

“UNITY”

- 1 Corinthians 11 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on May 23, 2021



1 Corinthians 11 - *Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ. 2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered [them] to you. 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. 4 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. 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. 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. 8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man. 9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. 10 For this reason the woman ought to have [a symbol of] authority on [her] head, because of the angels. 11 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. 13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 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. 16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor [do] the churches of God. 17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise [you], since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of [others]; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise [you]. 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the [same] night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke [it] and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner [He] also [took] the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink [it], in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks [this] cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many [are] weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. 33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.*

(11:1) After discussing the issue of Christian liberty now for several chapters, Paul herein “puts the icing on the cake” *so to speak*, by making what nearly all of us would consider a very bold statement, to say the least. Yet when we step back from it and separate ourselves from any hubris that would seemingly accompany such a statement, it is a rather sad admission to realize that the vast majority of us ...*even as we are theoretically filled with the Spirit of the living God*, are unable to say this. Perhaps it is just easier to bow out of that challenge rather than stepping up? One has to wonder how much greater an effect we could have on the world around us—our children, or co-workers, or even new believers if we too could utter those words to them?

Paul wasn't grandstanding here. We have no record of him ever taking an arrogant position in his ministry. However Paul seemed to clearly understand what he was supposed to be as a Christian, and what he *had to be* to be a disciple. He could make this statement because it was true!

All that Paul has thus far taught concerning the subject of Christian liberty has been to bring us to the understanding of the true expression of Christian love and the understanding of the critical importance of unity within a fellowship family. Ironically, both of these issues...*or the lack of them*, are two of the greatest struggles that the greater church is dealing with today. Perhaps because we are seeing scripture as a “suggestion” or a high ideal rather than the actual description of a faithful Christian life.

Paul's opening statement is not a change of subject. He is still driving home the same issue that he had been building over the last few chapters. All of it...while individually good counsel, is not meant to be a litany of micro-commandments for us to build our lives off of. The ultimate goal is what he has in his sights, and that is love and unity. In light of both of these, he has some more to say. Once again, in order to not get lost in the specific points, one must remember what he is trying to accomplish through these directives. He was not trying to take away their individualism or freedoms. But rather he was attempting to present the clear truth that the love we show others and the unity we live out in fellowship was and is more important than what we want individually, even if we are scripturally free to have it!

To clarify this, he goes on to speak concerning *traditions*. Not orders or commandments, but cultural elements that are unique and somewhat specific to Corinth and the church there. Now certainly we must be *very* careful here... for this road can be a slippery slope to liberal interpretation of any and all socially uncomfortable issues. It is not that what Paul is going to say in this chapter has no bearing or application upon our lives today. But we must also recognize, *even now*, that region and location matter as to how we “do church”...or at least how we *need* to do it if we want to successfully further the kingdom of God in a specific community! The way we engage the culture in a major city would not work in a rural area and vice versa. That does not mean that we practice any kind of avoidance or skew the gospel in any way to accommodate. We're speaking of traditions and style.

(11:2) We would be in error to place everything written to this church in Corinth on equal footing with the teachings of Christ, or even to that which God directed Paul and the others to declare as His very will and directives. Already we saw Paul deal with his teaching issues in a different vein here...even saying that some were *his* opinion and not the directive of God.

With all of that being said, this section of scripture has caused a lot of specific legalistic practices, even mandates in certain sects of the modern church today. What began as a tradition in Corinth, a unique cultural acquiescence specific to that city and a manifestation of both Christian distinction from the world as well as a position of love toward the lost world, has today become specific religious practices in some churches. In the hands of those who have embraced these traditional practices as mandates there have often been attempts to

even require these practices as a gateway *to* or at least an *evidential proof* that one is actually reborn! They have become, for many folks, modern mandates for **all** Christians!

(11:3-16 Overview) The first problem that arises concerning this passage before us, is that we lack specific details concerning their actual implementation. Of course, that latitude allows the directives to be then be interpreted in any way that is desired. For example...what exactly is meant here by the request to “cover ones head?” What would it look like and what form would it take? Is it a veil like a wedding veil? Is it a covering like the modern Muslims wear? A scrap of cloth? A hat? (I'd go for that one)

Eldred Echols, Professor of Bible, South Africa Bible School, Benoni, South Africa, summed up an extensive study of this problem by the Bible faculty with the following conclusion:

“The dogmatic position that 1 Cor. 11 requires a woman to wear a hat at a religious service is linguistically and historically impossible. To enjoin it as an obligation upon Christian women is dangerously presumptive, since it is not based upon Biblical authority. On the other hand, there is not the slightest reason why any Christian woman should not wear a hat at church or elsewhere if she wishes to do so. Nevertheless, she should not be deceived into imagining that her hat has any bearing upon first century doctrine or practice.”

Archeology also has something to say about this issue. All the drawings in the middle-eastern catacombs do not bear out any assumption that Christian women wore veils or artificial head-coverings at services in the early church. However, even a cursory exploration of the extensive art of the Middle Ages reveals portrayals of women as fully veiled; but, of course, this was derived largely from the Roman Catholic culture of that era. Before we jump into further verse by verse study of this scriptural section, one other colossal fact should be noted about the word "custom" which appears in 1 Cor. 11:16. The word "custom" as used in 1 Cor. 11:16 clearly identifies the subject under consideration in this section *as the customs of the times*, and not as an apostolic treatise on what men or women should wear in religious services.

(11:3-5) Defense of personal position, like other biblical passages tend to illicit, can quickly overshadow the message of this section stating that the “head of the woman is man.” While this issue is critical to our understanding of this passage, we cannot, for the sake of the text, ignore the rest of the verse which also says, “*the head of every man is Christ.*” Christ Himself is our example on this subject as He willingly accepted his place under the authority of God. Philippians 2 tells us He not only accepted such, but that He placed Himself in that position voluntarily.

However we need to understand that subjection does not mean inferiority. Everyone’s participation and place in the grand scheme of things is critical, but without final authority for each of us there is no order, and without order there is naturally nothing left but chaos. What is crucial for us in this issue is that in no case does the final authority end with us specifically. All of us “answer up.”

That same equality, unity of purpose and of will, should exist between a man and his wife as that which exists between the Father and the Son. Just as Jesus and God the Father have different roles in God’s plan of salvation, so men and women are given different roles. Any marriage that has not made peace with this teaching will be in a constant state of upheaval. Further, a woman who cannot allow the authority of her husband will ultimately not accept **God’s** authority over her either. A woman in this situation is looking for love without authority, from man or deity. A man who will not step up to this God-ordained position is looking for love without responsibility, to a woman or to God. Both individuals will undoubtedly deal with God the same way they deal with their spouse.

To dictate that Paul in verse 5 and verse 13 meant "mantle" or "veil" or any such thing, is to import into this text what is not there. We clearly see that he was speaking of hair in 1 Cor. 11:14, and accepted interpretative practices tell us that is exactly what he is speaking of here. "Not covered" in verse 6 would quite likely refer to the practice of the Corinthian women cropping their hair after the manner of the notorious Corinthian prostitutes; which, if they did so, was exactly the same kind of disgrace as if they had shaved their heads. It is very clear that Paul is not speaking of any kind of garment because he said in 1 Cor. 11:15, "For her hair is given her *instead of a covering*." In that passage, Paul does not mention any kind of garment (the original Greek bears this out) and even there he stated that the woman's hair took the place of it.

Once again...this leads us to the grand point of Paul's allegory. To believe that Paul's primary point in this passage was to dictate the finer points of church decorum is to ignore the context of the whole letter, not to mention the verses which lead up to this passage. He had been dealing with a rebellious congregation that was prideful and obstinate. His aim was to set this church back on the rightful path of holiness and authority (to the pastor and God). The picture he was presenting was the correct authority structure within a body of believers. We established in verse three that the righteous authority structure fits within the issue at hand. The "covering" spoken of is ultimately authority. Alan Redpath's book, *The Royal Route to Heaven* says, "...the man who prays and prophesies covered dishonors his "head"—not the 12 inches above his neck, but God. Christ is dishonored, for He is the head of man. On the other hand, the woman who prays or prophesies uncovered dishonors her head, not the inches above her neck, but the man, for the man is the head of the woman."

How did this misconception start? Read 2 Corinthians 3:13-18. "*The Jews say that Moses veiled his face when he came down from the mountain because the people would not be able to gaze upon his glory. But Paul says Moses did it because he knew the glory was fading, and he did not want the people to see that. The veil however was and is done away with in Christ; for in Him there is no fading glory, because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*" (Redpath)

So what does Paul mean when he says men should not be "covered?" It means that if men are praying and prophesying with something (some other authority) between them and God they stand in sin before the Father because He is to be our covering. And if women attempt such without a covering, they too stand in sin before God because man is their authority.

Also there are those who attempt to use this passage as some sort of license for a woman to be a pastor, leader, and church authority. The commentator Lipscomb said, "*In all the history of Christ and the apostles no example is found of women speaking publicly or leading in public prayer, although they were endowed with miraculous gifts, and did prophesy and teach in private and in the family circle.*"

Lastly, the textual content of this book, both before and after this chapter, makes it apparent that the church in Corinth was having power struggles. The scriptural record seems to allude to the strong possibility that in the midst of all the squabbling, the men were being wimps and the woman were taking the power lead. This is very much like so many churches and families today. Such a dynamic causes chaos, and the authority structure with God at the top breaks down. Such a church is a mess. Such a family is a mess. Welcome to modern America.

(11:6) Here again the sense of this passage is destroyed by the traditional rendering of the term "veiled." No artificial covering of any kind has been mentioned by Paul in this chapter so far, nor will there be any reference to any kind of garment or artificial covering until 1 Cor. 11:15, where it is clearly stated that her hair is given her "instead of" any other covering.

Paul is only repeating here the obvious truth that a woman adopting the hairstyle of the pagan temple prostitutes was the same thing as being shaven. The shaving of any woman's head was considered either a sign of deep mourning or a fitting punishment for adultery. It is not that the Corinthian women had thrown off the Muslim style veil that obscures almost all the female person. No such meaning is found here. Can it be believed that Paul was pleading for the Corinthian women to put on veils in the style of present day Muslims? Why would he then say in 1 Cor. 11:15 that their hair had been given to them instead of such a covering? To say this text means to instruct women to use an artificial covering of any sort to cover their heads is a flagrant mistranslation of this passage. Such constant and historical teaching by some church groups have obscured the truth and confused millions of people. There is no evidence at all that first-century Christian women ever wore such a thing, but rather that they had adopted the chic hairstyles of the women of Aphrodite, the temple prostitutes.

(11:7-12) The woman is the “*glory of man.*” Gentlemen, remember that if you think your wife is really messing up and is really a problem, the truth is that she is just reflecting you.

Paul continues with his allegory, his point being that this truth was not just a cultural issue for his day or a special message only for our day. It was in fact a timeless truth concerning the authority structure of the church and the “headship” of God the Father. That message still stands. Paul’s message is still real and applicable. Why the phrase, “*because of the angels?*” We really can only guess, but it is likely inferring that angels are spectators to all of this mess. They have seen it all from the beginning: the fall in the garden until today. They have seen the constant rebellion to authority, and the subsequent sin that followed such. Authority fell apart for them also, as one-third of them fell to earth with Lucifer in a power rebellion with *their* “head.” No doubt there would be a desire to see things change this time around. That structure and authority would be adhered to, and holiness would be paramount.

Hear me when I say this: Paul was not setting up a structure here where woman are some sort of subservient species. We are interdependent with and upon one another. The woman, if she would walk by these words, must find her place in authority to her husband or remain single. The man must always remember that he exists by and for the woman, and that both are of God.

(11:13) Paul appeals to the good sense that he is hoping is still there. He says, of course now with his reasoning on the table, that they need to consider what he has said. One only needs to look at the modern *results* of such a lack of authority within the church to see that Paul’s words carry some practical weight.

(11:14-15) What Paul is inferring here is a source of great speculation. There is nothing “natural” about short hair on men since the hair, if left alone will keep growing. Paul was also very aware of the Nazarite vow which required the individual not cut his hair for an extended period of time. Samson, Samuel, John the Baptist, Paul himself, and likely even Christ took the Nazarite vow at some point. The passage raises more questions than any answers: How long is long? After all, the average length of hair in that day for a man was shoulder length, and for a woman, middle of the back. Shoulder length for a man today would be considered in most circles as “long.”

Again the point was, no doubt, not primarily the **length** of a man’s hair, but the implied rebellion that went along with it. This was quite likely a problem in Corinth where history records that the practice of homosexuality was a widespread, as well as the effeminate issues that went along with it. Therefore such a hairstyle would have caused a ruckus in the church at that time, to which Paul seems to be saying, “why do it then?”

(11:16) If one feels as if he or she wants to argue these matters, then Paul says they can have their own way. But you will need to deal with the results of your decisions. Our choices will bear fruit, good or bad. Each of us must choose our battles carefully.