

“Head Covering or Heart Correction?”

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

I begin this message with a quote from Craig Blomberg, a highly respected NT scholar who says of this passage,

This passage is probably the most complex, controversial, and opaque of any text of comparable length in the New Testament. A survey of the history of interpretation reveals how many different exegetical options there are for a myriad of questions and should inspire a fair measure of tentativeness on the part of the interpreter.

So with great tentativeness (and an updated resume just in case!) let’s enter the landmine of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. So far in the letter, Paul has been confronting issues that the church had been divided over, mostly issues of preference not theology. That was from Ch. 1-6. Since Ch. 7 Paul has been answering questions they sent to Paul in a letter we do not have, concerning marriage and remarriage, eating meat sacrificed to idols or not, and about spiritual gifts in Ch. 12-14. Paul unites all these questions with the underlying theme, how will believers who don’t agree be willing to love their brother or sister in a way that builds them up and not tear each other down because they disagree?

As these believers grew in Christ and realized learning about being free in Christ they began to exercise their freedoms. Unfortunately for some, they exercised them to the point where it hurt other believers who did not feel the same way yet (or perhaps never did). In 1 Cor. 6:12 Paul made this statement as kind of a barometer to use:

¹ Cor. 6:12 “Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

That word for beneficial or helpful means that builds up the whole; productive. So yes, enjoy you freedoms but do it in a way that builds the body up and brings people together.

In trying to exercise their freedom in Christ, some women abandoned their head coverings in worship because they were now free in Christ. We don’t know the history behind head coverings or veils for women in religious settings. Many cultures had this and still have this today. When we come to this passage we often focus on should women wear head coverings today? That question could imply a legalistic approach to the passage; that somehow God is only pleased with me if I do this or God is displeased with me if I don’t. That is a works mentality approach to the Christian life. We are to live by grace.

This main issue is really not head coverings. The big issues

Is God Being Glorified in Our Worship? **(11:2-16)**

God’s glory is always the main point and so it is no different here. Again we just read 3 verses before this,

³¹ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

How do we know this was the issue here? 10:31 was his summary of how to figure out whether or not to eat meat sacrificed to idols. And now he moves on to a different topic to apply it to. Plus he tells us in a few places here. First of all, the context is in worship. He specifically addresses the head-covering issue when they are gathered praying or prophesying.

⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

This becomes more evident when we get to Ch. 14. For Paul, God is being dishonoured in the lack of head covering. So we see this honour/dishonour/glory language.

³ Now I want you to realize that the head [the one he's responsible to bring honour and because he spiritually comes from him] of every man is Christ, and the head [the one she is responsible to physically comes from] of the woman is man, and the head of Christ [Jesus is responsible to, even called the firstborn or only begotten] is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. [His head being Christ, whose head is God] ⁵ And every woman who prays or prophesies with her [physical] head uncovered dishonors her head [her head being the man/husband]—it is just as though her head were shaved.

⁷ A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God;

¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.

The issue for Paul here was God was being dishonoured when women did not have their head covered during worship (or perhaps only when they prayed or prophesied) because it was a visible acknowledgment to God's created order. At that time in the context of worship male and female believers were to mark their identity in this manner. If some women felt in their freedom they no longer needed to wear them, Paul strongly disagreed because he saw it as one-way men and women were not showing their God-given distinctiveness. Because women are inferior to men? No, no and no! How then? So how does Paul argue the case for women to keep their heads covered in the context of praying and prophesying? The context is ...

Are Men and Women Modelling God's Created Order to Glorify God? (11:2-12)

How does Paul defend his argument here? Not with the cultural practices but with Scripture. He clearly points out that

God's created order involves headship (vv.2-10)

God is a God of order we will read in Ch. 14:35. He is not a God of confusion but of peace. And when we voluntarily serve the one whom we are responsible to then peace entails. Christ is the man's head because Jesus is our Lord and through whom all things were created, Man is whom the women voluntarily serve because of created order, Adam, then Eve. And in Eph. 5 Paul commands that women respect their husbands while the men love their wives because of their head Christ, who set the bar very high by dying for His bride the church. Yet Jesus' head is God. Jesus did not consider equality with God as something to grasp/usurp. He always obeyed what His Father directed

Him to do. He followed God's plan for His life. Jesus is divine and always existed. He wasn't created by God yet He is referred to as the Firstborn or the only Begotten because that is his function or role. And Jesus sent the Spirit to us, so the Spirit is responsible to Jesus as well. And Paul even adds another odd phrase in v.10 regarding angels.

¹⁰ *For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.*

Since one of the roles of angels according to Heb. 1:14 is to serve God by watching over us and that they are involved in worship, it's suggested here that Paul argues even angels affirm the need for proper order in worship and they are overseeing this.

Whether we like it or not, this is just the way it is. Unfortunately, because we all still have a sin nature, when we read the consequences of sin in Gen. 3, we recall that men and women will battle for authority for headship. The identity crisis between men and women. We live in a world now where we are told we can be male or female or, even better we can remove those terms completely. Now we begin to see why for Paul it's not simply about a head covering or not, it's about blurring the God-given identities and responsibilities of male and female. If believers don't get it right then who will? For Paul, this is one way God is glorified by not blurring God's intended order. But let's be clear here,

Headship is about function not value (vv.11-12)

God created us with different functions and roles. That doesn't change that we are equally valued and equally important. We're made differently and for different purposes. When God created Adam, he was created incomplete, that's why Gen. 2:18

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

He needed help. He needed a partner to help him have authority over the world. Paul acknowledges this in vv.11-12,

¹¹ *In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.* ¹² *For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.*

The first man was created by God but every other man owes his existence to a woman. Paul makes sure we understand we are equal but we are distinct and have unique purposes and functions so that when we both obey God and follow His order, there is no confusion and there is peace. Why? Because the command in Eph. 5:22-25 for men to love their wives and women respect their husbands is introduced with the inclusive command for both in 5:21,

²¹ *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

'Submit' means voluntarily serve. To come under in order to lift up. That's the model for leadership/headship in the Bible. Relationships go sour when we abuse and confuse our God designed functions.

Paul wants to make sure that God's created order designed perfectly when followed will bring Him glory when we mutually submit to Him and each other. We are equally valued and equally important (vv.11-12) but we still have different functions and roles (vv.2-10). So the applicational question is

How Should Men and Women Show We are Modelling God's Order to His Glory?

(I11:13-16)

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

Some think Paul is equating long hair with the head covering but he is not. He's talking about how God made us both different and one of the obvious ways, generally speaking, is look at our hair. We already have a naturally created difference that we see daily between men and women. Paul made the point in v.6 that women who cut their hair to look like a man or shave their heads bring disgrace to who God made them to be. If the woman's covering is her hair then men should have to shave their heads, which Paul did not command. Paul's main point is that we honour God when we maintain our distinctiveness between male and female in worship, and that was demonstrated by women wearing a head covering.

So should we adopt this practice (v.16)

He argues in v.16 that it was also an adopted practice in the churches of his day. This was the only cultural argument he gave after giving countless, biblical arguments for adopting the practice. Some say we should today, some say we don't need to. The problem with any practice of course is we can do it but do it with the wrong attitude. Every week we come and sing songs of praise to God and listen to His Word being taught. Those are good and biblical practices. But just because we do the doesn't mean we obey them.

¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Interesting how he forewarns us to listen first and not become angry before he tells us to make sure we pay attention to God's Word. Because maybe some of you are getting angry. But I'm not done yet so please, be quick to hear and desire to obey God. And look at v.26. We follow our biblical practices this morning of worship and the Word and yet we very well may leave this place and in the car ride home not keep a tight rein on our mouths (James has a whole chapter [3] on our mouths – ouch.). Pure religion he tells us is actively using our gifts and abilities and resources to lift up those who have needs. To show our distinctiveness as God's people.

Should women wear head coverings in worship or at least when they prayed or prophesied? We have to agree Paul made a strong biblical argument for it. Let's say yes for the moment. If we say we must obey the Scriptures and that women must wear head coverings in worship, how many of you ladies are inwardly bristling and saying I'll be _____ if you think I'm going to wear something

on my head as a sign of sub-mission to my husband. Or, how many men out there are thinking, 'Well it's about time my wife submitted to me. Serves her right!'

See, now we've just discovered the heart of the issue. The real issue here when it comes to Christian men and women is,

Do I need to check my attitude?

Eph. 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless

Submit is an unfortunate word. It means voluntarily serve. Bend down to lift up. We're both called to do that for each other. But we do have different roles. That's the way God made us. We are uniquely made, with different gifts for the purpose God intended. Men need help; help to lead well. Ladies, we need your help. We're both supposed to follow Jesus and have His attitude,

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Should women wear head coverings? You could but you may not do it with the best intentions. But Paul says we need to show each other and our world that we are differently made and designed to meet each other's needs so that is God being glorified in our churches and homes. How are we modeling healthy male and female dynamics as followers of Christ to the glory of God?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net