

1 Corinthians 11 – Headship and Worship

CCC – April 7, 2024

Good Morning! Easter Reflection – Celebrate 271 people. 1 Corinthians like ‘stump the chump’. Answers to questions... So today, we are going back to 1 Corinthians 11.

We are going to tackle some obscure and difficult turf about men and women and worship and covering your head today. Now if you are coming back from a first service at Easter, this is going to make you say “Well, Christians sure are strange.” If you are from a Christian background and grew up reading the Bible, you might say “I always wondered what that part means.” For those of you who might be familiar, this is the part where it says man is the head of women and women need head coverings while men don’t among other odd sayings. PRAY

One other word before we get to our text for the day. I need to acknowledge that Christians simply disagree on the meaning of this text. For a number of reasons. Some words have multiple meanings. Some offhanded phrases are not well explained to a modern reader, but would have been obvious to an ancient reader. We bring our biases to the text. AND anytime you are reading an epistle – a letter – you only have one side of the conversation. It is like listening to a person on the phone – you can understand what they are saying, but not the other person, so you maybe get 70% of the conversation, but some stuff is unknown. The word is **humility**. So as I come to this text, I might be wrong. My job is to do my best to interpret the text with the best resources we have and teach it to you, but I want you to know that good hearted Christians disagree... and I’ll open that up as we go.

Credit – Dawn, Karl, and Sarah Sumner’s book “Men and Women in the Church”.

But lets all take a learners attitude toward this text.

² I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. ³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man,^[a] and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

⁷ A man ought not to cover his head,^[a] since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own^[a] head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

So we are in trouble at CCC, because one of our sound booth guys is wearing a hat, another has long hair and women all over the church are wearing their hair down. Big trouble, right? No, but we will get to the hair issue in a minute.

One big issue – what does it mean to be a head of something? The answer to this sheds light on the whole passage. And three smaller questions for today: When you pray or prophecy should your head be uncovered or covered? Why are women considered the glory of man? And, why does a woman have authority on her own head? My hope is that answering these questions will help you with practical men-women issues of today.

³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man,^[a] and the head of Christ is God.

Head of Christ = God Head of man = Christ Head of woman = man

Head of Church = Christ Head of Wife = Man

Now, this is one of the most controversial verses in the whole Bible. There is a strain of Christians who teach that men are the leaders and women are the followers. That husbands are the boss and wives are the assistant. That the man is the head of his household and the king of his castle. And I want you to know that these phrases are a part of the American Christian subculture and are never used in the Bible! In the 80s, James Dobson and Wayne Grudem and John Piper led a movement of hierarchal marriages and male-female relationships and the language still permeates the church. But we need to ask... what does the Bible actually SAY? And it does say in this passage that the head of woman is man. It uses the same phrase in Ephesians.

Now the big controversy around this is the meaning of the word Head. Kephale in the Greek. And head can mean Boss, Source, or Body Part. Just like in English. The head of a

company is the boss, the head of a river is the source, and Mark Ashton's head is this hairy part that sits on my shoulders.

Kephale

Head = Source = Rare (Put these in the middle of the screen)

Head = Boss = Rare

That leaves **Head = Body Part = Common**

In fact, the vast majority of time in the Greek and nearly every time the Bible uses Kephale, it means body part. As an American Christian Subculture, we are likely to read head as boss. It is what we have been taught for 40 years on Christian radio and in books etc. But I have also heard egalitarians, who don't like the idea of male bosses, argue of the word Source because it leads to more equality of the sexes. True confession, I was always uncomfortable with both. Why? Because the head of Christ is God. And I think boss and source both lead us to a trinitarian heresy. Let's take a look at the Athanasian creed, a centuries old standard for describing the trinity

Athanasian Creed: And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. (Right side)

In particular, the Trinity – Father, son and Holy Spirit are coeternal and coequal.

So, let's just say that we assume Kephale means source. This would have to mean that Christ comes FROM the Father. If this is true, they are **not coeternal**. One comes first, so the other can't be coeternal.

Similarly If Kephale means Boss – then that means that The Father is the Boss of Christ. If this is the case, they are **not coequal**.

Now wait a minute, some might say, wasn't Jesus sent by the father? Didn't Jesus send the Holy Spirit? Didn't he say "I do nothing unless the father tells me to?" And yes, that is true in his temporary incarnate form. But Paul is not talking about incarnate form, he is talking about their eternal form. In their eternal form, the trinity are ONE, there is not a leader and follower relationship. There is not a first and last relationship. There is a belonging like head and body, but not a Boss-assistant relationship. So it would be heresy to consider God the Father as the Boss of God the son for all eternity.

But if Head means Body Part, then it works in the analogy. And, most importantly, it is **not heresy**.

So, if Kephale means Head as a body part, what does that look like? What does it mean to have a head-body relationship? If it is body part? What he is talking about is **Head and Body are about BELONGING and INTERDEPENDENCE**. If Paul is talking about oneness, belonging, and interdependence, it is perfect. In fact Jesus himself said “I and the Father are One.”

So, my head belongs to my body. As a general rule, my head and body go everywhere together. I have never had a moment where my head says – yeah... I am going to the store and my body says “I am staying home”. That would mean death for both. They belong to each other and were designed FOR one another. Second is interdependence. If my body stops working then my head dies. If my head stops working, my body dies. We belong together and need each other.

Lets look at our **original slide** and test it on each head-body metaphor. Is Does Christ belong to God? Are they interdependent? Does every man belong to Christ? (**Hypostatic Union**) Has Christ chosen interdependence with men on his mission to reach the world? Does woman belong to man? Are men and women interdependent? Does the church belong to Christ? Is she designed to be his bride and become one with him? Again, does the wife belong to the husband? Are they interdependent?

So, our best understanding of Headship is about belonging together. Being interconnected in a deep and mysterious unity where the head needs the body and the body needs the head.

Men are not complete without women and women are not complete without men. It demonstrates the complimentary nature of men and women as well as their differentiation from men and women.

As a student of the Bible, there are six reasons I like Kephale as a body part and not as boss or source:

Why do I like head (Kephale) as body part?

- 1) **Not Heresy** Do I need to say more about that? Not heresy = good.
- 2) **Fits Context --** -Do you see the interdependence in these verses. Man needs woman and vice versa. All of chapter 12 is about the body working together.

⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.... ¹¹Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

- 3) **Works all Metaphors** – As I mentioned above, the idea of headship and belonging works for every metaphor Paul uses
- 4) **One Flesh** “The two shall become one flesh”. The uniting of a man and a woman is not just a sexual union. It is actually a reunion – because the woman was made from Adam’s flesh. She is Adam’s flesh. So the sexual union moves Adam and Eve from one to two and back to one. Every couple has this beautiful connection and the husband is commanded to cleave to his wife – oneness again.
- 5) **Divorce Teaching** God hates divorce because it is a severing of the one flesh concept. Severing a leader from his assistant is totally imaginable. But severing a head from its body is just deplorable.
Notice, importantly, that the Bible says the husband is the head of the wife but NOT the man is the head of his household. This makes sense, because you do not have the same oneness or cleaving with your children as your wife. You will sever from your children one day as they leave and cleave. You are not your children’s head.
- 6) **Rare vs Common** – As mentioned, it is generally good interpretation to use the most common use of a word unless there is a contextual reason not to.

How does God act as head Christ and how do I act as head my wife?

- **God is the head of Christ by including him, promoting him, and exalting him.** He includes him as the agent of creation. He puts him in the position to be the redeemer of the world, the prince of peace, the reconciler of humanity. Not small stuff. God heads Christ by exalting him to reign WITH the father. And ‘he exalted him to the highest place so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is lord.’ And now, he reigns WITH the father.
- **Christ heads men and the church by including, promoting and exalting us.** He includes us because he has chosen not to do ministry without us. We get to be his hands and feet in this world to lead, teach, pray and give a cup of cold water in his name. He allows us to grow and become by using our spiritual gifts for eternal impact. Plus, one day we too will be exalted and reign with him. Our destiny is not as disembodied angels, but as embodied co-regents with God over everything.
- **Men head women and Husbands head wives by including, promoting and exalting them.** So, does it not make sense that men head women by including, promoting and exalting them – raising them up as co-leaders in every context. This would include over your household, business, church or wherever you have dominion. This may be less controversial if you look at the opposite words: Exclude, demote and subjugate. Men, don’t do that – include, promote and exalt the ladies in your life – at home, at work, at school and in life.

If head and body is about belonging together, and ‘headship’ is about including, promoting and exalting, it puts an entirely new light on what some Christians have labeled the leader-follower relationship.

Now, when I was younger, the Christian teachers I heard said “You need to have someone in the family who is the tie breaker, so if the man and the woman stalemate in disagreement, we know who gets their way.” Let me say, I have been married 34 years and we have never had to pull an “I am the leader” moment. In fact, most healthy marriages develop realms of expertise where one person looks to the other for leadership based on expertise. Kelle is our medical leader in our family. She just knows stuff and guides our and our kids medical decisions. I am our financial leader. Kelle is our educational expert – by training and practice, she is just an education genius. I am an expert on grass. Oh yeah, my grass is thick and green and beautiful and Kelle does not mess with it....

Friends, I know this is different than Focus on the Family taught in the 80s. Some of you have marriages that have been based on male leadership and this is making you really uncomfortable. I understand. But I’d encourage you to take a look at the scriptures and align around what they say and not just what Christian subculture has taught from a specific interpretation.

Head Covering

OK, that was a long discourse around headship that was actually the setup for head coverings. Now, it is important to note that the headcovering part of this chapter is specific to the culture of Corinth. This is not a command that is repeated for ancient Israel or Ephesus or Rome. What that means for churches today is that we don’t require head coverings because our context is different. And it makes us ask “what may have been happening in Corinth that would make this good contextualization?”

Bruce Winter, in his book Roman Wives and Roman Widows gives insight as to the head covering issue. He says that Greco-Roman customs were such that only prostitutes wore their hair down. Respectable women wore their hair up and often covered. In fact, virtually all artistic paintings, vases and other remaining pieces from ancient Greek culture have women with their hair done up and not hanging loose. Paul is simply saying women who are publicly speaking and praying must dress respectably. This is an important part of our witness. It is contextualization – becoming all things to all people so that some may be saved. So, head coverings were specific to Corinth, not other churches, not us.

Alright, so in Corinth WHEN a man prays or prophesies, he should have his head uncovered. And significantly WHEN a woman prays or prophesies she should have her head covered. Note the important word “WHEN” It is interesting that women were public

prayers and prophesiers... so what does Paul mean by Prophecies? He tells us in chapter 14.

But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort... the one who prophesies edifies the church. 1 Cor 14:3, 4b

So, we know that women were speaking publicly to strengthen, encourage, edify and comfort the church. Not far from what I am doing right now. And praying publicly. This is one of many reasons we allow women to pray on stage. And to speak to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. They did it in Corinth... so we are imitating the Biblical pattern at CCC.

So, what is this women are the glory of man verse?

⁷A man ought not to cover his head,^[a] since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

So, in what way is man the image and glory of God and women the glory of man. Because we know that both are the image of God, what is the glory difference here?

OK, let me point out some simple things here that should be obvious about men and women. On the whole, men are physically larger than women. On the whole, men are physically stronger than women. This puts men in the position of power. It has been true nearly universally around the world and through time. Men held military power and protected the women because they were vulnerable and had something men can never have – baby making capacity. This physical power led to military power, economic power, and governmental power. Can we agree on that?

And so, God gives extraordinary responsibility to men to including, promoting and exalting women – in other ways, being the head. [Back to diagram 1](#) You may notice that if you look across at the head role, it is always God or Christ or Man. Women are always in the body role, but men are too in every man and the church. **So, it takes both head and body to be the image of God, but the head has a special commission in the way it promotes the body because of it's position of power. In this way, man is the glory of God in a way that woman is not.** Guys THIS IS WHAT WE DO as Christians! It is not just men and women, but it is rich and poor, majority and minority... those in power LIFT UP those not in power!

OK, one last verse? Do you have time for this one?

¹⁰It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own^[c] head, because of the angels.

Now, depending on which version you read, this verse may read very differently. And it is difficult in the Greek to say which way to go. Does it mean that a woman needs an authority – like a male – to tell her what to do with her head covering? Like there should be a male headcovering police? Some would say that it means that every woman needs a husband, father, or other male figure to help her figure out how to live her life and be the authority over her.

But I must say, I like what Dawn Gentry taught me. Just read the text plainly. A woman must have authority over her OWN head. See how I read that with attitude? Simply that every woman should take the responsibility to be sure she puts up her own hair or covers her own head. As a follower of Jesus, it is your job to be sure you are presenting yourself in a way that is respectable to a watching world. A woman ought to have authority over her own head, and not anybody else having authority over her own head. In this context of interdependence, it makes sense that she should be responsible for her own head and head coverings.

Well, friends, I don't have an exciting conclusion and don't have time for an inspiring story. But we have a lot to think about don't we? Have fun over lunch. Here are a few highlights.

- Men and women are made for each other like a head and body.
- We should imitate God and Christ in our head and body relationships.
- Headship is about including, promoting, and exalting the body.
- Headcovering commands were specific to Corinth.
- And a woman ought to have authority on her own head. Let's pray that God teaches us how to work this out for his glory!

Can I just PRAY that God will give us wisdom and unity here? Lets stand