

1Corinthians 11:1-3 "Authority, and the Role of Women"

1CO 11:1-3 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. 2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. 3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

This morning we come to a passage about authority which, later in the text, will lead to issues on hair and head coverings which on the surface might cause us to scratch our heads in wonderment as to what in the world Paul is talking about.

And certainly there are some very odd things here for 20th, now almost 21st century Christians, living in America. But, as with all of Scripture, this is no less instructive and no less important in the way in which God's people are to live to the glory of God.

So let's jump right in. You'll notice that Paul begins this next section with a verse which seems a little out of place.

1CO 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

The reason it seems out of place for chapter 11 is because it essentially is. Keep in mind that when Paul wrote this letter he didn't place verse or chapter divisions in it. This was a letter and was meant to be read as a letter. It wasn't until around the 13th century A.D. that such divisions were being introduced to help the reader better study and meditate upon those truths.

Most commentators would agree that verse one of chapter 11 of our text really belongs at the end of chapter 10. Remember that chapter 10 spoke of Christian liberties, specifically eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul's whole point was that if a liberty keeps you from being able to be an effective witness for Christ, both inside and outside the church, then it would be better to give it up for the sake of bringing many to Christ.

This was a practice Paul was willing to give up and in fact had done so for the sake of being all things to all men so that some would be saved through his ministry. And so, he could say with confidence, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

In other words, as Paul walked in the Spirit according to the truth of God's word, we should imitate his example. In fact, this would go for any believer who follows the Lord because of a love for Christ. Paul was not a god, he was not an angel in disguise, he was a man; flesh and bones.

But he was a man who followed Christ. And for any believer who follows Christ they too may qualify as examples for other believers to imitate. It only makes sense that the Lord would allow us to use other godly believers in our lives as examples.

The only restriction we must place upon human examples is that their example must be one which comes into conformity with the word of God and the life of Christ. But we can learn a lot from each other. We can be encouraged by each other as each walks after the Lord by faith.

What better way to learn how to walk by faith than to see someone doing it. What better way to learn how to walk obediently in the Spirit than to see someone walking obediently in the Spirit. What better way to learn what the fruit of the Spirit is than to see someone demonstrating love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

But now Paul moves from Christian liberty to an area of life which would probably fall into the category of public worship. In this section we are not sure that Paul is directly addressing a question which the Corinthians had posed in the letter Paul received from them.

Remember that much of what Paul is doing, from chapter 7 on, is answering questions they had written to him.

1CO 7:1 "Now for the matters you wrote about:..."

And then he goes on to explain the duties of wives and husbands, the responsibilities of singles, under what circumstances a believer may divorce his or her mate, how slaves should live under the authority of their masters, and Christian liberties which, for these Corinthians, involved eating meat sacrificed to idols.

And so, Paul seems to still be in the mode of addressing concerns that the Corinthians had on specific issues. Now, as it relates to our present issue, Paul is teaching these believers the proper role of men and women in the church as it relates to headship and authority.

But before he does this he actually praises them for something they are doing right. This is a pattern we see in Paul's letters on different occasions. And though Paul is balancing his tone when it comes to rebuking in this instance here in our text, it shouldn't be seen as an empty praise, nor some form of manipulation.

1 Corinthians 11:2 ² Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.

He's simply being honest about those things they have been faithful to consider and being glad that they do regard him as one who loves them. And apparently many of them remembered him in prayer and in their thoughts with fondness. But in light of this he would love to be able to praise them for their being doers of the word they've received from him, but he can't.

What this does is to help them see that being praised in one area of the Christian life may be a plus, but when God expects a complete adherence to those things we've received, it should motivate us to be praised in all areas. We don't have the luxury to pick and choose what area we'll be obedient in. God expects complete love and devotion if we are to call Him Lord and Master.

As we come back to our text Paul begins with a theological truth and then expands on that in the way it should work itself out in the church.

1CO 11:3 "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

What is Paul teaching? Paul is dealing with the roles of people in the church as he brings into focus how even Jesus Christ had a role in relationship to the Father regarding His ministry to men and our redemption.

Each has a role and each must submit to that role for the sake of furthering the kingdom of God and walking in the Spirit in the way that best glorifies our Lord and Savior in His church.

Let's begin with the "head of every man is Christ." When we talk of being the "head" in this case we are talking about one who has authority over someone else. However, we need to be careful not to suggest that this always means superiority over someone else unless we're talking about ontological differences.

Ontology simply means the nature of one's existence. God is Spirit and eternal. Man is flesh and spirit and has a beginning, therefore a creature of God. In light of this God is superior and greater than man since God's existence is eternal and He is man's creator.

However, there is no ontological difference between a man and a woman. Therefore, man is not superior or greater than woman. They are equals in the sense that each has come from their Creator and they are made from the same substance and given the same qualities of flesh and spirit.

And so, when it says that Christ has authority over every man, it is assumed that Christ has both authority and superiority over all His creation, since He is God and creator.

COL 2:9-10 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority."

But our text is really dealing with the authority issue as it relates to Christ's church.

EPH 1:22-23 "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

And so, if you're going to start with the standard as it relates to authority, there is no place to start other than with God, Jesus Christ.

And so, in our text, it is established that Jesus Christ is supreme in authority over man in general and over the husband in particular. But in being in supreme authority Christ has the authority to extend authority. And therefore, according to God's word, the head of the woman is man.

In other words, in the way God has designed His universe, and the ways in which things work together for our good and to God's glory, everything is created with a purpose in mind. Every detail has been planned out by God as to how it works best.

For example, in God's design of water He has purposed that it will work in a particular way. It will freeze only at a certain temperature. It will only freeze from the surface down. Of all the liquids in God's creation it will be the foundation for all that man can use to sustain life for himself, his livestock and crops.

No other liquid will be able to do what water can in all of these applications. In the same way, God designed that mankind, both men and women, are to have a place in God's universe which will be unique. And within their uniqueness the man will have certain responsibilities the woman won't, and the woman will have certain responsibilities the man won't; all by God's design and authority.

And so, to fight against such design by God is to fight against God. Imagine what kind of world this would be if water decided it will not freeze at 32 degrees F., or that it will not freeze at all.

If it decided to do that, rain would not be able to form. Whether you realize it or not, all rain starts out as ice. As it freezes in the atmospheric soup we call rain clouds, it becomes heavier and as it travels down it begins to warm up and then defrosts as it then travels down to earth in its normal form of water drops. Sometimes it will not defrost which is why you'll find hail storms in the middle of summer.

Now imagine if men's and women's roles and authority are mixed up and reversed. Well, we don't have to imagine that because in our world that has happened to a greater or lesser degree in many areas of our culture.

The sexes have been blurred. And the roles of women have crossed over to that of men in many areas of life. And as a result more pressure has been put on women to conform to the role that modern culture has deemed best for women.

Now, I'm not suggesting that men be chauvinistic about their attitude toward women, nor would Paul. In fact, in the way God designed women, and the role they play in marriage and in the church, they have really been set free to be exactly what their Creator meant for them to be in society and the church.

To go contrary to what God designed for them to be, in the long haul, is really more detrimental to them and society. And the only thing Paul is trying to bring to the forefront here is to have these believers in Corinth know what God's perfect plan for men and women are, and to live in such a way that humbly bows to the authority of God who created both and designed both for different roles in certain circumstances.

Christ is the head of every man. The man is the head of a woman. And God is the head of Christ. This is ordained by the Creator and

God of all creation. And yet, when we read such a thing it seems so foreign to our culture.

All of a sudden the extreme positions are the first things which come to mind. And women, quite understandably, begin to ask questions like; does this mean to imply that I remain barefoot and pregnant for the duration? Does this mean I can never get a job outside of the home? Does this mean that I never have any say in my marriage and that my husband is the king of our home?

As to the last question, yes we men are the kings of our homes. Just kidding. No, it doesn't mean this at all. But both men and women have a tendency to rush to these extremes when making their case as to what authority they have in the home.

But it doesn't mean that God doesn't have a design for society in both the family and in the larger areas of life where such authority is given by God, who is all authority. And if we lived in a perfect world we would see how this would work itself out in our homes and the world, and as we'll see in our text, in the church.

Unfortunately, we don't live in a perfect world. And even when the world was perfect we don't get a very good picture of how this worked itself out in the lives of the perfect man and woman in the Garden of Eden.

It appears that from the time God created Adam, and from him then created the woman, that not a great deal of time transpired before the woman was tempted by Satan, who then tempted Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit.

Remember that in the context here in 1Corinthians 11, Paul is using the creation scene as we'll see next week when we are able to get a little further in the text.

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."

I'm sure this will prove insightful for next week. But the point Paul is trying to convey here is that if God has designed for something to work a particular way then who are we to try and improve on it?

And when it comes to the church it is Jesus Christ who has all authority, and it is His church and if He has designed for it to work in a particular way, so as to be the most effective way of reaching out to a lost world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, while bringing

glory to God, then we need to see things from His perspective and walk accordingly.

It's when we decide to approach life with Christ in a worldly way that we begin to get ourselves in trouble. It's when we decide we know best, instead of following Christ, that we actually begin to accomplish the opposite of glorifying God.

But in the case before us, when authority has been given by God to men that is not the same authority given to women, some will balk at that and go one of two ways with it. Some men will assume that this authority is meant to mean superiority and instead of building a loving relationship it shows itself to be built on fear and bullying.

Women on the other hand are then taught that they are just as good as men and they should assert themselves in the home to the degree that they try and assume the role of the man that was meant for the man only.

It seems the nature of people wants what the other person's got, instead of being content in what has been given to them. In the case of authority it only works best when it is put into its proper context.

The military is a classic example. Someone has to be in charge. Someone has to be making the rules. Someone has to take responsibility for others. This doesn't mean that everyone at the top is necessarily best suited for the task. But to always be questioning and tearing down those who are in authority can result in mutiny.

The same is true in marriage or in the world in general when it comes to men and women and authority.

In fact, you'll find that in some marriages, the abilities, the skills, and maybe even the spirituality of the woman, may be better than those of her husband.

She may in fact be better equipped to handle some of the authority in that home that the husband should be utilizing. But does this mean she should usurp that authority that has been given to her husband by God Himself?

That answer is no. And the reason has to go back to what God has ordained. John MacArthur makes the point that "God established the principle of male authority and female subordination for the

purpose of order and complementation, not on the basis of any innate superiority of males."

Now does this mean that the woman cannot give input which would enable that family to run more efficiently or more spiritually? Of course not. In fact, that's part of the role of the woman. She is a helper in that situation. And in many cases the husband may even want to delegate certain authorities to his wife as long as he doesn't relinquish his authority in the home.

It's when the husband relinquishes the authority that many women are forced to pick up the ball. And by the way guys, we all will one day stand before God to give an account of how we used the authority He has given us to further His plans for this world, our families and His church.

Sometimes we look at this like the women are being denied something in the way of authority. But it ought to be looked at as protecting women from such accountability they were not designed to pick up.

Now granted, in a perfect world, we could make it a black and white issue. And yet, in a world full of sin we will always have exceptions to the authority issue. What about a mom who is a single parent? She has to play both roles when she may not be equipped to handle both. This is where the church and the men of the church can be supportive and helpful.

What about a dad who is an unbeliever and hasn't got a clue as to the spiritual authority he was originally designed to possess in his family? What is a godly mother to do? She must now assume a role in that family that was designed for her husband.

And yet, even in that situation she is to be careful how she assumes such a role so as not to usurp the God-given authority that her husband still has in the family. Remember, that this was designed by God for every man whether they are Christians or not.

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.*"

This command from God is post rebellion in nature and is being addressed to two rebels, not having embraced the promise from God, yet to be delivered, regarding a Savior. This authority structure therefore is designed by God for all men who now must live in a cursed world because of sin.

Every man, be he a believer or not still has the responsibility to honor God with such authority; an authority which is designed to nurture and build up his wife and children. It's not an authority to tear down. And this is where the world has gotten it backwards.

And so you have the feminist movement which wants to be separate from any male authority because they only see the abuses. And they want to be in charge of their own lives without any interference from a man.

If authority is simply used as an excuse to interfere with the well-being of women then I wouldn't blame them. But that's not how God has designed it, which is why it is so important that Godly men begin to use their authority in Christ to promote the role of women and to further the design of God in this world through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's when we deny or abuse the authority given by God that the will of God is placed on the shelf. Imagine if Jesus Christ decided to undermine the authority of the Father. Imagine if our Lord Jesus said, I don't need to submit to the authority of the Father. You and I would still be in our sin.

But as Paul says at the end of verse 3, "the head of Christ is God."

Again, this does not mean that Christ is inferior to God, since He is God. How can God be inferior to God? What this does mean is that in the area of authority the Son of God has submitted to the Father in accomplishing the Father's will for you and me.

Our Lord Jesus is not inferior to the Father any more than a woman is inferior to a man. But in regards to authority God has designed it so that someone will submit to accomplish the redemptive will of God.

This is an amazing mystery as we consider the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are three distinct persons, each with a role, and yet are identical in essence, being very God.

And yet, the Scriptures have made it clear that Jesus submitted Himself to the Father. Nothing could show this clearer than when Jesus Christ chose to become a man through His incarnation as He humbled Himself to become a man and redeem men from their sin as He died in their place.

Everything that Jesus did here on earth some 2,000 years ago was to submit and accomplish the task the Father gave Him.

JOH 4:34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

JOH 6:38-40 "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

And so, we see that even in the Godhead there is meant to be an authority as it relates to our salvation that our Lord Jesus recognized and submitted to. How much more should we submit and obey our Lord who has designed that men and women have different roles in the sphere of their authority from God?

"You cannot, for example, reject the principle of woman's submission to man without also rejecting Christ's submission to the Father and believers submission to Christ. It is clear that the man's being head of the woman means the same thing as Christ's being head of man -- that is, sovereign leadership requiring submission that recognizes the benefit of such leadership of love.....

..... Paul inseparably ties the three aspects of the principle together. As Christ is submissive to the Father and Christians are to be submissive to Christ, women are to be submissive to men. You cannot reject one part without rejecting the others." (John MacArthur)

No man will ever lead, to God's glory, unless he is willing to follow and submit himself to Christ. And no woman will ever submit to the authority given to man unless she is willing to submit and follow Christ. Both have to submit to Christ, even as Jesus was willing to submit to the Father for the salvation of His people.

He only desired to please the Father in all things. Should we not do the same in our families and in our church, as well as our world?

In all things may God be glorified in and through us. And may the roles He has given each of us be used in a way that honors Him.