in worship, and the derived glory that woman has from man that should be covered in worship.

Here is the point I think Paul is trying to drive home. **“The glory of man”** is not a negative statement at all. He illustrates what this glory is in verses 8-9, **“For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.”** Paul again refers back to the Garden of Eden as support for his principle of headship. **“Glory of man”** simply means that woman stands in a relation to the man that no one or nothing else does. She complements him in every way as designed by God. Further, Paul stresses her equality in verses 11-12. Man is not to exaggerate the fact that he was created first. Man and woman need each other and cannot survive without one another. And ultimately, Paul says, **“all things originate from God.”** Nevertheless, woman's relationship to man is not the same as man's relationship to God. She is **“the glory of man”** which is precisely why her head should be covered in public worship. In worship, God alone must be glorified and man's glory must be covered.

Further, this act of submission to man's authority as her head should be done **“because of the angels.”** I must confess that this little phrase caused me more consternation in preparing this sermon than the woman's head covering. But when we look at this in context, it becomes a bit clearer. You remember that man is in his present state lower than the angels. There are those angels that are good angels in Scripture who submitted to the authority of God and His plan for creation, unlike Satan and the demons. These angels long to see the redemption and salvation of man accomplished. They are “all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14). Further, these angels were present when man and woman were created:

Job 38:4-7 – Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, ⁵ Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Therefore, as one writer put it, “The angels observe, and the woman must not be unseemly before them.” The thought is that just as these angels seek to honor and glorify God as they were created by Him and for Him, not seeking to usurp His authority as the fallen angels did, so must women seek to honor and glorify God as they were created by Him and for Him. And she does so by submitting to the God-given authority of man over her, and in Paul's day, she represented this by covering her head. So again, Paul's teaching here is that man in his worship was not to cover the glory of God in public worship, and woman in her worship was to cover the glory of man.

What about Paul's apparent acceptance of the woman praying and prophesying in public worship in v. 5, particularly in light of his writing in 14:34, “The women are to keep silent in the churches”? Good question. Does Paul contradict himself? If you will allow me some ministerial license here, for the sake of time I would prefer to deal with this issue when we come to it in chapter 14. However, for clarification here, Paul does not contradict himself. Just because something was happening at Corinth, in this instance a woman prophesying in public worship, does not mean that Paul condoned it. That is what he addresses in chapter 14. Further,

notice in v. 13 of our text that Paul's question, "**Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?**" drops "prophesying." If he condoned prophesying, wouldn't he have mentioned it here?

III. The Propriety of Headship (1:13-16)

In v. 13 Paul tells the Corinthians, "**Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?**" He appeals to two things to clarify his teaching that the woman ought to have her head covered in this instance.

1. Common sense (vv. 14-15)

"Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering." There is debate as to what Paul meant by his use of the word "**nature.**" Some believe that here Paul again refers to the creation ordinance thus teaches that the created order demonstrated that men should have short hair and women should have long hair. However, this seems to be a stretch, especially if we look at how the Old Testament often refers to long hair on men in a positive light (Nazirites-Num. 6:5, 18; Absalom – 2 Sam. 14:25-26). The instructions in these instances were for the benefit of the man, not to his shame or disgrace.

Another view is that "**nature,**" taken in context with "**itself**" or the alternate translation "**of things**" refers to one of two things. First, "**nature itself**" refers to that which is commonly accepted in a culture, that which the culture defines as being natural. For instance, in Paul's day, a man with long hair was looked at as being effeminate, and a woman with short hair as being masculine. In good old Southern lingo, we might say, "It ain't right!" An alternate view is that the Greek philosophers of Paul's time, who would not have been Christians, often wore their hair long and covered it with a toga. These would contend that Paul is saying that the Christian man in this culture should opt to keep his hair short and his head uncovered as to not be identified with the Greek philosopher and consequently bring dishonor to himself. However, while this view might be true of men, it does not address women and the length of her hair.

Given these options, I opt for what I call the common sense cultural option, the view that it was culturally unacceptable for a man to have long hair and a woman to have short hair. Hair length, like the head covering, was a statement of culture, it was descriptive of the Corinthian culture but not prescriptive for the entire church age that followed. So in this culture, length of hair, like the head covering itself, was a distinguishing mark of male and female and to go against the cultural understanding in this way was to bring dishonor to one's self and by implication, their head as well. Paul says that they should use common sense in this area.

2. Customs of churches (v. 16)

Paul closes with a second appeal to clarify his position, again, a cultural appeal from his day. "**If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.**" Paul says that if there be anyone else that would still want to be contentious in this matter, then they need to recognize that he, along with the other apostles ("**we**"), did not cover their heads in worship, nor did any of the apostolic churches have men that covered their heads or women who did not. Paul knew that contentious sorts could drag out an argument indefinitely. In the face of such opposition, Paul points to the practice of other churches and the other apostles to settle the issue. While these might continue to disagree with him, they had

neither biblical warrant nor practical warrant to do so. The customs of culture and the churches dictated that men and women respond in public worship in a way that glorified God and would not bring confusion to the occasion. Case closed.

Conclusion

While the practice that Paul addresses is cultural, the principle he teaches is eternal.

1) Unbeliever – Christ is the Head of *every* man

Matt. 28:18 – “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Hebrews 2:7-8 – you have crowned him with glory and honor, ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet... At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

Philippians 2:9-11 – Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2) Men – Men have a distinct role as ordained by God to lead in worship. Man has been granted authority over woman at creation. This is not to be abused in somehow lording it over woman, but is to be exercised within the bounds of the glory of God. And again, this is a creation ordinance. Man’s headship is not a result of the Fall. Paul is careful to base this headship in creation before the Fall. The result of the Fall on this authority is that man often abuses this headship. But Paul reminds all men that their supreme purpose in glorifying God is to lead others in glorifying God. They are to reflect the glory of God in their lives.

3) Women – Women too have a distinct role as created by God. You glorify God in submitting to man’s authority just as Christ fulfilled His role as the Son joyfully submitting to the will and authority of the Father.

4) What practices in our culture can serve to send the wrong message in our worship?