

Chapter 11

Honor God's Order in Creation: Head Covering and Hair Length (11:1-16)

Introduction

Having concluded a large section on the issue of eating meat offered to idols, 11:2 opens up the new subject of head coverings and hair length, that is, that women should display their submission with a symbol of authority when praying and prophesying (verses 4-5, 13). This is argued from five vantage points:

(1) Because of a Divinely Established Order

Verse 1—Paul wanted the Corinthians to *be imitators of me* (Paul), probably in the sense of the previous instruction about the willingness of giving up his or her rights and freedoms in order to win people to Christ.

- Paul wants the Corinthians to continue that attitude, *just as I also am of Christ*.
- Their attitude, like the Apostle Paul's, would be the same as that of Jesus Christ in this regard.

Verse 2—It seems that in spite of their problems, the Corinthians respected Paul's authority and wisdom, so he praised the Corinthians *because you remember me in everything*, most likely referring to his ministry in general, *and hold firmly to the traditions* passed along by his inspired apostolic teaching *just as I delivered them to you*.

- This is not referring to the extra-Biblical man-made ideas or practices of the church or church fathers, but the inspired teaching of the apostles.
- So the head covering and hair length teaching is also from the same source.

Verse 3—There was something the Corinthians needed to explicitly know, *but I want you to understand*.

- Namely, *that Christ is the head* (κεφαλή chief, supreme or prominent) *of every man* or male, possibly as the Creator of Adam, the first male (John 1:3).
- Paul is asserting the principle of roles in God's order.
- "Head" is a metaphor for setting direction, authority or leadership.
- Then, *the man* (ἄνδρὸς male) *is the head of a woman* (a broad word inclusive of virgins, married females or widows).
- This is the way God designed it.
- Finally, *and God is the head of Christ* indicating the principle of headship, even in the Godhead.
- There is one Father, one Son, and one Holy Spirit each with distinctive roles, possessing simultaneously the exact same divine attributes.

Application

All three leadership roles are described as *head*, which is not like kingship or dictatorship. It's not even like being a boss or general. It's not like any other kind of leadership. If your body dies, your head is useless. Why? Because it's dead, too. A head must rule with authority over a body which is essential for its survival. This indicates that the basic essence of existence is in relationship, whether Divine to human, human to human or Divine to Divine. Women are safeguarded by the fact that man is under the headship of Christ, and, as such, must exercise his headship based on Christ's commands.

(2) Because If there Is No Symbol of Submission, It Is Disgraceful

Verse 4—*Every man who has something on his head, and the context for that is while praying or prophesying* (προφητεύων to speak divine revelation).

- Paul used the word for declaring revelation from God, not preaching (κήρυξον to herald or proclaim) or teaching (διδάσκοντες to teach or instruct).
- Divinely inspired speech can be heralded and instruct, but the nature of such is to reveal the new revelation directly from God.
- This is identified as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12:10. This gift was also destined to be done away with *when the perfect comes* (1 Corinthians 13:10).
- A male *disgraces* (καταισχύνει puts to shame) *his head*, that is, his functional role in God's order with any kind of covering on his head, when engaged in the act of his role before God.
- Apparently, his uncovered head reflected that order and leadership role.
- With his head covered, it would reflect a symbol of submission in that order, which the male was never commanded to display.

Verse 5—In contrast, *but every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head.*

- Men and women were participating in both praying and prophesying, and while doing these same things, women were to distinguish themselves by wearing a covering. If she did not, the shame is such that *she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.*
- A woman without a head covering while prophesying or publicly praying, when it's obvious men are present, speaks to her humiliation and shame.
- Since the woman has no symbol of origin or submission that reflects her role in God's order, she especially impugns God's design right in front of God—while praying to Him or prophesying for Him! In each case, performing these, one is in direct contact with God.
- If prophecy ceased as a gift with the passing of the apostolic age, then a head covering for women is only required when praying. It seems that this would be in the context of verbal public prayer when it is obvious to men and/or angels that men are present.

Verse 6—So what *if a woman does not cover* (κατακαλύπτεται to cover over) *her head* (while praying or prophesying)?

- She may as well go all the way and *let her also have her hair cut off.*
- If a man is bald, we call it a hairdo. If a woman is bald, she usually covers it with artificial hair.
- *But if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.* Just as a bald head on a woman is a shame, so, too, is her head being uncovered when praying or prophesying.
- There seems to be a direct connection between 'headship' man's authority and 'head covering' woman's submission. Since the man is the head of the woman, by covering the woman's head in her spiritually vertical and horizontal service, she symbolizes not attempting to express headship of man before God.
- There is significance to the fact that every woman testifies to her origin and submission to God's order by use of the same head covering symbol. It is this head covering that is the universal symbol, trans-cultural and generational in scope.
- There is only the head covering symbol available which declares God's order for all believers, *the churches of God* (verse 16).

(3) Because of Origins

Verse 7—The reason *a man ought not to have his head covered* is because uncovered the man reflects his role and position before God *since he is the image and glory of God*.

- Man was created first, from the dust, in the image of God. So there is no need to wear a head covering that symbolizes submission to the woman.
- *But the woman is the glory of man* in the sense that she completed him. She was created as a helper who corresponded to the man.

Verse 8—Fashioned from the side of man, she was created from him and for him, *for man does not originate from woman, but woman from man*.

- The woman came from Adam's body. Adam did not come from Eve's body.
- Adam was a direct product of God's creation.
- This is the reason she is the glory of man and the man is the glory of Christ.
- So the woman was created for the man's sake and this is another reason why she should wear a symbol of origin and submission when praying or prophesying.

Verse 9—*For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake* shows that God did not create the man as a companion for the woman, but the woman for man's sake.

- God created Eve to complete Adam, not the reverse.
- There was incompleteness in Adam, so God created Eve to fill his incompleteness. She was the corresponding dimension he needed.
- So the man's head was to be uncovered.
- God has a divinely ordered plan for male and female roles.

(4) Because of the Angels

Verse 10—The women's head covering is required *therefore the woman ought to have* [a symbol of] *authority on her head* when praying or prophesying, as it conveys a message to God, to males, and now *because of the angels*.

- Angels were spectators of the church (1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:21) and may be a reason for this inclusion.
- We know some angels followed Satan's rebellion against God. This was an issue of rejection of the authority of God (Isaiah 14:12-14). The fall of certain angels was an issue of the freedom to exercise volition. Some angels volitionally chose to go independent from God. This could be what the angels are wanting to observe about women.

(5) Because It Is Common, Proper, and Universally True

Verse 11—Even though the positions of man and woman differ in God's administrative order, this does not mean they can get along without each other. *However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman*. We need each other. We cannot exist without the other.

Verse 12—To highlight our mutuality, *the woman originates from the man*.

- Eve came from (literally, *out of, from the source of*) Adam because God created Adam first.
- *So also the man has his birth through the woman*, which highlights that every male has come from a female. God created them both for each other; men and women together in mutual interdependence, complementing one another.
- *And all things originate from God*, so that whether male came from female or female came from male, all came from God and are subordinate to Him and responsible for their God-given roles.

Verse 13—Paul suggests that we are to *judge for yourselves* if its *proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered*. The question expects a negative answer.

Verse 14—Well, *does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?*

- As a general rule, nature itself distinguishes between the sexes in various ways, and one of them was length of hair. As a general rule, men all over the world have naturally shorter hair than women.

Verse 15—*But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?* Long hair on women has been considered beautiful and generally a differentiation between the sexes.

- *For her hair is given to her for a covering* (περιβολαίου a wrapping or veil) argues from nature that since hair is a natural covering for all women, there is nothing distinguishing about that which evidences God's order when praying or prophesying.
- So the 'head covering' is closely associated with the 'natural covering' (hair) but distinct from it. One shows her submission to God's order, while the other displays her glory as God's creation.

Verse 16—Just in case one might consider other options, *but if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice*.

- So if one disagrees with this subject, well, there is no other practice in *the churches of God*. Paul applied this to all the saints.
- A look at a map of his missionary journeys should remind us of the many cultures represented among believers in Paul's day.

Application

Since there is a case being made in the passage for a head covering as a symbol of authority, a woman should wear one on her head when praying or prophesying. But what should that symbol be? Symbols are important teaching tools in Scripture. In this case, it seems that it should cover her head, especially all of her hair.

Summary of the Case for Head Covering

1. Women are commanded to wear a head covering which makes this a responsibility and not a preference.
2. The head covering is a symbol of a basic teaching in the Bible that the woman is in submission to the principle of the headship of the man.
3. This act of submission is in recognition of the woman's understanding and willingness to accept her place within the order of creation God has established.
4. The symbol of this submission to male leadership is when a woman wears a head covering when publicly praying in the obvious presence of men.
5. Head covering may not be required when praying alone, when praying silently while a man prays, or praying when men are not present.

Honor God's Order in the Assemblies of Believers: Corrections about Communion (11:17-34)

Introduction

What was this sin, so serious that it brought about divine judgment? Was it the shocking case of incest Paul confronted in chapter 5? Or was it the lawsuits or the sexual immorality of chapter 6? Or could it have been the idolatry as discussed in chapters 8–10? Was it possibly the refusal of some women to

wear some symbol of submission on their heads in chapter 11? No. It was the result of disruption at the Lord's Supper. This sin had resulted in many sick people and a number of deaths. The discipline of the Lord was intense and extensive. Why was the Corinthians conduct so offensive to God that He would discipline these people like this?

Divisiveness and Gluttony Is Unacceptable at the Lord's Supper

Verse 17—Whereas he was able to praise them before (verse 2), the Corinthians are not going to be praised now, *but in giving this instruction, I do not praise you.*

- The instruction carried the weight of apostolic authority.
- And the reason is *because you come together not for the better but for the worse.*
- Their gatherings were not beneficial but actually made them worse off for doing so.
- The church was divided at a celebration that was meant to express their unity.

Verse 18—*For, in the first place, instead of it being beneficial for one another when you come together as a church, the Corinthians were being partisan. I hear that divisions (σχίσματα to split, rift or tear) exist among you.*

- These divisions broke them up into groups of cliques and ended in dissension.
- Reports of these schisms may have been exaggerated, but Paul knew of them well enough that *in part I believe it.*

Verse 19—Previously, Paul argued against being partisan, but factions can be beneficial *for there must also be factions among you* when they have the purpose to separate and manifest *those who are approved.* This contrasts with those who previously were in danger of being disapproved (9:27).

- Twice it says *among you* to show that factions can be a vehicle to preserve truth among believers.

Verse 20—Another problem resulted from *when you meet together* and was related to the Corinthians sharing the Lord's Supper. *It is not to eat the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον belonging to the Lord, a feast or main meal).*

- Fracture and division made it impossible to celebrate the unity they had in Christ when commemorating His death for them.

Verse 21—The reason it was a problem was *in your eating each one takes his own supper first.*

- Apparently, the Lord's Supper was usually a part of a meal the Corinthians shared together.
- And while *one is hungry* due to a lack of food, *another is drunk* due to excess.
- This lack of regard for each other while eating together was due to a larger problem.

Verse 22—If the Corinthians chose to behave in such a selfish way, they should stay home and eat.

- *What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?*
- To act in such a spirit of selfish contempt for each other's needs was to *despise the church of God.*
- If they thought that this practice was acceptable, it was only a means to *shame those who have nothing.*
- The apostle cannot put his stamp of approval on such behavior. *What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.*
- The celebration of the utmost of selfless acts, became on occasion for acting very selfishly.

The Whole Point of the Lord's Supper Is Commemorating Christ's Death

Verse 23—These abuses certainly did not reflect the Lord's intended purpose for instituting this Supper.

- Paul taught what ultimately came from the Lord *for I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you* to stress the importance of this revelation.
- Namely, *that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread*, which began Paul's explanation of the meaning and importance of the Lord's Supper.
- That significance was in the context of betrayal, while Jesus was providing graciously for His disciples.
- The bread represented His body unselfishly given for the benefit of others.

Verse 24—Rehearsing the historical facts of the first Lord's Supper, after Jesus had *given thanks* (εὐχαριστήσας 'to give thanks' accounts for another name for the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist), *He broke it* [others call the Lord's Supper "the breaking of bread" because of this statement] *and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*

- There are four traditional views of Jesus' statement *this is my body*:
 1. Transubstantiation says the bread and cup literally become the body and blood of Christ. This is the Catholic view.
 2. Consubstantiation says the bread and cup have the body and blood of Christ present within the elements. This is the Lutheran view.
 3. The spiritual presence view says the Christ's spiritual presence accompanies the bread and cup. This is the Presbyterian view.
 4. The memorial view understands the bread and cup are metaphorical and meant as emblems of the body and blood of Christ. This is the Anabaptist Protestant view. This view seems preferable because Christ is represented with many such metaphors (*This is the light*, John 3:19; *I am the door*, John 10:7; *I am the true vine*, John 15:1; *I am the true shepherd*, John 10:9).
- The point of the focus of the *body of Christ* at the Lord's Supper seems to be twofold:
 1. Eating it heightens awareness that we are in Christ in the sense that He procured our salvation.
 2. It reminds us of our brotherhood and unity with other believers who, along with us, are also members of God's household.

Verse 25—Paul continued to rehearse the first Lord's Supper. *In the same way He took the cup also after supper* which was an emblem of Jesus soon to be shed blood—His death.

- The shed blood of Jesus ratified the New Covenant: "*This cup is the new covenant in My blood*," which referred to an actual covenant made between God and the Jews (Jeremiah 31:31-34).
- All the conditions of the New Covenant would be possible only because Jesus has died for their sins.
- We, in the church age, participate in the New Covenant, in that we have our sins forgiven because of the shed blood of Christ, and we have the Holy Spirit living in us, who teaches us.
- But the New Covenant is not made with the church-age believers. It will be literally fulfilled in the Millennium when Christ reigns on earth.
- Christ intended the cup to be a perpetual representation of Him. "*Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*"

Verse 26—The Lord's Supper should be done with some regularity. *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup.*

- When believers do this, *you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*.
- The Lord's Supper dramatizes the gospel, *for Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed* (1 Corinthians 5:7). The death of Jesus was not an atonement for sin, merely covering it, but a Passover that made a full payment for sin.
- This makes the Lord's Supper both a memorial celebration looking back to Jesus Christ's first advent, as well as an anticipatory celebration looking forward to His Second Coming.

Unworthy Participation Invites God's Judgment Unless You Judge Yourself

Verse 27—Here is a warning about abusing the Lord’s Supper. *Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy (ἀναξίως irreverent) manner.*

- It could have to do with their gluttonous conduct or their selfish disregard for others when eating together or the factious spirit in their assembly.
- Remembering Christ’s work of unity and reconciliation of sinners while in such disarray made the Corinthians *guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord* in the sense that they profaned it by treating it with such contempt.

Verse 28—The remedy was, *a man must examine (δοκιμαζέτω to test or scrutinize) himself* so as to see that such behavior is unacceptable to God. As he does, then in *so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup* and participate in the Lord’s Supper and honor the purpose for which the Lord instituted it for His people to observe.

Verse 29—Taking this personal examination prevents one from being judged by God. *For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself* for participating in the Lord’s Supper in an *unworthy manner*.

- The point of the examination is to avoid *not judge[ing] the body rightly*, including Christ’s body given as a Passover, and believers who have their place rightful place within the God’s family.
- An inappropriate understanding and application of these jeopardizes one when sharing in the Lord’s Supper.

Verse 30—Misjudging *the body* while participating in the Lord’s Supper is the *reason many among you are weak (ἀσθενεῖς to be weak, powerless or feeble), and sick (ἄρρωστοι without physical strength or sickly) and a number sleep* (a euphemism for death).

- These three outcomes included physical illness and physical death for thoughtless participation in the Lord’s Supper.

Verse 31—If a believer does not take responsibility to examine and judge himself, then God will take that responsibility. *But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.* The solution was self-examination. The alternative was God’s examining judgment.

Verse 32—We should regard God’s discriminating judgment of believers as discipline. *But when we are judged, we are disciplined (παιδεύομεθα to chastise, educate and instruct) by the Lord.*

- The purpose of such divine discipline is *so that we will not be condemned along with the world*. The condemnation God intends to spare us from is not eternal damnation which the unbeliever will suffer.
- Believers can experience premature death or disapproval at the Judgment Seat of Christ or loss of rewards or the right to reign with Christ. This judgment brings it own kind of condemnation to the believer.

Verse 33—Having all of this in mind, *so then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.*

- This has to do with the entire litany of abuses at the Lord’s Supper, including sharing the meal with others, the need to satisfy their hunger pangs at home, and not using the Lord’s Supper as time of self-indulgence, but mutual edification.

Verse 34—As a matter of fact, *if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home*, otherwise their gluttony and unloving selfishness might result in the Lord’s judgment, *so that you will not come together for judgment.*

- As if this were not enough, evidently there were other details of how the Corinthians were behaving and *these remaining matters I will arrange when I come*. He will deal with these when he comes to Corinth the next time.

Application

1. Don't let ritual become routine. Repeating something can make it seem trivial or lose its significance. Remember God's great acts, especially through participation in the Lord's Supper.
2. Avoid unbiblical distinctions that improperly divide us as believers. That includes denominationalism, and church membership for the breaking of bread together.
3. Enjoy the Lord's Supper with other believers as part of a larger meal together, where eating and remembering the Lord's death are central to the gathering.