

1st Corinthians 11

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v2-16: The truth of headship, & how this truth is to be practically acknowledged & displayed.

v17-34: Instructions pertaining to the Lord's supper; the acknowledgment of Lordship.

Headship versus Lordship

In headship, the one who is the head has the authority to give direction; the head leads, guides, directs, nourishes, succours & cares. With that acknowledgment of headship, comes a willing subjection & corresponding obedience based upon a relationship of mutual love, feelings, affections, and respect for an order of authority that is according to God.

In Lordship, there is a mandatory obedience demanded by subservience, subordination & ownership to one who is acknowledged as the superior & sovereign Lord.

1st Corinthians 11v2 – 16: Creatorial Headship

v2: Paul praises them for their remembrance of him "*in all things*", and for keeping "*the ordinances, as I delivered them to you*", i.e. the apostolic teachings & divine revelations (see v23).

v3: The Basic Truth of Creatorial Headship

There are no distinctions between the male & female, with respect to the blessings of God's salvation (see Gal 3v26-28). But, as believers, God has ordered distinct roles for males versus females (e.g. 1st Cor 11, 1st Cor 14, 1st Tim 2). God is a God of order (see 1st Cor 14v33,40).

These are 3 statements of truth relating to the essential hierarchy of creatorial headship; the order is first God, then Christ, then the man /male, and then the woman / female.

Each group has their appropriate relationships, respective roles & spheres in which to move.

In acknowledgment of headship, we are to accept these God-given roles & spheres of operation, which are for our spiritual safety & protection (consider Adam & Eve in Eden, and the fall of man).

To rebel against this creatorial order would be to rebel against God.

"The head of Christ is God", and Christ as the Son of God is essentially co-equal to God His Father; but as He moved here on earth, He took His place in the creation as the subject Son, a dependant Man & God's perfect Servant, subject to the will of His Father.

Similarly, *"the head of the woman is the man"*; this truth of headship, and the authority & subjection associated with it, does not in any way imply inferiority, or lesser spirituality, of the female compared with the male.

The truth of headship does not in any way belittle Christ the Son of God, and it likewise does not in any way belittle the female compared to the male.

This is a creatorial order that relates to all of humanity ("*every man*"), and whilst it is to be displayed in the gatherings of the NT local assembly generally (v4-5), the essential truth should have a wider application to our whole lives and conduct as believers.

v4-7: Headship Symbolized in Appropriate Head-Covering

The truth of headship is to be acknowledged symbolically by the practice of head-covering in the gatherings of the Lord's people, specifically by the male's heads being uncovered, and the sister's heads being covered.

V4: If the man /male were to pray or prophesy with "*his head covered*", i.e. with his physical bodily head covered, then he "*dishonoureth his head*", i.e. Christ, who is the creatorial head of every male.

v5: A female praying or prophesying with her physical head uncovered, "*dishonoureth her head*", i.e. the male, who is the creatorial head of the female.

NB. For the males, this is a real change of practice compared to what pertained in Judaism in OT times. This new practice is for Christianity & the Church, subsequent to the coming of Christ, in subjection to the will of God.

The context in v4-5, when head coverings is specifically being taught, is that of the gatherings of the local assembly, when the collective company is involved in spiritual assembly exercises of “**praying or prophesying**”. Verse 5 does not teach that a sister can pray publicly as long as her head is covered (see also ch14v34-35, 1st Tim 2v8-12). When a brother is leading the company publicly & audibly in prayer, the whole company is viewed as participating, and the sisters with heads covered are therefore praying too.

v5-6: The extent of the shame & dishonour for the woman who has her head uncovered is emphasised, by equating it to having a shorn or shaven physical head.

The head covering is symbolic, but such external symbols are important to God, just as later in ch11 the symbols of the bread & cup are vitally important, symbolic of the Lord’s body & blood.

v7: Headship must be acknowledged with appropriate head covering because it involves the very glory of God & Christ. The male’s head must be uncovered in the gatherings of the saints “**forasmuch as he is the image & glory of God**”, and in contrast the female’s head must be covered because “**the woman is the glory of the man**”. It should only be the glory of God & Christ that is openly displayed in the gatherings of the assembly, not the glory of man; hence the males are uncovered, and the females are to be covered.

Given that the general truth of creatorial headship is universally still true today, then this practice of appropriate head coverings is clearly not just for Corinth, or only for 1st century churches; rather it is for all “**the churches of God**” (v16).

v8-12: Headship Acknowledged in God’s Creation

v8: The basic order in creation was the man preceded the woman, “**For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man**”. Assembly order reflects this creatorial order.

v9: This order in creatorial headship for the man & woman is also in keeping with the original divine intention & purpose in creation; “**Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man**”.

God, in all His immutability, has not changed in His general creatorial plan, order & purpose from Genesis 2.

v10: “**For this cause ought the woman to have power (authority) on her head because of the (presence of) angels**”. The sisters, by having their physical heads covered, have the sign of subjection to authority on their heads, i.e. they acknowledge the authority & headship of the man.

Angels are observing the gatherings of believers on earth, and they are learning from such observations the divine creatorial order & intention (see also Eph 3v10).

Such heavenly interest in the gatherings of the saints on earth shows this is not a trivial matter.

v11-12: The man & woman are mutually dependent upon one another, and we are all, males & females, equally dependent upon God, for “**all things (are) of God**” as to creatorial origin.

That mutuality & dependence of brothers & sisters upon one another, and general dependence upon God for all things, is equally true in God’s assembly.

v13-16: Headship Acknowledged in Appropriate Outward Appearance

v13: He appeals to comeliness, and to our inward spiritual senses & intuition.

The emphasis in v13 is upon the Person to whom the woman prays; no less than “**unto God**”.

v14-15: The importance of the natural external appearance to clearly distinguish male from female, specifically in relation to length of hair. For a man to have long hair, “**it is a shame unto him**”, but a woman’s long hair “**is a glory to her**” and “**is given her for a covering**”, i.e. a natural endowment, a symbol of her modesty & subjection. This does not mean the woman’s long hair is instead of a head covering; if her hair was meant as the only head covering, v5-6 become completely nonsensical. Since nature has given a woman one type of covering for the natural sphere, her long hair; then she should be willing to wear another type of covering in the spiritual sphere.

v16: An uncompromising statement of apostolic authority; if any would think fit to hold a differing opinion, or just wants to be contentious, “**we (the apostles) have no such custom, neither the churches of God**”.