

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Part 1

Title: Head Coverings

Truth: Men and women are different.

Date/Location: Sunday November 1, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

- A. In this section of the Bible, we encounter teaching that is even more difficult than 1 Corinthians 7, and among the most difficult in the entire New Testament. The challenge arises in part because of great distance between our culture and that of first century Corinth. There are things said here that would be far easier to understand if we had grown up in Corinth. The passage is also challenging because western culture in the last 50+ years has seen the rise of feminism and strident opposition against “the *patriarchy*.”¹ As a result, Christians feel tremendous pressure to be shy about this teaching, or not to embrace it at all. The opposition to Christian doctrine comes from three directions.
1. First, patriarchy is frequently criticized by how it results in many bad things that happen to women, such as objectification, abuse, unequal pay, rape culture, stereotypes, shaming language, etc. These sinful behaviors are *not in fact part* of Christian teaching or correct Christian practice. They may be part of the practice of some professing religious people, or of some who like power-trips, but these are not Christians. It is “secular patriarchy” which is identified as objectionable. Yet the true faith of Christ is often wrongly blamed for such sinful behaviors. None of these behaviors is appropriate for a home or church or society that operates according to Biblical principles. Some of the opposition to Christianity is therefore misplaced.
 2. But some of the opposition to Christianity is because of what it *does* teach. For example, the Bible teaches that wives are to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22), and husbands are the head of their homes (Ephesians 5:23). Another example is that the Bible very clearly prohibits women pastors of churches (1 Timothy 2:12). The battle against “Christian patriarchy,” which is as old as Genesis 3:16, is from those who want to establish a *matriarchy*, where women hold the levers of power in all areas of life. Certain statistics show that western society has moved strongly in the matriarchal direction without most

¹ Wikipedia: “*Patriarchy* is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.”

people noticing it. Men are pictured as lummoxes, and too many waste their young manhood doing little productive or manly. Women have much higher privilege and achievement in many areas.

3. Third, other opposition to Christianity in this area of male headship comes about because of a *misunderstanding* of the blessings God intends for a young woman. She is protected by her father and brothers until she is given into the arms of a suitor who takes her as his wife. Her estate “in her father’s house” is not meant to stifle or harm her, but rather to protect her from the male-supremacists who lack of self control and sometimes use their (often) larger strength to take advantage of women.

B. The practical outworking of these lines of opposition is that men and women have been taught doctrine that is at least sideways to Scripture, and very often entirely opposite of Scripture. Note that I have called this teaching by the word *doctrine*. This is to alert you to the fact that the feminist philosophy teaches a doctrine that is in direct competition with Scripture. When you hear someone say that wedding vows should be changed to remove any idea of submission, that is a doctrine. It is a false doctrine, a bad doctrine, an un-biblical doctrine, but it is still a doctrine. When you hear about *Christian feminism*, or *egalitarianism*, these are doctrines preached by both women and men who are opposed to Scripture’s plain teaching. What you learn in school or hear on the news is often directly or indirectly *doctrine*. The Bible’s warnings to beware of false teaching apply here just as well as in religious contexts (Matt. 16:12, 2 Peter 2:1).

C. Another factor that complicates study of this passage about differences between men and women is that the Bible itself teaches that in some areas, there are *no* differences between men and women. For example, Galatians 3:28 teaches us that in Christ, distinctions between those of different race, social status, and sex become much less significant. While those distinctions remain true facts, they are not the most significant way in which people are “categorized.” The most significant way is that people are either “in Christ” or “outside of Christ.” Men and women are equal in terms of worth, spirituality, intellect. All are united in Christ and share equally in eternal life.

This truth confuses certain interpreters or induces them to throw out *all* differences based on similarities in *some* areas. But such distinctions are used as the basis of various Biblical instructions. For example, men and women are assigned different roles in the local church and home. Since

God cannot lie and the Bible is His truth, we know that there is no contradiction between “neither male nor female” and “the husband is the head of the wife.” They are both true simultaneously.

- D. Bottom line is this: we are learning the Bible, which is God’s word. As Christians, we are loyal to the faith only if we take it, believe it, and obey it. We betray the faith to the extent that we undercut any of its teachings, including the hard teachings on things like the relationships of men and women.

I. Summary of Differences Between Men and Women from 11:2-16

- A. Head of every man is Christ; head of woman is man, v. 3. The Bible uses the terms man and woman here generically. A man would not have to be married to fall under this command; consequently, a single man could violate the command because he is under the headship of Christ. That is true whether he is married or not. Likewise, a woman can be married or not and still will be required to observe the teaching of this passage. Just because a woman is single, for example, does not mean it is ok to have a cropped, boyish kind of haircut. I take it therefore that the “woman” in this passage does not have to be a wife.

An unmarried woman would be considered “in her father’s house” and is therefore under his headship. The kind of cultural arrangement we have now of women living out on their own does not seem to have been feasible in the first century or before.

The passage especially applies to a married woman and her husband. The married woman is to show her submission to her own husband, and not to other husbands in the church. That said, however, following this teaching will inevitably affect her relationship to other men in the church, and vice versa.

- B. Men are to pray with head uncovered; women are to pray with head covered, v. 4-5. I will try to help you understand later why these *principles* are still applicable, but the particular *practice* of wearing a cloth head-covering is not necessary today because the principle can be put into practice in another way. For full disclosure, I should note that a minority of Christian denominations still believe in head coverings.
- C. Man is the image and glory of God; woman is the glory of man, v. 7.
- D. Man is not from woman; woman is from man, v. 8. God created Adam first from dust and spirit. Then He created woman using the man instead of dust.

- E. Man was not created for the woman; but woman for the man, v. 9. Read Genesis 2:18 on this. Evidently, God (not just Paul) believes that this creative order and purpose retains significance for today.
- F. The woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, v. 10. Similar to (B) above, this is a principle that can be put into practice in different ways depending on prevailing cultural practice.
- G. Man is dependent on woman; woman is dependent on man, v. 11. This undoes any superiority complex that a man might have. He needs to remember who bore him and cared for him while he was a helpless baby.
- H. Woman came from man; man comes through woman, v. 12. This tends to reduce the significance of the differences between the sexes because they are inter-dependent on one another. No man can say he has never had need of a woman. And no woman can say she is independent of every man!
- I. Long hair on a man is a dishonor to him; a woman's long hair is her glory, v. 14-15. Paul appeals to "nature"—our innate sense and our observation of the natural world. What percentage of women grow bald over the course of their lifetime? Very little. Thus a woman's hair is a lasting symbol of her femininity and beauty. Not so for the gentlemen! The result is that men typically have shorter hair and this marks them as male, and women have longer hair, and this marks them as female.

As an extension of this, and the principle of Deut. 22:5, men should not "wear" their hair in a female way, nor women wear their hair in a male way. Such practice is natural. What defines the proper hair length is not a ruler in inches, but a clear distinction between male and female hair style. There is probably some room for debate in each culture about the particulars. But what Paul teaches here is that a man with a woman's hairstyle is not honorable to him because he is confusing the design of God. What real man wants to look like a woman? Looking or behaving effeminately for a man is sin. For a woman to act feminine is glorious. On the other hand, it is shameful for woman who has a short haircut. But if she has a very feminine hairstyle, she makes clear that she is in line with God's design, as does a man with a masculine hair style.

[To be continued...]