

THE VEILED WOMAN

1 Corinthians 11:2–16

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1 Corinthians 11:2–16 (NIV)

“I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings [or traditions], just as I passed them on to you. Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.”

As we examine today’s Scripture, we recognize that Corinthians is a letter that has been filled with problems. The problems in the Corinthian church are: divisions (chapter 1–3), spiritual

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pride and self-sufficiency (chapter 4), toleration of gross immorality-incest (chapter 5), lawsuits among believers (chapter 6), confusion about morality and marriage (chapter 6 and 7), standards of conduct—should we eat meat offered to idols? (chapters 8 through 10). Now, beginning in chapter 11, extending through chapter 14, disorders in worship.

Paul starts out in verse 2 by saying there's much that he can praise them for, for they're holding fast to tradition which he has handed down to them. Yet, while he begins with praise, he immediately finds some things that are wrong. Traditions that they're not holding to. Paul's characteristic attitude is to find something he can commend and then to address what needs to be addressed. By the way, it's a good thing to keep in mind whenever we're trying to correct somebody else. First of all, what can be commended? Then, what is it that needs to be corrected? In chapters 11 through 14, there are three matters of disorder in public worship that the apostle is seeking to correct. One disorder has to do with women praying and prophesying unveiled. The second disorder has to do with improper celebration of the Lord's Supper. The third disorder, in chapters 12 through 14, has to do with disorder in respect to spiritual gifts.

Today, though, we just look at the first disorder in public worship that is before Paul: the pressing problem of the unveiled woman. Why is this a problem in the Corinthian letter?

The problem, first of all, must be traced to its root, the roots of the gospel seed of liberation.

There are liberated women in the church at Corinth, and they have a good reason to trace their liberation to the teaching of Jesus, the work of the Spirit and the example of Paul himself. Jesus, in regard to women, had broken tradition by talking to a woman openly and publicly, something that a good rabbi did not do. He stopped and conversed with a woman of Samaria at a well. Jesus set aside the role-casting prevalent in His day in respect to women, for He taught Mary and other women, something that a rabbi would consider to be beneath one's dignity. Mary is commended

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by Jesus for doing the right thing, even though it was a manly thing. Whereas, Martha was corrected by the Lord for doing the womanly thing—staying in the kitchen and neglecting the higher thing: receiving teaching.

Jesus insisted on an end to moral discrimination, so that He made divorce cut both ways, for women as well as men. And He insisted that those who brought the woman taken in adultery must themselves be responsible for sins in their life.

When He resurrected, He appeared first to women, thereby honoring womanhood forever as being the first custodians of the message: “Jesus has risen from the dead.”

And, in the ultimate consummation in the age to come, Jesus has indicated that the distinctions between the sexes, which prevail now, will be obliterated. Matthew 22:30 says, “There will be neither marrying nor giving in marriage in heaven for we shall be as the angels.” Therefore, women can look to the time, as well as men, in which the distinctions that pertain to this age will be done away with.

By the way, one person humorously said that the reason why Jesus indicated that there would be no marriage in heaven is because there will not be enough men.

Women and Jesus. They’re given a high position by Jesus.

Women and the Spirit. The ladies at Corinth could point to the fact that women are full participants in the Pentecostal community. In Acts 1, women are there, alongside the men, to pray, not just to do the cooking. Or not simply to do cooking. They are there to receive the Spirit. They do not need their husband’s permission first to receive the Spirit. Peter, in fact quotes, Joel on the Day of Pentecost and says that in the last days the Spirit would be outpoured upon men and women (Joel 2:29).

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Women were gifted by the Spirit in ministry. Peter’s four daughters were prophetesses in Acts 21. And women in 1 Corinthians 11 are seen as praying and prophesying. Or, that is, praying and preaching in the Christian congregation, something that would have been extremely foreign to a Jewish context of the first century. Foreign even to many church contexts today. Paul’s problem, and the issue in 1 Corinthians 11, is not whether women may lead the congregation in prayer or preach, that is, prophecy. The issue was whether or not they should wear a veil when engaged in such activity. We’ll look at why that was such an important question in just a moment.

Women in Corinth could also point to the example of Paul; Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos the way more accurately. Both of them are involved in teaching. In fact, of the six occasions in which Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in the New Testament, four out of six times, Priscilla’s name comes first. This would be very unordinary in the first-century world, unless the woman had a leading position in the relationship.

Not only that, but in the names of people that Paul greets in Romans 16:8–9, eight or nine of the twenty-eight names are women. One “Phoebe” is a deaconess, or rather “deacon,” which the Greek reads. It doesn’t add the “ess” in the English translation. Phoebe, a woman, is a deacon in the church and a fellow helper with Paul. Junias, probably a woman, is described as an apostle in that context. In the Philippian letter, Euodia and Syntyche are co-workers with Paul. Not sub-workers, but co-workers. A term also used of other male co-workers of Paul. In Galatians 3:28, which has been written before 1 Corinthians in that point in time, says that “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female.” So ladies at Corinth had good precedent—in the pattern of Jesus, in the pattern of the Spirit and in the pattern of Paul—to say, “The time has come for women to express their freedom in Christ.”

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The reality of this gospel seed or the root of this gospel seed of liberation met the reality of the cultural soil of social expectation. The seed of liberation is placed in the soil of cultural expectation. We need to look at what the cultural expectation was, for just a moment, or this passage doesn't make any sense at all.

In the Jewish culture of the first century, women were more or less regarded as things, an item of property. Not to say that certain women, and many women, in fact, weren't treated as persons, but women were seen, in the sense, as property. They were at the disposal of their husband or father, forbidden to learn the law, not being allowed to participate in the synagogue service. In fact, they sat apart, in a separate section, in the back or in the balcony of the synagogue. A man came to the synagogue to learn. A woman only came to hear. It was forbidden for a woman to teach in school, even the youngest of children. A strict rabbi would not greet a woman on the street. One of the rabbis in the first century said that a woman's work was to send her children to the synagogue, to attend to domestic concerns, to leave her husband free to study in school, to keep house for him till he returns. A Jewish man of the first century would thank God, "That I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman."

About Jewish custom in respect to the veil: In the Jewish custom, a bride went bareheaded until her marriage, as a symbol of her freedom. But when married, she wore a veil as a sign that she was under the authority of her husband.

What about Greek culture? The same thing prevailed, pretty much. Respectable women stayed home. They led a confined life. The veil was a sign of respectable womanhood. Only in Corinth were the prostitutes and the adulterers going about unveiled or with short hair in the temple area. To appear unveiled, therefore, or with short hair in the Corinthian culture was to be treated as a loose, vile woman of the world, subject to the ridicule of the culture.

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The gospel seed of liberation had met the socio-cultural seed of the soil of society. The results, at Corinth, as the results today in the body of Christ when this kind of dynamic is going on, was that there was havoc in the church. There were radical feminist liberators in Corinth who were erring in three significant ways.

One, by their insistence on praying and prophesying without the veil, they were leading the Christian community into disrepute among the non-Christian community. It was radical enough that the Christians had women participating in public roles of praying and preaching. It was absolutely unthinkable that the women in Christian congregations should have the same kind of demeanor as prostitutes in the temple area. Here the gospel was attempting to establish a basis for morality in the world, and yet in the eyes of the non-believer, the Christian community was very much infiltrated by persons who, at least from an outward standpoint, looked immoral. So, therefore, this brought the Christian community into disrepute.

Might I say that the reverse prevails today? In this church, for example, to insist that for women to come here they must wear a veil, would be to fly in the face of our cultural context and bring this church into some kind of ridicule in our culture by making the world think, “What *are* those weird people at Newport Mesa Christian Center?” It’s that same kind of a thing. The same principle’s working, only in the reverse direction, based upon the culture.

The feminist liberators, the radical feminist liberators at Corinth, also were erring, Paul is indicating here, in seeking their own good rather than the good of many. They were more concerned about establishing their position instead of the good of the whole. A kind of short-sighted, myopic way of life. Paul, at the end of 1 Corinthians 10, had emphasized this whole point of laying aside our rights and being careful that we not cause anyone to stumble, not seeking our own good, but the good of the many.

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The third problem at Corinth with the exercise of this freedom, is that some had gone so far as not only throwing aside convention, but seeing spiritual equality with men as grounds for dismantling God's ordained social order. At which Paul gets into in verse 3, and we'll spend some time talking about that. To chuck the veil at Corinth, therefore, stood for immoral association, for rebellion against their husband and home and rebellion against the authority of the church itself, as well as a the flaunting of church custom.

To these problems, Paul brings, first of all, an unchanging principle (verse 3). What I would call simply "the principle of headship." "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

What is the meaning of the term "headship"? There are two meanings that can be involved.

One meaning is associated with the word "source." Like we use, for example, the "headwaters," meaning "the waters which are a source for a stream." Therefore, direction or life flow comes out of the headwaters.

The other idea associated with headship is subordination. The head is the word that is used for the hairy knob that sits on top of the shoulders. Or, in some people's cases, the hairless knob that sits on top of their shoulders. The, so to speak, "control center," if you will. Although the ancients didn't think of the head as the control center. But Ephesians 5 is clear to indicate that the principle of subordination, in terms of getting things done, is associated with headship.

Let me talk, for a moment, about subordination. As the pastor of this church, God has placed me in a position of responsibility and leadership. However, if I am, at a particular moment, involved in one of the ministries of the church—let's say, for example, that I had gone with John Huntley out on a missionary trip and he is functioning as the leader of that trip, I do not, in that moment, in being with him on that trip, go as a person to whom he is subordinated. Rather, at that

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moment, I place myself as a subordinate to him, because God has placed him in that sphere of ministry. And it is my position at that particular time to be submitted to the direction which God is calling him to in that particular trip. Subordination has to do with the ability to function to get a job done. Somebody has to be the final, so to speak, court of appeal and someone needs to place themselves in a position of receiving the direction that is given. There are some very false concepts of subordination that are afloat in the body of Christ that I want to share, just for a moment.

Some falsely think that subordination is inferiority. To be subordinate means an inferior being subordinate to a superior. That's certainly not the case with most instances of subordination in the New Testament. In John 10:30, Jesus says "I and the Father are one." He is in equality with God. But He says in John 14:28, "My Father is greater than I." And Philippians 2:6–7 say, "Though He was equal with God He thought not equality with God as a thing to be grasped but humbled himself, made himself of no reputation and became a servant." Subordination in regard to Jesus' relation with the Father is not a matter of Jesus being inferior to the Father. It is, rather, something which has to do with getting the task done. It is organizational in scope. It is directional. It is also volitional. One has to agree or be willing to accept headship and be willing to be submitted. For example, God does not force His headship on Jesus. Jesus voluntarily takes submission. Jesus does not force headship upon men. Men must willingly respond to headship. And man cannot force his headship upon woman. Woman must respond voluntarily to headship. There's nothing more disgusting than men stomping their fist and demanding leadership. That is not the way leadership comes.

Subordination is not inferiority. By the way, once in the Scriptures, I think in Peter, woman is called the "weaker vessel," some substitute the word "inferior" for "weaker". That's not the case

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at all. A weaker vessel is not an inferior vessel. In some cases, it may be superior. You take a Ming Dynasty Chinese vase, that is a weaker vessel. But that has got a lot of quality in it. And it is of great value.

Another false concept is that subordination somehow removes a woman's direct access to Christ. There are seemingly some in the body of Christ today who are saying, in the chain of command sort of a sequence, that the woman is responsible to her father or her husband. He's responsible to Christ and Christ's responsible to God and everything flows that way. So if you're woman and you want to find God's will for your life, look to a man. You can never get it direct. Here is where the chain-of-command principle falls way short. The Spirit does not ask the husband's permission in order to fill the wife with the Spirit. Jesus has not relinquished His position as the mediator between God and man—male or female. And the Father in heaven is not in relationship to women as though they were His daughters-in-law rather than His daughters. The relationship is direct with Christ, with the Father and with the Spirit.

Bill Gothard has used the model of Sarah's submissiveness, but we also need to see that there is a false way of submitting; Sapphira was responsible to God for her own actions and she did not get out of her responsibility because her husband had his covering on her. She was held responsible for her own sin. Subordination does not, therefore, remove a woman's direct access to Christ by now having to go through a man.

I'm stating the case rather extremely. I don't want to say that there aren't appropriate relationships between man and woman, husband and wife. There are. But Christ is not forced out as high priest.

A third false concept is the idea that the subordination of women means that any woman is subject to any man. In the case of any man meeting any woman on the street, the woman

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automatically gives way, because she is subordinate to him. This is not the way the Scripture applies it. It's primarily applied in two ways in the New Testament. Specific application of the wife to her husband. "Wives be submissive to your husbands" (Ephesians 5:22). But what Scripture does that come after? After a Scripture that says "Be subject or submissive one to another" (Ephesians 5:21). So, first of all, the submission of a wife to a husband is conditioned by saying there is mutual submission, and submission within the mutual submission. That's really creating the clauses around it, isn't it?

Then the other type of submission is woman as a single unit or women as a group to the collective body of men in the church. This was the problem at Corinth. Some women were flying in the face of the collective judgment of leadership of the church.

These are false concepts of subordination. There needs to be a balance seen in the Scripture. A balance, on the one hand, between equality in being and ranking in function. God and Christ are equal in being. And male and female are equal in being. Genesis says, "God created man in His own image. Male and female created He them" (Genesis 1:27). That is, male and female together expressed what "man" is. We use the word "man" almost solely in a male sense. But Scripture uses it in a male-female sense in that passage in Genesis. God created man in His own image. "Male and female He created them."

There is therefore equality in being. A woman is not inferior to a man. But there is ranking in function. God-Christ, man-woman. Or to use Gothard's scenario, in the outline you'll see a kind of chain-of-command sort of thing. Or perhaps to express the dynamics of equality in being with a differing function, God is the source of direction for Christ. Christ over man and man in the marriage relationship, or in the church relationship, providing direction for women.

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If there are false ideas in the subject of subordination, there are false ideas, I think, on equality.

Sometimes, in defining an area, it's easier to talk about what's wrong or what's false than actually get at the gist of what is right. You can say it's not that or that. If it's not what is left.

Whatever's left is what it is. This is one of the things Peter talks about, Paul writes some things that are difficult to understand.

A false concept of equality. There's a prevailing idea—today especially—in the secular world that we should view ourselves as persons, not as man or woman. This view says the person is trapped inside of his or her anatomy. If, therefore, we could only refrain from giving toy cars and baseball mitts to little boys, and dolls and aprons to little girls, we will discover that they have no prior inclination to enjoy these things at all. We will liberate them from what roles society has impressed them with. There are no inclinations or energies peculiar to little boys or little girls. We have perpetrated sexism. While, indeed, there has been some fraud in the perpetration of sexism, this whole attitude, in its main, falls flat on the basis that male and female together bear the image of God in creation. And God intended for there to be a distinction or He would not have made it. If He wanted just to make persons, He could have very well done it without the male or female body. But He chose to put persons with maleness or femaleness as expression of His image.

If this is the unchanging principle of headship, there is equality yet in regard to function, sort of a directional flow of governance. How do we then apply this unchanging principle of headship to the unchanging cultural order? This is Paul's burden in verses 4–16. I've tried to get the principles that apply to Corinth as well to apply to us.

I. I think the first thing Paul is saying is that Christian men and women in any culture are called upon to recognize headship.

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In Corinth, for a man not to recognize the headship of Christ is to bring dishonor upon his own head and bring dishonor upon Christ, his spiritual head. At Corinth, the way that was shown was when a man put something on his head when he prayed or preached.

I would submit to you that what holds good for Corinth holds good for California. If I came into this sanctuary this morning and I had a hat on my head, I walked in and sang the hymns with it on, got up and prayed with it on, and preached with it on, you might get a little uptight with me. When they pray, men take their hat off. Just like when the “Star Spangled Banner” is playing, “Men, get your hat off!” It’s disrespectful, not only to you. You bring disrespect to yourself if you keep your hat on, but you disrespect the flag. You disrespect custom. You disrespect what people stand for in society. So, therefore, men, keep your hat off when the “Star Spangled Banner” plays and, preachers, keep your hat off when you preach. Such will take away from the glory of God. It flaunts social convention. We understand that as it pertains to men.

What’s a little bit difficult for us to grab is that, in the Corinthian setting, for a woman to appear unveiled was also to bring dishonor to her own head, physically, and to bring dishonor to her spiritual head, that is, her husband or the church as a whole. I’ve already indicated the reason for this, it was because, in the Corinthian culture, it was a mark of tremendous disrespect for a woman to go without her veil or head covering. It was a tremendous mark of disrespect to have short hair. Ramsay says, “In oriental lands, the veil is the honor and dignity of the woman. With a veil on her head, she could go anywhere in security and respect. She is not seen. It is a mark of severely bad manners to observe a veiled woman in the street. But without the veil, woman is a thing of naught whom anyone could insult. A woman’s authority and dignity vanish along with the all-covering veil she discards.” That’s why Paul says that women who refuse the veil ought

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to cut their hair, because they're acting like a prostitute and they simply ought to identify with them.

The reverse of the Corinthian situation applies to our culture today. Suppose I take this passage and say to my wife, "Scripture says, 'Wife, wear a veil.' I want you to wear a veil when you come to church today." She is going to feel a little bit ridiculous doing that. She would be the only woman in here with a veil over her head. And by requiring that, I've brought her into dishonor. But suppose I'm indifferent on the manner or I'm saying it's better for women not to be veiled in our culture, because that's what the culture expects. And my wife says, "No, the Scripture says. I'm going to veil myself. I'm going to wear a veil." So she wears a veil and if a person says, "Why are you wearing a veil?" She answers, "Because I want to." "Does your husband want you to?" "No. He hates this thing, but I'm going to wear it." What has she succeeded in doing? She has brought, in using Paul's terminology, dishonor to her head and dishonor to her spiritual head. And essentially created havoc in the church.

The principle of headship doesn't change, but the customs that prevail on headship do change. In fact, women at Corinth were bringing the congregation, as a whole, into a position of being a laughing stock in the community, as well as plotting rebellion against the authority in the church. By the way, if men do not reflect the glory of God, women have a tough time reflecting the glory of men.

II. Paul goes on to say, in this manner of reflecting headship in any culture, that headship is in fact established by God in creation (verses 8 and 9).

We talked about man being created first and then the woman coming out of him, suggesting again the directional flow of organization.

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Christian men and women in any culture are called upon to recognize headship because of the angels. Verse 10 is one of the most intriguing passages in the New Testament. “For this reason, because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.” What in the world does Paul mean by this? There are two possibilities as to what is involved. One is the idea of angels as observers of Christian worship. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:9 that angels are watching him as he’s in the procession of life. He’s a spectacle to men and angels. Maybe Paul has the understanding that, as unseen guests of Christian worship, there are angels who would, in essence, watch how mortals worship God. Their worship of God is strengthened by seeing how the church does it. That would really do something to our worship, wouldn’t it? An angel is watching when we worship. Maybe that’s one thing Paul’s saying here. We can’t say for sure. Another thing that he may be saying is simply that angels recognize the principle of headship. In Isaiah 6:2, we see angels covering their face and covering their feet before the throne of God. There is a sense that Paul may be connecting that with the matter of the veil and saying that, in the presence of God, there is appropriate recognition of authority. We don’t know. It’s an intriguing passage.

The point seems to be, how can human beings be insubordinate and yet judge angels who are subordinate? Because Paul, in this letter, tells us that there will come a day when we will judge angels. Therefore, if we are insubordinate in our own life, how can we judge angels who are subordinate?

III. The third thing Paul is saying, by way of application to us, is that Christian men and women in any culture are called upon to recognize that in the Lord we are between creation and consummation.

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Consummation is the end of the age. Verses 11–12 speak of this, “In the Lord however woman is not independent of man nor is man independent of woman. As woman came from man so also man is born of woman. Everything comes from God.” That’s a qualification of what Paul has said in verse 8, “Man is created, and out of him, woman.” Now, all of a sudden, Paul is saying, “But in the Lord, that creation is superseded by redemption, by Christ’s work. For now, it’s not simply woman that comes from man, but man also comes from woman. So in the Lord, everything evens out.” What he is looking at is that we, as Christians, are pressing toward that future moment in time where, indeed, the distinctions that pertain to sexuality in this present age will be done away with. We are between creation and what is yet facing us in the consummation. This leads to a struggle. On the one hand, we recognize some distinctions that pertain because of creation. On the other hand, we see those distinctions being done away with because of what is happening in the consummation.

We must learn, therefore, to somehow get along with that. At Corinth, the way to get along with it was that women were free to pray and to preach, as long as they did not violate the principle of headship.

IV. A fourth thing. Christian men and women in any culture are called upon to adhere to the natural, non-sinful social norms of a culture.

There are certain things that are expected in culture. We’d do well to adhere to them. The Africans find it exceedingly offensive that Caucasian people could be so crude and dirty as to carry around a white cloth and blow their nose in it and put it back in their pocket and keep it. That’s not the way they function. In some societies, the right hand is used for eating and the left hand for toilet functions. If you are not aware of this, you can, in the course of the conversation or eating at a meal or in a public gathering, offend the sensibilities of everyone in the room by

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simply using wrongful mannerisms. The Christian, in order not to offend a culture, will be aware of the social norms of that culture, so as not to create offense.

That's what Paul appears to be saying here in verses 13–15, when he talks about the manner of it being natural for a man to have short hair and natural for a woman to have long hair. Here we raise the question, does he mean natural in the sight of creation, do we go back biologically to say that it takes two genes in a woman to produce baldness and only one gene in a man? Do we mean it in the biological sense or the cultural sense? The normal, natural expectation within a culture is that men have short hair and women have long hair. I think it's natural to culture. Paul is saying that, in that culture where the men have short hair and the women have long hair, go with the social convenience. Don't give offense to what is natural to people.

Christian men and women, in any culture, should respect their traditions in their church, even when these traditions may be extra-biblical, but are not necessarily non-biblical. Verse 16 says, "If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice nor do the churches of God." By the way, just another thing on "natural," in respect to short hair and long hair. A man who's bald headed doesn't look so bad. But women who are bald are very sensitive about that. That may be another thing Paul is saying here.

Christian men and women in any culture should respect traditions in their church, which may be extra-biblical, but are not non-Biblical. What do I mean by that? There is a custom or tradition in a church which is practiced where there's not anything in the Scripture against it, but there's not anything necessarily in Scripture for it, either. It's just that that's the custom of that church.

That's what Paul finally ends up with in verse 16, "If anyone wants to be contentious about this." He's realizing, when he's giving these arguments, that someone can still find fault with them. The last argument which he gave may have been his weakest of all. "If anyone wants to argue

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beyond this, then we've got an answer. This is the custom in all of the churches." Go with the custom. Don't rub against the grain, is what he's saying.

This is an important admonition, I think, in respect to certain things. Some people may come from a church where the choir doesn't wear robes. They come to a church where the choir wears robes and they say, "This church must not be spiritual. The choir wears robes." Or, "The preacher wears robes." Or, "They have a printed order of worship." Such things are matters of custom. They're not related to spirituality at all. They can sometimes stand for a certain kind of deadness. But spiritually alive churches can go either way in those matters. It's well within a given situation not to judge that church or the custom in that church. Traditions can help us develop roots and infuse us with a sense of belonging. We can be too experimental—too "Let's do something new"—forgetting there is such a thing as predictability that is good, being able to expect a certain kind of thing in a certain kind of time. This is the way these people behave. They're predictable kind of Christians. I would like more predictable kind of behavior among believers in many areas. There's nothing necessarily wrong with tradition. It is wrong if it gets in the way of our relationship with God, if it becomes an obstacle in spiritual life and fellowship. But traditions can help develop roots and infuse us with a sense of belonging. Paul says, "There's tradition in the church. Go with tradition."

The one word behind this whole passage is the word "authority." The problem with some of the gals at Corinth was that they wanted to be in authority, but they did not want to be under authority. That's the problem with many preachers as well. I've had to face that struggle in my own life. Do I just want to be in authority? Am I willing, also, to be under authority? If I am going to be in authority, I have to be under authority. God is not at all committed to spiritual dictatorship. He is not in the interest of deifying tin gods for preachers. He requires the pastor of

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the church to be submitted to the church and submitted to the leadership of the church. So it's my task as pastor of this church to be submitted to the direction that is offered by the other pastors and by the deacons and by the church as a whole. No one who is not under authority can exercise authority. The problem at Corinth was that there were some who wanted to exercise authority, but wanted to throw aside all constraints or restraints in respect to authority.

Where are we moving as a church in regard to the role of women in this local body? We're involved in a serious ongoing study of trying to look at this gospel seed of liberation, in this cultural soil of expectation, to see how the two fit. It's my own personal persuasion that there ought not to be any ministry in the church that is open to men, that is not also open to women. I think that can come about only as we go about that sort of change, in responding to the authority God has already re-established in the church and working through that authority to bring that change. That's what the people in this fellowship are doing. Maybe a trace of this has been shaped by my mother, as many of you know, she went out as a single missionary when she was twenty-four and was an ordained minister of the gospel for over fifty-five years. We had, in the early days of the Pentecostal movement, a phrase: "Holy Ghost hermeneutic." "Hermeneutic" is the word which describes how you interpret Scripture, a method of interpretation. It went something like this, if you were a woman, "God called me to preach. How can I deny the calling that is upon me? The Spirit gave me that experience." When you have that, you go. Does the Scripture support this experience? It does. Philip's daughters were prophetesses or preachers (Acts 21:8). Paul says that women at Corinth could pray or prophesy. The Spirit is poured out on all flesh—men and women. You go to those passages and say, "The Spirit gave me the experience. And I can justify it from the Word."

THE VEILED WOMAN

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One of the things that weren't done in that kind of experience is to take a difficult passage like 1 Corinthians 11. "In heaven, we'll understand that passage, but right now, the Spirit's leading in this direction." I think, right now, what's happening in the charismatic renewal is that God is bringing us to a point of spiritual maturity so that we can not only go with our "Holy Ghost hermeneutic," but we can also take a passage like 1 Corinthians 11, which seems to take away what other Scriptures grant, and look at that and treat it as a whole and say, "We, as a body, are coming together in a mutuality and a maturity of understanding on this manner."

It seems to me that for the church in today's culture to adopt a sort of male supremacy kind of a view is to be an affront to the people that we're seeking to bear witness to, as well as certain principles in the Scripture. I'm not interested, on the one hand, in being a part of that church experience, that sort of mentality, which says, "Let women keep their place, and their place is to shut up. When we come to 1 Corinthians, we'll look at what Paul means when he says, 'Let the women keep silent.'" I'm not interested in that kind of radical masculine sort of an emphasis, which seems to maintain the man's role on the basis of power rather than service. On the other hand, I'm not interested in the radical kind of thing that some of these evangelical feminists are saying—that, for example, Paul, when he writes Scripture in respect to headship, is simply reflecting his rabbinical training and his prejudice as a Jew, and he's not yet Christianized. To do that kind of approach is to treat the Scriptures with violence and it is to step out from under the authority of Scripture. I can have no part in that. Somewhere, as is so often the case, truth lies in the great middle, with a balancing of the principles which God gives us on the one hand, of equality of man and woman being created in the image of God, and on the other hand, differing in function according to an order that God has placed within the home and within the church.

THE VEILED WOMAN

1 Corinthians 11:2–16

I haven't answered all the questions, but I hope that, with this passage, the Spirit has given us the perspective to treat them fairly and honestly.

Closing Prayer

Lord, we thank You for these moments we've shared together around Your Word today. You have come as our liberator in life, to break apart the distinctions that prevailed before we came to You, and now in Christ we know a unity that is deeper than any unity we experienced in the world. By Your Spirit, You are bringing us, as a whole body of people, to a place of growing maturity in You. I thank You, Lord, for the men and the women You have placed within this congregation, for the callings and the gifts of the Spirit You have placed upon each of us, for the manifold ministry of Christ that has developed, as we faithfully seek to serve You. Lord, grant us, as we leave today, that quiet gentle peace of Your Spirit in our lives. Grant, Lord, as we exercise authority in Your name, that we will always be people under authority, realizing that no one of us is a law to himself or herself. But all of us submit one to the other and submit each one to You. May Your will be done in this, Your body. We pray, in Christ's name. Amen.