

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

Title: Head Coverings

Truth: Men and women are different.

Date/Location: Sunday November 8, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

Part 1 summarized the differences between men and women by noting various truths in the passage. Now, we explore the verses a bit more.

I. A Few Questions and Answers

We are dealing with a challenging portion of Scripture concerning which there are many questions. In order to teach this section of Scripture adequately, we must give answers those questions.

- A. For instance, are the head coverings distinct from hair? The text indicates that indeed there is a difference. The head covering seems to be something removable, while the hair is fixed and should be of distinct length and style for men and women. The confusion comes mainly because of verse 15 where it says, “her hair is given to her for a covering.” This word “covering” is different than the other word-family used for “covering” throughout the chapter. This is like an article of clothing (Heb. 1:12, Psalm 104:6). Because of this difference of words, we have two kinds of covering—the hair which is like an article of clothing, to be worn in a way that matches the gender of the person, and an actual hat/shawl/veil that is to be worn by the women as an additional sign of their femininity.
- B. Is the meaning of *head* always the same throughout the passage? No, it is not. Sometimes it is literal and refers to the actual physical body part above the neck. Other times it is a metaphor that refers to an authority relationship in the Lord.
- C. Can men and women minister in similar ways in the church? The short answer *from this passage* is yes, in the two ways mentioned in the passage, they can minister in similar ways: praying and prophesying. Other passages of Scripture fill out the details to make clear the role of teaching and authority is vested in the male leadership of the church. Women may pray, but they are not exercising authority over the congregation. They could prophesy when such a gift was active in the first century (it is not now). But they could not hold the office of pastor/teacher or act in that capacity over adults in the church.

- D. What is considered short hair and what is considered long? In the last message, I resisted offering a ruler measurement in inches for the difference. The point is that generally, across all time and all cultures, the woman's hair is longer than the man's hair. It is kept, worn, and styled in a distinct manner to highlight the woman's woman-ness. This is understood intuitively and should be maintained by faithful Christians.
- E. Is the proper length determined by the opposite gender? Not exactly. The issue of length is determined by God's word. The exact length is somewhat driven by cultural and practical matters. It may be hard to get a haircut due to poverty, pandemic closures of barber shops and hair salons, or other factors. But the distinction must be maintained. On the other hand, we *could* say that proper length is influenced by the opposite gender. If your husband tells you that you should strive to look more feminine with the hairstyle, do not argue—do so. And for the gentlemen, if your wife or parents tell you that your hair is too long (or you are not allowed to 'look like a girl') then you need to get a haircut!
- F. What about the turban and crown of the priest in Exodus 29:6? If you look back at Exodus 28:36-38 (and ahead to Lev. 8:9), you will see further details on this turban or head covering. It was designed to have a blue cord/band on it attaching a gold engraving "Holiness to the LORD." This was a special case only for the high priest. It functioned to remind Aaron that he was the interface between the iniquity of the children of Israel and the holiness of God. It was not worn by all the priests or men. There are no high priests today, so it should not be an issue. Sometimes the men wore coverings on their head to indicate grief (2 Samuel 15:30, Jer. 14:3-4). At other times, a turban seems to be an indication of normal daily life that was not to be taken *off* for mourning (Ezekiel 24:16-17). It seems that the cultural practice was quite varied.
- G. Jewish men today wear a kippah or skull cap (or yarmulke, Yiddish language, or yamaka). This is a sign of respect or fear of God. They are obviously not in the church so they would not consider the instructions here to be relevant. If a Jewish person came into the church, based on my present understanding of this text, and he asked me whether to wear or not wear the skull-cap in prayer, I would say not to.

II. Bookends: the first and last verses of the section, 11:2, 16

- A. In verse 2, the apostle Paul commends the believers in Corinth for following what he had taught them before. The body of this teaching he called *traditions*. These traditions are accessible to us in the Bible. God recorded that material for us in written form at the hand of the apostles

so that we would have it without error over the centuries since. But theologians commonly confuse different kinds of tradition.

1. The first is the kind we are talking about—**apostolic teaching**, which is reduced in written form into the Bible (2 Thess. 2:15, 3:6). These are good traditions. They are binding upon Christians.
2. The second kind of traditions is the **traditions of men**. See Mark 7:5-13, Galatians 1:14, and Colossians 2:8, Isaiah 29:13. These are man-made ideas, rules, religious practices, and the like that are added to God’s word or end up taking the place of God’s word. They are of human origin. They are useless to mortify the flesh or to advance our spiritual growth because they are not based in Christ, in Whom all the fullness of God dwells, and Whose work is complete. These are bad traditions, often flat-out wrong. Paul knew very well about this sort of tradition (Gal. 1:14).
3. Then there are traditions in the sense of **cultural events, ministries, or annual holidays**. These are neutral; they could be changed to different dates or activities without an issue. Christians are not required to observe them.

Notice that Paul’s teaching about men and women has a cultural aspect to it as well as apostolic teaching aspect. But it is not at all a man-made tradition that can be conveniently discarded when the cultural winds change to favor matriarchy. The cultural aspect has to do with the particular form of head coverings and how the distinction between men and women is displayed. The apostolic teaching part of this is the authoritative declaration about the roles of men and women in life and ministry that must be maintained.

So Paul commends the believers for following his teaching, BUT there seems to have been a few areas lacking, including some about giving finances to support the poor, the doctrine of resurrection, their use of gifts from the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s Table, and the proper distinction of men and women in the church.

- B. At the end of the section (v. 16), Paul imagines that a contention might arise because of his teaching on the subject of men and women. It was a hot topic then, and it still is today. If quarrels were to arise in Corinth, Paul reminds them that neither the apostles nor the churches have such a practice or habit. In other words, the “standard practice” of the churches is to receive Paul’s teaching as coming from Christ. In fact, 1 Cor. 14:37 explains why—Paul’s teaching is the very word of Christ.

It is not accepted behavior in the church to object to apostolic teaching and directives. Most of the churches accepted this teaching as from God and submitted to it without quarrel. Corinth should willingly embrace the teaching as well.

Rejecting this teaching is unacceptable to God. But women sometimes rebel against this doctrine. Some men also oppose it, either because they think that they are supporting women by practicing the feminist philosophy, or they are afraid to displease the women. But maintaining the distinction between male and female in appearance and roles in church and home life is the essence of obedience to this passage. This does not mean women must necessarily wear head-coverings today (more on that later), but the proper roles must be clearly observed in the church, whatever the cultural norms are.

III. Reasons for These Differences Between Men and Women

- A. Because of the order in the Godhead, v. 3. Even Christ is subordinate to the Father. It should be no problem then for a woman to consider herself and place herself under the authority of her husband, or other leaders such as the pastors of the church.
- B. Because of the glory of God, v. 4. In other words, we do not want to dishonor God.

This raises the critical issue of honor, dishonor, and shame as used by the apostle Paul. The idea of dishonor is that of “put to shame” or “humiliate.” This is a very important idea, even though in our natural selves we do not want to consider it. Think about something you did that has embarrassed you or humiliated you because of how morally bad or how foolish it was. This is the same feeling that a man should have had if he covered his head like a woman did in that culture. The church observing him would also have that uncomfortable feeling. He should have felt ashamed, but whether he had that feeling or not, it was objectively a dishonor to his Lord to cover his head or have long hair. This was not a dishonor like we might think in terms of wearing a baseball cap during the national anthem or prayer. This is an even deeper dishonor to God in that it disrespects his design of the sexes, mixing and confusing the male with the female. The two must be kept distinct.

A violation of the created distinction between genders is the issue that brings shame. Long hair or a head covering on a man brings this shame; and short hair, shaved head, and no head covering on a woman cause humiliation. We are dropped into a culture when we are born, and over

it we have little control. But it has forms and expressions that variously harmonize with the Bible, or not. If the culture generally maintains the sex-distinction in attire and hair, then you can follow that. If it does not, you have to be counter-cultural in that area.

The same kind of shame would be upon a woman who did *not* wear a covering when praying. It was a shame, kind of like being uncovered on some other part of her body (a “naked” head). Why? She is dishonoring her husband or father by mixing and confusing male with female. The covering was a symbol in that culture for authority. If it were missing, then the woman was saying that she was independent and rebellious. She was dissing her husband or father. It was a similar case with a woman who shaved her head or cropped it close. This was the hairstyle of a feminist or prostitute. That would be shockingly shameful in a church setting.

- C. Because of God’s design of men and women in creation, v. 7, and because of the order and purpose of creation, v. 8. See also 1 Timothy 2:13. Note that verses 8-9 are an explanation of why men and women are “arranged” in the order they are. The order of creation is that woman came out of man. The purpose of creation was that the woman was to be a help to the man. Obviously this is terribly unpopular today, but it is God’s word nonetheless.
- D. Because of the angels, v. 10. This one throws many readers for a loop! I believe it is kind of like what we read in Col. 2:5 about Paul. Paul was observing the church from afar, with them in spirit, and happy to see how they were doing. Likewise, the angels are observers of the earthly realm and they can observe whether a church is in order, and whether its members have a right attitude toward God and one another. They can observe if God’s women are following instructions relevant to them, and if God’s men are following instructions directed to them. It is important for us to demonstrate obedience in this area of submission and authority to be a good testimony to the angels. Think of how disgusted the holy angels must be when we are disorderly *in the household of God!* And then think of how it offends God and our Lord Christ and the Spirit, that the church which He purchased with His own blood disobeys Him!
- E. Because of nature, v. 14. The physical and emotional characteristics of men and women are simply different. Their appearance should reflect this difference. We understand this intuitively. Unfortunately, society is creating people today who are working double-time to confuse and hide these created natural distinctions.

Conclusion

We have covered a lot of ground. If you are unsure how to proceed in terms of praying or attire, err on the side of caution until you figure it out. If you are a woman, ask your husband what he prefers about your attire and hairstyle and follow that to show you are submitting yourself to him. That will please God. If you are a man, you need to figure this stuff out as well—by reading Scripture, by asking your pastor or trusted Christian friend, etc.

MAP