



Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 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. Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 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. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 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. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God (1 Corinthians 11:2–16).

I asked Julia to read our passage of Scripture this morning because the subject matter was such I thought it would be appropriate for a woman to do it. After all, this passage is all about the women praying and prophesying in church. But you might have noticed there was something missing. Where was her head covering? That's really what this passage is all about, at least on the surface. It seems obvious Paul wants women to cover their heads in church. We're not really told what this means or even why the Corinthian women were casting their head coverings aside, but it's clear Paul wasn't too keen on what they were doing.

In some ways, this passage raises more questions than answers. We feel a little like we're getting to read only the very end of a long e-mail thread. So we have to kind of feel our way in the dark

as we go through this passage. What makes it even more challenging is Paul is dealing with a very sensitive subject: the role of men and women. Some people have accused Paul of being a woman-hater with this passage being a prime example of his prejudice. So not only do we have to feel our way in the dark, but there are some land mines to avoid in the process.

The significance of the head covering.

With all that in mind it's important we try to piece together what was happening. Why did Paul make such a big deal about head coverings? What we know is the good news Jesus offered was revolutionary in terms of the freedom and equality it offered to women. Christianity proclaims all people are equal before God and all believers are one in Christ. Jesus treated women with respect and dignity unheard of in his culture. Paul even wrote in one of his letters, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Gal. 3:28). The local church was the only community in the Roman Empire that welcomed all people regardless of nationality, social class, or gender. And the new believers in Corinth embraced this, but it seems some of them carried this radical freedom to excess. Some of the women flaunted their freedom in Christ and refused to cover their heads in public worship. That was a big deal. Worship is a big deal. How we worship and why we worship together as a church is hugely important.

You see, in that culture, women wore their hair long, but out in public they put it up and covered it with something like a shawl. The head-covering was a symbol of sexual purity. The only ones who didn't wear a head covering were temple prostitutes and high-class mistresses of wealthy men. Often these women would shave their heads or cut their hair short without any covering at all. In essence, they looked like men. For a married woman, the head covering was a symbol of her loyalty and respect towards her husband. It would be like the wedding band a woman wears today. Why would a woman take her wedding ring off in a public setting? So for a Christian woman in the church to appear in public without a covering, let alone do so while worshipping in church, was both culturally offensive and confusing. Imagine guests coming to church and trying to grasp what Christians stood for in terms of values and relationships.

There are some places where this is still the rule. Years ago my friend Frank Cutter and I traveled to Romania. The first morning

I was scheduled to preach at a Romanian church. We arrived at the church just as the service was starting. They told Frank to go in and sit down but they wanted me and the pastor to sit in the front on the platform. When I got up there and looked at the congregation I noticed all the women had head coverings on. Not only that, but all the women were on one side of church and men on the other. Then I saw Frank, looking rather conspicuous with his black beard, sitting with all the women. I wanted to ask him where his head covering was but I didn't have the heart. Now I call him Franchesca!

We all know different cultures have different practices that mean different things. And often times these things have to do with the way people dress and even how they wear their hair. There was a time here in America when almost all women wore a hat or veil to church. Now they don't. Now the only ones wearing hats are the teenage boys! But not everyone likes that, right? How would you feel if I had a baseball hat on right now? To some that communicates disrespect. But I doubt any of you women would go to a wedding wearing a bikini! Even today if a woman shaves her head or wears it closely cropped, that often communicates something.

The principle of headship and submission.

With that in mind, you can understand why Paul says what he says in v. 3. He lays down a general principle that should still govern relationships between the sexes. God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, and man is the head of a woman. Whatever you say about this, it's clear there is a divinely ordained pattern for relationships between men and women.

Notice how this is rooted in God the Father's relationship to His Son. God the Father is head over Christ the Son. They're both God. They're equal in terms of their essence, but they have a different role to play. Jesus willingly submitted to His Father's will. He himself said, "I came to do the will of Him who sent me." This doesn't mean God the Son is less than God the Father; it's just the role he played. It wasn't demeaning; it was fulfilling and even freeing.

In the same way, Paul says Christ is head over the man and the man is head over the woman. And once again even though there's a clear difference of function for men and women, there's no hint of inequality or superiority in nature. Men and women are equal in value; we're both made in the image of God, we both have equal access to God, but there's an order; there is headship. Headship means the weight of responsibility and leadership is on the man. It's not a weakness for a woman to submit to this; rather it's a strength.

Yesterday I had a chance to watch a young woman from our church ride in equestrian. She rode a powerful and beautiful horse. Trust me, that horse was more powerful than she. But for that horse to clear those jumps his power had to be harnessed

and he had to submit to the rider's signals. It's not a weakness for the horse to submit itself to the rider; submission is his strength. It wasn't weakness in the Son of God that made him submit to the will of his Father; it was strength.

There are many men who misunderstand what headship means. Jesus is your role model in how to do this. You're called to exercise headship in the same way Jesus did. In Mark 10:42-45 Jesus spelled it out: *"...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."* Paul said the same thing in Eph. 5, *"the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church."* And then he shows what that looks like, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her."* That's the headship men are called to: servanthood, living and loving sacrificially for the good of others. When a woman submits to that, it's not demeaning; it's fulfilling and freeing.

Biblically, there are two spheres in which men are to exercise headship. One is Christian marriage, where the husband is the head of the wife. The other is the church, where a group of male elders are called to submit to the Lord and serve the body sacrificially with their leadership. People ask us all the time why we don't have women elders at CPC and here is the reason: men are called into that role of headship (1 Tim. 2). Not because they're superior, but because that's the role they've been given. My wife says it's God's sense of humor. Doesn't it say, "God uses the weak things of the world to shame the wise"? But limiting headship to these two spheres is important because this isn't teaching that men in general are the head of women in general. If that were true then every women would have to submit to the leadership of every Joe that came along. That's absurd. For example, this doesn't apply to the workplace. Women operate as head over men all the time in the workplace. That's fine. This is talking about marriage and church.

But something very important to notice here is women were still given a very significant roles to play in church. Look at this passage; they're not just serving tea and cleaning up after the men! These women were free to exercise ministry in the church, to pray and prophesy when the church gathered. Paul doesn't tell them to stop; he just says don't do it without a head covering; don't do it in a way that communicates you're trying to usurp your husband or the elders. By the way, prophesying meant standing up in church and sharing a word that you believed had come from God and would edify the congregation. Women in the early church were free to do that. They also prayed in public meetings. This is why we have women at CPC who serve in every capacity except elder. Women serve on our staff as pastors and directors, they lead community groups and teach Sunday School classes. They serve communion and host and lead us in prayer.

They don't have to wear head coverings, but they do this under the leadership of the elders.

That was the problem with these women in Corinth. By doing all this without their head coverings they were communicating they didn't have to be submissive to anyone. They weren't any different than men. That's at the heart of Paul's concern. Several times Paul says not wearing a covering is "disgraceful" and that it "dishonors" their head. This would happen for several reasons: it would be a distraction for other people in worship. If a woman came to our church dressed like a prostitute that would be a distraction for some of us! It would also dishonor the woman's husband because she'd be saying, "He's not my spiritual leader." I've been asked by brides-to-be whether or not they should take their husbands' last name when they get married. There may be some exceptions but most of the time they should do that because it communicates something in our culture. It also communicates something to her husband. Finally, taking off the head coverings would have been dishonoring to the Lord, because he's the one who created us different but equal and established this order.

Now what Paul does in verses 7-16 is give three different arguments to defend this teaching. In verses 7-12 he argues from creation. In verses 13-15 he offers a commonsense argument from the pattern of nature. And finally in verse 16 he offers an argument from apostolic authority.

Three arguments to abide by this teaching.

The argument from creation

Let's look first at the argument from creation in verses 7-9. He starts out and says a man shouldn't have his head covered. In other words, a man should dress like a man, not a woman. A man should dress like a man because he's the image and glory of God, but a woman is the glory of man. Notice he doesn't say a woman is the "image" of man because woman was made in the image of God just like man was. Again, they're equal. Gen. 1:27 says, *"God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* But they're also different. A man is the glory of God while a woman is the glory of man. What does that mean? I take this word "glory" to mean "honor." A man is meant to reflect honor back to God; a woman is meant to reflect honor back to her husband. A man who dresses like a woman dishonors God; a woman who dresses like man dishonors her husband. So what we call "cross dressing" today dishonors God because it denies what we are.

He goes back to creation to defend this. In Genesis 2 God started with a man named Adam. He was created first. Then he put Adam to sleep and took one of his ribs and made it into a woman. So she originated from man. And not only that, she was made for man. She was made to be his helper. Now I'm in trouble, right? I'm digging a big fat hole for myself. But it was God who said,

"It's not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18).

The word "helper" is a rich word that implies tremendous worth. It's a word that's used of God in the Old Testament where God is seen as the Helper of his people. Then in the New Testament we have the concept of the *paraclete*. In John 14:16 Jesus says to his disciples before he leaves, *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever."* Jesus had been their Helper but he's going away so he says he'll send us another Helper. Who is that? It's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son, but he has a different role to play. He comes alongside us and helps us, encourages us, teaches us and strengthens us. So you wives have the unique role of being a helper—a strength, an encouragement and a wise counselor your husband desperately needs. I tell you what, my wife goes away for a weekend, at first I think, "Wow, I can do whatever I want. I can watch sports on TV 24/7. I have the whole bed to myself. I'm free." But by Saturday noon I'm a mess. I'm lonely. I have no one to talk to. I'm sick of potato chips. I smell. I can't sleep. I need my wife!

In v. 10 Paul reiterates that a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head *"because of the angels."* That's one of the most mysterious verses in the Bible. No one knows for sure what it means. There have been all kinds of explanations. But let's just keep it simple and recall that angels show awe and reverence and respect in the presence of God by using their wings as what? According to Is. 6:2 as coverings. So if angels don't step over their boundaries who are we to throw off such constraints? And when angels did throw off constraints they became...what? Fallen angels or demons. So Paul throws this in as another reason women were to wear a covering

One of the things I love about Scripture is the balance. We have to be careful of extremes. In v. 11 Paul is quick to remind us that men and women are also interdependent. Notice the words "in the Lord." You see, in the Lord, in the body of Christ, we all need each other; we're one in Christ Jesus. So you men, be careful. You need her as much as she needs you. You have no claim to superiority or dominance. You need to appreciate and respect and build up the woman in your life. Then in v. 12 he reminds us though Eve came from Adam, ever since then every man has been birthed by a woman. And he reminds us that all things come from God." See the balance? Men and women need each other. That's why men need women to be women, and women need men to be men.

The argument from nature

So that's the argument from creation. The second argument is from nature in verses 13-15. Paul says if they just looked around at the natural lengths and styles of men's and women's hair, then they could judge for themselves on this whole thing. When it

comes to hair, men and women are generally different in every culture. It doesn't say exactly how long a woman's hair ought to be, or how short a man's ought to be. I think he's just talking about how women naturally tend toward longer, styled hair. Paul says a woman's hair is her glory. He doesn't say a guy's hair is his glory. He's just saying, when it comes to hair, a woman ought to look like a woman and a man ought to look like a man. You men, when you go out for dinner, how long does it take you to **do** your hair? You're thinking, "I don't **do** my hair." Guys don't **do** their hair, they just comb it. But women **do** their hair and it's a guy's painful responsibility to wait around looking at his watch every 30 seconds while she does her hair. Paul is just saying that's how it ought to be! That's why I don't like those pictures of Jesus with beautiful, windswept, bleached hair. Trust me, Jesus didn't **do** his hair. He was a construction worker. Go to a construction site and ask the guys, "Who did their hair this morning?" Then you better run real fast because none of them did!

Now I understand there may be some variation on this from culture to culture and generation to generation. Some of us recall when guys started wearing their hair long in the 60's. And certainly there are many women these days who wear their hair short. I don't think either one of those things are a problem today. That's not the point. The point is, in keeping with the culture we live in, a woman ought to look like a woman and a man ought to look like a man. There's a lot of room for variation and personal style in that, but let's not confuse the sexes and let's not throw off convention and communicate something that discredits our faith.

This goes for how we dress in general. For example, for many Muslims, a bare shouldered woman is considered sexually promiscuous; it's almost the same as a bare breasted woman in the West. But let's bring it closer to home. I'm wearing jeans this morning. For some of you that's no big deal. People get dressed up and wear jeans today. But when I started preaching here at CPC in the dark ages, you didn't wear jeans. You wore a coat and tie. Then about 15 years ago I took the tie off and raised a few eyebrows, but no one fired me. Then about 10 years ago I took the coat off. And then a couple of years ago I wore jeans. I know you noticed. Some of you didn't like that. But within our culture, that was normal. I hate to think what's next, but it's normal.

The argument from apostolic authority

There is one more argument Paul gives and it's short. Look at v. 16. ***"But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God."*** Paul says we have no other practice. So this wasn't just for one church, it was for all the churches. Earlier in v. 2 Paul talked about ***"holding firmly to the***

traditions." There were traditions, ways of doing things, teachings that came from the apostles and we still follow today. This teaching about men and women is one of them. Some of you say, "But I know other churches that teach it differently." But Jesus is the head of the church and churches are called to obey Scripture. Churches that don't will have to answer for that. Paul says we have no other practice. Some of you may think, "But I read this book and I know this pastor who says something different." It doesn't matter. Doing whatever you want and rebelling against God's created order isn't what churches are supposed to do.

Conclusion

So what's the bottom line? Should women should wear coverings today? No. When we interpret Scripture we have to understand what it meant in that culture and then extract timeless principles that apply to any age and culture. The principle here is men and women are equal in worth and dignity but are called to complementary roles within marriage and the church; roles that ought to be expressed in ways appropriate to the culture in which we live.

Men should act and dress in a way that honors the God who created them as men. Men, it ought to be clear you're a guy and not a girl, okay?

Women should act and dress in a way that honors the God who created them as women. A wife should dress in a way that shows she's faithful to and respectful of her husband. She's not on the prowl. There's nothing wrong with a woman dressing with beauty and style, but always with modesty.

We want to avoid extremes. We're not chauvinists. Chauvinism says men are better than women; women are stupid and should just stay home and bake things and be quiet. We don't hold that position. It's wrong and unbiblical.

On the other hand, we're not feminists. Feminism says men and women are the same. Men are bad and the cause of all kinds of horrible things for women. By the way, the reason for the feminist movement is that many men throughout history have totally misunderstood what headship really means. Instead of being servants who lead with humility and gentleness we've become abusive and dictatorial. That's wrong.

So we're not chauvinists or feminists, what are we? We're complementarians. A complement is something that completes something else. Men and women are equal in worth and dignity but are called to complementary roles within marriage and the church; roles that ought to be expressed in ways appropriate to the culture in which we live.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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