

“Oneness”

Spring Series 1

Lesson 4

“1 Corinthians 11:2-16”

Objective: To examine the Scriptures in order to seek understanding and guidance on how we are to work together as the people of God using all the gifts and resources that God has bestowed upon the Church. Through the centuries the relationship of men and women and their service to God has been hotly debated and continually examined. We consider what we are undertaking here to be a continuation of that debate and dialogue as we carefully and prayerfully seek the guidance of God through His Word and His Spirit. We are people of the Book and it is to the book that we look for answers to our questions, not to traditions, to science, or to society.

Materials: The Bible, Ancient translations, Commentaries, both ancient and modern, Books, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet, inscriptions, Ancient letters, Ancient Documents, lectures and other resources as may be appropriate.

Procedures

1. To explore the message of God in the hope of understanding more fully its meaning first as it was understood by the original audiences of Scripture and what they will have understood as God’s will for their lives in community.
2. To understand how Scripture has inspired, challenged, and educated people down through the centuries guiding them not only in their personal lives, but in their vocation as image-bearers of God.
3. We will seek to find out how beliefs have played a role in the history of Christianity and how they continue to impact our existence and service to Jesus Christ in the world today.
4. We will provide a sheet to take home as a reminder of what has been examined and to provide additional opportunities for consideration of these matters and their application in order to live out daily our eternal destiny. This sheet can be used as a discussion guide for small group discussion.

In the first lessons we saw that the issue of hierarchy between the male and the female was addressed first in Genesis 3 and came as a consequence of sin. As we came to 1 Timothy 2:8-15 Paul deals with a situation that has arisen in Ephesus because of women stepping outside of culturally accepted norms in a way that was bringing the church into disrepute. Paul challenges the men and the women in that community to work together in a manner that will bring glory and honor to Jesus. At 1 Corinthians 11 we come once again to a place in Scripture where there are problems in the church. Certainly it has been the case that some have seen the issue here as an issue of who is dominant in a hierarchical fashion. It continues to amaze me that the default for those of us in the West is to go to hierarchalism in almost any instance. This is despite the words of Jesus at Matthew 20:25ff:

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them (κατακυριεύουσιν - katakurieuousin - gain or exercise complete dominion, gain dominion over, gain possession of), and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant (διάκονος

- *diakonos* - servant, when used as an adjective servile, menial),²⁷

and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave;

²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,

and to give his life a ransom for many.”¹

In 11:2-16-14:40 Paul turns his attention to the factionalism that has become manifest in the church in Corinth. This factionalism appears to have grown out of the fact that persons are claiming to be Christians, but who express little genuine concern for others in the assembly. This is in a setting when they are forced to come together and worship in one place.²

Throughout this section Paul will appeal to his audience using “building” and “body” images similar to the way he does in other sections of 1 Corinthians (6:13, 15, 18; 7:4; 10:16; 23; 11:24, 27, 29; 12:12-27; 14:3-26). He will appeal for unity and loving compromise on all sides.³ Paul begins in 11:2 commending the Corinthians for remembering him and maintaining “the traditions” (*τὰς παραδόσεις* - *tas paradoseis* - the handed down

¹ NRSV.

² Carroll D. Osburn, “1 Cor 11:2-16— Public or Private?” in Carroll D. Osburn, ed. *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, Vol. II (Joplin MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1995), pp. 307-316.

³ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 259.

things, traditions).⁴ They remember the things that Paul has instructed them in the past. All of this verse is mild in tone and praises the people in order to prepare them for additional religious tradition with which he hopes to correct the impropriety in their current worship practices. This practice of praising his readers before he delivers correction is not an uncommon rhetorical feature in Paul's letters.⁵

In this lesson, we will examine 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, where Paul appears to speak very positively of women in the Corinthian church praying and prophesying in the public worship assembly, while expressing concern that they must respect local traditions while doing so. The discussion of Paul in this section raises several interpretive problems that need to be addressed. The major questions here include: 1. Whether in fact a public, or private assembly is in view? 2. What exactly does Paul mean by "headship?" 3. Why is wearing a veil and having long hair important for women?⁶ 4. Why is it important for men to have

⁴ Matthew 15:2 - "**Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.**" NRSV. The same word for traditions is used here.

⁵ Richard E. Oster, Jr., *1 Corinthians*, in the The College Press NIV Commentary series (Joplin MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1999), p. 244.

⁶ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church* (Abilene TX: ACU Press, 2001), p. 173.

their head uncovered? In our study it will be important to recognize that these verses occur within a fuller contextual framework of, not only the letter (1 Corinthians), but the whole New Testament. In Acts 21:9, we are told that Philip had four unmarried daughters that had the gift of prophecy. Next week we will study 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 where Paul will address the issue of women in the church only this time he will tell them to “to keep quiet” (σιγάτωσαν - *sigatosan* - to keep quiet,⁷). Some have argued that Paul in 1 Corinthians contradicts himself. Certainly, I do not believe that such a conclusion is correct; there are other viable alternatives to consider.

Two main views are prominent regarding the relationship of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:34-36. First, since women pray and prophesy in 11:2-16 with the approval of Paul, but are forbidden to speak in 14:34-36, some view that chapter 11 must refer to worship in a private setting. This is a commonly held view, but is rarely defended with thoughtful argument and should be rejected.⁸ In the restoration movement (Churches of Christ) it is a

⁷ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Second Ed., Vol. 1 (New York NY: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989), p. 402 - s.v. σιγάω - 33.121.

⁸ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, pp. 173-174.

long held view among some (from 1916 at least), that 11:2-16 refers to the public assembly. After a careful exegesis of the text, McGarvey comes to the firm conclusion that, “Paul is here discussing how men and women should be attired when they take a leading part in public worship.”⁹ He argues that “the customs of the age made it a shameful thing for a woman to speak in public,” but that the prophecy given in Acts 2:17, “your sons and daughters will prophesy,” demands viewing 11:5 as an exception to the cultural norm.¹⁰

He goes onto say:

The powers of women have become so developed, and her privileges so extended in gospel lands, that it is no longer shameful for her to speak in public ... The Christian conscience has therefore interpreted Paul’s rule rightly when he applies it generally, but admits of exceptions, those women who have a

⁹ J. W. McGarvey, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*, The Standard Bible Commentary series (Cincinnati OH: The Standard Publishing Foundation, 1916), pp. 113.

¹⁰ J. W. McGarvey, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*, p. 143.

marked ability, either for exhortation or instruction, are permitted to speak in the churches. Moreover, the apostle is speaking of the regular, formal meeting of the church....¹¹

The second prominent view of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is that the women are praying and prophesying during the public worship assembly, with the approval of Paul, but are asked not to forget to do so in line with widely-accepted cultural norms. This is the view most commonly held in the academic scholarly world.¹² This is our view as well. We believe this to be the best reading for a number of reasons.

At 11:3, where Paul introduces the idea that Christ is the “head” (ἡ κεφαλὴ - *he kephale*) of every man, the man/husband is the “head” of the women/wife and God is the “head” of Christ. In this passage, with our lens of interpretation so powerfully and consistently drawn to hierarchalism, the tendency is to interpret his instructions that way. This then seems to go against the unity inherent in the imagery of 1 Corinthians 12:12 with his emphasis

¹¹J. W. McGarvey, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*, p. 143.

¹² Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 174.

upon “one body,” made up of many members, each fulfilling its function but still being “one” organism.

When Paul uses the word κεφαλή - *kephale* (“head”) we must remember that this word has as much semantic range in Greek as it does English. Our understanding hinges on how we interpret this word. Some argue that κεφαλή - *kephale* (“head”) should be translated here as “source,” but linguistic usage in Greek does not support this meaning.¹³ To see it as “source” is to define this word in a manner that it is not used in Classical Greek nor have I found this as a usage for the Hebrew term for “head” (ראש - *rosh*).

When we, those living in the 21st century world, think of the term “head” we see it as the seat of the brain from which the functions and movements of the body are directed. This often leads us to a hierarchical understanding. In classical and contemporary Greek usage the term κεφαλή - *kephale* (“head”) does not signify the ruler, or chieftain, of a community.¹⁴ Though

¹³ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 178. Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2009), pp. 322-323.

¹⁴ Stephen Bedale, “The meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 5:2 (1954) pp. 211-216.

interpreters commonly attribute to it this sense in Colossians 1:18; 2:19; Ephesians 1:22; and 4:15, that is for the most part a misunderstanding. Such an interpretation would convey the image that Christ is the “head of his body,” the church, because he is the ruler, or director over it as He were the brain. This harmony comes then from the brain in the head which controls and coordinates the organism. Such an understanding makes perfect sense to us today, but it leaves us guilty of “...serious anachronism: for this metaphor, which is so ‘natural’ to us, would be unintelligible to St. Paul or his readers, who had no idea of the real function of the central nervous system.”¹⁵

Hippocrates appears to have been on the right path to understand this more modern view of the brain and perhaps Plato is following him in a more modern understanding of the brain, but the influence of Aristotle would prevent people having such an understanding. In Paul’s day popular psychology, in both Greek and Hebrew thought, believed that mankind reasoned and thought not with the “head” but with the heart (לב or καρδιά—or

¹⁵ Stephen Bedale, “The meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 5:2 (1954) pp. 211-216. Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, p. 322.

diaphragm, φρήν).¹⁶ Therefore our default understanding of this text is flawed.

As we move on it is important to ask, “Does Paul have in view here relationships between husband and wife, or between male and female?” The words used here can be interpreted in either way and we seek the clarity of making it either or, but it is likely that Paul meant both. At 14:34-36 the focus is upon husband/wife and men/women. Here we find Paul making repeated references to the creation narrative in Genesis, where “woman” was created *for* “man.”¹⁷ “Yet we should notice that he is not arguing for anything other than a partnership (cf. verse 11), though a partnership in which the man is the head of his household.”¹⁸ He takes a role in going first and blazing the trail. Certainly, marriage stands as an image of partnership and should be seen as in view here in a prominent fashion without excluding

¹⁶ *Phaedo* 96b. “...into being, why it perishes and why it exists. I used to change my mind frequently, back and forth, when I first looked at things such as: is it when hot and cold begin to putrify, as some used to say, that living creatures are nurtured? And whether blood, air, or fire are what we use to think with? Or none of these? Is it the brain that gives us the sense of hearing, seeing and smell, and from these come memory and opinion, and from memory and opinion remaining fixed we get knowledge? And again when I looked at” William Preddy and Chris Emlyn-Jones, ed. and trans., *Plato: Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo*, Loeb Classical Library, Book 36 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 442-443.

¹⁷ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 178.

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary series, Vol. 7 (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p. 152.

male/female relationships that are conducted in a manner that expresses the unity of Christ's body.

C.S. Lewis writes about marriage in his work *Mere Christianity* in a manner that is helpful in comprehending part of what Paul is trying to teach the Corinthians about working together as a single organism:

The Christian idea of marriage is based on Christ's words that a man and wife are to be regarded as a single organism—for that is what the words "one flesh" would be in modern English. And the Christians believe that when He said this He was not expressing a sentiment but stating fact—just as one is stating fact when one says a lock and its key are one mechanism, or that a violin and a bow are one musical instrument. The inventor of the human machine was telling us that its two halves, the male and the female, were made to be combined together in pairs, not simply on

the sexual level, but totally combined.

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union.¹⁹

Before we see this headship as some form of authority for the tyranny of the man over his wife we must recognize that Paul couches the headship of the husband over the wife in Ephesians in the following terms: **A husband is the head of his wife like Christ is head of the church, that is, the savior of the body.**²⁰ Husbands are called upon to: **... love your wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.**²¹ Paul focuses on

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York NY: The MacMillan Company, 1958), p. 81.

²⁰ Ephesians 5:23. CEB.

²¹ Ephesians 5:25. CEB.

unity and the oneness of the church with all of its many people being drawn together.²²

The order that Paul gives in this text (11:3 of the Greek text) is man—Christ, woman—man, Christ—God (in English we change the order to fit our language). Those who are hierarchalists want to read this text only to come to the conclusion that in a “hierarchal way,” man is over woman. That, however, is not at all Paul’s point—and is to *miss* Paul’s point totally. The point is rather to be found in the three doublets which are used in v. 3 to make clear the proper relationship between males and females: husbands and wives. The following illustrations of the relation of man to Christ, and Christ to God, involve a certain “unity of will and purpose.” The way a woman conducts herself in worship is a reflection of her view of male-female/husband-wife relationships and this issue is a vital one for the church at Corinth.²³

We must remember that Paul is writing within and to a distinctly hierarchical world (Rome). His concern here is not with

²² Ephesians 4:1-6 **I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. NRSV.**

²³ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 179.

the hierarchical “order of creation,” but with the behavior that will be seen in the cultural setting as a blatant disrespect for cultural expectations. ‘Headship in this text does not connote hierarchalism, or authoritarianism, but a “head—body” metaphor which focuses on the unity of will and purpose between man and woman, husband and wife. Paul is not concerned with power and authority, but with how each part of the body represents the head. This is Paul’s meaning of “head” in this context.’²⁴ Nash says it like this:

The “head” of something is the front part or the top part, that is, the part that one sees first. The head is representative of the whole. This usage can be found in the ancient writings, and it fits the context of 1 Corinthians 11. The husband was the recognized representative of the family. He was its public face. The behavior Paul criticizes in this passage presents no challenge to a husband’s “authority,” but it

²⁴ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 180.

does threaten to dishonor his public face.

If we understand Paul's symbolic usage of *kephalē* in this way, then we can appreciate both the connection and contrast he makes between the material and metaphorical meaning of "head."²⁵

This text then begins the section (1 Corinthians chapters 11-14), which deals with relationships in the worship assembly of the Corinthians. The emphasis of this section is upon conduct in public worship that will be interpreted in a certain way. The problem is related to Gentile women who are unaccustomed to traditions and customs that are widely accepted in Christian worship, or perhaps they are aware of the traditions, but are unsympathetic to them.²⁶ Why then did Paul consider this to be a problem? It appears that some wives were uncovering their heads during worship and some men were covering theirs. Paul considers this as an undesirable practice and according to him the practice should be reversed since in his judgement the "semantic significance" of men covering their heads during worship is

²⁵ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 322-323.

²⁶ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 180.

counter to the imagery that is fit and proper. Oster goes onto say that "... the Corinthians issue of whether a man may cover his head when he prays and prophecies emerged from a particular matrix of mores that were totally indigenous to Roman pietistic and devotional ethos, and had spread, as archaeology proves, to the urban centres of the Mediterranean basin, Corinth included, decades prior to the advent of Christianity."²⁷

Why does Paul express concern? For men, the covering of the head was not accomplished by putting on a hat, but by pulling the back of their togas up over their heads like a hood. This was the regular practice, the Roman way, to lead a religious function, as significant statuary from Corinth demonstrates. In following this tradition in a Christian worship setting, the man was dishonoring his "head" (Christ) in two ways. First, he was bringing a pagan ritual into Christian worship. The men of the church in Corinth were following patterns of piety they had witnessed and practiced all of their lives before becoming a part of the church. This may have seemed to them to be an appropriate way to express their devotion to Christ. For Paul, it signified the

²⁷ Richard Oster, "When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988), pp. 481-505.

intrusion of pagan worship into the church. Secondly, in Roman culture the man who covered his head in pagan worship was the leader of the ritual. He was the “head” of the ceremony like a priest who stood in front of the others and represented them before the deity. This signified that the man who covered his head was drawing attention to himself as the leader-representative of the church, a place that was not properly his, it belonged to Christ. He was therefore dishonoring the true “head” of the church, Christ.²⁸

This would then mean that such a covering of the head would have reinforced the hierarchical system that existed in Roman society. In order to help them to understand the fact that the church only had one ruler and that ruler was Christ; Paul instructed the men not to cover their heads. In the case of the uncovered heads of the wives it was a dishonor to their husbands to uncover their heads in public. There were three kinds of women who appeared in public with their heads uncovered in Roman society: virgins, widows and prostitutes. Married women covered their heads at all times in public. For a married woman to

²⁸ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, p. 323.

appear in public without her head covered made it appear as if she was not married; thus she was giving the appearance that she was sexually available. There is some evidence that indicates that some women indeed deliberately violated this custom as a way of exerting their right to engage in the same promiscuous behavior that Roman society allowed for men.²⁹

For a woman to have a shaved head in Roman society was seen as embarrassing, a mark of shame. Paul's implication is that the shaved head of a woman symbolized that she had been publicly disgraced because of something she had done, or that she was flaunting her independence and refusing to show respect to her husband and other males in general.³⁰ At 11:7 Paul gives as the reasoning for man not to have his head covered, "... he is image and glory of God ..." Paul is obviously alluding to the creation account at Genesis 1:27. However, it should be noted that nothing is said about "glory" (*δόξα - doxa*) in that text. Paul appears to have added it to his allusion to that verse because he wishes to

²⁹ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 323-324. Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Says*, 6.3.10. "He divorced his wife because he learned that she had walked abroad with head uncovered." D. R. Shackleton Bailey, trans., *Valerius Maximus Memorable Doings and Sayings*, Loeb Classical Library series, Vols. 492-493 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 493.

³⁰ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 183.

draw a contrast between men and women in terms of “glory.”³¹ It is important to notice that Paul does not describe the woman in terms of being made in the image of “man” (ἄνθρωπος - *aner*). In Corinthian society, a Christian man’s conduct would be seen by people as a reflection upon God (he brings glory, or shame). The conduct of a woman in this society was seen as a reflection on her relationships with males, particularly her husband, and her view of the distinction of the sexes. Public prayer by an unveiled woman, or a veiled man would be perceived as a flagrant abuse of the traditions of the church and in the instance of the women be taken as a disregarding of accepted social norms. Such behavior would be disrespectful and disruptive.³²

In 1 Corinthians 11:7, Paul is distinguishing between the “glory” of a man and a woman. The man is the glory (δόξα - *doxa*) of God, and the woman is the glory (δόξα - *doxa*) of man. The issue is that the man in some sense exhibits, or reflects God’s glory (δόξα - *doxa*), while the woman does the same for the man’s glory (δόξα - *doxa*). This discussion of the distinction between “glories” for men and women is driven by Paul’s effort to give a theological

³¹ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, p. 329.

³² Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, pp. 183-184.

basis for the differing customs for women and men regarding head attire in church.³³

In 11:9 Paul alludes to Genesis 2 to explain the differences in their “glories.” Verse 10 stands as a continuation of the reasoning for the woman wearing a head covering as “authority” (ἐξουσίαν - *exousian* - the word symbol is not in the Greek text), “because of the angels.” To be honest Paul’s reasoning is quite confusing to scholars with a whole host of options offered.³⁴ What is clear, in some fashion, is that the head covering acts in some way as a protection for the woman. Osborne says, “It is clear that Paul’s argument is based upon later Jewish intertestamental understandings of angels and not upon the OT text per se.”³⁵ Morna Hooker argues, “Far from being a symbol of the woman's subjection to man, therefore, her head-covering is what Paul calls it—authority: in prayer and prophecy she, like the man, is under the authority of God. Although the differences of

³³ Robert Scott Nash, *1 Corinthians*, p. 330.

³⁴ Genesis 6:1ff. The Watchers, demons, angels as protectors of the order of creation. Such views would then make the head covering a sign of subordination, which does not suit this word here at all. Some have seen the issue as being the angels who are present as in divine worship as would have been reflected by the Qumran Community. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians in the Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible series*, trans. by James W. Leitch (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 189.

³⁵ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, p. 186.

creation remain, and are reflected in the differences of dress, it is nevertheless true that in relation to God ‘there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’”³⁶

With the glory of the man, hidden by covering it with a veil, the woman is free to reflect the glory of God and not to reflect the glory of man.³⁷ In verse 11, Paul will bring his argument in this section to a primary point, saying, **Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman.**³⁸ Paul indicates in verse 12: **For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.**³⁹ The man and the woman need each other, the focus is upon an interdependence between the sexes. At verse 15, Paul appeals to the widely accepted custom in the early church, of a woman wearing a head covering; a custom that reflected a respectful relationship between the man and the woman in the church in that culture.

³⁶ M. D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. XI. 10,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964), pp. 410-416.

³⁷ M. D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. XI. 10,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964), pp. 410-416.

³⁸ CEB.

³⁹ CEB.

The issue that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is the showing of disrespect by some women to men and therefore to God and of some men incorporating pagan practices into the worship assembly. Such disrespect is contributing to chaos, disruption and most importantly disunity in the congregation. Paul calls upon men and women to pray in the public worship assembly in a manner that shows honor and respect.⁴⁰

However, we must take care not to wrest a local ruling from an ancient setting and apply the practices to a modern situation where the customs and traditions mean very different things. What is timeless is that in all things we are to honor and glorify God and work together as men and women, in our differences, to fulfil our destiny as “image bearers” of the living God. The way we do that will vary according to the local customs that will affect our practice. One of the main issues for us here is that God had gifted men and women for service to him, giving them the gifts of prayer and prophesy. He calls them to use these gifts in a manner that honors Him and does not hurt the witness of the church in the community in which they are ministering.

⁴⁰ Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church*, pp. 186-188.

Dynamic Equivalence Translation with Running Commentary

1 Corinthians 11:2 I commend you because you have remembered me in all things and, inasmuch you hold onto the traditions I delivered to you. 3 But I desire you to understand that *whether one is talking about the relationship between man and the Messiah, wife/women and man/husband, or the Messiah and God, that relationship is to be like that of a body-head, or single organism relationship where the body (man, woman, Christ) and the head (Christ, man, God) live as one in purpose and will. How that relationship lives out reflects the view of one toward the other. Let me show you how you are not living with one another in this kind of relationship.* 4 Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered disgraces Christ because *they are not only bringing pagan worship practices into Christ's assembly, they are acting as if they are taking the same leadership role in Christ's assembly that a priest does in pagan worship. These men are drawing attention to themselves and taking Christ's place in worship.* 5 But any woman praying or prophesying uncovered shames her head (*her husband*); indeed it is one and the same thing as if she was shaved. *You all know in the Roman culture this is a statement of disrespect to your husband, or even other men in Christ's assembly because it sends a*

message that this woman is either a virgin, a widow, or a prostitute. The pagan world may even think she is signaling a desire to engage in promiscuous behavior by this dress. If a woman cuts her hair it is not only a sign of public disgrace, which disgraces her husband, but it may also be her flaunting her independence from her husband, or even other males. Such behaviors fracture the unity of Christ's body. ⁶ For if a wife will not cover herself, then she should cut off her hair, but if it is disgraceful for a wife to cut her hair, or be shaved she should wear a covering. ⁷ Likewise a man should not cover his head (*as is done in pagan worship*) because he is obligated to honor God as one who possesses the image and glory of God. ⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman out of man. ⁹ For neither was the man created because of the woman, but the woman was created because of the man. ¹⁰ Because of this the woman ought to *reflect a positive relationship of respect for her husband by covering her head as her husband reflects a oneness with God by his behavior* because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, neither woman is independent of man, nor man independent of woman in the Lord. ¹² For just as the woman came from the man, in the same way the man comes from the woman, but all come from God. *In other words; men, women, and God, had a unique relationship with one another at creation. Now Christ's body is called to work toward restoring that same relationship.* ¹³ Based upon what I have said, Judge for yourselves; is

it proper for an uncovered woman to pray to God? ¹⁴ Does not nature teach you that indeed 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? Because the hair has been given to her for a covering to her. ¹⁶ But if anyone is disposed to be argumentative, we have no different custom, nor do the churches of God.

Synopsis

As we come to 1 Corinthians we find Paul addressing problems in the church there. As we today see him addressing these problems it has so often been the case that our understanding of his solution is to flatten it out, Westernize it, and modernize it: to see the solution offered in terms of respecting hierarchical order. This tends to be our default despite the warnings of Jesus that His kingdom is not like that (Matthew 20:25ff.), but is marked by servanthood and not hierarchalism.

As Paul begins this section he speaks very positively of women praying and prophesying in the public worship assembly. This praying and prophesying should be expected from the words that we find in Acts 2:17 that indicate “your sons and daughters will prophesy.” Even in the early 20th century scholars in our own fellowship understood that women were indeed praying and prophesying in the public assembly at Corinth. The issue that Paul seeks to address is that there is factionalism in that church caused by certain practices and attitudes that are reflected in how head coverings are being used.

The men are covering their heads in a manner that will have been practiced in paganism when one person stood in the role of leader of the people as if he is a priest mediating between God and the people. Paul takes issue with such practices as they reinforce the hierarchalism of the Gentile world and bring pagan practices into the church: This dishonors Christ. The women, wives in particular, are praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered which dishonors their husbands and other males sending the wrong message to their community. It sends the message that they are sexually available and thus they dishonor their husbands, males in general, and the Church of Jesus Christ.

Paul gives them some theological reasons for curbing this practice that will bring them together in unity of purpose and practices that will honor God as an expression of their unity and cooperation as distinctly different and yet unified in a singularity of purpose.

Questions

1. What are some traditions that people observe today that demonstrate honor?
2. What are some ways that people today show disrespect to others?
3. Why does honor, or shame matter?
4. What are some ways that we can show honor to God today?
5. Are there things that people do during the public assembly of the church today that you see as disrespectful to God? What are they? Are these things cultural or personal in nature?
6. Why do you think we have such a tendency to view Biblical passages through a lens of hierarchalism rather than through a lens of unity and cooperation?
7. What are some ways that people can demonstrate unity?
8. What are some marks of disunity?
9. Why do you think it was necessary for Paul to address the congregation at Corinth regarding their problems in the worship assembly?
10. Do you see God as the “source” of Jesus? Why, or why not?
11. In what ways can we reflect the glory of God today?
12. What are some different ways that men and women reflect the image of God?
13. Is it a dishonor to men for a woman to come to worship with her head uncovered today? Why, or why not?

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14. In what way could reflecting the glory of man inhibit woman from bringing glory to God?
 15. What are some ways that focusing upon giving glory to God and to each other should be a part of who Christians are?
 16. What are some ways that our unity today as Christians might be seen as a reflection of God's image?
 17. How important is it that the people of God seek to honor God in unity?

To Take Home

What is Important to know?

It is important to know that Paul here is not concerned with promoting hierarchalism, but actually seeks to curb it through his writing in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Paul is trying to promote unity that can be seen not only by those within the community of faith, but also by those on the outside. Paul's concern is that the practices of the church focus on bringing "glory" to God in proper ways. What are some ways that people show honor to God in our time and social context?

Where is God in these words?

God is to be seen in the words of Paul here calling the people to a life devoted to unity (oneness). Unity is a reflection of the nature of God and it is reflected in the creation of all that He made and especially in His image bearer (human beings). Our concern as disciples of Jesus Christ should be to reflect this "unity" not only in our words, but in our practices, and especially when we assemble for corporate worship. God has called men and women to use the gifts that He gave them in His service, in a manner that reflects His nature. What are some ways that people can use the gifts of God today to reflect the unity and glory of God?

What does any of this mean for how I live my life?

Paul calls his audience to think about how their practices in life, and especially in worship, reflect upon God. Sometimes we want to compartmentalize our lives into sacred and secular. This is not possible, and we are to take care that all of our lives and actions reflect our discipleship of Christ and our devotion to God. This means that at home, at work, or in the assembly, our lives are to be united in seeking the "glory" of God. What are some ways that we can glorify God outside of the public assembly?

What is the word of God calling us to do?

The word of God is calling us to understand that we need to think carefully and thoughtfully about how we serve Him. We must do this not only for the sake of those in the assembly, but for the sake of the community in which we live. Nothing that we do should bring the name of Christ in disrepute. Immorality should not be a label that can in any way be applied to the people of God from within, or from without. We are called to represent the unity of who God is to the world in a way that brings Him glory and honor. What are some ways that you think we should honor God today?