

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 “The Big Display”

It is very important in the understanding of this text that the location of the activities discussed is not in the assembly, but away from the assembly. Two important evidences indicating this are below.

- 1) Paul just discussed offenses that were taking place in the temples of idolatry and the homes of outsiders.
- 2) The transition to the assembly discussions do not begin until 11:17 “you come together”. It is at that point that Paul addresses the problems that are occurring on the first day of the week in the common assembly.

Because of this, we must place the activities discussed here as outside the assembled Church. This is important because it carries with it cultural implications of modesty and a leadership perspective of the society around them.

1 Corinthians 11:2-3 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

- Paul “praises” them, a word that the Greek elites frequently use to describe themselves. He was praising them because they held to the “traditions”, just as Paul had given to them. The word that Paul uses for “traditions” is actually as many of the translations interpret it as *teachings*. When teachings are passed from one generation to the next they become traditions. Even though the Corinthian church had many problems with pride, division, immorality and idolatry, they apparently did pass some of the teachings of Paul to others in the Christian community there.
- When Paul uses the word “*but*” (negative conjunction), he is pointing out that what follows in the text was an area that they have failed to do so. That particular area is in the realm of the husband/wife relationship, particularly while assembled together as a congregation. That is the contextual use of the word “man” and “woman” from verse 3. Apparently in the worship service there was quite a bit of confusion taking place and in this stage it was with the woman’s role in worship. There appears to be a power struggle of the sexes and their defined roles to be carried out when the assembly met on the first day of the week.
- Paul reminds them that the husband is the head of the wife and God is the head of Christ. There are two examples of the same concept being discussed here.
 - 1) The husband is the head of the wife.
 - There are many in the religious world that has a problem with this. They view such a statement as demeaning to women as inferior, but that is not the point. In any group of two there can only be one leader and one follower.
 - How did God decide in a marriage who would be the leader and who would be the follower? Paul provides two primary indicators of this fact in *1 Timothy 2:13-14 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.¹⁴ And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.*

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- a) Adam was the first formed.
 - b) Eve was first tempted.
 - It confirmed to God's people that God FIRST gave the commandment first NOT to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to the MAN (Genesis 2). When he did not take seriously his leadership role and yielded to his wife, she FIRST partook of the fruit and gave it to her husband. God chose the husband to lead and the woman to follow. If one does not like it, then take it up with Him.
- 2) God is the head of Christ.
- Jesus came in the flesh, but yielded to God in every way. Though He was tempted to go the course of sin, He did not yield. When faced with the preference to not be beaten nearly to death, hung on the cross and experience separation from the Father for the first and only time in eternity, it was to the Father's will that He submitted. Matthew 26:39 "*My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.*"
 - He modeled submission to the Father though He was an equal to God (Phil 2:6) in the like manner that the woman can submit to the man, not as an inferior, but an equal. It is not about who is better, but who is fulfilling the natural design of God's will.

1 Corinthians 11:4-5 Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.⁵ But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.

- When Christ was introduced to the civilization of the Roman/Greco societies, there was quite a contrast to the Judean/Middle Eastern traditions. Religious men and women from the idolatrous and immoral backgrounds had already influenced the Christians. We will start with the men first.

1) The Men: Pagan men involved in their idolatrous worship did not participate in the public ceremonies with their heads uncovered, but covered.

- As Clinton Arnold summarized: "The covering of the man's head—called the *capite velato*—was commonplace in a Roman religious cult. One explanation was that it helped to reduce the noise of the animals being sacrificed. The statue of Augustus displayed at Corinth showed the emperor with his head covered; similar iconography is found on the frieze of the Ara Pacis ("Altar of Peace"- to the right) that he dedicated at Rome."
- If you were a spiritual leader in the pagan world, you were to have your head covered. But Paul was writing to the Christians, not Pagans. They followed the concept that men portrayed their leadership with their heads uncovered. The public perception that they were to model to the world was that of an uncovered head, not covered.



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2) The Women:

- The women of the pagan world were quite different from the perception of Christianity. They would often decorate themselves as the idols they worshipped. They would dress in fine clothing that would actually have metallic threads interwoven within to give off the shine of the favorite idols. Usually the clothing was revealing and called attention to them. Their hair would be arranged with decorative jewels, gems and pearls. The makeup they would wear would cause them to stand out as a living idol. Later when the pagans converted to Christianity and still carried on in such a way in public, Paul and Peter actually addressed this behavior.



- a) 1 Timothy 2:9-10 Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments,¹⁰ but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness.
- b) 1 Peter 3:3-4 Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;⁴ but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.
- That was not what Paul was used to. We must not read this as a twenty-first century Roman-Greco text, but a first-century Judean perspective. As William Barclay writes in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, “*In Paul’s time, the veil...came right over the head with only an opening for the eyes, and reached right down to the feet. A respectable middle eastern woman would never have dreamt of appearing without it.*”
- Paul was from Tarsus in the Middle-East and the women there were expected to be modest in their appearance. Though it was eccentric, when they were in public and living the faith, their display was very modest, not drawing attention to themselves.



1 Corinthians 11:7-10 For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.⁸ For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;⁹ for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.¹⁰ Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels.

- How we display ourselves in the public realm says quite a lot. We either send the message to the world that men are to the spiritual leaders of their families and the woman

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as his biggest support OR the opposite. When it is the opposite, bad results occur in society.

- The angels understand this. In heaven, all angels were not designed the same. There were arch-angels and there were angels that were not arch. Jewish writings reveal there were actually seven arch-angels of God, Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel and Remiel (Tobit 12:15). There are stated “strong” angels (Rev 5:2, 10:1, 18:21) implying weaker angels and fallen angels (Jude 6). There are seraphim, cherubim and ophanim in the heavenly realms. The angels can testify to the leader/follower concept through their very existence.



1 Corinthians 11:11-12 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God.

- It is not that one lord's over the other. The man and woman are not independent of one another. The original woman came from the man and all other men since then have been born from a woman. Both of them fit into the plan of God AND male leadership of the marriage on display for the world is God's design.

1 Corinthians 11:13-16 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

- Notice what lesson that nature teaches us. Women, by nature, tend to grow more hair. They tend to keep it longer than a man. We don't see women in masses walking around looking like cue balls. On the other hand, the man's physiology will display more of his scalp as time goes by. Paul says God designed it in such a way to demonstrate the concepts that are at hand.
- That leads to another point. Can a woman's long hair serve as a covering for her hair? It did in the Garden of Eden before they had any article of clothing. Could it not do the same today? I believe it depends on the culture and the people within the culture. If someone prefers to carry out a head-covering to show honor in such a way, then that is fine. If someone prefer not to have a man-made head covering in a modest way, then that should be fine. If however we reach a point in our society that we look more like the world as a Christian instead of a Christian, then we have a decision to make. If a head-covering would clean up the public appearance and our designed roles that God desires to be displayed in our culture, then we should consider it, but don't forget the modesty principle as well. Make it a good covering that covers up some flesh in the process.



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In conclusion:

- We live in a world where the man is being emasculated from his spiritual influence on the next generation.
 - He is portrayed by the media as incapable of being a strong influence for his family.
 - If you listen to the world, they would tell you that a man must be men and that is inclusive to going out and doing all the things that he wants. The media portrays men as a fishing, boating, golfing, beer-drinking, card playing group of rough-necks that are at best a breeder for their wives to fulfill the wish to be a mother.
 - Husbands as leaders of their wives have taken a bad rap and must stand up and be the men of God that they designed them to be. We were designed to be the spiritual leaders of our family and that is a message that should be displayed for all the world to see. WE WILL CAVE INTO TO THE WORLD'S MOLD!!!
- The woman who has desired a man to marry must understand that if she wants a man of God, then she needs to be a woman of God whom yields to her husband's leadership.
 - She must not buy the world-driven concept that she does not have to yield to her husband's godly leadership while clinging to the thoughts that she is right with God.
 - She must not buy the world's argument that the man in her life is not capable of being the spiritual leader of the family.
 - She must not listen to the media when they tell her that being a housewife, a mom or a supportive spouse that she is selling herself out. This is garbage and must not be allowed to influence the ways that Christian's live.
 - She best not buy the argument of the world that she has to display her body for all the world to see in order to be somebody. God wants submissiveness and modesty, not idolatry and immorality.
- If we cannot get this right outside the assembly, then how will we avoid confusion when we do meet as a church?

Men, be the men of God that He wants on display for the world. Women, be the women of God that He wants on display for the world to see. Be Christians that shine forth in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation.