

***The Context:***

--1 Corinthians is a letter in which God is showing a church full of problems how to deal with its problems God's way.

God doesn't save "perfect" people. By His grace He saves sinners! When He saves sinners He puts them together with other saved sinners in the local church. And by His grace He gives those saved sinners the ability to deal with the inevitable problems in their lives.

--In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul talked about the proper attitude towards one's *rights*.

We'll never deal with problems in a way that pleases God as long as we're thinking about what *I* want or what *my* rights are.

--In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul invited us to learn from the past.

He used the Israelites as an example for us. Then he applied their faulty example to the questionable matter of eating meat once offered to pagan idols.

In chapter 11 Paul moves to another problem issue that plagued the Corinthian church (and which is hindering the contemporary church, too). It had to do with the roles of men and women in church worship services.

The verses we're about to study have been a source of much disagreement. Some have used this text to say that women need to wear a head covering in church worship services. Others say that a woman should never cut her hair, again using this passage. Paul even talks about hair length for men. What's going on and how does it apply to us?

***Some things to keep in mind:***

*1. Paul was not anti-women.*

Paul had great appreciation for the contribution of women to the ministry and spoke of it in several places.

*2. The immorality in Corinth was a constant threat to the church.*

Wiersbe comments, "One mark of a sinful woman was her short hair; such a woman often walked about the city without the usual veil for a covering. In some Eastern countries even today, women do not appear in public unveiled. This is a sign of disrespect to their husbands and would be interpreted as an invitation to sin. In fact, even among the Jews, a shorn head was a mark of immorality (see Num. 5:11–31, especially v. 18). So, Paul warns the women of the church not to lose their testimonies by worshiping in public without a veiled head. That veil (or covering) was a mark of subordination to the Lord and to their husbands and a recognition of the principle of headship."<sup>1</sup>

*3. The problem being addressed in 1 Corinthians 11 is disorder.*

**\*\*Main Idea:** In 1 Corinthians 11-14 Paul deals with the problem of disorder in the church at Corinth, particularly as it surfaced during worship services.

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<sup>1</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

To enable the church to deal with this problem Paul addresses two critical issues in 11:1-16. We must come to grips with these two issues ourselves if we're going to honor God in dealing with church controversies, no matter what the problem.

### I. We must settle the issue of authority (1-2).

Discuss: What's the common reaction when the term "authority" is mentioned today?

Q: What does Paul invite the Corinthians to do in v 1?

Q: What does he say he did in v 1?

What was unique about Paul that is not true of us, nor anyone else on the planet today? He was an *apostle*. Keep that in mind...

In terms of authority God has given us two things...

#### **A. God has given us the example of the apostles (1).**

That's what the NT records for us, not only what Jesus did but also what His chosen representatives, the apostles, did and taught.

#### **B. God has given us the teachings of the apostles (2).**

Q: For what did Paul commend the Corinthians in v 2?

Please note that Paul didn't "invent" truth. He says he "passed it on" to the Corinthians. That's critical (see 2 Pet 1:20-21).

Discuss: How would you use this truth to respond to a brother in Christ if he said the following, "What right do you have to talk to me about my relationship with so-and-so? If I refuse to talk to him, that's my business, not yours. You have your opinion, I have mine."

God's Word is the ultimate authority in the church. It's the basis for what we teach and believe and how we function. I have no right to impose my opinions on another, but I do have a responsibility to insist that we do things according to God's Word.

Discuss: Why is it critical to settle the issue of authority before attempting to deal with a particular problem?

### II. We must settle the issue of order (3-16).

Paul explains three matters related to "order" in these verses...

#### **A. Paul explains the principle headship (3-10).**

Read v 3. Paul clarifies three things about headship in verses 3-10.

##### *1. Here is where headship exists (3).*

Headship is a fact of life in God's universe. Paul gives three examples.

- Christ is the head of the man.
- Man is the head of the woman.
- God is the head of Christ.

Discuss: What does the term "head" mean in these three examples? What does it *not* mean?

##### *2. Here's how headship applies to public worship services (4-6).*

Read verses 4-6.

Q: What two early church activities does Paul mention in v 4?

Q: What should a man *not* do when engaging in these activities?

- A man should not cover his head when praying or prophesying.

Why not? Paul doesn't explain in great detail. He merely says for a man to do so "dishonors his head."

Q: Why does he mean by his second use of "head" in v 4? It could refer to his position as head—that is, by covering his head (as a woman does) the man is showing disrespect for his God-given position as head. "Head" also could refer to THE head of the man (from v 3), that is, *Christ*. For a man to cover his head in church could be a sign of disrespect to Christ.

E.g. At a sporting event, the announcer often says, "Would all men and boys please remove their caps and stand for the playing of the national anthem." If a man refused to do so, what would his hat on his head signify? Is the hat sinful? No. God looks at the heart. But the hat on the head says something about the heart, right? I can say I respect my country in my heart but if I am in public meeting and refuse to remove my cap I am sending a clear message to all around me...

I think this gets at what Paul has in mind in this chapter.

- A woman should cover her head when praying or prophesying.

Q: Why so according to v 5? Remember Wiersbe's earlier comment about the Corinthian culture.

As the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* states, "Whether women today in church services should wear hats depends on whether the custom of headcoverings in the first century is to be understood as a practice also intended for the present day. Many Bible students see that for today the principle of subordination (not the command to wear hats) is the key point in this passage. The intent of the custom of women wearing hats today, for fashion, seems far different from the purpose of the custom in the first century."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. *Here's the basis for headship (7-10).*

- It has to do with the glory of God (7).

Read v 7.

God created the man in His image. The woman is in His image, too, but He created her out of the man. She is the "glory" of man, the reflection of him. The man is the "glory" (reflection) of God. God wants those roles maintained (more about this momentarily).

- It goes back to creation (8-9).

Read verses 8-9.

There is order in God's world. God could have created the man and the woman at the same time. He chose not to. There is beauty in variety. The

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<sup>2</sup>Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

world wants sameness. Not so God. In terms of worth there's wonderful equality between men and women, but not in terms of function.

- It affects the angels (10).

Paul doesn't tell us how so it's best not to speculate. Peter said the angels marvel at God's dealings with man (1 Pet 1:12; see also 1 Tim 5:21).

### **B. Paul explains the principle of interdependence (11-12).**

Men and women may be different, but they need each other. They are not competing enemies but complements in the Body of Christ.

1. *Woman came from man.*
2. *Man is born of woman.*
3. *Both man and woman come from God.*

### **C. Paul explains how to put it into practice (13-16).**

Paul commands the Corinthians in v 13, "Judge for yourselves." We need to think through the implications of this and live accordingly. Here are three lessons.

1. *What we do (even how we wear our hair) sends a message (13).*

Sometimes a person says, "It's the heart that matters." That's true. But actions matter, too. A pure heart can be misrepresented by an indiscriminant act.

E.g. I can love my country but if I refuse to take off my cap during the national anthem I've sent a very clear (though unintended) message to other people.

Discuss: We can do the same in church worship services. How so?

2. *Men and women are the same in worth but not in function (14-15).*

- God has given the woman a special role.

- God has given the man a special role.

Q: What do the words "very nature of" (KJV "even nature itself") indicate in v 14?

3. *We must avoid causing contention in the church (16).*

To sum it up, a helpful commentary by Warren Wiersbe: "Paul gave several reasons why women must keep their proper place in the church: (1) it shows honor to their husbands; (2) it honors Christ, the Head of the church; (3) it agrees with the plan of creation itself, for God created woman for man; (4) the angels watch our worship and know what we do, v. 10; (5) nature itself gives the woman long hair and the man short hair, thus teaching subordination; (6) this is the practice in all the churches, v. 16. How does this matter of "wearing hats" and "wearing short hair" apply to us today? While we do not have all of the same circumstances that Paul had to deal with in Corinth, we must admit that a woman or a man out of place is always a hindrance to the work of God. There ought to be modesty in the local church, both in dress and action. We dare not conform to the world, lest we lose our testimony."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.