

“Head Coverings for Women”
(An Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16)
Trinity Baptist Church Discipleship Training
(March, 2010)

Introduction:

The topic chosen for this study is “Head Coverings” in the context of women covering their heads in worship. Some churches have made this practice an absolute rule. The passage of Scripture that covers this subject is the first part of 1 Corinthians 11. The primary issue being taught in these verses, however, is not head coverings but that of authority. The text of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 has often caused controversy, particularly in modern times. In this passage Paul is clarifying the roles of men and women.

As we approach this passage, we must try to understand the cultural background. In first-century Greece dress for men and women was apparently very similar, except for the woman’s head-covering. It was not the same as the Arab veil which covered the entire head and face. The Greek custom was to cover only the hair which was usually very long. The exceptions were the mistresses of influential Corinthians and prostitutes from the temple of Aphrodite who did not cover their heads. Also, slaves had their heads shaved.

We don't know all of the cultural activities of this period. We don't know for certain why some of the Corinthian women were beginning to come to worship with their heads uncovered. Perhaps it was from Paul’s teaching about the equality of men and women in Christ.

Galatians 3:28 – *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

Perhaps some of the women were glorying in their freedom by casting off their head coverings – a symbol of submission to their husbands. We know from history that there were various movements of feminism in the Roman Empire during N.T. times. Women often took off their veils or other head coverings or cut their hair in order to look like men. They asserted their independence and demanded to be treated like men. Perhaps some of the Corinthian Christians were being influenced by these trends.

In this passage Paul is correcting their misinterpretation of his teachings as he sets forth four principles that should govern the actions of both the men and the women particularly in the Church of Christ. In this study we will do an exegesis of the passage as we examine the four principles outlined by Paul.

- I. The Principle of Submission – Verses 3-6
- II. The Principle of Glory – Verses 7-10
- III. The Principle of Equity or of Equality in Christ – Verses 11-12
- IV. The Principle of Nature - Verses 13-16

- I. The Principle of Submission – Verses 3-6
- A. Paul first states the Divine order – God, Christ, Man, Woman
1. God is supreme over all
Psalm 83:18 – “That *men* may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, *art* the most high over all the earth.”
 2. Jesus willfully submitted to the will of the Father
John 5:30 – “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.”
 3. The man willfully submits himself to Christ.
 - a. In a general sense this points to the church
Ephesians 1:22 – “And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,”
Ephesians 4:15 – “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:”
Ephesians 5:23 – “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”
 - b. It also points to the headship of the man
Ephesians 5:23 – “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”
 4. The woman willfully submits herself to her husband
Ephesians 5:22 – “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”
 - a. This applies to all women, not just to husbands and wives
 - b. There is a principle masculine headship that goes back to creation. The man has a duty as protector, provider, and leader
 - c. Paul relates the principle back to creation in **Verses 8-9**
- B. This in no way implies inferiority
1. Christ is in no way inferior to the Father
 2. The woman is in no way inferior to the man in spiritual value, intellect, or ability. She may be better educated and may be more spiritual, yet she is to submit to the headship of her husband.
- C. These principles of headship and submission should be carried into the church
1. The covering of the head was cultural and a symbol of submission
 2. When a woman prayed or prophesied without the head covered it was a symbol of the rejection of her husband’s authority
 3. In the Corinthian culture a man worshipping with his head uncovered was a sign of his authority over the woman and a woman covering her head was a sign of submission.
 - a. For a man to cover his head would be a reversal of roles
1 Corinthians 11:4 – “Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonoureth his head.”

b. For a woman to come with her head uncovered would bring disgrace to her husband

1 Corinthians 11:5 – "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with *her* head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven."

4. It would seem unnecessary to speak of having the head uncovered while praying or prophesying since **1 Tim. 2:12** bars women from speaking in church at all. Paul's correction of their lack of submission here is not an approval of their praying or prophesying in the church.

Calvin – "When the apostle disapproves of the one thing here, he is not giving his approval to the other. For when he takes them to task because they were prophesying bare-headed, he is not giving them permission, however, to prophesy in any way whatsoever, but rather is delaying the censure of that fault to another passage (chapter 14:34 ff).

D. The covering or uncovering of the head should not be an issue today. Head covering is not a sign of submission in our culture. Paul is not presenting a universal teaching that women should have their heads covered in church.

1. The universal principle of submission however must be maintained
Examples from personal experience:

- - The visit where the wife had made a list of questions but the husband vocalized them.

- - The woman who called with questions about the church apologizing for taking the lead but her husband was out of town.

-- Examples of Trinity women whispering questions to their husbands during business meetings.

2. As Christ is submissive to the father and man is submissive to Christ, the woman must be submissive to the man

Ephesians 5:24 – "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing."

II. The Principle of Glory – Verses 7-10

A. The principle of headship goes back to creation

1. Human beings were created in the moral, mental, and spiritual image of God.

2. Both man and woman were created in the image of God - both share this distinction.

But to man was given authority to exercise dominion over the earth.

Genesis 1:26 – "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

- Adam was placed into the garden to dress it and keep it
- God brought all of the animals before Adam and he named them
- God gave His covenant of works to Adam
- God would then create Eve to be Adam's helper

3. God delegated this authority to Adam
 - a. Man was created to bear the image of God as a ruler.
 - b. Man is to represent God in authority and ruler-ship.
 4. It was in this dominion and headship that Paul describes man as the glory of God
 5. Because of this glory man is not to wear any symbol of subordination
1 Corinthians 11:7 – “For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God:”
- B. The woman, on the other hand, is the glory of man – **Verses 7-9**
1. The woman was created to manifest man’s authority just as man was created to manifest God’s authority
 In this way she is said to be the glory of the man
Verse 7 – “but the woman is the glory of the man”
 2. Paul reminds us that the woman was not only created from man, she was created for man.
1 Corinthians 11:9 – “Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.”
 3. Eve was created as a helper to Adam
 4. The woman rules under the authority of man – she reigns in his stead and carries out his will. She is to submit to his direction.
 5. Man is both the image and glory of God
 Woman is the image of God but the glory of man – She derives her being from man and finds her fulfillment in being his helper
 6. Head covering in first century Corinth represented her subordination to her husband
1 Corinthians 11:10 – “For this cause ought the woman to have power on *her* head because of the angels.”
 - a. The word for “power” is ἐξουσία - “lawful authority”
NAS **1 Corinthians 11:10** – “Therefore the woman ought to have a *symbol* of authority on her head, because of the angels.”
 - b. Head coverings are no longer a part of our culture, but the woman is still to be covered with her husbands authority
- C. We can see this in practice with the excellent woman of **Proverbs 31**
Proverbs 31:10-12 – “Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price *is* far above rubies. ¹¹ The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. ¹² She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.”
Proverbs 31:23 – “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.”
1. The excellent woman exercised great authority in her home.
 This is consistent with Paul’s teaching to Timothy
1 Timothy 5:14 – “I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.”
 οἰκοδεσποτέω – to be master (or head) of a house 2) to rule a household

2. She labors for the good of her husband and her home. He trusts her. She only does those things that are to his good.
3. Her husband was able to sit as an elder because she was his glory – he was well respected because of his wife.
4. It is the duty of godly older women to teach these principles to the younger women

Titus 2:3-5 – “The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; Titus 2:4-5 ⁴ That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.”

- D. Paul’s commands state that men and women must conform to God’s ordained role for them “Because of the angels”

Two possible interpretations:

1. Because the angels are always bearing witness to our actions

Matthew 18:10 – “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”

 - a. The angels are always watching and waiting for the salvation of the elect.

Luke 15:10 – “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”
 - b. The angels are continually sent to minister to the elect

Hebrews 1:14 – “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”
 - c. They are continually the defenders of the elect

Psalms 34:7 – “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

Acts 5:17-29 – “Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.”

Acts 12:7 – “And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands.”

- d. The angels will also accompany Christ when He comes in judgment
Matthew 25:31-33 – “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.”
Matthew 13:41-42 – “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
 - e. Paul may be saying, do not be rebellious against God because of these holy witnesses
2. By “angels” Paul is speaking of the holy angels in contrast to the fallen angels.
- a. Their chief characteristic is that they give total and immediate obedience to God
 - b. Throughout Scripture they are shown to possess great power – but it is always under the authority of God
 - c. Satan, on the other hand, denied God’s authority and sought to establish his own dominion according to his own selfish desires. God cast him and all who followed him out of heaven. All who rebel against the rule of God will share the condemnation of Satan.
Matthew 25:41 – “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:”
 - d. In other words, Paul is saying that the holy angels are an example of submission
 The fallen angels are an example of prideful rebellion.
 May we obey God because example of the angels

III. The Principle of Equality in Christ – Verses 11-12

- A. After stressing the distinctiveness of the man and the woman Paul now stresses their equality in Christ
 - 1. Knowing the sinfulness of man Paul inserts this all important principle
 - a. It is easy for men to become puffed up and abuse their authority
 - (1) This is clearly seen in many middle eastern countries where women are often beat if caught with their faces uncovered
 - (2) This can also often be witnessed in American homes where religious men use the Biblical principle of headship to lord over their wives. They are revealing their own godlessness.
 - b. Godly men exercise their headship with fear and trembling knowing that they are representing God

2. All authority is delegated – it all is derived from God
 - a. We have no authority of ourselves
Civil authority is delegated
Pastoral authority is delegated
Masculine headship is delegated
 - b. It is easy for sinful men to diminish the importance of women
 - c. Men are in no way superior to women
- B. Woman may have been created from man, but every man since has been born of a woman – including our Lord

1 Corinthians 11:12 – “For as the woman *is* of the man, even so *is* the man also by the woman; but all things of God.”

 1. The woman is greatly honored in the rearing of Godly children
1 Timothy 2:12-15 – “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.”
 2. The woman instigated the fall of man, yet Paul says that she is saved from that stigma by the godly offspring she raises.
 3. Ultimately, all things originate with God. It is His ordained plan He created us as we are and established our particular function. Since all of us originate with God we must all humbly accept the particular place God has appointed for us.
- C. In Christ we are all one and equal

1 Corinthians 11:11 – “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”

Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

 1. This does not diminish the fact that men and women are different and serve different functions
This is probably where the Corinthians were confused. Many today are confused here. They assume that since we are all equal in Christ we all serve the same function.
 2. Women may have a different role and function but they are just as important as men
 - a. Women have equal access to Christ
 - b. Women have equal opportunity to grow in holiness
 - c. Women can be mighty soldiers in our Lord’s army
 - d. Women can be great laborers in His kingdom
- D. We are interdependent – we need each other
 1. We are all a part of the same body – each part is essential
Each has a different function
Romans 12:4 – “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office (function): ⁵ So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”

2. From the beginning of the church women have been essential to the health and prosperity of the church.

In the last chapter of **Romans** Paul commends a host of individuals who had labored in the church of Rome, eight of which were women.

At the head of the list was Phoebe

Romans 16:1 – “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: ² That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”

3. The church needs godly men *and* women
 - a. All of us have the duty to live as holy examples
 - b. All of us have the duty to pray
 - c. All of us are laborers in His kingdom

4. All of us have the responsibility to uphold the truth

Both Aquila and Priscilla taught Apollos

Acts 18:24-26 – “And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, *and* mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. ²⁶ And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”

- a. She was with her husband and under his authority
- b. She was respectful of Apollos as a man
- c. This is not the same thing as public teaching of which women are prohibited from teaching men

- E. In marriage too, the man and the woman are dependent upon each other

Genesis 2:23-24 – “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.” ²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

1. It is still a guiding principle that a man needs his wife

Genesis 2:18 – “And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”
2. Both are essential to a prosperous home
3. The woman rules the house under the authority of her husband
4. The guiding principle of all these things is the principle of love. We are to love one another. “Husbands love your wives . . .”

IV. The Principle of Nature – Verses 13-16

- A. Paul now calls upon nature to reinforce his argument
 1. God has made men and women different

From the beginning God has ordained that men and women should appear different as an outward expression of the inward difference

2. There are certain external qualities that characterize masculinity and femininity. Hair is one of these qualities.
1 Corinthians 11:14 – “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?”
 3. This does not exclude certain cultural differences
 - a. Absalom wore his hair long cutting it only once a year
^{NAS} **2 Samuel 14:26** – “And when he cut the hair of his head (and it was at the end of every year that he cut *it*, for it was heavy on him so he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head at 200 shekels by the king's weight.”
 - b. We remember the story of Samson
Judges 16:17 – “That he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I *have been* a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any *other* man.”
 - c. Throughout history there have been periods in which men wore long hair.
 4. The point is that women naturally find it easier to grow long hair. It adorns their femininity
 - a. You seldom find women who have gone bald.
 - b. In the history of the world women have consistently worn their hair longer than men. In many cultures it would have been degrading for a man to have long hair – emasculating
 This is true for the Greek culture to which Paul is writing.
1 Corinthians 11:14 – “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?”
 - c. A woman's long hair characterizes their femininity
1 Corinthians 11:15 – “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for *her* hair is given her for a covering.”
- B. The principle here is that women should be distinctively feminine and men should be distinctively masculine
1. This is a great condemnation of the modern unisex fashion
Deuteronomy 22:5 – “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so *are* abomination unto the LORD thy God.”
 2. Mothers should teach their daughters how to be feminine
 - a. To purposely adorn herself in a feminine manner demonstrates modesty, loveliness and submissiveness
 - b. To hate and reject a feminine appearance is to demonstrate a hatred of subordination

Conclusion:

1. These are universal principles. Following them is so important that God includes them in the qualifications of those holding the offices of the church
 - A. Of the Pastor

1 Timothy 3:4 – “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; ⁵ (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) “

 - a. A man rules his house well only with the aid of an excellent wife
 - b. She represents him at home, she is his glory.
 - B. Of Deacons, their wives are their glory

1 Timothy 3:11 – “Even so *must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.*”
2. These principles must be universally obeyed by the church. There is no room for disagreement.

1 Corinthians 11:16 – “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”

 - A. In other words, if a person is contentious against these doctrines he is standing alone. Paul says this person’s position is supported neither by the apostles nor the church.
 - B. There are some people who are contentious, quarrelsome. With such people there isn’t to be much proved by lengthy debates – to contend with them until you get the better of them. Those who are obstinate should be avoided.
3. While these things are universal principles taught in God’s Word it doesn’t mean that people universally accept them.
 - A. The reason the world rejects many of the biblical principles is because the Church ignores them also.
 - B. As Christians we must make sure that we are living according to these biblical principles and then demonstrate them to the world.
4. There are some who sincerely believe that women should wear head coverings in worship. We must always be patient as we deal with weaker brethren. We must be cautious in the exercise of our liberties.

1 Corinthians 8:12 – “But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.