

CCLEB SERMON NOTES

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 1, 2024
1 CORINTHIANS 11:1-16

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HEAD COVERINGS & LOVE



Today we begin a new discussion in Paul's letter to the Corinthians in the book we call 1st Corinthians. To review, Paul's letter is divided into five different "essays" – we have covered the first three essays already. All of the essays in this letter are addressing divisions in the Corinthian church. And Paul addressed the first three divisions by simply teaching the Corinthians how to apply the gospel to what they were experiencing, how to resolve their divisions and differences with the foundation of love. The fourth essay in this letter, the one we will be talking about today which is Ch 11:2 – 14:40, addresses problems and divisions in the physical gathering in the Corinthian church. If Paul's solution to the problems in Corinth in the first three essays was essentially "apply the gospel, apply love" what do you think in the 4th essay, Paul's solution to the divisions in the gathering is going to be? "Apply the gospel, apply love".

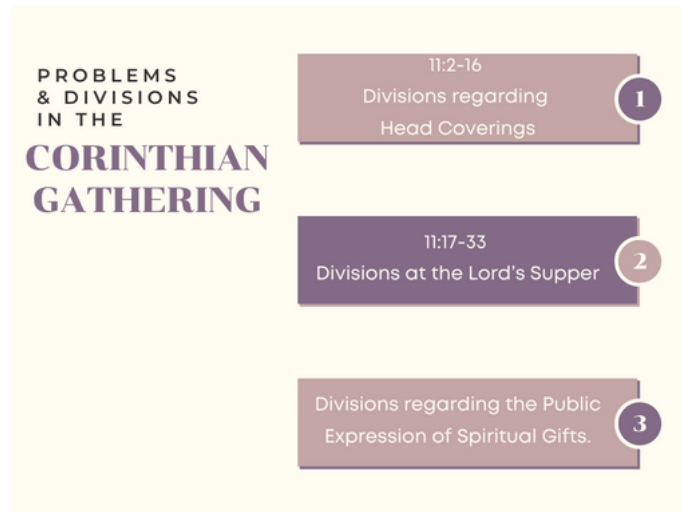
THE CORINTHIAN LETTER IS WRITTEN IN FIVE LONG ESSAYS
THAT OUR MODERN CHAPTER DIVISIONS BREAKS UP.

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THE ESSAYS ARE:

- CH 1-4 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS CAUSED BY FOLLOWING MAN, NOT FOLLOWING CHRIST
- CH 5 -7 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS RE: SEX
- CH 8-10 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS RE: FOOD
- CH 11-14 DIVISIONS & PROBLEM RE: THEIR WEEKLY GATHERINGS
- CH 15 DIVISIONS & PROBLEMS RE: UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE RESURRECTION TO THEIR LIVES AND GATHERINGS

As a reminder the Corinthian “church” is who this letter is written to. **1 Corinthians 1:2**. The word “church” Paul uses is from the secular word “ecclesia” that simply means an “assembly” of citizens called to gather publicly for a common reason. So the Corinthian Christians are “called” to come together, literally, as followers of Christ to gather together and be “God’s gathering”. This gathering is “God’s church” which God supernaturally equips by His Spirit and His word with supernatural unity, love and truth, to encourage and build each other up, and to accomplish God’s purpose of sharing His good news with the entire world. Paul’s purpose is to address things in the church that stand in the way of God’s purpose, things that make the “church” less effective. What is it that makes a church less effective? “Divisions”! Where there are divisions there is often, as we see here, a lack of love.



The first one we will look at is Divisions re: Head Coverings. Now I know that this passage has the potential to alienate. Please note that my purpose in this teaching this topic is to unify all believers under the banner of God’s love. The passage in the bible that deals with head coverings is **1 Corinthians 11:2-16**. In non-anabaptist churches, **1 Corinthians 11:1-16** regarding head coverings is often: not taught, sometimes just skipped over, or just plain avoided and/or taught out of context. I must admit as a teacher it is tempting to skip over it and avoid the potential of alienating or offending. Calvary Chapel’s “tradition”, however, is to teach chapter by chapter, verse by verse. That “tradition” “frees me”, so to speak, from the liberty of skipping over passages that we may not all understand, or are controversial, or that make us uncomfortable. So, holding true to Calvary Chapel “tradition”, we are going to read and study this “head covering” passage together.

So let’s begin by reading the passage. A common experience of many people in reading this passage is confusion, questions and uncertainty. For many, me included, this passage reads like a progression of theological “muddiness”, it starts off less clear and then progresses with less and less clarity. I will purpose today to provide some clarity to the muddiness, and to do so by looking at this passage through the overarching theme from the entire letter to the Corinthians...and that is “Love for one another”. So as we read, we will together answer these questions...

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**Does “love”
have a voice in the head
covering issue?**

If so, what does love say?

Before we dive head first, covered or uncovered (my wife thought this was a cute pun), allow me to share a story. In the summer of '90 I was a camp counselor at Camp Hebron near Halifax, PA. It was a Great summer job. It paid "diddly" but it was fun and a good experience for 19 year old. The camp was run predominantly by one of the Mennonite conferences, not sure which. And the fact that it was Mennonite was reinforced when the director who interviewed me introduced himself with the last name "Schwartzentruber". During the week of staff orientation I came to learn that, many if not most of my fellow camp counselors, were from Mennonite churches and Mennonite colleges. Not many of the female counselors wore head coverings, but some did. I wondered why some did and some didn't? But what made me pause even more was that during family week, many of the counselor's families came and most of the moms had coverings, even tho not all the daughters did. I wondered why.

Two years later, fresh back from unsuccessfully trying to find myself in Europe, I was a waiter at "Bird-in-Hand Family Restaurant" just east of Lancaster. It paid much better than camp counseling but was not nearly as fun. The wait staff there was very good, just not very diverse. I was the first male waiter they had ever hired. Almost all the other wait staff, I came to learn, were Mennonite women. Just as I had experienced at Camp Hebron, some but not all of the women wore coverings. Again, I wondered why.

The "head covered" waitress that trained me invited me and my brother to her church. She was part of the worship team. My brother and I went, and to my utter surprise there was a full band on stage, drums, electric guitars, digital pianos, as well as the "head covered" waitress. In my naivety I was not expecting to see both the band's full expression of modernity AND the expression of what I viewed as traditional head coverings on the same stage. More questions.

And these questions have persisted. I've long been able to avoid this issue since it's never been my responsibility to teach it, however, now is that time. In preparation for today's lesson, I talked with several people from both sides of the issue, some that continue to use head coverings, and some that did, but no longer do. What I learned is that I'm not alone in my questions regarding head coverings. And from what I have gathered, this topic, for people on both sides of the issue, tends to generate more questions than answers. In my experience things that generate lots of questions can become controversial, and divisive.

Here is a sample of a few of the questions /comments that this passage has generated:

1. Paul seems sincere in what he is writing, why doesn't our church practice this?
2. If we (I) don't practice head coverings, are we (me) not compliant with God's word?
3. If we (I) are not faithful in the little things like head coverings, will we (I) not be faithful in the big things? After all it's a slippery slope isn't it?
4. It seems like those who don't practice head coverings are "picking and choosing" from the bible what they want to follow - isn't that just another form of disobedience or rebellion?
5. What from this text gives others permission not to wear head coverings?

Those are just a few of the questions this passage generates for me, and maybe possibly you as well.

As always, when interpreting scripture, we need to do the best of our ability to fill in some context of what Paul was addressing. What we know is that Paul is writing to real people living in 1st century in a very real city of Corinth. These real people are those who heard and accepted the real message of Jesus Christ, the Gospel. In the 1st Century they became known as "Christians"... followers of Jesus and his teachings. These first century Christians living in Corinth were trying to apply the gospel of Jesus Christ to the non Judeo polytheistic culture. They were a tiny religious minority group in Corinth that dared to turn to Christ and abandon the polytheistic beliefs and practices of both the Romans and the Greeks, and for some, abandoning the practices of the mainstream Jews. Government, economy, and culture all evolved around the religious practices of idol worship, temple sacrifices and temple worship that included temple prostitutes as a form of worship. Greek and Roman religious, political and economic culture were strongly influential and expected all citizens to bow to its pressures and comply.

So for the common Corinthian, not specifying believers, if one's hair was covered, or whether their hair was long or short was predominantly in response to the cultural trends of the community and religious influences.

Listen to what commentator Keener says about hair. "Women's hair was a common object of lust in antiquity, and in much of the eastern Mediterranean women were expected to cover their hair. To fail to cover their hair was thought to provoke (male) lust. According to commentator Bailey, temple prostitutes did not cover their hair for this reason, because it provoked lust. According to the historian Dio Chrysostomus, who wrote towards the end of the 1st Century, he observed that large numbers gathered in Corinth on account of the sacred prostitutes.

The Jewish Mishnah ruled that Jewish women should be divorced if they uncovered their hair in public as a woman's hair was to only be seen by their husband and or family. Think of the gospel story of the woman who anointed and dried Jesus feet with her hair and the outrage of the religious leaders - yet Jesus commended her.

Archeology has discovered that statues from this time era in museums show Greek women with their hair covered.



Also according to Keener, what further complicates this issue in Paul's writing was that "some upper class women were eager to show off the latest fashionable hair styles", indicating that their societal level and wealth gave them "a pass" on the expected hair covering. So if you didn't cover your hair you fell into one of two categories; either wealthy from an high societal class that gave you a pass on hair covering, or you were seeking to provoke lust, like a temple prostitute.



One further cultural piece was that in public worship in a temple Greek men and women bared their head for worship, while the Romans covered their heads during worship. Just an interesting side note.

So as the gospel in Corinth reached people from all cultures, all societal levels, the wealthy, the poor, slaves and freeman, the Greek, the Roman and the Jews - these new believers began to gather together as a church, God's church, one Spirit. It must be taken into account then that Paul is addressing a hair covering issue within a clash of cultures in a Christian gathering.

This diverse Corinthian church, that God equipped by Jesus' "abiding presence" in the believers, is to be unified by his Spirit and love. Jesus' teaching for all believers in **John 15:5** was that if they "abide or remain" in him, they will produce much fruit. Jesus goes on to define what the fruit resulting from "abiding or remaining" in him is in **John 15:16-17**. What is the fruit produced by abiding in Jesus and Jesus abiding in you? "Love each other". That teaching is true for all believers, including the Corinthians.

So whatever Paul was addressing must fall under "love", and whatever the interpretation and application of this passage is for you, the love of Jesus must have a voice, precedence.

Let's look a little more closely at what Paul says about head coverings. Now as some of you have grown to expect from my teachings, we will look at the last verse first, then go to the first verse, then see what is "sandwiched" in between. The reason we look at the last verse is that it was common in Greek rhetoric writings to conclude a discussion, last verse(s), with a summary of the main point being communicated... we have seen that time and time again in 1 Corinthians and other of Paul's writings - that is true here in this passage as well.

Let's read **verse 16** again, this verse tells us several things.

First note the word "argue". The Greek is more like "contentious" - where one argues for the sake of creating argument... it has more to do with the heart of the arguer, maybe motivated power, maybe control, maybe fueled by bitterness... But what this tells us is that Paul anticipated or knew that people were going to argue or want to argue about this, and history has certainly proven Paul correct. I feel for those of you that have been caught in the painful emotion of those contentious arguments. That is not Jesus' intended experience for his followers in his church. Jesus intended love and unity, not contention. Based on **verse 16** alone, we all need to pause, check our hearts on this one. Amen?

The second word of interest in **verse 16** is the word "custom". The NIV and the NET translate that word as "practice". This word is only used two times in the New Testament.. the first time it is used is in **John 18:39** when Pilate tried to release Jesus. The only other time this word is used is in **1 Corinthians 11:16**. Paul doesn't use the word "commandment", or "instruction", or "law" he uses the word "custom". The word is more about the transmission of something through generations, than it is about "content". It can take years of regular practice before something becomes "custom". That this word is never used by Paul to describe any of his other writings is worthy of consideration. It seems to indicate that what Paul presents as a solution to their division in **verses 2-16** falls under a unique classification, "custom".

Now let's go back to the beginning of the section, **verse 2** where there is another interesting word. Note the word "tradition".

Now in contrast to the word "custom" only occurring two times in the New Testament and only used by Paul one time, the word "tradition" occurs 13 times in the New Testament, eight times used by Jesus in the gospels where it is used in a negative light. For example look at **Matthew 15:3-6**. The "tradition" was viewed as negative because the tradition, presumed to be a well-intended practice of man, when put in broader application ended up eclipsing or canceling a higher biblical principal or command.

Now in fairness to the text, the word “tradition” is not always used negatively. Paul used it five times, two of which were negative, but the other three were positive. As in **2 Thessalonians 3:6** NIV. So Paul instituted specific practices in the Thessalonian church to prevent idleness and disruption. We don’t know which of Paul’s instructions fell under “tradition” and what fell under general teaching, but we know from this verse there were some. So a “tradition” was a practice by the community put in place to resolve a specific scenario. And the “tradition” then had the potential to, if it was treated as law, to eclipse or cancel a higher biblical principle or command.

For example. It is the “tradition” of Calvary Chapels to teach chapter by chapter verse by verse. It is a distinctive of Calvary Chapel, part of the Calvary Chapel brand, if you will. The founding pastor Chuck Smith instituted this practice when he wisely recognized in himself and recognized in his denomination the danger of only teaching the passages he was comfortable with. And there is much wisdom in this way of teaching. In all Calvary Chapel’s, chapter by chapter, verse by verse teaching has become tradition. But If in my heart I came to view this as the only way of teaching, and then judged other non chapter by chapter verse by verse pastors, if I condemned them, or looked down upon them, or verbally criticized them, or excluded them in friendship, what higher command of God have I canceled? Love.

I personally feel this is what has happened in some communities with head coverings. The higher biblical principle and command from Jesus that has been eclipsed by the tradition of head coverings is love. **John 15:17** Judging, shaming, controlling, rejecting those that do or do not wear head coverings – that is not love.

Now we know from the text that Paul’s solution to the divisions in Corinth regarding head coverings is that the Corinthian women, regardless of race, culture or socio economic class, should cover while praying and prophesying in the gathering. And Paul seems to present several different reasons behind his solution.

The first reason addresses the issue of uncovered hair, in the Corinthian culture, provoking lust. Paul is writing to the Corinthian church, “ecclesia”, the gathering of believers – like our service or homegroups or studies. Paul speaks specifically in **verses 4-5** about men and women “praying or prophesying” in the public gatherings. So the issue that Paul is addressing here in these two verses seems to be in the context of public worship gatherings, specific to when men and women are praying or prophesying in public. In Corinth, men, when praying and prophesying were to do so with their head uncovered. One commentary said that servants were expected to cover their heads when addressing their masters because they were servants. The covering was a symbol of being under the authority and protection of another. But once set free, they are no longer slaves, they no longer covered their heads. The suggested interpretation here then would be that sinners set free by the blood of Jesus are adopted into God’s family, thus brothers and sisters with Christ no longer slaves, thus there is no longer a need to cover one’s head when addressing their master. But wouldn’t that also be true of the woman who are praying and prophesying in public gatherings? Yes, I say hesitantly. However, imagine being a believer at the gathering who is a slave, or lower class, or a Jew, and from any of their culture or class perspectives a woman with an uncovered head/hair means they are provoking lust. It seems then that Paul is saying to the women who are praying and prophesying publicly, “out of love, cover your head so that you are not a distraction to others. So that your prayer and prophesying can bless them and the church”. And then Paul essentially says in **verse 6** – if you don’t like my solution to this problem then just cut off your hair altogether so it’s not a distraction. Regarding the rest of **verse 6**, several commentators suggested that a woman caught in adultery had her hair shaved off to shame her by indicating that she had provoked lust, making herself equivalent to a temple prostitute.

Now the “hair provoking lust” reason for Paul’s solution of head coverings is “neat and tidy”, but it assumes those historical assumptions that rely on extra biblical resources are true. Which should cause us to pause and proceed with humility and caution.

But the “hair provoking lust” reason Paul gives, cannot be the only reason for Paul’s instituting the tradition of hair covering because it ignores a whole lot of other things Paul said in this passage, which are not as “neat and tidy” – and some that we may not get to today.

So let’s go back and look at **verse 3**.

Some interpret the word “head” to simply mean “origin” or “source”. For example the head of a river is the “source”, its “origin”. “Head, source, origin” are acceptable translations, however it seems from the context that Paul is indicating “yes it is a “source or origin or head” but it inherently has some authority.

Regarding this interpretation David Guzik says, “in Biblical thinking a source has inherent authority. If something comes from me, there is some appropriate authority I have over it. In its full sense, “head” has the idea of “headship and authority”. It means to have the appropriate responsibility to lead, and the matching accountability. It is right and appropriate to submit to someone who is our head.”

Verse 3 is one of the verses where the theology of men and women comes from in relation to the word “authority”. I urge caution here for two reasons. The main issue Paul is addressing here “head coverings”. The theology of men and women derived from Paul’s argument is not the main issue of what Paul is addressing, its secondary. However, because the theology of men and women is where many take this passage, we need to address the fact that some interpretations of this passage have resulted in “misuses of the role of husbands as head or authority, in that they have allowed sin to redefine what God’s intended role for “head” is. Some have consequently turned this passage into permission for abuse of power and withholding love both in marriages and in churches.

So, if we are going to use the word “authority” as synonymous with “head”, then we have to look at the role of Jesus, who **verse 3** calls the “the head of man”, in relationship to Jesus’ bride the church. In other words we need to look at Jesus’ actions towards his bride. How Jesus, the head of man, treated his bride (the church), will then inform us how “man the head of woman” is to treat woman, and specifically man’s bride, his wife.

Let’s consider Christ’s relationship to his bride. Look quickly one passage. Jesus said in **Mark 10:42-45**. That turns the worldly definition of authority on its head doesn’t it? So the authority in action that Christ intended for man the head to have towards his wife is “Serve”, not “be served”. “Give”, not “get”. “Give” your life.. ooof. Have you given your life for your wife yet today? What a calling and what an invitation to emulate Christ.

So in this theology of men and women, how is man then to respond to Christ the “head” of man? And how is woman to respond to “man the head of woman”? To answer this we likewise need to look at how Christ responded to “his head”, which is God. The end of **1 Corinthians 11:3** says “the head of Christ is God”.

Philippians 2:5-8 gives a clear summary of Christ response to God his “head”. This is what Jesus models for us. What a convicting passage! Christ’s response to his head is to motivate our response in like manner.

Now back to the passage. In **verse 7** The word “worship” in the NLT was added by the translators for clarification that Paul is still addressing the specific setting for head coverings of when Corinthian men and woman were praying and prophesying in public. This highlights the danger of only reading one verse and not looking at the verse in its context. As the saying goes, “Text without context is pretext”. Otherwise single verses out of context can become universal laws.

In **verses 7-9** Paul seems to introduce another reason for the head covering while praying and prophesying.

In **verses 7-9** Paul is referencing the creation story of **Genesis 2:18, 21-23** This references the order of creation of men and woman, and the purpose of the creation of men and woman. In essence man was created first and was incomplete without woman. The word “helper” in **verse 18** is actually two words in Hebrew. “Ezer Kenegedo”.

Ezer Kenegedo

Ezer means helper, but not less than like “lowly assistant”

Kenegedo means compatible to him or fit for him, as in opposite of

The first word simply mean “helper” but we dare not view “ezer” as “less than” like “lowly assistant” for two reasons. First because in scripture “ezer is used in the name “Eliezer”.. which means “God is my Helper”. The Greek version of Eliezer is “Lazarus” whose story provides imagery of a powerful helper raising the dead simply with his voice. And second reason we should not dare view “ezer” as less than or lowly assistant is that **Genesis 1:26-27** clearly indicates that both male and female were created in God’s image.

The second word from **Genesis 2:18** that the NLT does not translate is “kenegedo”. The new revised standard translates it as “comparable to him”, the RSV translates it as “fit for him”. The root word “neged” has the sense of “face to face as in a meeting”, or more generally “being the opposite of”. That’s why some translations say “help meet”. So in context of Genesis of being fruitful and multiplying the word carries a “procreation” function requiring an opposite sex, and context of “reigning over creation together” it carries a “partnership” meaning. **Genesis 1:28**

So Paul referencing this in **1 Corinthians 11:7-9** as a reason for a head covering while praying and prophesying seems to be saying “yes there is an order to creation and that woman came from man (literally - from Adams side) that’s the “origin or head” part, and Paul references that God identified man’s need to have an “ezer kenegedo”- “opposite” of him in gender, “comparable to him”, “fit for him” but different, and meant for procreation and partnership. So yes, man was created first, man needed an “ezer kenegedo”, thus God created woman from man as his partner to procreate and reign together. And Paul cites this as a reason for Corinthian woman wear a head covering while praying and prophesying in their public gatherings as a symbol that the woman is under authority. Authority that would lay down their life for woman. **Verse 10**

The part of “angels watching” we are not going to touch today, but note Paul used it for a reason, and I have included some interpretations of that in the sermon notes. Now to prevent people from taking **verses 7-10** too far in terms of male arrogance and domination, Paul balances it with **verses 11-12**. The commentator Barclay says this regarding the mutual dependency in the partnership, “Neither can live without the other. If there is subordination, it is in order that the partnership may be more fruitful and lovely for both.”

Now **verses 13-16** So after giving them all the tools they need, Paul then says, based on these tools now figure this out - “judge for yourselves”. And then he throws in a statements about hair lengths that I’m not sure where that fits.

So, what do you do with all of this?

Head coverings is deemed by our Calvary Chapel tradition and many other evangelical churches as not required for or us today, however if it is your conviction that it is required for you, then that is OK - it's your conviction. You are welcome here, respected, and loved.

There are many churches and many have their own traditions. Some traditions differ over music, instruments, dress codes - shoes or flip flops -(don't mess with my flip flops), let alone differences in theology, eschatology, Christology, and all the other "ologies".

All of these differences can create divisions, and where there are divisions there is a diminished love.

If we allow a tradition to be elevated to the point that it defines what is spirituality, then we run the risk of it eclipsing or canceling the higher law of love - for us as believers to love one another.

For head coverings specifically, allowing an external adornment practice to become more important than love and thus then define spirituality, is in contradiction to what God says about the heart. **1 Samuel 16:7b** "People judge by outward appearance but the LORD looks at the heart."

God's children, from all church traditions are to be known by their love for each other, not known by their differences. **John 13:34-34** read this out loud.

So what voice does love have in the head covering issue? Love has to be the loudest voice.

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

In **1 Corinthians 11:10**, Paul mentions that a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head "because of the angels." The significance of the angels' presence can be understood in several ways:

1. ****Order and Authority****: Angels are often associated with God's order and authority. Their presence implies the importance of adhering to the established divine order, particularly in worship settings. By observing proper conduct, including head coverings, believers demonstrate respect for God's ordained structures.
2. ****Witnesses to Worship****: Angels are considered witnesses to human actions, especially in the context of worship. Their presence during worship services underscores the sacredness of the gathering and the need for proper decorum. This suggests that the actions and attitudes of believers in worship have cosmic significance.
3. **Spiritual Beings and Intermediaries**: Angels are spiritual beings who serve as intermediaries between God and humans. Their watching indicates that the spiritual realm is attentive to earthly worship practices. This awareness can encourage believers to maintain purity and reverence, knowing that their worship has spiritual implications beyond the physical realm.

These reasons highlight the importance of acknowledging the presence and role of angels in maintaining proper worship practices and adhering to divine order.

"Help Meet" defined. <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/studies-interpretation/what-is-a-help-meet.htm>