

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 “Who’s the Head of the House?”

Intro. A man had just finished reading a book called *Man of the House* while commuting home from work. When he got home, he stormed into the house, walked up to his wife, pointed his finger in her face and said, “From now on I want you to know that *I* am the man of this house and my word is law! You are to prepare me a gourmet meal tonight, and when I'm finished eating my meal, I expect a sumptuous dessert afterward. Then, after dinner, you're going to draw my bath so I can relax. And when I'm finished with my bath, guess who's going to dress me and comb my hair?” She thought for a moment and responded, “The Funeral Director is my guess.”<sup>1</sup>

Well, I believe that most men and women do not follow the biblical pattern of husband/wife relationships. Men tend to abuse their authority, or they go to the other extreme and assume a submissive role. Women tend to reject the headship of their husbands.

The issue of the role of women has become a battleground over the past several decades. Many Christians seem to say that what is good for society in general is good for the home & church. They attempt to redefine, or even alter, biblical truths to accommodate the standards of contemporary thinking. And our text today is one passage of Scripture that has been ignored or reinterpreted to “fit” the viewpoint of secular society.

I am not coming to this passage of Scripture with any axes to grind. I hope that I will interpret this passage of Scripture honestly, and not try to read into the text something that is not there. And I hope that none of you will reject what Paul says, just because this text conflicts with what contemporary society is saying. Now which viewpoint are you going to agree with: the viewpoint of the world, which changes from generation to generation, & from culture to culture, or the viewpoint of Scripture? 2 Tim. 3:16 says, “ALL Scripture is God-breathed....” Titus 1:2 says that God cannot lie. I will present to you this morning some timeless truths. So please do not let the opinions of men, or personal biases cloud your understanding of what Paul is saying here. And as Paul says in v.16, “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.” The word “contentious” refers to one who loves to argue. Paul implies that we Christians are not to be that way. I hope that there will be a willing acceptance of God’s Word. Paul praised the Corinthians in v.2 for their willingness to accept the apostolic teachings.

My goal is not to get bogged down with the peripheral issues and miss the timeless truths of this text. Now in v.3 we find the main point of the whole passage. There we first see:

### I. THE PRINCIPLE OF HEADSHIP

The word “head” is found 9 times in vv. 3-10, so it is a very important concept. Paul says in v.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.” The head is that portion of the body that gives direction or leadership. The main point of this passage of Scripture is that God has ordained that within the family, church, and society, there is to be a clearly defined system of authority and submission. In the military, there must be a chain of command, and submission to authority. In fact, if you don’t obey orders, you will be more likely to get killed in battle. In a business, there must be a boss, and the

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<sup>1</sup> From Mikey's Funnies; Illus. #C-1213.

employees must follow the instructions of the boss in order for a business to operate effectively. That is also true in school, in homes, in government, etc. There is chaos, confusion, and disorder without authority and submission. Authority and submission to authority are indispensable elements in God's order and plan. There is no peace without authority and submission.

Now notice the 3 examples of authority found in v.3:

A. The Headship of Christ and the Submission of Man - V.3 says, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ..." For those of us who are Christians, Christ is our head, not only by virtue of His creative act, but also by virtue of redemption. Note His redemptive title, "Christ" is used. If individual human beings do not submit to Christ as Savior and Lord, they are doomed and lost.

We must take "of every man" as it stands. Christ is uniquely the head of the Church (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15; etc.) But in His divine authority Christ is head of every human being, believer and nonbeliever. In fact, Jesus said after His resurrection in Mt. 28:18, "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Every person is to submit to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that many men do not acknowledge the headship and Lordship of Christ over their lives does not change the fact that He is Lord. The day will come when everyone will acknowledge His Lordship (Phil. 2:10-11). Those who willingly submit to His authority constitute the Church. We believers are already a part of His kingdom.

Have you accepted the authority of Christ over your life? Until you do, your life will be out of order & in a state of chaos & turmoil. If you are not mastered by Christ, then you will be mastered by the sin nature, and Satan, and the world. Some will be mastered by drugs and alcohol. Which will it be for you?

B. The Headship of God and the Submission of Christ – The last of v.3 also says, "...and the head of Christ is God." Though Jesus is Lord of all, He Himself set the example & was submissive to God the Father. In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus was hesitant about going to the cross. But in prayer He found strength to submit to the will of His Father, and go to the cross. If Christ had not submitted to the will of God, redemption for mankind would have been impossible. Furthermore, He even submitted to the authority of His earthly parents when He was a child (Lk. 2:51).

Now I want to make a point here that will be very important in our understanding of the next point. Christ has never been in any way inferior in essence to God the Father. He said in Jn. 10:30, "I and the Father are One." He said in John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." But in His incarnation He willingly subordinated Himself to the Father in His role as Savior and Redeemer. That is why Jesus said in John 14:28, "for my Father is greater than I." In Phil. 2:5-7 Paul said that even though Jesus was equal with God, He did not consider equality something that He had to hold on to; but he emptied Himself and took on the form of a slave! Furthermore, Jesus was superior to His parents, yet he was subject to them!

So ladies, submission to authority does not mean that you are inferior to your husband. It's about authority, not inferiority.

C. The Headship of Man and the Submission of Woman – In v.3 he also says, "the head of woman is man." Actually, this could just as well be translated, "the head of a wife is *her* husband." The Greek words for man & woman, and husband & wife are the same. This teaching has been the norm for thousands of years, and in almost every culture. Unfortunately, in most cultures men have abused the meaning of headship. In Greek culture women lived in the background and were not

treated very well. But the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ gave women dignity and honor. However, that same gospel affirmed the principle of the headship & authority of the husband.

Ladies, do you accept this biblical principle that God has placed your husband as the head of your home? Headship does not mean that you do not express an opinion. You should always discuss matters and seek *mutual* agreement. That is the ideal. But you should have a submissive spirit in your dealings with your husband.

I read the following that was mail into a magazine: “My friend Connie was very supportive of her husband's campaign to be elected vice president at his local union, but she missed seeing him off for work the day of the election. Since she would be late arriving home, she left a special message for him on their home answering machine: “Good luck, honey, and don't worry. No matter how the election turns out, you'll always be vice president at our house.”<sup>2</sup>

Let me give you young unmarried ladies some advice: if a man asks you to marry him, ask yourself if you can look up to him and respect him and follow him, and respond to his leadership. If not, then don't marry him because you are going to have a very hard time with this principle from God's Word. If you marry a Mr. Milquetoast, you will be in trouble from that day on! Or if you are a strong, forceful woman, find yourself an even stronger guy.

God's chain of command in the home is through the man, who is to be the spiritual leader. Now Christian women should not get the idea that Paul is picking on them, as if they are the only ones that have to do the submitting. As we have clearly seen, men are to submit to the authority Christ. And even Christ shows us an example by submitting to God the Father. Submission is not just for women & children; it is for everyone. Look over at Eph. 5:22. Right before the verse that speaks of wives submitting to their husbands, it says that we all should submit to one another.

Now guys, if you want your wife to respect your authority in the home, then you need to set the example and live under the authority of Jesus Christ. I do not believe that a Christian woman will have any trouble submitting to her husband when he is living in submission to Jesus Christ. But a woman will have difficulty submitting to a man who is self-willed and rebellious to authority in his own life.

I believe this principles applies to the Church. I Tim. 2:12 says, “I do not allow a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man....” As we will see later, women in the early church were liberated to pray or even speak God's Word in public, but only if they maintained a proper submission to authority both to their husbands, and to the God-ordained leaders of the church.

You say, “Why should men have the leadership role?” Why not make husbands and wives co-leaders? Or why not get together & pick the one that seems to be the most qualified? After all, I'm sure you will not have to look hard to find a wife who is smarter than her husband. Well Paul argues his point from creation. To me, his arguments based on creation transcend culture and the passage of time.

In v.8 he gives his first argument, “For man is not from woman, but woman from man.” The principle of male headship is not a matter of social custom, but a matter of God's order of creation and should never be compromised. Adam was not in any way derived from a woman; he was created directly by God. The opposite is the fact regarding woman. Eve was derived from (*ek*) Adam.

Now notice v.9, “Nor was man created for [lit. because of: *dia*] the woman, but woman for the man.” God made a woman for Adam, but not a man for Eve. God could have created both man and woman, Adam and Eve, in one undivided act. But He didn't, and there is meaning and purpose in the creative order. The woman's place is to be a helpmeet to the man. She is to be the other part of him. He is incomplete without her. And we should not think that at this late date God's creative

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<sup>2</sup> Christy S. Marchand, *Reader's Digest*, issue unknown [Illus.#C-245].

act makes no difference. God established the principle of male authority and female subordination for the purpose of order and complementation, but not on the basis of any innate superiority of males. An employee may be more intelligent and more skilled than his boss, but a company cannot be run without submission to proper authority. A wife may be better educated, better taught in Scripture, and more spiritually mature than her husband. But she will show her spirituality by submitting to her husband, not by taking over the God appointed position of headship.

One of the most fundamental natural facts is that the sexes differ profoundly, far more so than is generally recognized. The sooner we learn to accept the way God made us, and to live accordingly, the sooner we will find peace with ourselves, with others, and with God.

## II. THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED TO SOCIAL CUSTOM

I need to make an important point here: I believe that the principle that we have just looked at is a timeless principle. But the application of the principle in terms of appropriate dress will change from culture to culture. So a lot of what Paul says here in applying the principle to Greek social custom will not apply to us. We will need to apply it differently in many cases. For example, the symbol of having your head covered means different things to different cultures. In our society having your head covered or not covered has little meaning. One custom that is still pretty prevalent is that men should take their hats off, especially when praying, and when in a worship service. But it's not the custom itself that is important, but the meaning of the custom. If a social custom does not contradict biblical truth, then we should go along with such customs, especially when they confirm biblical truth.

Now another point we need to remember is that Paul is applying the principle to the context of worship (vv. 4-5). Paul is referring to activities of believers in ministry before the Lord and the public, where a clear testimony is essential. So with all this in mind, consider with me what Paul says concerning:

### A. What is Appropriate for Men?

1. A Man's Head Should Not be Covered – Paul says in v.4, “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.” Then v.7 says, “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God....” The Gk. word for “cover” (*katakalypto*) literally meant, “having down from head,” and probably referred to a veil or scarf. Now in Greek society, a head covering was a symbol of submission. For example, slaves were often required to wear a covering. And, as Paul states, in the context of worship, Greek women were expected to wear a covering, to show submission to God and their husbands. And Greek men just didn't wear a covering.

Argumentation: Paul gives 2 arguments. First, in so doing he dishonors his Head. Paul says in v.4, “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.” The head here is probably not Christ, but the man himself; he is shamed by wearing a covering, because it suggested a reversal of the proper relationships.

Secondly, because he is the image and glory of God. v.7 says, “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God....” Paul defends the Greek custom here. There is a good reason for a man not covering his head. Man was created in the image and glory of God. When we ordinarily speak of God's glory, we mean the shining forth of the radiance of His attributes. Paul has in mind the reflection of God's attributes in his highest visible creature. Being God's image, man is also a reflection of God's glory, a glory that should not be covered up, but allowed to shine forth. The head is the noblest and most expressive part of a man's body. A man should not cover up the glory of God.

Man is also uniquely created to bear the image of God as a ruler. In Gen. 1:26 it says, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion....” God gave man dominion over the entire created world before the woman was created. So the man is to represent God in authority and rulership, thus being the glory of God. Consequently he is not to wear any symbol of subordination to anyone but God.

2. A Man Should Not Have Hair like a Woman - Paul says in v.14, “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?” The Greek word *koma* is actually a verb that refers to growing long hair like that of a woman. Paul is not defining here what constitutes long hair. When I was a teenager, Independent Baptists defined long hair as anything over the ears. But the principle of this passage is that our hair ought not to be so long that people have to look twice to tell if you are a man or woman. This passage unquestionably teaches that the unisex movement is wrong (cf. Dt. 22:5). Also, the length of the hair is not as important as the motive for having long hair. Often, long hair has been a means of expressing rebellion. That is certainly not in line with the submissive spirit that all Christians are to have.

Argumentation: Paul argues from nature [see below regarding baldness]. He also says that for a man to grow hair just like a woman “is a dishonor to him.”

## B. What is Appropriate for Women?

1. A Woman Should Wear a Covering - V.5 implies that a woman can pray or share God’s Word in public as long as she wears a covering as a symbol of submission. Then v.10 says, “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head....” Christian women should not contradict their culture in this regard. In many Middle & Far Eastern countries today a married woman’s veil still signifies that she will not expose herself to other men, that her beauty and charms are reserved entirely for her husband.

We know from secular history that various movements of women’s liberation and feminism appeared in the Roman Empire during New Testament times. Women would often take off their veils or other head coverings and cut their hair in order to look like men and discarded all signs of femininity. There was nothing in the wearing or not wearing of the head covering itself. It is the rebellion against God-ordained roles that is wrong.

Paul gives 3 reasons why Corinthian women should wear an appropriate head covering in worship. First, it is a shame not to have a covering. In vv.5-6 Paul says, “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. 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.” Here again, it is not that she shames her husband, but herself. In Greek society, not having a covering is a shame similar to a woman shaving all her hair off, which in v.15 Paul says is a natural covering for a woman. Every act on the part of a woman which denies her position as a woman under the headship of man is an abrogation that brings her dishonor. Note the last of v.6, “If it is a shame for a woman to be shaved, then....” This condition of reality expresses a universal feeling and conviction regarding women. This matter of being merely uncovered is in reality only an inconsistency. She stops halfway. Hence, let her carry out the idea to its legitimate and logical conclusion: “let her also have herself shorn.”

Secondly, the angels would otherwise be offended. In v.10 Paul says, “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” Paul’s statement implies that God’s good angels are present when God’s people come together. There’s a praise song that says, “I can hear the rush of angel’s wings, I see glory on each face, surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.” You see, Hebrews 1 says they are ministering spirits. They are observing us when we gather for worship. We must not offend them by impropriety. For after all, the angels are

the supreme examples of proper creaturely submissiveness. They do whatever God tells them. They are unlike the devil & his demons, who rebelled against God's authority. Furthermore, the angels were present at creation (Job 38:7) to be witnesses of God's unique design for man and woman, and would be offended at any violation of that order. So don't offend the angels who are our unseen guests at our worship services.

Thirdly, it is seemly, fitting. In v.13 Paul says, "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" From this we see that the obligation mentioned in v.7 & v.10 is one of propriety. Some prostitutes wore their hair short in that culture and all did not wear veils. Paul did not want them looking like them. The temple prostitutes had their heads shaved. Since human beings can only see the outward appearance, it is important that we do not let what we are on the outside contradict what we are on the inside. As Christians, we ought never to be so far outside the normally accepted standards of modesty and propriety that we lose our testimony with lost people and hurt the influence of the church.

2. A Woman Should Have Feminine Hair – In v.15 Paul says, "But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering." Now Paul gives 2 reasons why women should have distinctly feminine hair:

a. It is a Natural Covering - The fact is that a woman's hair grows quite long by nature, much longer than a man's. Plus, women rarely become bald, whereas at least half of men become at least partially bald by the time they are 40. Women rarely lose the natural covering for their head, whereas most men do not retain their covering. So if nature itself provides a covering for a woman, it is highly proper that she follow this hint of nature and cover her head during acts of public worship.

b. It is her glory – V.15 says, "But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her...." A beautiful head of hair is the natural crown which God has given to a woman. Remember, woman was made *for* man. And one thing about men is that we are very much stimulated by the visual. So a woman is to be attractive to her husband, and one of her great attractions is her beautiful hair. Her long hair gives her that womanly distinction. Furthermore, as Paul says in v.7c, the woman is the glory of the man. Her entire creation places her in direct and immediate relation to man.

In modern Western cultures where the wearing of a hat or veil does not symbolize subordination, that practice should not be required of Christians. So I do not believe that all of our ladies should wear a hat next Sunday. But women's hair and dress is to be distinctively feminine and demonstrate her womanly loveliness and submissiveness. There should be no confusion about male and female identities, because God has made the sexes distinct - physiologically, psychologically, and in roles and relationships.

### III. THE PRINCIPLE QUALIFIED AND HARMONIZED

Notice v.11 begins with the word "nevertheless." Paul is qualifying and harmonizing this principle. Authority and leadership is never to be used selfishly and abused. Your authority is only to be expressed in a way that is consistent with God's will, and your love for your wife. So lest men abuse their authority over women, Paul reminds them of their equality and mutual dependence. So notice first of all:

A. The Equality of Men and Women in the Lord – Paul says in v.11, "Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord." That verse really puts men & women on the same level in the Lord. One way that Satan and others seek to reject this teaching is by carrying it to extremes. Man as a fellow creature has no innate superiority to woman

and has no right to use his authority selfishly. Male chauvinism is no more biblical than is feminism. Whatever God arranged at creation when He made man the head, as far as being “in the Lord” is concerned, both are altogether equal. See I Pet. 3:7. Paul makes no distinction between men and women as far as personal worth, abilities, intellect, or spirituality are concerned. Paul said in Gal. 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Some women obviously are even superior to some men in abilities, intellect, and maturity.

And I want to remind you that true Christianity has not oppressed women, but has been the greatest liberator of women.

B. The Mutual Interdependence of Men and Women – This point is really made in both vv. 11 & 12, where Paul said, “Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.” In the very beginning God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” So God gave Adam a wife. But He did not create the women independent of man. She was created from the man. She owes her existence to man, as well as God. But it’s also true that every man after Adam owes his existence to a woman. Every man is born of woman. Boys are dependent upon the influence and care of their mothers.

Furthermore, adult men need women. God created the man so that he will always need a woman to complement him. Men & women have complementary strengths & weaknesses. I sometimes wonder if it is not true that a man needs a woman more than a woman needs a man. Married men live longer than single men. And why is that when an older man loses his wife, he often will pass away so soon after that? Many widows live a long time without their husbands. It is nonsense for either man or women to talk about liberation from the opposite sex. The man needs the woman, and the woman needs the man.

Man, since you need that wife of yours, you had better treat her right. Love her. Complement her. Give her security. Woman, you need a man to fulfill that high calling of motherhood. Your children need the presence & guidance of a father. I believe you will be happiest when you fulfill your purpose in life regarding your husband and family.

Men and women are complementary in every way in life. And in the Lord’s work, the church is very dependent upon the work of women (Cf. Ps. 68:11; Acts 1:12-15, 12:12, 16:40, 18:24-26; Rom. 16). In many times and places, faithful women have kept the church alive with little or no support from men.

Men and women have different roles but not different importance.

Sources: R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: I Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).