

Good morning, Foothills family! If I haven't yet met you, my name is Phil, and I'm one of the pastors here. If you're new with us, maybe you came last Sunday for our Easter celebration, I'd love to meet you and get to know you a little bit.

We're continuing in our Corinthians series this morning, looking at chapter 11:2-16. Before we jump in, I want you to hear what one scholar has to say about this text. "This passage is probably the most complex, controversial, and opaque of any text of comparable length in the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> I went back and looked at the preaching schedule because I was sure this text was intended for *Dillon* not me! You're going to see, as we dig in, that there are a lot of 'maybes' and 'perhaps,' and that's because scholars aren't in agreement on all of it. That's okay, though, because there's still plenty for us to consider and apply.

### ***Some Encouragement (v 2)***

Remember, Paul is writing to the Corinthian church to encourage and correct them as needed. At some point, the church had sent him a letter seeking clarification and instruction. Paul may be replying directly to their letter or maybe he's received reports about what's going on there. Our section begins with verse two—look at it with me. He writes, "*Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.*" Paul is encouraged because they have been diligent about implementing the things he's taught them; they're [The Corinthians are] practicing the truths of the faith. They were growing and maturing. They were learning how to function as Christ followers in their culture. Chances are, when they heard "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and

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<sup>1</sup> Blomberg, Craig. *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1994), 214.

female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,"<sup>2</sup> they took that to heart and ran with it—but they took it too far. This comes right after chapters 8-10, where Paul had to remind them that they were not to exercise their freedoms by ignoring others and the glory of God. And that was all in the context of eating food sacrificed to idols.

### ***Lots of Heads (v3)***

It seems that the Corinthians were exercising their freedoms in ways that negatively affected their worship gatherings. So, once again, Paul seeks to guide them back toward glorifying God and building one another up.<sup>3</sup> Which leads us to verse 3. [READ]

*"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."* Other translations may say, "...the head of the woman is man..." but I think the ESV translates this better, "the head of a wife is her husband." You'll see why in a few minutes.

There are a lot of heads in this verse. But Paul is highlighting the reality that we are all under the headship, the authority, of someone else. Men are under the authority of Christ. Wives are under the authority of their husband. Notice it does not say that all men are in authority over all women. This text is talking about husbands and wives.<sup>4</sup> Even Christ is under the authority of God the Father. For clarity, to be under the authority of another doesn't diminish that value of the one under authority. That's precisely why Paul lists Christ as being under the authority of the Father. Christ is not made less. He still has all the divine attributes, equal in essence with the Godhead, able to say, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), and at the same time say, in John 14, "...the

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<sup>2</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>3</sup> 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. 528). Victor Books.

<sup>4</sup> Blomberg, 209-210. "In every other place in Paul where [the words for 'man' and 'woman'] are paired, with the possible exception of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, they refer to husband and wife. It is much harder to understand how Paul could have claimed that every man is an authority over every woman and much easier to interpret the passage if husbands and wives are meant throughout."

Father is greater than I" (v 28). Jesus knew His role and He submitted to the will of the Father.

I bring this up because I want to make sure the husbands and wives, and future husbands and wives, understand that a husband's authority over his wife does not diminish the value of his wife. He has a role that is different than hers. She has a role different from his. Neither is greater. Neither is less. We are equals before the Lord with different roles. Now, before any of the men in the room get cocky about being the *head* of your wife, please remember Ephesians 5. As head of your wife, you don't have extra privilege, but extra responsibility. You're head of your wife like Christ is head of the church. Your job is to lay yourself down for her, to wash her in the water of the word, to nurture and cherish her and present your wife as holy before the Lord. You are the head-servant, my friend—just like Jesus. You live not to be served but to serve. So, yes! Wives, your husband is the head over you, but what wife would complain if she was loved like Christ loves the church?

Husbands, men in general, Jesus is your head. You're under Christ's authority. It all starts there. The only way you can fulfill your role is if you stay intimately connected with Jesus. Some of you guys need to reconnect with your Head. You've been trying to lead your wife, your family, your own life, in your own strength and wisdom. That will never work. You must stay close to Jesus. If you need to talk more about this, give me a call. We can set up a time to talk it through to help you get to where you want to be.

### ***Proper Worship (v 4-6)***

You'll notice as we walk through the rest of this section that the word 'head' comes up a lot. Paul plays with the word in two ways: one is to describe a physical head—your melon—and the other to describe one in authority. So, in verse 3, Paul is describing the proper relational structure, the authority structure. Now look at verses 4-6. This gets interesting.

[READ]

*“Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, <sup>5</sup> but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. <sup>6</sup> For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.”*

For those of you playing at home, how many times was the word ‘head’ used in those verses? (I counted eight!) Paul’s making a point. Don’t blur the distinctives between men and women—especially in worship. When men act like women or women act like men, it dishonors their head—their authority. Use your freedom in Christ to build one another up and glorify God.

Most of what Paul is describing in today’s text is directly tied to first century Greco-Roman culture and understandings of propriety. Certainly there were Jewish elements as well. Women had long hair and men had (comparatively) short hair. Wives would cover their heads in worship, but men did not. These were social norms for sure, but not the kind to be abandoned because of newfound freedom in Christ and here’s why: to let go of these norms would confuse unbelievers or new believers about the sexuality or faith status of those in the church, and distract people from honoring one another and glorifying God in worship. Stay with me. It’ll make more sense in a moment.

Men did not wear head coverings or have long hair that could be used like a covering, because they were under the authority of Christ. If a man pulled up folds of his garment/toga to cover his head, he’d be acting like one of the pagan priests who did that same thing when preparing to worship a false god. For a man to have and wrap up long hair like a woman would make one think, in Greek culture, that he was a homosexual. A man who prayed or prophesied with his head covered dishonored his Head: Christ. His religious and sexual status were called

into question when he covered his head and distracted others from worshipping God.

Traditionally, wives wore a head covering. It could have been a garment of some kind; a shawl, even a veil. Some believe it wasn't a garment all, but her long, flowing hair put up in a bun or wrapped somehow around her head. This covering of her head communicated that she was married and that she was under the authority, the care, of her husband. For us, it's like a wedding ring.

For a wife to let her hair down, flowing, or perhaps to not wear a covering garment, communicated a couple of things to those in the worship setting. First, it communicated that the woman believed she was no longer under the authority of her husband, and that she may be seeking to have an affair or that she was flinging off all her inhibitions in a frenzied act of pagan idol worship. Do you see the problem? Inadvertently, the wife communicated things totally untrue about herself, her relationship with her husband and her relationship with God. That's why Paul says she dishonors her head: her husband.

I hope you noticed that Paul did not have a problem with a wife praying or prophesying in the worship gathering. That's perfectly acceptable. The problem was her being uncovered. It communicates the wrong things and dishonors her head. Yes, this wife has freedom in Christ. But she doesn't need to behave like a man to be free. Our freedoms are to be used to honor God and others.

In verse 6, Paul overstating his case—exaggerating to make his point. If you're going to send mixed signals, why not go all the way. Shave your head! "But if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven as men are, she should do her hair in a womanly fashion."<sup>5</sup>

*Who Cares?*

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<sup>5</sup> Blomberg, 214.

Now, I can almost hear some of the “who cares?” coming from you. I hear ya! Who cares? Hair up, hair down, long hair, covered by a garment...big deal! Right. It was a *big deal* in that culture. It may not be a big deal to us 2000 years later, but it was to them; in that culture at that time. Our freedom in Christ must be used to honor God and others—not confuse people and distract them from Jesus. I’ll come back to this at the end.

### ***From Creation (v 7-10)***

Take a look now at verses 7-10. [READ]

*“For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.<sup>8</sup> For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.<sup>9</sup> Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.<sup>10</sup> That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”*

Because of the angels...(?) We’ll get there. Paul takes them all the way back to the creation narrative in Genesis. Adam was the first of creation made in the image of God, intended to reflect God to the rest of creation. The Corinthian man in worship doesn’t cover his head because he’s not under the authority of anyone else in the room, but only the Creator. And, since Paul is looking at the creation account, he highlights that Eve was taken from Adam, and that she was created to be his helper. She’s the one who supplies strength in an area that is lacking. She is to help him, but not have authority over him. [A wife helps her husband, but she doesn’t have authority over him.]

So, Paul is reaffirming the headship piece from verse 4, but that’s not all he’s doing. He’s highlighting the amazingness of women. Commentator Larry Richards says it like this, “Man’s headship over the woman does not imply subservience, but instead the lifting up of the woman. Headship does not proclaim the rights of men to enslave. Just the opposite. It insists that men should recognize the high value God places on woman not only as fully a person, but as man’s ‘glory!’”<sup>6</sup> Wives, you are the

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<sup>6</sup> Richards, L. O. (1987). *The teacher’s commentary* (p. 867). Victor Books.

sweetest gift to your husband. You reflect the ‘wow!’ of God, and how blessed your husband is, to the whole world. Everything that makes you **you**—your femininity, your creativity, your brilliance, your wisdom, needs to be held onto—not reshaped to be like a man. That’s why it’s sensible for a wife to cover her head. It honors her husband. She’s embracing that her husband is over her to guard, guide, lead, love and serve her. She’s under her husband’s authority, and she shows it by covering her head, whether that’s with a garment or her long, beautiful hair done up just right.

We don’t think about it much, but angels can be all around us even though we don’t know it. And that’s why some scholars think our worship must be done with dignity and decorum: God’s messengers are present, watching, and interested in how our worship is conducted. We know from 1 Corinthians 4:9 (and other passages<sup>7</sup>) that angels are present, but we’re not certain about what “because of the angels” really means. Some scholars think that the Greek word for angel, which literally means *messenger*, might actually be describing a *human* messenger. A person of status sends an undercover person to a worship gathering, to check it out and see if it functions properly. The messenger reports back and, if all is well, the person of status would come visit. Again, that’s not very helpful. The truth is, we don’t know entirely what this means.

### ***We Need Each Other (v 11-12)***

In verse 3, Paul underscores the propriety of headship. Then, he reaffirms this authority from the creation account in verses 8-9. But he’s definitely not diminishing women! Look what he does in verses 11-12. [READ] *“Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; <sup>12</sup> for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.”*

Certainly, there were those who balked at the idea of headship. That happens today, too. ‘I don’t need a husband over me. I don’t need a man in charge of me.’ And, as Brian talked about a few weeks ago, marriage is

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:9; 6:3, 1 Timothy 5:21, Hebrews 13:2 and 1 Peter 1:12

not required. There's value in singleness. But Paul drives deep into the goodness of what God has ordained: Husbands and wives *need* each other. Men and women need each other. In the creation narrative, the woman came from the man, but after that man would be born of the woman. Our differences "are designed to make men and women *interdependent*, not to make one sex of lesser importance."<sup>8</sup> We need one another. We're in it together. She has a role, and he has a role, but the roles are not the same. God is calling husbands and wives to mutuality. That's exactly what God the Father and Christ the Son modeled for us—and we see a hint of that in verse 3, "The head of Christ is God." When a marriage functions this way, each person is concerned about pursuing the best interest of the other above themselves and they seek to "arrive at decisions through mutual prayer and discussion."<sup>9</sup> But when a joint decision can't be agreed upon, that's when the husband's authority kicks in and he must decide, *based on the best interests of his wife (and children)*, not simply to satisfy his own desires. Again, any guy who thinks being the head is easy doesn't understand what God has called him to. In the end, we're all made by God and *He* is the ultimate authority.

### **About Hair (v 13-15)**

As Paul concludes his redirect, he makes a couple quick appeals, urging them to again consider how they live and worship. Check out verses 13-16. [READ]

*"Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, <sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup> If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God."*

Paul's first appeal is to their sense of propriety. He's saying, 'Think about it. Really think about it. Is it okay for a woman to act like a man in

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<sup>8</sup> Richards, 867.

<sup>9</sup> Blomberg, 218.



worship?’ And the expected response is, ‘Of course not!’ Propriety dictates that a woman worship like a woman; with her head covered.

Paul then goes deeper into the inner parts of the listener with his, “Does not nature itself teach...” He isn’t trying to build a case using the laws of nature, but he’s appealing to the deepest part of the listener that knows, without thinking, what is right. Very often, people seem to know, instinctively or intuitively, whether something is appropriate or not, and we often ignore it. When something is such a regular part of society or culture, we don’t even need to think about it. For instance, driving your car on the left side of the road ‘feels’ weird—because it *is*. Every bit of us *knows* that driving on the right side is correct. Or consider personal space. You don’t think much about it until someone encroaches on yours. All you know is that they’re too close, too ‘in my face.’ Every bit of you is uncomfortable and you *know* that the other person is in your space. Or, for many, it’s the unstoppable compulsion to stand during the singing of the National Anthem. To sit would feel wrong. Without thinking, almost automatically, when we get into the car the first thing we do is put on our seatbelt. That hasn’t always been part of our culture, but it’s become that way. Not wearing the belt feels weird.

That’s what Paul is appealing to with his ‘Doesn’t nature teach...’ He’s appealing to their gut level, instinctive response. Long hair on a man is disgraceful because “young men in Corinth cut their long hair at the transition to manhood (at ten years old). To keep the long hair was a cultural sign of femininity or homosexuality.”<sup>10</sup> But, on a woman, long hair is a marvelous revelation of femininity. Embracing her *womanliness* glorifies God. And, when a person obediently seeks to be fully who God has called them to be, that’s the highest glory a person can achieve.<sup>11</sup> Without artificial, outside influence blurring the lines, they know it’s short hair on men and long hair on women. They *know* it’s true. And that

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<sup>10</sup> Utley, R. J. (2002). *Paul’s Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians: Vol. Volume 6* (p. 131). Bible Lessons International.

<sup>11</sup> Barret, C.K. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 2000), 257.

beautiful, flowing hair is given to her to serve as her covering—done up beautifully, or perhaps covered with a garment, as a sign that she is free in her femininity as she rests under her husband’s Christ-led authority. She doesn’t need to be like a man to experience freedom in Christ. Jesus set her free to be the woman God created her to be.

### ***No Contrarians Needed (v 16)***

The final verse in this section is Paul basically saying, this isn’t up for discussion or debate. There may be differences in the churches, but this is not one of them. In all churches, women have their heads covered in public worship.

### ***Applications***

So, what do we do with this? None of these verses suggest that this applicable for all people in all times and places—even though it was widely held in the first century. Let me give you four things that this text draws out which are good reminders for us today.

1) First, use your freedom in Christ to glorify God and benefit others—not as a license to be self-indulgent. Don’t defy social fashion and norms just to express your freedom.<sup>12</sup> Just because you *can* doesn’t mean you *should*. If your action, attire, language, body décor, movie or music choice is going to make it hard for people to see Jesus when they’re around you, you need to rethink what you’re doing, saying, wearing, watching or listening to.

You’re free to love now. So, if your PG13 movie choice is out of bounds for your friend, choose a different movie. If you’re okay having a drink with dinner, but your dining partner isn’t, then let it go. You are free in Christ, but it’s not just about you. When you lovingly defer to one another, you honor God, too.

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<sup>12</sup> Blomberg, 222.

2) Next, be a student of the culture you're in. Some parts of the world are more conservative. In some places in the US, it would be inappropriate for a woman to wear pants to church—dresses or skirts are the right things to wear. So, even though Jesus doesn't care if you wear pants, you choose to defer those in *that* culture. Out of love, you choose *not* to exercise your freedom.

"Christian workers in Muslim lands will have to consider seriously whether or not it will promote their witness if their women wear some kind of veil. At the very least, they will have to avoid causing...offense when women's shoulders are not covered appropriately. For many Muslims, bare-shouldered women are sexually promiscuous..."<sup>13</sup> If we're going to reflect Christ well, we must know the culture we're in and adjust accordingly.

3) Women are a vital part of the church. They must be encouraged to serve and use their gifts and talents for the glory of God. Paul thinks it's appropriate for women to pray and prophesy in public worship. His issue was propriety—men acting like men and women acting like women.

4) Men need to behave like men and women need to behave like women. That may seem like a 'duh!' to you, but in our culture, this is important. God created male and female. He didn't make a mistake or mess it up when He made you. If you were born male, that was God's desire. If you were born female, that was God's doing. You will never be more fulfilled or complete than when you fully embrace who God made you to be and walk in obedience with Him. Be the *man* God created you to be. Be the *woman* God made you to be. Be the husband; be the wife. It glorifies Him when we live, love and serve as the people He designed us to be.

## **Wrap**

There was a lot going on in today's text, but the overall concern for Paul was that the Corinthians conducted themselves in their worship in ways

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<sup>13</sup> Blomberg, 220-221.

that glorified God and honored each another. Specifically, he was concerned that men behaved like men and women like women. Men weren't better when they behaved like women. Women weren't greater if they acted like men. Rather, women were at their best when they embraced who God made them to be and they flourished as they came under the loving leadership of their husbands.

**Pray**

Thank you for setting us free, for rescuing and redeeming. Help us to use our freedom to glorify God and benefit others. May our lives help people connect with Jesus, not hinder them. Show us where we need to change for the sake of others.