

I CORINTHIANS
Chapter 11:1-16

INTRODUCTION:

In our study of this epistle, we have noticed that in the first six chapters the apostle brings before the Corinthian church certain matters that require correction. God providentially permitted these many things to come up in the early Church in order that they might be corrected by apostolic authority during that first century of the Christian era. We all realize that similar things have come up continually in the Lord's churches down through the years.

The remarkable fact is that there are no circumstances that can arise, no sins that may cause trouble and distress, no irregularities that may appear, that are not already met and provided for right here in the epistle of the New Testament. Because these things were prevalent in the beginning of the church's history, they were dealt with by the Holy Spirit through inspired men. All we need to do today is to walk in obedience to the Word.

In the first six chapters the apostle deals with such questions as divisions among Christians, schisms of various kinds, immorality getting into the Lord's churches, Christians going to law with one another, and other things that disturb the peace of the church.

Beginning with ***chapter seven*** and going right on to the end of the epistle, Paul takes up issues which the church wrote for instruction and help. He says in ***chapter 7:1 - "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me,"*** and deals first with the question of marriage and divorce, the relationship of a Christian married to a heathen. Then in ***chapter 8*** and ***9*** he takes up the question of meats offered to idols and the Christian's relationship to idol temples. He carries that on over into ***chapter 10*** and shows how carefully the Christian ought to walk apart from everything that leads to hints of idolatry.

Now in ***chapter 11***, he touches on another problem that was disturbing the early church. In order to properly understand this portion, we need to try to visualize conditions existing in those days. Corinth was a very loose and dissolute city. I question if any of the great cities in which the apostle preached the gospel were worse in character in this respect than the city of Corinth.

The passage is dealing with the proper relationship between men and women and the meaning of the veil in showing that relationship. It is my conviction that the passage teaches Christians to respect the customs of their society.

It would have been a shameful display for the women in Corinth to have removed their veils. Paul was not revealing a new and peculiar manner of dress. Women had spiritual gifts, but they were still to dress and act consistently with their subjection to men.

VERSE 1 - "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Paul is simply saying in this phrase, I imitate Christ; He alone is my example and model in all that I am, and in all that I do and say. The apostle is urging them to also be imitators of Christ. Such conduct on the part of both pastor and church – every member of each local church – will solve all problems in all churches. Any member who is a diligent, faithful imitator of Christ will have no reluctance in following the God given pastor who is also an imitator of Christ.

Verse one - should go back to ***chapter 10***, as it serves as a conclusion to it. Be it known that it is not wrong to follow a man if that man is following Christ as Paul was doing. Paul followed Christ, in that he willingly gave up the exercise of his rights in order to gain the spiritual benefit of others. He also wrote: ***"For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, the reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."*** – ***Romans 15:3.***

When Christ became man to die for the sin of man, He gave up His right to be served in order to serve others – ***Philippians 2:5-8.*** Paul wanted his followers to be humble, selfless servants also.

VERSE 2 - Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

The – ***"all things"*** in which they remembered Paul, and for which he praises, approves, and commends them, are the things that he had taught them. That meaning is evident from the remainder of the verse.

The ***"all things"*** for which any preacher or pastor is to be remembered must be the Word of God he has taught. In this sinful and wicked day in which we live so many preachers and pastors are seeking to build great names and reputations for themselves. It should be the desire of every man of God to be remembered for preaching the unadulterated Word of God.

VERSE 3 - "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."

Paul wants them to understand what he is now about to say is in addition to what he had already delivered unto them. We should always be seeking to learn more about God through increased knowledge of His Word.

There is every indication that the subjects discussed in - ***verses 4-16*** were answers to the things which they had written Paul – ***7:1.***

In a series of three statements, order of spiritual authority is established: God - Christ - man - woman. In this order, a clear distinction must be made between the equality of essence and the headship of function.

1. ***"The head of Christ is God":***

This verse is the foundation upon which the Holy Spirit, through Paul, bases the teachings in **verses 4-16**. As usual, Paul grounded all his instructions upon divine principles.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equally God. The Father is not more divine than the Son, nor is the Spirit less divine than the Son. The Father is called God - **Ephesians 1:3**, the Son is called God - **Hebrews 1:8**, and the Spirit is called God - **Acts 5:3-4**. Christ claimed to be one with the Father - **John 10:30**, and yet He claimed that the Father was greater than all - **John 10:29**.

In order to carry out the divine program of redemption, God sent the Son. The Son came to do the will of the Father - **John 14:9**. Therefore, even though there was an equality of persons within the divine oneness, there was an order, (a headship), to execute the divine counsel.

2. ***"The head of the woman is the man":***

The fact that God has decreed man to be the head of the woman cannot possibly degrade or dishonor the woman. Is man degraded because Christ is his head? Is Christ degraded because the Father is His Head? Most definitely not!

The man is not superior to the woman. Both are equally human and in Christ there is spiritual oneness. Paul wrote: ***"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,"*** - **Galatians 3:28**. However, to carry out the divine will for the family and for the church, ***"the man"*** has been established as the ***"head of the woman."*** The woman is to be submissive and obedient to her husband. **Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5**.

3. ***"The head of the man is Christ":***

As Christ is the head of the church, so He is - ***"the head of every man."*** The man must be obedient to Christ; thus, he is commanded to love his wife even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it - **Ephesians 5:25**. In fact, the man must esteem others to be better than him - **Philippians 2:3** and that includes his wife.

Note: Let me state before we continue, some people think Paul to be an actual enemy of womanhood. This judgment is largely based on his writings in **I Corinthians 7** and in the present chapter. He should more properly be considered as the emancipator. At a time when woman were generally regarded as far inferior to men and little better than slaves, (in heathen lands this is more or less true even today), the apostle taught something quite different. NOTE: **Galatians 3:28**.

In Corinth, it seems that certain Christian woman had been so swept off their feet by their new-found liberty in Christ, that they were discarding the established customs of modesty of that day. Thus, they were bringing reproach on the name of Christ and on His work. Here again is another matter that can be at least roughly classified under the heading of an abuse of Christian liberty.

This problem, like that regarding meat offered to idols, reflects a custom which is no longer in existence in this modern day or at least in the western world. To benefit from the teaching, we must therefore separate that which is purely local in nature from the basic underlying principles.

In first century Corinth, decent women usually wore veils when going around in public where men were present. Loose women went bareheaded, and were found in the streets unblushingly, seeking those who might be companions with them in their sin and wickedness. Women who sought to live in chastity and purity were very particular never to appear in public unveiled. The unveiled woman was the careless, immoral woman; the veiled woman was the careful wife or mother who was concerned about her character and her reputation.

So, we are able to see and establish the fact that the covering was the sign of at least two things. First, it was a symbol of the female sex; second it was the symbol of the female subjection.

VERSE 4 - " Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.

Beginning in **verse 4**, Paul takes us into the Corinthian church and shows us how this principle is portrayed. He also takes us back to creation and shows us how this principle is shown.

A man can **"dishonor"** Christ (his authoritative head) by praying or by prophesying with his physical head covered. Praying is when one speaks to God in behalf of man, and prophesying is when one speaks to persons in behalf of God. The phrase - **"having his head covered"**, literally means "having down from the head". It refers to the wearing of a lengthy veil or shawl, but it could also depict long hair comparable to that of a woman. In either case, the man should not seek to hide his male status by attempting to manifest his spiritual equality with the woman through outward appearance and actions. He is still a man even though there is a positional oneness.

Again, Paul is talking about a Corinthian custom from which he draws a divine principle. In the Corinthian society a man praying without a head covering was a sign of his authority as the head of his wife and family. Understanding this custom, one sees how it would be a disgrace to the man to have his head covered.

Verse 5 - "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.

A woman can dishonor her husband (her authoritative head) by praying or prophesying with her physical head uncovered; thus, a woman could pray and could witness for the Lord, but she must be covered. The "veil" was a cultural sign of subordination.

NOTE: **"praying"** and **"prophesying"**- Whatever it meant for men to **"pray"** and **"prophesy"** it meant for women. **"Praying"** and **"prophesying"** was also done in the church at Corinth. Those who bind the veil only in the church have a problem with consistency. If this is the only place a woman had to be veiled, then

she not only prayed in the assembly, she also prophesied in the assembly. The assembly-only position places a woman prophesying in the assembly provided she was veiled, and that violates - ***I Corinthians 14:34-35***.

For a woman to pray or prophesy uncovered was one and the same as if her head were shaved. Here we have the first indication of an appeal to custom. Is there a revelation that it is shameful for a woman to shave her head? If so, where? The appeal here is to their custom. They knew that it was shameful for a woman to shave her head, and Paul said that removing the veil was one and the same.

Verse 6 - "For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered."

The discipline for this violation is set forth in the two imperatives: ***"let her also be shorn"***, and ***"let her be covered."*** In the first, Paul stated that if she wanted to act like a man then let her hair be cut in a manly style. In the second, he referred to the cultural custom. If it was shameful or embarrassing for a woman to have short hair or to be bold, then let her wear the veil. Thus, culture had to dictate the punishment. A woman must be consistent. She must look and act like a woman both in the home and in the church. She cannot act like a woman in one and like a man in the other.

"Shorn" means to cut off, and "shave" means to use a razor.

"Let her be covered." - A.T. Robertson comments that ***"let her be covered"*** signifies "let her remain covered or let her continue to be covered". (Word Pictures of the New Testament, Vol. IV, p. 160). This is the second appeal to their practice. It was not putting on special head-wear but not removing their customary head-wear that Paul was requiring.

Paul was saying for a woman to worship with her head uncovered was the same as her head shaved. Paul says if she will not cover her head, let her go ahead and shave her head. In that day only a prostitute or an extreme feminist would shave her head and that was the purpose of identification. It showed what she did or stood for as a woman.

To those in the church who were rebellious against the principle of submission, Paul said in essence, "Go all the way and identify yourself for what and who you are. If you don't want to be identified as a prostitute or feminist, then cover your head." Once again I remind you that Paul was not laying down a dress code, but showing how a Corinthian custom demonstrated the principle of submission.

VERSE 7 - "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. Some argue that since man is still the "glory of God..." then he ought not to be veiled and the woman ought to be."

"As he is the image of God" - First, man was created in the ***"image"*** of God. Man being created in the - ***"image"*** of God does not necessarily imply man

looked like God, but that man was created as a three-fold being which possesses body, soul, and spirit.

Let us compare Christ's **"ought"** in **John 13:14**. - **If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.** We could argue that if Jesus is still our Lord we ought to wash one another's feet, but it would be assuming something. Showing hospitality was not a custom, but the method of showing it was.

Likewise with the veil, for a man or woman in Corinth to have violated the custom concerning head covering would have been a reflection upon his or her place. Headship, and subjection, was not a custom, but the method of showing it was just as with washing feet or greeting with a holy kiss - **I Corinthians 16:20**.

VERSES 8-9 - {8} **"For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. {9} Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man."**

The subordination of the woman to the man is here proved from two facts recorded in the history of their creation. Paul simply states that man was not made from the woman, but the woman of the man. Then in **verse 9** we see that man was created by God and for God. Woman was created from man for man. **Genesis 2:7; Genesis 2:21-23**.

VERSE 10 - **"For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels."**

Paul was saying that since in the order of creation man was given the role of ruling, the woman ought to wear a symbol of her submission.

The reference to angels no doubt speaks of the role of angels and their submission to God in that role. Just as angels are submissive to the One in authority over them, the wife should be in submission to one in authority over her. It was the sin of pride or insubordination that caused Satan and his angels to sin - **Isaiah 14:12-14, I Timothy 3:6**. Satan wanted to be like his authoritative head, God. Thus, the good (elect) angels can learn about the acceptance of authority through the voluntary subordination of woman to their husbands. If the women try to be like their authoritative heads (their husbands), then a valuable lesson will not be able to be taught.

Paul is showing through creation the role of submission by women is demonstrated. The principle goes back to the order in which man and woman were created. The role of authority was given to man. The woman was created from man and placed under man's authority.

Now, some men have misunderstood their role and their God-given place of authority. They think it makes them the final word and the woman is to obey them no matter what. To remind men who would abuse their role they must read - **verses 11 - 12**

VERSES 11-12 - {11} *Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.* {12} *For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.*

A word of caution is added lest either sex think that it is complete or independent in them. The man is not complete - **"without the woman,"** neither is the woman complete - **"without the man"**. They were made to be mutual comfort and blessing, not one a slave and the other a tyrant. The woman is of the man in the sense of being made from the rib of Adam. At the same time the man is also by the woman in natural birth.

Paul reminds us that both man and woman are - **"in the Lord."** The man is not independent of the woman and the woman is not independent of the man, both are - **"in the Lord."** Woman may have come from man, but in truth both man and woman originated with God. Paul is reminding man that his role is one received from God. Man's authority is a God-given authority that is to be used for God's will and purposes. Again, we are reminded that as the head of the woman, man has a spiritual leadership and authority. It is not a case of a man dictating to a woman what she can do or not do, but providing her spiritual leadership and spiritual direction.

But even then, both are dependent on one another. Man and woman are a team, following God, serving Him, and doing His will. Both are equal having been created by the Lord, but each having different roles by which God's will is done. It just so happens, that God's role for a man is to be the head, and God's role for the woman is to submit to man as God's appointed head. Again, it is not that one is superior to other or inferior to the other, but how God established the role of man and woman.

VERSE 13 - ***"Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?"***

They were not to "judge among themselves whether they should keep a Divine law, but whether it was "proper" for a woman to pray unveiled. This is an appeal for them to make a judgment based upon their own knowledge, not an appeal to judge a new revelation from God. The women in Corinth knew from their customs that to have acted otherwise would have been "one and the same" as if she were shaven and a shameful display - (**vs. 5-6**). It would have been a rejection of her position of subjection to have removed the veil.

Paul is showing how the principle of submission is a God assigned role for the woman. It is not because the man is stronger physically or more mature spiritually, but because God made it that way. Also, man should never forget that it is God's doing and not his; therefore he is accountable to God for how he leads as the head.

VERSE 14-15 {14} ***Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame (dishonor) unto him?*** {15} ***But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.***

"Nature" - here refers to "natural sense, native conviction, or knowledge, as opposed to what is learned by instruction and accomplished by training or prescribed by law." (Thayer's Greek- English Lexicon, p. 660). **"Nature"** - does not refer to inborn nature, for women's hair will not naturally grow longer than men's". (See **II Samuel 14:25-26; Numbers 6:1, 5, 18.**)

"Nature" - refers to practice - **Ephesians 2:3**. What one practices for a long time becomes custom, or nature to him. The verse says - **"nature"** teaches you. Paul was saying that by **"nature"** a man's hair is different from a woman's hair. Man is usually identified by shorter hair and the woman is identified by longer hair. He adds that it would be a shame for a man not to be distinguished as a man, and likewise the same for a woman. The hair of the sexes tells us that there is a difference between man and woman.

Paul speaks of the woman's hair as **"a glory to her"** and how her hair has been - **"given to her for a covering."** Once again Paul is pointing to the natural covering God has given which is a symbol that from creation, God has given distinct roles to the man and woman.

VERSE 16 - " But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

The word - **"custom"** is used in - **John 18:39**, where Pilate said - **"But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover:"** It means "to practice, or customary usage".

"If any man seem to be contentious," - whether the one who seemed to be contentious was in Corinth or somewhere else makes little difference. Paul may have been referring to himself, and anyone else who taught them to respect these instructions. He may have appeared to be contentious, because he was binding these things on the Corinthian women when he did not bind them in other places - **"we (the apostles?) have no such custom, neither the churches of God"** (in other places).

The reason he did not bind this practice in other places is that they did not have such a - **"custom"**. The Corinthians did and they had to respect those customs and not conduct themselves in a shameful manner.

Some say then that - **"custom"** was being - **"contentious"**. This avoids the veil being specifically called a **"custom,"** but it does not fit the context, or the Bible teaching in other places. The **"custom"** is what he has been discussing in the previous verses, and contention would not have been called a **"custom"**. It is a violation of God's law - **Romans 1:29; II Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:2.**

Some think that if the veil is called a - **"custom,"** that Paul was saying they did not have to respect his teaching. That is the opposite of the passage. He was saying that the Corinthians did have it and had to respect proper attire, but others did not have it, so it was not binding on them.

We need to learn the principle in this passage, but not bind peculiar dress. In a country where women wear a covering as a sign of subjection, or walk behind their husbands to show respect, women should respect those customs; but in many

countries such customs do not exist. When "we have no such – **"custom"** we should not bind such practices".

What is the real importance of this? It is the test of whether our wills are subject to God, or whether we are going to be subject to the fashions and order of the day in which we live. The Christian is one who has forsaken the world for Christ's sake and has turned his back on the fashion of this world that passes away in order that he may subject himself to another, even the Lord from heaven. I do plead with you to remember what - **Romans 14:21-22** says.

QUESTIONS:

1. Did Paul not teach the same thing in all the churches? - **I Corinthians 4:17**.
2. Did he teach every church to salute with a holy kiss? - **I Corinthians 16:20; II Corinthians 13:12; Romans 16:16**. Or, was that a regulation that applied wherever people had the custom?

Rely - We should respect the principle of warm greetings, but to bind the custom of kissing is to miss the point. Likewise, we should respect the principle of women's subjection, but to bind the custom of Corinth is to miss the point. (Wearing of veil does not indicate subjection in our society. My observation has been about the same percentage of women who wear the veil are not in subjection as the percentage of women who do not wear it.)

CONCLUSION:

God's word teaches Christians to respect the customs of the society in which they live (to the degree they can do so without violating Scriptural principles). For the Corinthians to have acted any way other than what Paul discussed would have been shameful conduct.

Those who teach that we must salute with a holy kiss have bound a custom (though the Bible never specifically calls it a custom) and missed the true principle that we should apply.

Those who teach that women should put on a veil have bound a custom (and the Bible specifically calls it a custom), instead of teaching the principle of the passage.

Let me sum up what we have seen by saying once again that the real issue is not women's rights, but a woman's role. That is true for men as well.

When it comes to this matter of submission, oftentimes both are wrong. The husband is wrong because he thinks it makes him master of the house, and the wife is wrong because she feels she is made inferior. The husband is to be a spiritual leader seeking to do the will of God and manifest God's glory. The wife is to likewise fulfill her role as a **"help meet"** to the husband and in so doing both can enjoy a wonderful life of blessing. Both are equal and important, and the one cannot do without the other. Each just has a different role in life.

I Corinthians 11:1-16
Study Guide

1. The first six chapters of ***I Corinthians*** deals with what?
2. Beginning with ***chapter 7***, what does the apostle Paul deal with?
3. What issues does Paul deal with in ***chapter 8*** and ***9?***
4. Is idolatry still being committed today? If so what is idolatry?
5. What is the problem being dealt with in ***chapter 11?***
6. In ***Verse 1*** what does - ***"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"*** mean?
7. What is the greatest testimony a pastor or preacher can leave behind?
8. ***"The head of Christ is _____"; "The head of the woman is the _____"; "The head of the man is _____"***:
9. Beginning in ***verse 4***, Paul takes us into the Corinthian church and shows us how this _____ is portrayed. Explain the difference between a principle (custom) and a doctrine.
10. ***"Shorn"*** means to ____ ____.
11. What does - ***"As he is the image of God"*** mean?
12. The reference to angels no doubt speaks of the role of angels and their _____ to God in that role.
13. The man is not _____ - ***"without the woman,"*** neither is the woman _____ - ***"without the man"***.
14. Man's authority is a God-given authority that is to be used for _____ and _____.
15. Paul speaks of the woman's hair as ***"a _____ to _____"***.
16. God's word teaches Christians to respect the _____ of the society in which they live (to the degree they can do so without violating _____ principles).