

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 – “A Feminists Nightmare or Awakening?”

As we've been making our way through 1 Corinthians, we've seen in the last few chapters how Paul has been making a case that as believers, there may be times we're going to have to lay down our rights or liberties for the sake of others.

- **1 Corinthians 8:9**, *"But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak."*
- **1 Corinthians 8:13**, *"Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."*
- **1 Corinthians 9:12b**, *"If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."*
- **1 Corinthians 10:24**, *"Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being."*
- **1 Corinthians 10:33**, *"just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."*

Paul's motivation in all this was not to be compromising or conforming to others, but rather to live in a way where the gospel would not be hindered; where nobody would be stumbled and justify sinning by his actions.

Now this is leading us into some things that we'll be looking at with the Corinthian church where they weren't doing so well in living this way. They began to adopt things that were more selfishly driven rather than being driven by love and concern for others.

It also leads us into some Scripture that's not always fun to have to deal with because it's not very popular in today's culture. That's why I've titled this message: "A Feminists Nightmare or Awakening?". We're going to talk about some differences between men and women today. More so, what the Bible has to say about the roles and conduct of men and women in the worship service. This is one of the very rare times when I think it would be much easier not to have to teach verse by verse and chapter by chapter. But being faithful to the Word of God is important because we need to see what it has to say to these timeless truths in the midst of continued cultural pushback.

11:1 - *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Now this verse more aptly fits at the end of Chapter 10. Remember, when the Bible was written, these original authors weren't putting verse numbers down, or chapter breaks. These all came much later to make referencing the Bible easier.

Paul's been stating how he seeks to please all men, not seeking his own profit (10:33). As we saw, this has been the case he's been building over the last few chapters. So with that, he encourages others to imitate him in this same attitude and practice.

Paul's not trying to boast in how great he is, he's just setting himself as a model or example for others to follow.

- Isn't that what we all should be doing? Yet how many people would feel comfortable telling others to imitate you?
- Yet we're called in Ephesians 5:1 to be imitators of God. This was Paul's desire, which is why he said, *"imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."*
- You see, too often we try to deflect people off of us. Which I get, we can be pretty flawed and fail often. We find it easy to say, *don't look to me, look to Christ*. And that's good, but if we're seeking to imitate Christ, then others should be able to look to you as an example.
- Live as imitators of God. Live in a way where telling someone to imitate you will be a good thing and not a bad thing.

11:2 - *Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.*

Paul was very grateful to know that this church wasn't just moving past Paul and looking to the latest and greatest new evangelist. Or that they weren't forsaking the things that he taught them. That's what Paul is implying when he speaks of ***the traditions***. He's speaking of God's Word that he passed on to them, which would become the Scriptures as we have today.

That term *tradition* can have a real negative connection to it, and it has been used that way in some Scripture, especially when Jesus called out the religious leaders for the way they kept their traditions at the expense of the Word (Mark 7:8-9). They held traditions higher than God's commandments.

But in this passage Paul is simply speaking of God's inspired Word that was written through him and passed on to them.

Now even though they kept this teaching, abuses and misunderstandings of what this teaching implied crept into the church. Paul will address these errors over the next few chapters – primarily dealing with conduct and order within the church.

If there's any place that we should be more than willing to lay down our liberties, it should be in the public worship service where the focus is always to be on Jesus. Nothing should be distracting or pulling our attention away from Him.

With that, the first issue Paul tackles in conduct and order within the church centered around gender roles. And who says the Bible is irrelevant for today?

Three things we'll look at regarding God's order:

1. Headship – 11:3-6
2. Creation – 11:7-12
3. Nature – 11:13-16

1. Headship – 11:3-6

11:3 - *But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

If we're going to consider order in the church, we must first establish what is God's divine order for His creation. Paul lays that out pretty clearly here.

- The head of man is Christ.
- The head of a woman is man.
- The head of Christ is God.

First of all, we must all understand something, we are all under authority. There's no absolute authority given to a particular gender or position; everyone must realize they are under authority. When we read verses that speak of wives submit to your husbands, or the head of woman is man, it causes some to want to throw out the Bible as out dated, out of touch, or some to draw conclusions that the Bible is no longer applicable in today's culture.

But whenever the Bible deals with gender roles, it's never to indicate a superiority of one over the other.

- The woman is not a second-rate citizen, though in this culture she was often treated this way; often seen as just a little above a slave. She was seen basically as the property of the husband. But this is not God's heart. The woman is not inferior to the man. This verse is just simply establishing God's order. Because without order, you have chaos!

We need simply to look at the example of Jesus. You see, Jesus was equal with God, yet Jesus submitted to the headship of the Father.

- **John 4:34**, "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."
- **Philippians 2:5–7**, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."

Woman is equal to man, yet there has been a God given order instituted. As we move along we will see how this order was being challenged.

11:4-5 - Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

It's important to look at the culture we're dealing with at the time this was written. It was common for women to wear a covering, or veil. It was to keep their beauty for their husbands only and to show their submission to them. Many places around the world (especially the Middle East) still observe such customs.

Now remember in Corinth, there was the temple to Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty and fertility. A 1000 temple prostitutes devoted themselves to the worship of Aphrodite there.

A prostitute would be very recognizable by not wearing a head covering, or having short or shaved hair.

So within the gathering of the church, if a man comes ministering to the body of Christ (**praying or prophesying**) with his head covered, it would be like he was reversing his role as the man. It would be dishonoring **his head** – which was Christ.

- Today the equivalent would be like if I came up to teach wearing a dress with a purse over my shoulder. There would be confusion and disorder and it would be very dishonoring to what God designed me to be as a man.

Now I want you to catch something here. Because when we talk about roles and gender, people argue today that women shouldn't be exempt from ministry. And I agree. But the Bible lays out parameters and guidelines for what that entails.

Paul says, ***every woman who prays or prophesies...*** In other words, women were not excluded from ministry. Some would think that men in general are down on women being involved in the church, but there's no precedent for that in the Word. In fact, there's many examples of women through the Word being active in ministry. There is however one requirement or restriction made:

- **1 Timothy 2:12**, *“And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”*
- Women were permitted to teach other women in the Bible, they're permitted to do a number of things in the church today, but Paul says they are not to do something that puts them in authority over man (like teaching the Word). Simply because this goes against God's divine order.

And is this not what we've been seeing since the 60's when these areas of authority and headship have been challenged and usurped. It's not just between man and woman, it's become an issue with kids and parents, students and teachers, employees and employers, and public with police. And do we see any fruit in this? Has good come in trying to break down the levels of authority. Not at all! Our society is in ruins. If people would follow the Word and stop trying to change it to fit the times we would be in a far better situation.

- “Just as an army would be in confusion if there were no levels of authority, so society would be in chaos without submission.”¹

Now again, some woman could have begun to think, *but I have liberty!* True, but that liberty doesn't always edify - **1 Corinthians 10:23**.

- There was an account of 2 missionary women in a foreign land who would sit each morning on the veranda of their rented apartment and do their devotions while sipping some coffee. But there was no fruit that came in their ministry. Nobody even wanted to talk with them. Until someone told them that the prostitutes in the area would sit on their balconies each morning to sell themselves.

...for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For a woman to come into the local assembly with her hair uncovered, it would be the same as if it was shaved. In that day only a prostitute or a woman in real rebellion would have her head shaved.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 217–222). Victor Books.

A woman might think, “*I know who I am, I’m no prostitute, I can wear my hair down or uncovered if I want, God sees the heart.*” This may be true, but you may cause unnecessary shame to yourself and the advancement of the gospel. Keep in mind, the symbols may have changed but the biblical principles have not.

- We’re not saying you need to start a head covering movement here. You’re entitled to wear a veil on your head, but it’s more about fashion or covering up a bad hair day than it is about what’s right and wrong.
- There are however symbols of submission in our modern culture that apply and that reveal this attitude of submission.
- “For example, taking your husband's last name makes a profound statement. As does wearing his wedding ring and exchanging traditional vows...

A Christian lady is responsible for the message she sends to her culture.”
(Sandy Adams)

11:6 - *For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.*

Paul is using a little bit of sarcasm here. What he’s saying is right though. If a woman doesn’t want to cover herself and show her submission to her head, just go all the way and shave your whole head. They both gave the same message to the Corinthian onlookers.

Many women would agree that a shaved head was kind of the lowest degradation. They should have the same view then towards an uncovered head. The shame was the same.

- In Jewish law if a woman was caught in adultery, she would be brought before the priest and if guilty, she would have her head shaved (Numbers 5:11-31).

2. Creation – 11:7-12

11:7 - *For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.*

Men on the other hand are not to cover their head. To do so would be to cover or veil the very glory of God that they are to represent. Man was created in the image of God. Man originated from God and is to reflect Him – his head.

~~“Paul based this conclusion on Genesis 1:26–27. A woman’s (a wife’s) **glory** and image was derived from (1 Cor. 11:8) and complementary to (v. 9) that of the man (her husband). Man, then, was God’s authoritative representative who found in woman a divinely made ally in fulfilling this role (Gen. 2:18–24). In this sense she as a wife is **the glory of man**, her husband. If a married woman abandoned this complementary role, she also abandoned her glory, and for Paul an uncovered woman’s head gave symbolic expression to that spirit.”²~~

Woman on the other hand originated from man and is to honour him – her head. This is what Paul says next...

11:8-9 - *For man is not from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.*

Paul goes back to creation, to the very beginning to show how this order has always been in place. God made all of His creation and looked at it all and said it was good. But as He sees Adam He says, *it’s not good that Adam should be alone*. It says that there was no suitable helper for Adam. This speaks of a helper in a way that completes a person. So God put Him in a deep sleep, and out of his side, brought forth Eve. Again this was done for Adam. And it is to be this way for every ‘Adam’ and ‘Eve’ through history.

- Ladies understand, your joy rests in being your husband’s completer not competer.
- I’m thankful for the help my wife brings me. There are a number of things that she’s much better at than me, many things I turn to her for counsel in, and I covet her help.
- Nevertheless, there is an order that has been ordained – a Biblical authority structure. And Paul takes us to the beginning – even before the fall, to show how this order was established even then.
- Now a lot of women get worried at the thought of their man having authority. They think it’s going to turn him into a totalitarian dictator. But this is not what the Word teaches. Paul would say in **Ephesians 5:25**, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.”* This is the kind of leadership men are to bring to their wives.
- “A man who can only rule by stamping his foot had better remain single. But a man who knows how to govern his house by the love of the Lord,

² Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 529). Victor Books.

through sacrificial submission to the Lord, is the man who is going to make a perfect husband. The woman who cannot submit to an authority like that had better remain single.” (Redpath)

11:10 - *For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*

Here’s the point when we make an already difficult passage even more difficult!

What do angels have to do with this? Angels are ministering spirits who are observing what’s going on in the church.

- **Ephesians 3:9–10**, *"and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,"*
- **1 Corinthians 4:9**, *"For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men."*

Angels are present and watching what’s going on in our churches. They’re very concerned with order and God receiving the glory. They’ve seen man rebel at the beginning when Eve usurped her husband’s authority and took of the fruit. They’ve seen what rebellion leads to. They’re present with us as we worship and they’re keenly aware of when we step outside of God’s order. (*1 Peter 1:12)

11:11-12 - *Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. ¹² For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.*

Here’s the thing, men and women need each other. We’re not to work or live independently of each other.

It’s true woman came from the man, but it’s also true that without women, we’re going to have a man shortage.

It’s all in the perspective you have.

A Woman, without her man, is nothing.

A Man, without her, is nothing.

The bottom line is that we're all from God. And our purpose is to live unto Him and to glorify Him (10:31 – *do all to the glory of God*).

Lastly, Paul appeals to nature as another example of God's order...

3. Nature – 11:13-16

11:13 - *Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*

Paul asks them to reason among themselves now what is proper and good. He's given enough evidence it would seem to show that a woman is to have her head covered as a symbol of submission to her head – either her husband or the man in authority at church.

Now is this wrong today? No, we don't have the same cultural issues exactly as this today (at least in the West). But we still draw the same lines in areas that could be problematic (ie. if a person is on the worship team wearing something J-Lo would to the Oscars, we may have to talk.).

11:14-15 - *Does not even nature itself teach you that 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; for her hair is given to her for a covering.*

Throughout the centuries, woman typically had longer hair than men. It came naturally to them! God provided for them to have a covering!

This gave a visible differentiation between men and women.

- It's interesting how culture today, and how our enemy, wants to blur the lines of gender. That people can just choose what they want to be and in a sense be their own authority.
- We're all under authority – ultimately to God. Live for Him and not for yourself. He doesn't make any mistakes. Your life will find fulfillment and peace as you live as you are made.

[“The term [nature] can convey the idea of basic human awareness, i.e., the innate sense of what is normal and right. The male hormone, testosterone, speeds up the loss of hair in men. Estrogen causes women's hair to grow longer and for a longer time. Women are rarely bald, no matter how old. This physiology

is reflected in most cultures in the custom of longer hair on women. God has given her hair as a covering to show tenderness, softness, and beauty.”^{3]}

11:16 - *But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.*

If people wanted to be contentious over this, Paul states that they have no need to do so and neither do the other churches of God. In other words, this was accepted by many. If the Corinthians have a problem with it, then they have a problem with God’s Word.

- Sadly, there have been many shifts within Christianity in our culture today over what was once unaccepted to what has now been accepted. There’s many excuses given as to wanting to see the gospel be more palpable, or wanting to come across loving. People will say that we have been too legalistic in our views. But in the end, to accept these things means that the Word of God needs to be removed as the standard or guide. And that’s where we’re at in Christian culture today.
- Let me remind you today. God doesn’t change, neither does His Word. It says what it means and means what it says. And it’s the Word of God that must consistently be our authority and truth.

³ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2005). *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (1 Co 11:14–15). Thomas Nelson.