

1Corinthians 11:4-16 "Submission is Freedom"

Last week's study ended with the concept of God's design for headship among the human race, especially as it pertains to the body of Christ. Headship in our text simply means authority over another as it relates to the role of that person.

And so when Paul says, "that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God", he simply means that there must be an authority structure for the sake of accomplishing God's will as He has determined it.

This is not about superiority, it is about the role that each person has been given by God. And so, the man is subject to Christ as his head, the woman is subject to the man as her head, and Christ is subject to the Father as His head, as each is accomplishing what God has desired for mankind.

And so, when Paul writes to the Corinthians it seems apparent that there was a breakdown in this structure among these believers. For whatever reason, some men were not assuming their roles and authority as God designed it for them, and some women were not assuming their roles and authority as God designed it for them. He deals first with the men.

1CO 11:4 "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head."

Now, at first glance, as we read the English translation, we might think that Paul is talking about a hat that these men were wearing. This would be an anachronism where we superimpose our cultural understanding of things on others in the past. But, this doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

How does wearing a hat dishonor the man's head, who in this case, is Christ? Well, to understand what Paul is saying we need a little background in the cultural setting of these days in this part of the world. In both the Greek and Jewish cultures of this day women were seen as inferior. Their roles were truly subservient without much say in the way their lives were to be directed.

Though you and I as modern day Americans might see this as unfair this was the norm. And so, this is just how people dealt with the structure of their society. And there were particular ways of expressing such an authoritative structure which was also normal.

Many women in this part of the world, for example, demonstrated their role by wearing veils out in public. The veil, which covered the face, was a normal part of life which no one questioned because it was a symbol in that society in Corinth which said to everyone that this woman fits in society and is accomplishing her role in society.

This was a cultural norm for this time and place; not unlike cultural norms we have today which most people don't question, or for that matter don't even think about, precisely because it is the normal and accepted practice.

For example, in our society no one seriously questions who goes into what public bathroom. If it's got a little male figure on the front door women stay away. If it's got a little female figure in a dress, men stay away. Even though the fixtures are essentially the same, with one exception for the men, there is nothing really feminine or masculine about any particular public bathroom.

So, why do men and women stay away from the others bathroom? Because our culture has set it up this way. You would feel culturally out of place if you men found yourself in the next stall to a woman in a public bathroom.

But Paul's point is much more serious than what bathroom someone uses. His point has to do with the divinely appointed privilege and responsibility of who ultimately has the final authority and what the problems are if we try and change such a divinely appointed system. So, let's try this again.

1CO 11:4 "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head."

The phrase, "with his head covered", or as the NASB puts it, "something on his head", could literally be translated, "having down from the head."

What this infers is a man wearing a veil which would not just cover his head, but would drape down over his head. In other words, it infers a man wearing a woman's veil. In our culture it might be the equivalent of a man wearing a dress.

Now, I doubt that Paul is addressing a problem where men are acting like transvestites as they wear women's clothes in public and at church gatherings. He's simply stating the obvious about the roles of men and women as their culture understood things.

If a man were to come to church with his head covered in a veil Paul would say that that man has publicly denounced his manhood and the authority he has in that household and church as a man. But worse, he has dishonored his head, who is Christ, who has not designed man for a woman's role.

And so, essentially, in that case, the man has total disregard for God who has given man his role. In our case this has to do with how men are to conduct themselves in the church. There may have possibly been some women who felt that they were better equipped to handle some of the spiritual duties of the church.

And that may have been true in some cases, but it didn't give them the right to assume the role of the man, because that was given to man by God . And so, while these some of these women possibly felt compelled to play a different role in the church, both their culture and the word of God would say no to them as they tried to assume the role of the man who was to be a godly example.

1CO 11:5-6 "And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head - it is just as though her head were shaved. 6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head."

Just as man has a role in society and the church, so does the woman. And by the way, you'll notice that Paul has no problem with the culture dictating certain norms for society, as long as those norms do not conflict with the word of God. The other thing to point out here is that Paul is not discouraging women from praying or prophesying in a worship setting, only that they do so with the proper covering.

Now, Paul is not teaching that women today should come to church draped in veils. Throughout church history such practices were more or less adopted depending in what part of the world one lived.

I remember growing up in the Catholic church years ago where women could not come into church without some form of head covering. Most women carried these little linen doilies they would pull out of their purses just before going into church. This was true of even some Protestant churches to an extent.

Our culture today, by and large, doesn't require such a thing. And so, if Paul were living in our culture he would not force women to

wear such coverings at church. But, he would not compromise on the more important issue of women submitting to their husbands, for example, as it came to the role and authority a man has been given by God.

By the way, what we are not saying here is that culture dictates what the truth of God's word is really saying. Unfortunately, this is all too real in our world today, where the plain teaching of God's word is discarded for cultural norms that defy God's truth, be it the acceptance of homosexuality, and other sins of convenience that are "not to be touched" by the church, be it a lax attitude toward marriage, divorce or even, as is the case before us, women assuming a role in the church that God has not ordained.

So, how can we say that certain types of clothing in a worship setting that Paul describes in our text, be arbitrarily put to the side?

Keep in mind that the very context of this letter has already addressed areas of liberty that Paul says may be pursued as long as they don't contribute to the weakening of the faith of frailer saints. The principle of liberties is qualified by God's word and in the same way this principle would apply to clothing.

Two principles are at work here. 1) The principle of a type of clothing symbolizing headship of both husband and Christ. 2) The principle of modesty.

In a similar worship setting with similar subject matter of the role of men and women in the body of Christ Paul gives this instruction to Timothy.

1 Timothy 2:9-14 ⁹ Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, ¹⁰ but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. ¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. ¹⁴ And *it was not Adam who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

In this case Paul uses the term "proper clothing" in relationship to being submissive to the one given authority by God to exercise that authority in the church and by extension in the home. Proper clothing would certainly include head coverings in that culture.

Remember, Paul is teaching about the head of the woman, and the head of the man while using their literal heads as a metaphor for such authority and the clothing of their culture that indicates such submissiveness.

The principle of modesty however is not limited to the actual clothing, though that is certainly reflective of it, but the principle always goes to the issue of a humble heart before God as it bows to the will of God found in His word, and Paul gives some practical advice in this respect to older women when writing to Titus.

Titus 2:3-5 ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴ so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

But this brings us back to our question. If Paul mandates, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a head covering for a woman in a worship setting, how can we simply say our culture rejects such a mandate?

Because of the principle at work. Clothing necessarily is an area of liberty since it has changed over the years. In fact, from the time of Adam and Eve it's changed dramatically. Does anyone remember what type of clothing those two wore prior to the fall?

The first clothing was not invented by man. The first clothing was given to man by God. And if you'll remember that clothing was made out of animal skin.

Genesis 3:21 ²¹ The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

To clothe them with animal skin necessarily means an animal gave its life for clothing their nakedness. But the clothing of animal skins was not a mandate for all men in all times to wear animal skins. In fact, just as in the case of our text, clothing Adam and Eve was more than covering their naked bodies. It was symbolic of God's covenant authority over them as He mandated how one can be found clothed as it relates to their sin.

Galatians 3:27 ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Clothing is used symbolically of both authority and salvation in Christ and Paul uses the clothing of his day to demonstrate how authority was recognized in that culture which was recognized in the church.

By the way, we have no indication that Eve ever wore a veil on her head, but it was clear that she was to submit to her husband as she submitted to her God and Savior, which brings up an important question regarding Adam and Eve both before and after the fall.

Was there an authority structure of man to woman before the fall? Absolutely. Woman was made for man to be a helper to man, not the other way around. But after the fall, that tension of who would be the head of the family, and in particular God's family, would be apparent as there would be a blurring of those God ordained distinctions because of sin. And because of that God made it clear after the fall that the authority given to Adam before the fall would still be in place.

Genesis 3:16 ¹⁶ To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you."

So, how does a believing woman in the first century in Corinth dishonor her head in church when praying or prophesying according to our text? She comes in with her head uncovered and through that cultural act she denies she has any authority over her, be that her husband, the elders or even Christ.

What Paul is saying is that she is demonstrating a rebellious attitude. And if a woman in that time and place had done that she would have known that she was demonstrating such an attitude. There would have been no way she could have done this accidentally, any more than an alert woman today could accidentally go into a man's bathroom which was clearly marked.

To demonstrate the way in which the woman has spiritually dishonored her head, or husband or elders, for example, Paul goes on to give a parallel, once again using the cultural norm of his day by comparing the uncovering of her literal head to a woman who had shaved her head in verses 5 and 6.

"..... it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head."

Paul says, ‘okay, you want to show your rebellion against the norm of God’s plan and the cultural norm? Then you might as well go all the way, because what you have essentially done is to show yourself as one who has truly gone against all Godly and cultural norms.’

The cultural norm was to have your head covered in public and at worship settings with the church. ‘But if you women want to assume the role of the man, then you might as well look like one. If you’re not disgraced in your culture with leaving your head uncovered, then try this on for size. Crop your hair as close to the scalp as a man, or shave it off completely.’

In those days, there were women who did just that. But in that culture everyone knew what they were. They were prostitutes. And so, Paul puts this whole problem back into the laps of these women in the church by asking them if they are willing to be shamed in such a way.

If they are not willing to be disgraced in this way of shaving their heads then do what is right by wearing the veil at times of public worship. But more important, be willing to submit to those men who are in authority over you, first your husband, and then those authorities in the church who have to do with the advancement of the church through the gospel of Jesus Christ; Pastors, elders and deacons.

This by the way, is the reason that Pastors, elders and deacons are to be men, according to the word of God. It has nothing to do with men being better than women because we know that there may be godly spiritual women who could probably handle such positions.

But because God has ordained that men be in authority over women in such matters, we see clearly in the letters Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus that such leaders must be the husbands of one wife, not the wives of one husband.

The issue of Pastors, elders and deacons being men only is another issue which we’ll deal with at another time, but in the case before us it certainly may have been an issue as some women were vying for the authority that belongs to such leaders.

What Paul is doing here, and what the Holy Spirit is giving us in this portion of Scripture, is to show that the Lord knows what is best for His church. And as it relates to the roles of men and women in the home and in the church, God has the final word and

it's always best as long as it's carried out according to His word in love.

This is why it's so important to understand that though men have been given such authority it is always meant to be done in the same way Christ loves His church. For example, we see this as Paul teaches the church in Ephesus what the husband's role is.

EPH 5:25-28 "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. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself."

If men abuse their authority and role as husbands and leaders then they will be held accountable to their head who is the living Christ and Creator and God.

But this also works the same way for women. If they will not submit to their head then they also will be held accountable to the head who is over both men and women, who is Christ.

In fact, Paul puts this into perspective as he gives us a glimpse into how God views the roles of men and women.

1CO 11:7-9 "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."

Notice that Paul says that man is both the image and glory of God, whereas woman is shown to be the glory of man.

Now, women, please don't lose sight of the context. This is not a cut to women or is it meant to degrade women. Remember, Paul is elevating women and trying to keep them from disgracing themselves as they fulfill the role their Creator has given them. Women are, in essence, the glory or crown jewel of man.

And so, when Paul says that men are the glory of God and women are the glory of man it has to do with their respective roles before God. As it relates to the church man is seen to be both the image and glory of God.

What this means is that an image is an exact representation of something. Now obviously a man is not an exact representation of

God and is therefore not God. But in so far as God is head of man, man is the image of such authority over woman.

And then Paul goes on to explain how this works in the natural order of things as God created them.

1CO 11:8-9 "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."

Paul is using the creation account and simply repeating what is known to be true as to how God brought man and woman into this world. And through the creation account Paul is teaching God's intent as to the role of man and woman, especially as it relates to Christ's church.

Man did not come from the woman. Here Paul means the first man. The first man came from God as He took the dust of the ground and formed man and breathed life into man. But God makes it clear that man needs a helper, a companion to make him complete.

GEN 2:18 "The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

He then took a rib from man and used that portion of man to form woman. But the woman was formed for a very specific purpose and that was to be a part of man.

GEN 2:21-22 "So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

And so, Paul uses this creation account to put the order of things into perspective when talking about authority and roles of both men and women. And this is why he can say that man was not created for woman, but woman for man. That was just God's order. Woman followed man in the order of creation.

And it is for this reason that women are to understand their roles with men and it is this reason that Paul comes back to his original argument that if God has placed women in a role of submission, then they should not violate that role from God in the way they demonstrate that role in public worship.

1CO 11:10 "For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head."

In the culture of Paul's day the sign of authority over a woman was the veil. And this didn't mean that Paul was excluding the spiritual sense of their role. In other words, Paul is not saying to women that as long as you wear this veil on your head you are truly being submissive to God and men. Otherwise we get into a works oriented approach to worship.

The outward sign is simply meant to demonstrate an inward reality. Paul wants the hearts of these women to understand that God loves them so much that He has given them a very special place in the church. It just doesn't happen to be an authoritative place over a man.

In our culture the sign of authority is a little more vague. But Paul is not teaching that 20th century women living in the U.S. must start wearing veils.

But how do women show such submissiveness today? The answer is quite simple as it would have been in Paul's day. Simply love Christ by being submissive to His will. And if His will is that women submit to men in an authoritative environment in the church and in the home then that would be the best course of action to bring honor to God in that way.

By the way, when we look at verse 10 of our text we might wonder what Paul means when he says the reason women should cover their heads includes angels. What does this mean? Well, the answer is, no one seems to know. There is a lot of conjecture, but no one can conclusively give an answer.

One such answer might include allowing the angels to view the way in which God has worked in the life of mankind, and in such an example they give glory to God when they see women giving glory to God as they submit.

Remember that angels are not omniscient or all-knowing, and so they are constantly learning new things as they experience their world and ours as they serve the living God and witness the grace of our Lord in our lives and give Him glory for that as well. They love to see Jesus at work in the lives of men and women.

1PE 1:12 "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. ***Even angels long to look into these things.***"

And so, Paul in our text might be reminding women that whether they realize it or not angels are learning about submissiveness in the lives of people as they watch and take notice of women who love the Lord in their submissiveness. It may be that simple.

But, despite the submissive role of women it is never meant to mean that they are inferior to men, or that they are door-mats, or that they are without usefulness as they work in the role God gave them.

1CO 11:11-12 "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."

Now, this is an interesting line of argument because essentially Paul is taking us back to creation where God created man from the dust of the ground and as we saw earlier he states that the woman came from the man. This does not mean Adam willed the woman into existence or even that he asked that a woman be created from him.

In fact, in the whole process Adam was not even conscious as the Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam as the Lord literally opened his side and took one of his ribs and then we are told He closed the flesh, which is another way of describing a surgical procedure, though certainly a miraculous procedure in this case.

But then Paul, after reminding his readers of this arrangement of the man coming first in the creation order of God, and after reminding us that woman came from man, he then turns the argument around by saying that despite how the first woman came from man, thus being dependent on man, all subsequent men came from women, thereby being dependent on women.

But, in all of this arrangement, it is still God's world and it still God's will that both women and men be dependent upon one another and that both submit to the will of God, according to His word, since all things come from Him.

With that in mind Paul wraps up this section by repeating what he has already touched on earlier regarding cultural norms of their day.

1CO 11:13-16 "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."

In this portion of the letter Paul moves from a cultural norm of head coverings, regarding the expression of the roles of both men and women, as it relates to authority, and reintroduces the natural order of things not dictated by culture but by God Himself.

Paul says, judge for yourselves. In other words, it is not necessary for Paul to teach a new concept of authority to these Corinthians since they already know how nature itself speaks to the issue.

1 Corinthians 11:14-15 ¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

The teacher in this case is nature. Now Paul is not suggesting that "Mother Nature" is in control of the roles of men and women, though Greek thought certainly included the idea of nature being an animate force in the lives of people.

Rather, Paul is pointing these people back to an obvious proposition and that is that the very nature of man demonstrates that there are differences between men and women in something as mundane as hair. Generally speaking men have short hair while women have long hair.

This does not mean that throughout the ages that the culture of man hasn't changed to accommodate different patterns of hair length. Samson comes to mind. But Paul is speaking in generalities and can make this broad statement from history.

And his argument is that women have been adorned by God with long hair. This is what Paul means to say in the statement, "For her hair is given to her for a covering." **1 Corinthians 11:15**

Well, who gave it to her? The Creator, God. And why did He give it to her? For a covering. And what covering has Paul been discussing? A covering that demonstrates that she is covered by a man who has been given the responsibility by God to protect, nurture and stand over her with the authority that God gave the man as both he and the woman are dependent on each other in their respective roles that God blessed them with.

And then Paul makes this final statement.

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

Here Paul sums up his argument and places the evidence back into the laps of these Corinthians and essentially states that they can be contentious and not believe the obvious or they can submit to the order of authority that God created in the Garden of Eden which has been in place and has been practiced for all these years.

Paul is not introducing a mandate for head coverings, but is demonstrating that the woman has already been given a covering by God and this is seen in a variety of ways that are obvious to anyone who is not contentious and wants not to kick at the goad of God's truth.

The Law of Moses never mandated veils for the women of Israel and yet even before the law was given by God it was customary for women to utilize head coverings in a show of humbling themselves to the authority of men as was the case with Rebekah.

Genesis 24:64-65 ⁶⁴ Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. ⁶⁵ She said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself.

God has ordained how His creation should behave, be it gravity, seasons, the rotation of the earth and even the way men and women interact in this life. To go against the nature of things as it relates to God's created order is to go against God.

All authority belongs to God because all things originate from God. This section may deal with authority of man over the woman in certain respects but only because God is Creator and deserves our full allegiance as we submit to Him.

May we never find ourselves fighting against God, but may we flee to Him and cling to Him by faith as we honor Him with our lives in whatever role we have been given by God.

It's true that, in a spiritual sense, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (GAL 3:28)

But in our oneness there is still diversity of gifts and roles. May we seek to know the difference and walk in Christ as those

servants who will be found faithful and will honor Him in all things including our roles as men and women in the church.