

**I Corinthians Lesson # 25**  
**Our Hierarchical Order in Christianity**  
**Pentwater Bible Church**  
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*1 Corinthians 11:1-2 Be ye followers of me even as I am also am of Christ.  
Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to  
the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.*

The Corinthians had expressed to Paul, either in their letter or via their spokesmen (cf, 1:11; 16:17), that they remained devoted to Paul and to the teachings, the central doctrines of the faith, which he had communicated to them (cf. 11:23; 15:1, 3). For this Paul commended them: I praise you. He uses this praise to soften the blow for the rebuke that follows. He also uses a play on the words, *tradition and delivered*. He wants the Corinthians and us to realize that these concepts he teaches are from God and he is the hand-deliverer without any modification.

From question one in last weeks lesson:

From verse 1 would Paul want us to follow him if he were *not* following Christ? The answer is obviously no. No Christian leader that knows the Bible should ever cause His brother to sin by leading him astray. Perhaps the Biblically ignorant could.

*1 Corinthians 11:3 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 here established the concept of Headship. He is going to develop it in two ways. 1. He will defend the principle first from Scripture then 2. From nature. This is the principle of governing the structure and authority in the believing community. Paul characteristically laid down a theological basis. In fact his letters are about 2/3rd theological and 1/3rd application. In this instance it concerned headship. The word head (Gr.*kephalē*) seeks to express two things: *subordination & origination*. The former reflects the more usual Old Testament usage (e.g., Judges 10:18), the latter that of Greek vernacular (e.g., Herodotus History 4. 91). The former is primary in this passage, but the latter may also be found (1 Corinthians 11:8). The subordination of Christ to God is noted elsewhere in the letter (3:23; 15:28). His subordination to the Father is also true in His work as the “agent” of Creation (8:6; cf. Colossians 1:15-20).

So from question 2 in last weeks lesson: What does Paul mean by the hierarchy espoused in verse 3? We see the structure of subordination and origination.

Man here is not generic because it follows with, “The man is the head of the woman.” This is an absolute hierarchical order not culturally derived as evidenced with the reference to the Godhead. The concept of headship as developed here can’t mean inferiority or superiority. The prototype is the reference to the Persons of the Trinity. This

then denotes a functional responsibility not inferiority and /or superiority. The Father and Son are each in their essence God but each had different roles. Christ is obedient to the Father to the point of death (Philippians 2:8) but none the less God Himself (John 6:38-40; 10:29-30; 14:9; I Corinthians 15:28; Philippians 2:6). Those who would challenge this functionality and appeal to a cultural derivative must therefore challenge the very nature of God Himself. This is simply an introduction to function and not essence.

Paul then takes this arrangement to the next step in the hierarchy. He continues the line of relationship and functionality to men and women. The authority flows from the Creator to whom he wishes to share this authority. Paul wants us to realize that this same functionality and authority in the Godhead transfers in line to the man then the woman. Women are subordinate to men but equal to them in their essence.

*I Corinthians 11:4-5 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.*

Now the text builds on the axiom of headship and shows how it relates to the custom of wearing a head covering. The apostle then shows that the head covering is not appropriate for a man but it is for a woman. Paul here engages in a pun. He uses the word "Head" in two ways; 1, the head on our shoulders and 2, the head of the man, which is Christ. He then follows this with the admonition that every married woman that prays or prophecies with her head (on here shoulders) uncovered shames her head (husband).

This answers question three from last week:

What are the two meanings of "Head" as expressed in verse 4? The head on her shoulders and her head in the chain of authority her husband.

The shaving of a woman's head has always been disgraceful. For example when the Second World War was over French women who sympathized with the Nazis were shorn by the French as a symbol of disgrace for fraternizing with the enemy. Photographs of these women evidence a humiliating disgrace in their countenance. This disgrace in head covering moves upward. If the woman is being disgraceful to her husband, he in turn is being disgraceful to his Head Christ and Christ to God the father. The covering is symbolic indicating the authority that exists above the woman yet still under Christ. The covering represents the authority that stands above the individual on the way toward addressing God in prayer or communicating truth from God in prophecy. We will address the gift of prophecy in chapters 12 and 14. The point here is the respect of authority and the appropriate symbolic recognition of that. In the ancient world this head covering was rather substantial and included a large shawl with a hood like appendage to draw up over the woman's head. Today in can take any form in modest apparel. Until the 1960's most if not all women wore head covering to church. The young girls in my Sunday school classes all wore them too. With the restructuring of the culture in the 60's and women's liberation hats began to lose their cultural appeal. Culture dictates and style are not reasoning through which these passages speak. We are not to be conformed by the culture.

*Romans 12: 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Today hats have been totally trivialized. Women have lost the obligatory significance of head covering. The proper biblical approach is somewhere between the two extremes of legalism and avoidance. Again head covering represents a woman's voluntary demonstration of respect for God's order and authority. It is her decision alone that must be prayerfully determined with God's guidance. Here observance of this issue is obligatory, as an agent to exercise her will in a free demonstration of godly submission.

*I Corinthians 11: 6 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.*

Paul then makes his argument in the absurd. That is, a woman with her head uncovered taken to an extreme might as well follow the disgrace and shave her head entirely and fully engage the disgrace. According to Paul, for a woman to throw off the covering was an act not of liberation but of degradation. She might as well shave her head, a sign of disgrace. In doing so, she dishonors herself and her spiritual head, the man. In times past including Corinth prostitutes had shaved head. It was usually done for punishment. They then wore wigs to cover their heads. They would stand out in the crowds and be easily identified. Just as no respectable Christian woman would go out of the house appearing like a prostitute it is equally important that she show respect for the hierarchical chain of authority established by God.

*I Corinthians 11: 7 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.*

The man, on the other hand, was not to have his head covered because he was the image and glory of God. Paul based this conclusion on Genesis 1:26-27. Men are made in His image and therefore stand in God's image as a display of His glory.

*I Corinthians 11: 8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;*

Paul continues to affirm the authority relationship through the creation account. Woman was made from man. Then through the birth process all men come from woman.

*I Corinthians 11: 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.*

Chronologically she comes after man in the creation but positionally she was created for the man's sake. She is to be his helpmeet. She was brought forth to compliment and complete him. In fact as God declared almost all aspects of the creation

as “good.” He declared only one “not good.” That was the man being alone (Gen 2:18). She fulfills the divine complement to man as the crowning achievement of God’s creation.

*I Corinthians 11: 10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*

Paul offered a third reason (the first reason was the divine order— God, Christ, man, woman, vv. 3-6; the second reason was Creation, vv. 7-9) why womanly non-conformance to Scripture in the church should not exist. Angels were spectators of the church (4:9; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:21; cf. Psalms 103:20-21). For a woman to exercise her freedom to participate in the church without the head covering, the sign of her authority would be to bring the wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10) into disrepute.

*I Corinthians 11:11-12 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.*

Paul now brings balance to the entire situation. Men and women together in mutual interdependence, complementing each other, bring glory to God (cf. 10:31). Neither should be independent nor think themselves superior to the other. Woman’s subordination does not mean inferiority. Man is not superior in being to woman. Eve came from Adam, and each man born in the world comes from a woman’s womb (11:12). God created them both for each other (Genesis 1:27; 2:18).

This then answers question 5 from last week:

Are women equal to, subordinate to or superior to men? In which manner?

They are equal to men in God’s eyes but subordinate to them in the hierarchical authority, which flows from God.

*I Corinthians 11: 13-15 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.*

Paul now he turns to natural revelation (cf. Rom. 1:20) for a fourth argument in support of his recommendation. Mankind instinctively distinguished between the sexes in various ways, one of which was length of hair. Exceptions to this general practice were due either necessity “to escape a situation in disguise” or perversity such as the effeminate. No abstract length of hair was in mind so much as male and female differentiation. The Spartans, for example, favored shoulder-length hair for men (cf. Lucian, *The Runaways* 27), which they tied up for battle (Herodotus *History* 7. 208-9), and no one thought them effeminate.

Long hair was a woman's glory because it gave visible expression to the differentiation of the sexes. This was Paul's point in noting that long hair was given to her as a covering. Natural revelation confirmed the propriety of women wearing the physical covering (cf. Cicero *On Duties* 1. 28. 100). She has a natural covering, and should follow the custom of wearing a physical covering in a public meeting.

*I Corinthians 11: 16 But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.*

As in the case of food offered to idols (8:1-11:1), Paul dealt with the immediate issue but also identified on the root of the problem, the Corinthian pursuit of self-interest which was unwilling to subordinate itself to the needs of others (cf. 10:24) or the glory of God (10:31). Throwing off the head- covering was an act of contention to God's will, which discredited God.

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