

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT

Starting from 11:2, Paul turns his attention to 'matters that pertain to public worship' in the Corinthian Church. There are three major concerns: *conduct of men and women in worship, the Lord's Supper and spiritual gifts.*

We will look at the first matter today: *conduct of men and women in worship (11:2-16)*. This is one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible. The various questions one can ask regarding these 15 verses include:

How does verse 2 relate to verses 3-16?

What is the meaning of 'head' in verse 3?

Does it have the same meaning in each of the 3 occurrences?

What exactly is the head covering being discussed here?

In what sense is the woman the glory of man (verse 7)?

What is the meaning of 'woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head' (verse 10)? And what has angels got to do with the whole thing?

What is the meaning of 'nature' in verse 14?

The passage is hard to understand, engaging the mind at full stretch to work out its meaning. It is also hard to accept, engaging the will at full stretch to respond in obedience. So we need to ask God to teach us and give us grace to obey what is taught.

Prayer: O Lord our God, in Your light we see light. Grant us Your Light to enlighten us and give us Your strength to enable us, that we will know Your truth and live by Your truth, and hence glorify You, O most glorious God. Amen!

STUDY OF THE TEXT

Verse 2: *Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.*

(i) Traditions [*paradosis* – *transmission, precept, ordinance*]

Matthew 15:2-6 (parallel passage: Mark 7:3-13) – human traditions

Galatians 1:14 – traditions of the fathers

Colossians 2:8 – tradition of men

2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6 – traditions of the apostles

(ii) Delivered [*paradidomai* – *surrender, yield, transmit, betray, commit, give over*]

❖ The word is often used in the negative sense, like unbelievers ‘will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues’ (Matthew 10:17) and Jesus knowing who will ‘betray Him’ (John 6:64)

❖ Four times in the New Testament, other than our text, use this word in connection with the conveyance of divine truths/apostolic traditions:

Romans 6:17 ~ *But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.*

1 Corinthians 11:23 ~ *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;*

1 Corinthians 15:3 ~ *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*

Jude 3 ~ *Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

❖ Three times in the New Testament, this word is used to describe what Jesus has done for us:

Galatians 2:20 ~ *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Ephesians 5:2 ~ *And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*

Ephesians 5:25 ~ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.*

This points us to the basic force of this verb, that one ‘commits’ not just his mind but his life to the thing in view!

Traditions [*paradosis*] + Delivered [*paradidomai*] → *What Paul conveys here is not mere human traditions whereby we can dismiss it if we wish, but it comes with full divine authority and is hence binding on all churches. Paul deems it to be so important that he is prepared to give his life in passing it on to the churches.*

(iii) Praised for keeping (hold fast).

How could Paul praise them for holding fast to the traditions he has delivered to them, and then in his next breath, admonish them for their malpractice and misconduct in public worship (11:3-16, 11:17-34, 12:1-14:40)?

Three Possibilities:

[a] Paul is out of his mind!

This is not an option evangelical Christians can accept. Paul is here speaking as an inspired apostle of Christ.

[b] Paul is just flattering his readers!

This would imply that Paul is not a sincere man of integrity. If you ought his integrity, then why would you want to hear him?

[c] Paul is giving credit for where it is due!

On the whole, the Corinthian Christians have held fast to the traditions he has delivered to them. Hence, Paul praised them for it. However, there are three areas where they have gone out of line. Hence, he talks about them in the next 4 chapters.

This, to me, is the most natural and acceptable explanation for the relation with verse 2 and the rest of the passage.

Scanning verses 3-16, we see that the words 'man' and 'woman' appears on almost every verse of this passage. In addition, we find the words 'honour' or 'glory', as well as 'covering' and 'uncovering' occurring numerous times.

Since the context is public worship, our first guess is that this passage has to do with the conduct of males and females in public worship, their conduct having something to do with covering or uncovering, with the end result being honour and glory, or otherwise.

Verse 3: *But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

What does the word 'head' (*kephale*) mean?

Two answers have been put forward: (i) source (ii) authority.

So the verse could read: *the source of every man is Christ, the source of woman is man, and the source of Christ is God.* Or it could read: *the authority over every man is Christ, the authority of over woman is man, and the authority over Christ is God.*

Which is the correct answer? Let's see how Paul used this word in his other epistles:

Ephesians 5:22-24 ~ *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*

Which fits better in verse 23 -- source or authority? *Unless verse 23 is talking about Adam and Eve, it would sound very strange to say that the husband is the source of the wife. In what sense is he her source? In what sense is it that she comes from him? And it is clear that the verse is not talking about Adam and Eve, but about husbands and wives in general. Hence, the word 'head' here can only mean 'authority' - the husband is the authority over his wife.*

How does the context - verse 22 and verse 24 - help us in our interpretation? *If the husband is the authority over the wife, then it matches perfectly that the wife is called to submit to her husbands in verse 22. Authority and submission goes together. In the same way, as Christ is the authority over the church, hence it is fitting that the church should be subject to Christ (verse 24).*

Ephesians 1:20-23 ~ *which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

What is the meaning of 'head over all things' in verse 22? *This is the climax that has been built steadily from verse 20 where it is said that Christ is raised from the dead and seated in the heavenly places. Verse 21 tells us that he is seated above people and all beings in this age and that to come. Verse 22a says that all things are put under His feet. Now comes our phrase in verse 22b, announcing that He is head over all things. Surely the context demands that we say the meaning here is authority! To answer 'source' just don't fit!!*

Colossians 2:10 ~ *and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*

Is Colossians 2:10 saying that Jesus is the source of all principality and power? Or that Jesus has authority over all principality and power? When we realize from 2:15 that all principality and power refers to demons, the answer is plain, isn't it? Jesus is the source of demonic power? What blasphemy! Jesus has authority over the demons! What comfort!!

Conclusion: *Head (kephale) means authority. Paul is teaching hierarchy here in 1 Corinthians 11:3 == Christ is the authority over every man, man is the authority over woman and God is the authority over Christ.*

Clarification #1: God is the authority over Christ

This does not mean that Christ (the Son of God) is less than God (the Father). The Son is equal to the Father in essence, meaning He is as God as the Father. But in terms of function and role, the Son subjects Himself to the Father.

John 5:19 ~ *Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."*

The Jesus who says, *“My Father is greater than I”* (John 14:28) is the same Person who said, *“O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”* (John 17:5)

Clarification #2: Man is the authority over woman

Like God is the authority over Christ does not mean Christ is inferior to the Father, so man is the authority over woman does not mean man is superior over woman.

What is in view here is role and functions, not essence and nature. Man is the authority over woman because God appoints him to that position. That has nothing to do with either he is superior or inferior to the woman.

List out **TEN WAYS** where you can live out the truth of verse 3 in the coming week:

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|----|-----|
| 1. | 5. |
| 2. | 6. |
| 3. | 7. |
| 4. | 8. |
| 5. | 10. |

Verse 4-6: Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.

These 3 verses flow from the theological principle stated in verse 3, in the format as follows:

Since verse 3 is true, therefore . . .

- (i) verse 4 must be done*
- (ii) verse 5-6 must be observed.*

Message of verse 4: A man must not wear a head covering when he prays or prophesies publicly.

Why? Because this is how a woman will adorn herself and for a man to have such adornment is to disgrace himself and his Head.

‘Dishonour’ is ‘kataischuno’ meaning ‘to shame down, i.e. disgrace or by implication put to the blush’

Message of verses 5-6: A woman must wear a head covering when she prays or prophesies publicly.

Why? *Because if she doesn't wear a head covering, she would be dressing like a man and this is to act in a shameful manner. She brings shame to herself and her head.*

What does it mean when Paul says that for a woman to have her head uncovered during prayer or prophesying is the same as having her head shaved (v5)?

Verse 6 ~ *For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.*


Verse 14-15 ~ *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.*

From verse 15, we know that a woman's long hair is her glory. But for a man to have long hair, that is a dishonour (shame) to him, says verse 14. Why? Because man should have short hair! To have long hair will make him look like a woman!

The reverse is true for a woman: long hair is glory, short hair or bald is shame!

Using these two verses, and coming back to examine verses 5&6, we now understand that Paul is saying that if a woman has short, crew-cut hairstyle, or even shave herself bald deliberately, then she is choosing to have a hairstyle of a man, and that is bringing shame.

Hence, the main concept here is 'shame'. Man must look like man, and women must look like women. Man must have short hair and uncover their head in public worship. Women must have long hair and have head covering in public worship. When men behaves in this way, and women adorns themselves in this way, a distinction is made between them, and that is good and right.



Did he REALLY say that women may pray
and prophesy in public (v5)?

Go to Page 10!

Verse 7-10: *For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*

These four verses are Paul's further explanation as to why women should wear head coverings and why men shouldn't. A man should not wear a covering because he is the image and glory of God. A woman should wear a covering because she is the glory of man. A key word in these four verses is the word 'glory', otherwise translated as 'honour'.

Truth: *Woman Is The Glory of Man!*

How?

[1] Woman comes from man (v8)

Here, Paul is obviously thinking of Genesis 2:21-23 ~ And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

Woman comes from man. Hence she was made for his glory, she should honour him. She honours him by wearing head covering during prayer and prophesy, showing her submission to him.

[2] Woman made for man (v9)

Here, Paul is obviously thinking about Genesis 2:18-20 ~ And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him.

Woman was created to help man in the tasks God gave him. Hence, woman should honour him. She honours him by adorning herself in a way that is feminine, different from him, acknowledging his headship.

Here then is the logic of Paul the apostle: Doctrine of creation (Genesis 2) → Woman is the glory of man → Woman should have head covering

Because of the angels - what's that?

Go To Page 11!

Verse 11-12: *Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.*

Verses 3-10 are a sustained argument for male headship and female submission. It is easy to misunderstand Paul's argument and conclude that therefore man is superior to woman. Verses 11-12 seek to ensure that the Biblical balance is maintained.

Man and woman both stand in interdependence in the Lord. It is true that the first woman was made from man. But since then, all man come into this world through women! In one word, there is a profound interdependence and mutuality present in the male-female relationship. Neither sex can boast over the other and no one is superior to the other. Ultimately, everything comes from God!

Putting verses 11-12 together with verses 3-10, we get the following teaching:

In Christ, man and woman are equal. In the words of Galatians 3:28, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ. Both are made in God's image, both are redeemed by the blood of Christ and both are God's precious children.

Man and woman are equal does not mean they don't have different roles given to them in creation and affirmed in redemption. Man is called to lead, having the authority while woman is called to submit.

It is against the revealed will of God to confuse the roles of man and woman, and to blur the lines between the sexes.

Verse 13-16: *Judge among 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 anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.*

These four verses are Paul's concluding argument concerning the issue of woman wearing head covering. He has earlier appealed to the doctrine of creation. Now he appeals to *nature*. This is the same word used in Romans 1:26-27 where Paul says to live a homosexual lifestyle is against *nature*.

Nature here means the natural and instinctive sense of right and wrong that God has implanted in us, especially with respect to sexuality. *Nature* teaches us that, in a particular cultural situation, masculinity and femininity each has a different expression. A male instinctively and naturally shrinks from anything that his culture labels as feminine while a female have a natural inclination to dress like a woman rather than a man. *Nature* teaches us to behave as a man, if we are male; conduct ourselves as a woman, if we are female. We should not confuse the two or blur the line between them!

In verse 16, Paul calls those who reject his teaching here as 'contentious'. By saying 'we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God', Paul is saying that Christians everywhere and churches in every land practice drawing a clear line between males and females. If the church @ Corinth goes the other direction, then they must know that they are the oddballs!!

Some questions to ponder / discuss:

**You know a lady who shaves herself bald.
Many said she looks charming with that hairstyle!
(You might even agree!!)
After our study today, what are you going to do?
Will you say anything to her? Why?**

**In 1st century Corinth, men without head covering and
women with head covering in public assembly maintains the
clear line between males and females, and signifies
female submission to male headship.
Name some concrete ways where we can maintain the clear line
between males and females, and signify female submission
to male headship in our day and age today.**

**Do you agree that the way we dress conveys a message?
What is the hallmark of modern dressing?
What message does it convey, if any?**

**Cross-dressing is becoming very trendy today.
(Example: Jack Neo dressing up as Liang Po Po)
Should Christians cross dress - in daily life? In acting? For fun? At all?**

Did he REALLY say that woman may pray and prophesy in public (v5)?
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- **Some said that ‘woman praying and prophesying’ here is done in private. But the context points to a public meeting as the next two sections (Lord’s Supper – 11:17-34 and Spiritual Gifts – 12:1-14:40) relate to public worship. Moreover, prophecy is a gift given to edify the community when gathered; it is not a private gift to be exercised alone. So verse 5 is talking about women in the Corinthian Church praying and prophesying in public!**

- **Isn’t that a contradiction of 14:34-35 that say: *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church”*?**

**Read the context, beginning from verse 29. It appears that Paul is here talking about prophets prophesying, and others in the congregation making judgments concerning the prophecy. Woman may prophesy, according to 11:5. But Paul in 14:34-35 is prohibiting women from taking the role of judging prophecies in the church! When it comes to judging prophecies, she should keep silent.**

- **So woman may prophesy? We do read in the Old Testament that there are woman prophets. Huldah was a prophetess (2 Chronicles 34:22). Prophets convey messages from God to God’s people. Most prophets we know in the Old Testament are males, but there are some females. In His sovereignty, God does choose some females to be His mouthpiece!**

**HOWEVER, we note that in the Old Testament, there are no female priests. Besides the task of offering sacrifices, priests have the duty of teaching the people the Law of God (Malachi 2:7). Therefore, in the Old Testament, the priests (males only) regularly teach the people the Word of God while from time to time, prophets (males and/or females) come forward to convey messages from God.**

- **In the New Testament, during the apostolic period, we have apostles who also function as elders of the church. We note that all the apostles were men. At the same time, we have prophets in the churches, like the male prophet Agabus (Acts 21:10) and female prophets like Philip’s four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).**

**This is to be expected since the Day of Pentecost is a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. Joel 2:28-32 talks about ‘your sons and your daughters shall prophesy’, that God will pour out His spirit on His menservants and maidservants, and they shall prophesy.**

- **With the death of the last apostles and the completion of the New Testament canon, we have left the apostolic period. This means the gift of apostles and prophets have ceased. The office of elders remains and it is the task of the elders to exercise spiritual oversight in the church, teaching God’s people God’s Word regularly. Like the priests in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament, this is a task that God has instituted for man. Time and again, we may have gifted sisters whom God has taught truths in particular areas and it is right that they share/teach them to the church. BUT this is not occupying the office of pastor/elder and not engaging in regularly teaching in the church.**

**“Because of angels” – what’s that?**  
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Normally (not always), when we encounter ‘angels’ in the Bible, it refers to good, sinless angels. Fallen, sinful angels are normally termed ‘principalities and powers’.

In Luke 15:10, we read: *Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

In 1 Corinthians 4:9, we read: *For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.*

In 1 Peter 1:12, we read: *To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things which angels desire to look into.*

From the above selection of three verses, we know that the angels are very interested observers of what is happening in the church. It is assumed (understandably) that when the angels see what accords with God’s truth, they rejoice. But when they see what is contradictory with God’s truth, they are disgusted.

This could be the reason for the phrase in verse 10 – “*because of the angels*”. Paul is giving yet another reason why women should adorn in the way he prescribed – because the angels are watching!

End of Study