

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Abusing Christian Liberty in Church Inappropriate Behavior for Women 1 Corinthians 11:2-17

Introduction

- The apostle Paul had dealt specifically with several behaviors of the Corinthian believers that involved abusing their Christian liberty. In this chapter we will see how the Corinthian believers were abusing their Christian liberty even during their church services.
- The Corinthian Christians had written to ask Paul several specific questions, and in chapter eleven Paul is apparently responding to another of their written questions. He does not state the question before answering it, but begins by presenting several facts that he wants them to grasp. He hopes they will come to the right conclusion so that the answer to their question will be obvious after their investigation of these facts.



The Importance of Holding Fast to Doctrinal Truths (1 Cor 11:2)

- "Now I praise you" (*epaineo*) = to commend. This is the only chapter in this letter where Paul used this word of commendation, but the other two instances of this word are in the negative: "I do not praise you" (1 Cor 11:17) and "Shall I praise you? I will not praise you!" (1 Cor 11:22). We have not seen the apostle Paul commend the Corinthian believers yet in this letter. We saw him thank God for the grace and the gifts they had been given (1 Cor 1:4-7), but most of what he has said up to this point has been to exhort or correct them. What is it that Paul is commending them for in this verse?
- "You remember me in everything" (*mimnesko*) = akin to *mimetes* (imitators) in verse one, this means to remember, to call to mind, or to remind oneself. Apparently there were some ways in which the Corinthians were imitating the apostle Paul's good example. The phrase "in everything" probably means "in your general practice."
- "To the traditions" (*paradosis*) = consist of instructions given by word of mouth or in writing. This refers to the new revelation of the Word of God that was given to them through the teaching ministry of the apostle Paul.
- "Just as I delivered them to you" (*paradidomi*) = a verb related to the noun *traditions*, it means to deliver verbally or in writing.
- What were these instructions which Paul commended them for holding? They must have related to gathering together on the first day of the week for worship, prayer, and the ministry of the Word of God, because that is the topic of this section. The Corinthian church was at least obeying Paul's instructions to meet together and to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The Principle of a Hierarchy of Authority & Responsibility (1 Cor 11:3)

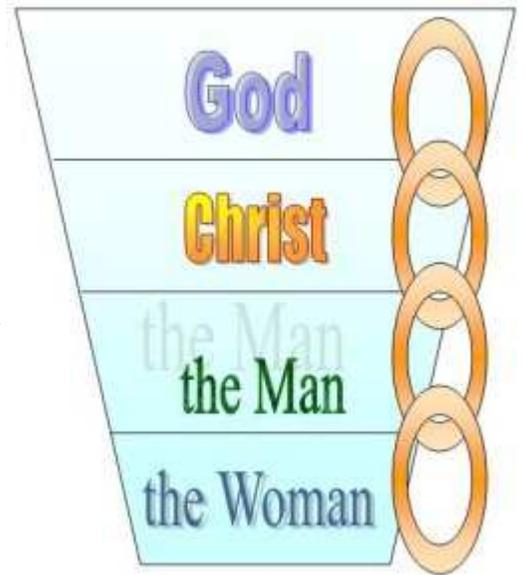
- "But I want you to understand" = "But" is the same word translated "Now" in verse two. If it is to be understood as a contrast, then it is contrasting with the commendation in the previous verse. In other words, there was a specific way in which the Corinthians were not holding fast to Paul's teaching. We could also understand this as something Paul wants to add now to the "traditions" he had left them previously. There was something additional that he wanted them to understand. Paul wanted the Corinthians, literally, to see something (*eido*) = to gain knowledge by examination of some facts. In the next phrase Paul will begin to present these facts, and at the end of this section of chapter eleven he will apply these facts to the specific situation in the Corinthian church.
- Head (*kephale*) = the physical head, that which is prominent or chief, that which is in authority. The parallel uses of this word in Paul's writings would include Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10. These passages show that the word means *authority* in the context of the relationships between Christ and the Church, and between a

husband and wife. In the context of a person's physical anatomy, the word obviously means the physical head. In verse three the word "head" means *authority* in every instance.

- "Christ is the head of every man" = Christ is in authority over every man, believers and unbelievers alike. Several Scripture passages show that the Lord Jesus Christ has been given authority over every man (Matt 28:18; Phil 2:10-11; Heb 2:8). One of the primary aspects in which Christ is in authority over every man is because He is identified as our Creator (Col 1:16), and Paul will soon use the Creation event as a major part of his argument for the principle of subordination. But in the context of the meetings of the church, we can also see that Christ is in direct authority over every believer (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18).
- "The man is the head of a woman" = A man is in authority over a woman in two specific situations within the context of church meetings.
 1. If the man is one of the church officers who has authority and responsibility for the spiritual well-being of all the men & women who are present (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:2-3)
 2. If the man is the husband of the woman and has authority and responsibility for her well-being in every area (Eph 5:22-28; 1 Pet 3:7).

It seems most likely that this statement refers to the proper relationship of authority within the marriage relationship, although it could also refer to someone who is in spiritual authority over the unmarried women of the church.

- "God is the head of Christ" = The gospel of John gives many clear statements by the Lord Jesus about His relationship to God the Father (see John 4:34; 5:18-19; 5:30; 6:38; 14:28). This is the greatest example of someone under authority, and it may have been put last in this sequence for the purpose of emphasis. It is also possible that Paul put it last to encourage women that they are under authority just like their Lord is under authority.
- The guiding principle in this issue is that order and subordination are an essential part of God's original design for the universe. It becomes apparent from the diagram that neither the man nor the woman has any ultimate superiority since they are both clearly under the authority of someone else. The apostle Paul ties together all of these levels of authority, which is pictured by the sections of chain that are linked together. You cannot reject one part without rejecting the others.
- Another point that should be explained is that God did not establish the principle of male authority based on any innate superiority of men. And just because a woman is under proper authority in a particular relationship does not mean that she is in any way inferior to the person to whom she is responsible. Proof of this is seen in the relationship within the Godhead. Christ is just as much *God* as God the Father. He is equal in essence, but He is second in the Godhead and subordinate to the Father in function.



The Shame of Violating Customs Which Support This Hierarchy of Authority (1 Cor 11:4-6)

First, for the Man (1 Cor 11:4)

- Why is the man mentioned first? Possibly because he is first in the hierarchy of authority discussed previously. It seems that men are mentioned throughout this section only for the sake of illustrating this principle. The real issue is with the wrong behavior of women in the church services (see 1 Cor 11:6, 10).
- "Every man who has *something* on his head" = Literally this says, "down over his head having." This is referring to a man having something that covers his physical head and possibly hangs down over his face as well. This could be describing something like a veil that may be worn by a bride in today's American culture. Such a veil was typically worn by decent women in Corinth as a sign of modesty and particularly by married women as a sign of being under the authority and protection of their husband. However, it was not appropriate in that culture for a man to wear such a covering.
- "While praying or prophesying" = Simply stated, praying is speaking to God on behalf of man, while prophesying is speaking to man on behalf of God.
- "Disgraces his head" = The context here makes it clear that whatever this verse is suggesting, it would have been completely ridiculous in the culture of that day for a man to do it. It seems most consistent to view the word *head* as referring to the man's physical head. To disgrace his head would mean to bring shame upon himself as a person.

Second, for the Woman (1 Cor 11:5-6)

- "But every woman who has her head uncovered" = The term *akatakalupto* begins with a negative particle (*not*) and ends with a compound word: *kata* = down & *kalupto* = to cover. The term *katakalupto* will be used by the apostle Paul in the next several verses to mean a covering on or over the head. History tells us that the pagan priestesses wore their hair uncovered and disheveled, and so some of the Christian women in Corinth may have been imitating them.
- "While praying or prophesying" = This phrase is parallel to what Paul said about the man in verse four. It is not clear whether Paul meant this as a literary parallel only, or if it actually described the practice of some of the women in the Corinthian church. In either case we should understand that it is normal to describe an event without actually passing judgment on whether it was right or wrong. Later in 1 Cor 14:34-35 Paul will comment on whether the women should be praying or prophesying in the church services.
- "Disgraces her head" = It seems best to understand this as referring to the woman's own physical head. The disgrace falls upon her as a person, rather than upon the one in authority over her.
- "For she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved" = Here Paul stated the *reason* that she disgraces herself: It is because she has identified herself with the same category of woman whose hair had been cut off.

Who was a woman whose head was shaved?

- An unveiled woman in Corinth was a prostitute. Being unveiled was the badge of prostitution, and in some cases the woman was also shorn. Also, the Justinian code prescribed shaving the head of an adulteress that the husband refused to receive after two years.
- "For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off" = Here Paul is telling these women to act consistently. If they are not going to follow the proper custom of covering their heads in public services, then why don't they go the whole way and cut their hair off.
- "If it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved" = This is a first class conditional clause, which is assumed to be true. It could be translated, "Since it is a disgrace..."
- "Let her cover her head" = The apostle Paul is teaching that in the situation where a woman was attending the public meeting of the church in Corinth, it would be wrong for her to be uncovered. Wearing some type of head covering must have been a customary symbol in Corinthian society for a woman to indicate that she was living under proper authority. Paul is now going to give several reasons why the Corinthian women should continue to follow the typical practice in their culture and wear this outward symbol that represents the universal truth of God's hierarchy of authority.

The Argument from the Sequence, Manner, and Purpose of Their Creation (1 Cor 11:7-12)

Sequence: The Man Was Created First in the Image of God (1 Cor 11:7)

- "For a man ought not to have his head covered" = For a man to cover his head would be a reversal of the customary practice; the man would be acting like a woman. This is a strong phrase that tells men that they are obligated not to cover their heads.
- "He is the image and glory of God" = Glory means splendor, brightness, that which stands forth to represent God, or something by which the glory of God is known. Notice that the apostle here is only discussing the original formation of man at the time of Creation. In Genesis 2:7 we see that only the man was originally created "from the dust of the ground." It was only the man that was given dominion and authority over the things God had created. This all occurred before the creation of the woman.
- "But the woman is the glory of man" = The man was created first and was directly fashioned in God's image, while the woman was created later and out of the already existing flesh of man (Gen 2:21-22). Notice this does not say that the woman is the *image* and glory of man. The truth is that the woman was created in the image of God, just as much as the man was (Gen 1:26-27).
- This set of arguments from Creation is somewhat based on what we might call seniority. It involves a subordination to man because of the order of creation.

Manner: The Woman Was Created Out of the Man's Body (1 Cor 11:8)

- "For man does not originate from woman but woman from man" = This is a statement of the facts presented in

Purpose: The Woman Was Created to Function as a Helper (1 Cor 11:9)

- "Man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake" = The woman was made for man (Gen 2:18), but we must remember that the man was never complete until the woman was there.
- After the Fall in Genesis chapter three, God confirmed the hierarchy of authority for the man and the woman (Gen 3:16-17).

Conclusion From This Argument & An Additional Reason (1 Cor 11:10)

- "Therefore" = as a result of what Paul has said so far. Here is the logical conclusion, based on the facts of the Creation, concerning the issue of a woman in the church services following the appropriate customs to demonstrate that she is clearly functioning within the sphere of authority provided by her husband and her church leaders.
- "The woman ought to have a *symbol of authority* on her head" = *exousia* means the power, strength, ability, or freedom to do something. The woman should clearly be covered and protected by the power of the authority of her husband or her leaders. This indicates that a woman *does* have power -- the power that is hers as a result of living in a proper hierarchy of authority with her husband or church leaders. This verse clearly states that the cultural use of the head covering by women in the Corinthian church services represented the God-ordained principle of a woman's submission to authority. For that reason the woman was obligated to follow this custom which upheld that important principle.
- "Because of the angels" = In 1 Cor 4:9 Paul had mentioned that angels observe the behavior of men and women.

The Balancing Truth: The Interdependence of Men & Women Under Christ (1 Cor 11:11-12)

- "However" = This contrasting statement gives an important balancing truth to what has been presented so far regarding the seniority of the man at Creation. Paul wanted to guard his words against the false interpretation that women are inferior.
- "In the Lord" = It was by the design and direction of the Lord that this is so. In other words, not only did the Lord place the man in a position of authority, but He also designed the relationship between the man and the woman in such a way that they are intended to function together. The Creator is the one who planned it to work this way.
- "Woman independent of man" = This may have been at the core of the issue Paul was addressing in Corinth. Some Christian women were behaving in ways that made them appear independent or out from under the proper hierarchy of authority and protection.
- "Nor is man independent of woman" = Man's authority is a *delegated* authority that was given by God to be used for His purposes and in His way. The man is a fellow creature who has no innate superiority over the woman, and he has no right to use his authority selfishly.
- "As the woman originates from the man" = This restated the truth about the sequence and manner of the original Creation. The woman came later and came out of the man.
- "The man has his birth through the woman" = Every man who has come into existence *after* that initial Creation event has been born of a woman. The woman has a very important function in God's design for the sexes.
- "All things originate from God" = Everything has its source, purpose, design, and function as a result of the working of God. Neither men nor women should complain or be dissatisfied with this arrangement because it is God's will and His design for the universe.

The Argument from Social Propriety in the Culture of That Time (1 Cor 11:13-15)

You Judge: Is It Proper? (1 Cor 11:13)

- "Judge for yourselves" = As he did in 1 Cor 10:15, Paul tells the Corinthians to put themselves into the judge's seat and exercise their own wisdom. They are to use their own sense of propriety, of that is right and proper.
- "Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" = History tells us that it was the custom of the women of Greece (except their priestesses) to wear a veil when they appeared in public.

[What Does *Natural Hair* Teach Us About Properly Covering the Head? \(1 Cor 11:14-15\)](#)

First, for the Man (1 Cor 11:14)

- "Does not even nature itself teach you" (*phusis*) = the nature of things as they exist.
- "If a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him" = At the time Paul wrote these words, and even through later history up to our present day, people have recognized that (except in rare cases) it is considered normal and proper for a woman's hair to be worn longer than the style for men. By dealing with the man first, as he has done throughout this section, Paul introduced the idea that God designed men and women to be distinguishable in appearance, in physiology, as well as in their roles and relationships.

Second, for the Woman (1 Cor 11:15)

- "But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her" = In the same way that it is proper for a man to wear his hair shorter, it is proper and brings glory to a woman to wear her hair longer.
- "Her hair is given to her for a covering" (*peribolaion*) = Previously the term *katakalypto* was used for a covering (1 Cor 11:5, 6, 7, 13), but here Paul used a different word for *covering* which means "something that is thrown around or flung about," as the hair might be tossed to and fro by moving the head. The term for "given to her" also indicates something that is given as a permanent gift, rather than a temporary covering such as a shawl or mantle.
- This *cannot* mean that her hair is the outward sign of authority on her head, because previously Paul had said if a woman would not cover her head then she might as well have her hair cut off. This implies that the proper covering was something *in addition to* her natural hair. Paul is using the natural hair as an analogy for whether covering the head is proper in the case of men versus women.

Summary Chart of Statements Made About Men and Women

Verse	MAN	WOMAN
3	Man is under the direct authority of Christ	Woman is under the direct authority of the husband or the male leadership of the church
4-5	Man is disgraced by covering his head while praying or prophesying	Woman is disgraced by being uncovered while praying or prophesying
6-7	Man is obligated not to cover his head, and he was created in the image & glory of God	Woman is obligated to cover her head, since being uncovered was as disgraceful as having her head shaved. Woman was created to be the glory of the man.
8	Man was not created out of woman	Woman was created out of man
9	Man was not created for the woman's sake	Woman was created for the man's sake
10		Woman is obligated to wear a symbol of authority on her head
11	Man is not independent from woman	Woman is not independent from man
12	All men since Creation have been born by means of a woman	At Creation, the woman originated from the man
13		It is not proper for a woman to pray uncovered
14-15	Long hair is not customary or proper for a man	Long hair is customary and proper for a woman

The Argument from the Common Practice in the Churches (1 Cor 11:16)

- "But if one is inclined to be contentious" (*philoneikos*) = "fond of strife." In other words, if anyone will not be satisfied with the reasons given so far but continues to argue just for the sake of arguing.
- "We have no other practice, nor have the churches of God" = *We* probably refers to Paul and the other apostles who were being used by God to write the New Testament at that time. Neither the pronouncements of the apostles nor the practices of the other churches in that area supported what the Corinthians were doing.
- Did this section of First Corinthians have the desired effect on the church there? Evidently the Corinthian believers did obey Paul's command about following the practice of women covering their head when in public services in order to affirm the principle of the God-ordained hierarchy of authority. The writings of both Tertullian and Chrysostom affirm this, and the sculptures in the catacombs show the women wearing a head covering while the men have the hair short.

The Transition Between This Church Issue and the Next (1 Cor 11:17)

- "But in giving this instruction" = *This* probably refers to the preceding instruction about the head covering of women, as well as providing a transition to what follows concerning the Lord's Supper.
- "I do not praise you" = The same word was used in 1 Cor 11:2, but this time with the negative (*not*). In these specific practices, the apostle Paul could not commend them but needed to rebuke and exhort them to do what was right.
- "You come together not for the better but for the worse" = This refers to their assembling for public worship. These gatherings did not serve to build up the body of Christ, but actually to tear it down.
- Whatever we do in our church services, we should do it for the greater glory of God. One way we can affirm God's glory is to follow common practices that affirm God-ordained principles, such as the principle of God's hierarchy of authority in His created order. As we mentioned in our last lesson, it would be much easier if the Christian life were a matter of Black & White, of simply following a specific rule from God's Word. But often we find ourselves in a circumstance or in a culture where the Bible has not given us a specific rule. In those cases, we must determine what actions would bring the most glory to God.

**In the society and culture that you live in today,
what are some of the actions or behaviors that you could practice
in order to affirm God's principle of the hierarchy of authority?**