

1 Corinthians #17
Guidance for the Home
1 Corinthians 11:1-16

We have come to another very interesting subject which the Corinthian church has raised with Paul, because of the conditions of their time, concerning the behavior and attitude of women in the church fellowship. Once again Paul exposes the fact that their question is not touching the root of the issue, and he takes the opportunity of answering them by lifting the question up from the detail to the principle: the beauty and glory of a Christian home.

There are denominations, and women, who have so misunderstood this portion of the Scriptures that they will not even bow before a meal at home without wearing some sort of head covering. But that is neither the real meaning nor the significance of this passage, which brings us to a consideration of the ideal balance in the Christian home.

One thing that places this nation in great peril is the breakdown of its homes, even Christian homes, and the collapse of the sanctity of marriage. Paul has some things to say about this as he reveals the principle, and against that background he answers in detail the subject about which they had written to him.

He begins in verse 1 by saying, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” This is a tremendous claim for a preacher to make, but Paul states that Christ is now his standard. Everything that he has to say he first received from the Lord; therefore he can safely say, “Be ye followers of me.” In verse 2 he puts in a word of praise, “I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances.” Whenever Paul could find opportunity to be grateful to others in spite of their imperfections, he was careful to give that word of thanks.

After that very tactful opening of what is, of course, a delicate subject, he draws them away from the question of a woman's behavior to a great principle he wants to bring to their attention, as seen in verse 3, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” Many people love the middle part of that verse and others dislike it, but no one can understand what it really means unless we see it as the jewel in the lovely setting of the other two relationships. The fact brought to our attention is that the head of the woman is the man in the Christian home. But how do you explain, and how do you carry out the relationship? You do so only when you understand the other two.

“The head of Christ is God,” says Paul. **Here we enter on holy ground, into a realm of mystery which we cannot fully understand.** Yet we can know this much from the lips of our Lord Himself, as seen in John 10:30, **“I and my Father are one.”** **Christ is equal with God in character and in deity.** Jesus made this statement in John 16:32, **“I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”** **Christ and the Father are one in cooperation, in service, in ministry.** Christ once again said in John 14:28, **“My Father is greater than I.”** Here is the submission which He voluntarily took upon Himself when He humbled Himself and stooped to the death of the cross for us, as seen in Philippians 2:5-8, **“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”**

Jesus Christ claimed equality with God but offered submission to God. **He was claiming to be one with God, and yet delighting in the fact that He was submitting to God.** Here submission is in the context of absolute fellowship, complete equality, utter understanding. **Here is oneness of character, oneness of service, oneness of purpose, and oneness of life.** Yet He was subject to His Father for the purpose of redemption.

The second relationship in this verse is that Christ is the head of man. **This is true in what I would call the generic sense of the word.** That is to say, when God made the human race it was His intention that there should be the same principle of headship as there is between Christ and God. **There was to be an equality of life and a communion of nature, for God made man in His own image.** There was to be unity of life, identity of character, and complete cooperation, but at the same time there was to be a voluntary submission that the purpose of God might be fulfilled and that the glory of God might be revealed.

That voluntary submission was not given by man, however. Instead, there was an act of rebellion, and the identity was lost, the likeness ruined, and the purpose spoiled. But the whole message of God's grace is that His likeness is recovered through Jesus Christ: His shed blood, His empty tomb, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. **That which was lost in the fall of creation has been restored in redemption.**

If we are born of the Spirit of God and are members of the body of Christ, there is identity of character, for we are partakers of His nature. There is to be unity of cooperation in His service and submission to the authority of Jesus Christ. Here is the relationship between Christ and man. **It is a glorious thing to be the child of God, to share the character of the Lord through His**

redemptive purpose, and to have the experience of voluntary submission to His authority.

Against that background is set forth the glory of the relationship between man and woman that makes marriage so wonderful and the Christian home so precious. It is in the light of the relationship between God and Christ and between Christ and man that Paul puts into the forefront the relationship between man and woman. It is to be exactly the same in God's purpose as the other two relationships.

When God made woman, He took her from the man, but not from the head in case she should dominate him, nor from the feet in case he should trample upon her. God took her from his side, close to his heart, that she might be his companion, his comfort, and his love. That is how God made woman, and He said to her in Genesis 3:16, “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” Paul, writing to the Ephesians, in Ephesians 5:22,25, insists upon this authority, when he says, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it...Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” The rule of the family is that, just as Jesus Christ voluntarily submitted Himself to the Father, so the husband is to submit himself to Christ. As the woman is to be man's companion, so she is to submit to an authority which is exercised in love as expressed at the cross. And I do not know a woman in all the world who would not give glad submission to an authority like that.

The marriage relationship is something sacramental. When you think of authority in the home you should think of the cross, where Jesus has brought us into submission to Himself. That is where we learn how much He cares for us, and where we are brought in humility before His feet. That is how He secures our love and our surrender, “even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.” **A man who cannot exercise authority like that had better remain unmarried. A man who can rule only by stamping his foot and raising his voice had better remain single.** But a man who knows how to govern his house by the love of the Lord, through sacrificial submission to the Lord, is the man who is going to make a loving husband. **The woman who cannot submit to an authority like that had better remain single.**

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan tells how he asked a friend of his, a lady who was a spinster, “Why do you remain single?” She replied, “Because I have never met a man who can master me.” **You smile at that, but she knew something of the principle of marriage. Such a person had better remain single, for she is much happier working things out for herself.**

Even Christian homes are many times unhappy and broken because of authority, if it is exercised at all, is not exercised in submission the one to the other in the light of the cross. Some homes, though fundamental in terminology, are desperately lacking in Christian love and discipline. And many of those marriages have been kept going for appearances sake, but there is no real love or discipline, no acceptance of authority. **And I am convinced that failure in these areas is because our lost society has absolutely no understanding of what biblical submission really means, and we as Christians have allowed our flesh to embrace such ungodly thinking.**

Here is the basis of the loveliness of a Christian home. God is the head of Christ. But Christ is equal in fellowship, in character, and in service, but submitted to the will of God. **And Christ is the head of man. Likewise we are one in character and in purpose, but submitted to the will of God in Christ.** Man is the head of woman. **And yet, we are one, because the woman is taken from the man: one in life, in companionship, in character, for God's purpose to be fulfilled, and submissive to the will of God. Here then is the permanent principle of the Christian home.**

But in the light of those relationships, Paul now brings to the foreground a detail following the principle, as seen in verses 4-5, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven." The Greek reads like this, "A man dishonors Christ if he covers his head while praying or prophesying. But a woman dishonors her husband if she prays or prophesies without a covering on her head, for this is the same as shaving her head."

Notice that the man who prays and prophesies covered dishonors his head - not the twelve inches above his neck, but God. Christ is dishonored, for **He is the head of man.** On the other hand, the woman who prays and prophesies uncovered dishonors her head, not the twelve inches above her neck, but the man, for the man is the head of the woman.

Praying, a man is speaking to God on behalf of others. Prophesying, he is speaking to others on behalf of God. Paul says if he does that covered, he is dishonoring God. **If I stood up to preach with a ball cap turned whop-sided on my head, you would think me very irreverent. But why is it irreverent?**

Paul himself a Jew, is writing to many that are Jews, and what he says here cuts completely across the understanding of the Jews. Why does the Jew keep his hat on when he worships God? Because of a misconception of his own history, as seen in 2 Corinthians 3:13-18, "Not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is

abolished; but their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ...Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

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 the glory. But Paul says Moses did it because he knew the glory was fading, and he did not want the people to see that. But the veil is done away in Christ; in Him is no fading glory, because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Made in the image of God, but losing that image, man is *recreated* in Christ and shines with something of His glory that shall never fail nor fade, and therefore the veil is unnecessary. The Christian man worships uncovered in his place of worship that he might reflect something of the glory of the Head. Glory to God, Paul is saying that when we are truly involved in real worship, there others should see a glory on your face that never fades. The fact that you can worship Him uncovered is a reminder that you have been recreated in Christ Jesus after His own likeness, and the glory that will never fade is yours. Child of God, we are a light that shines in the darkness.

But if that is true of the man, what about the woman? When she prays and prophesies uncovered, says Paul, she dishonors her head, the man. Why?

To answer that question, one must go back to Corinth. The women in Corinth who went through the street unveiled were the prostitutes. Now Christian women were saying, "We are all one in Christ; all things are lawful, so we do not need to bother about this covering." Paul says, “Yes, you do! For if you go through Corinth uncovered you will be identified with that kind of woman, and therefore you are dishonoring your husband.” It is in this same context that Paul talks about a man life long hair, as seen in verse 14, “Doth not even nature itself teach you that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?” Now folks before you go off the deep end right here, and start buying head-scarves and hair clippers, Paul quickly reminds us in verse 16, “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.”

Folks, I have heard how some preachers present these passages of scripture, but what Paul is really saying here that it really does not matter what you kind of clothes you wear or the how long or short your hair is, the great need in all of our lives, and in our families, if to have the right kind of relationship with the Father through the Son. And when that happens in my life and your, we will have much less trouble dealing with the issues of life.

If you have never been saved, why not tonight?