

1 CORINTHIANS 11:7-16

INTRODUCTION

Last time we didn't get time to finish this section so we are coming back to it again in order to understand further what Scripture is saying. The key to the passage is verse 3 for there Paul states the principle that he will use to try and resolve the issue about the roles of men and women in the society at Corinth.

In verses 4-6 Paul applies the principle to a specific issue and to a specific custom of the time that of wearing head covering. Now as we continue looking at this issue notice:

1. THE PRINCIPLE IS DEFENDED (VS 7-10)

It seems that the covering of a woman's head was a customary symbol of submission in the Corinthian society. But Paul wants us to understand that male headship has nothing to do with custom for it is God's order and creation and should never be compromised. Therefore because a covered head was a sign of submission a man ought not to cover his head for he is the image and glory of God (v 7).

Man was created in the moral, mental and spiritual image of God. But man is also uniquely created to bear the image of God as a head (ruler) and it is in this sense that man is created to be the glory of God.

Now don't misunderstand what Paul is saying here. Both men and women are created in God's image but as Paul points out in verse 8 the original creation from the dust of the ground was of Adam only (Genesis 2:7) Eve was created later as part of Adam himself to be his helper (Genesis 2:21-22). They were given the dominion and authority and headship.

Therefore Paul says that if head covering is a sign of submission in human relationships then men must not wear head covering in Corinth.

But now as Paul turns to women he says that the woman is the glory of man (v 7). In other words God made women in his own image to manifest man's authority and will just as men were made to manifest God's authority and will. The woman carries out man's will just as men carry out God's will. Man is made in both the image and glory of God while woman is made in the image of God but not his glory because the woman is the glory of man. The point is that men show how magnificent a creature God can create from nothing while women show how magnificent a creature God can make from a man (Genesis 2:2:19-22).

Yet let's be clear for as far as saving and sanctifying grace is concerned a woman comes as deeply into communion with God as any man. She was made equally in the image of God and that image can only be equally restored through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The woman who is converted is as much like Jesus as any man who is converted we all see our Lord face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).

But though the woman is fully made in the image of God she is not directly the glory of God for she is the glory of man. Her role in the world is to submit to the direction of her husband to whom divine authority of headship is given.

To further defend this truth Paul points out that man does not originate from woman but woman from man. Adam was created first and was given dominion over the earth even before the woman was created and when she was created she was created from Adam and she was given the name woman because she was taken out of man (Genesis 2:9-23) cf. 1 Timothy 2:11-13).

Woman not only was created from man but for man. For man was not created for the woman's sake but woman for the man's sake (v 9). A woman is not intellectually, morally spiritually or functionally inferior to man. She is unique from him. Her role is to come under the leadership, protection and care of the man and she is to be a helper suitable for him (Genesis 2:20).

Now in verse 10 Paul returns to the application of the principle. The cultural use of a head covering represents the divine and universal principle of a woman's submission to man's authority. The phrase "the sign of authority" is one word in Greek and it means authority or rightful power. The covered head in Corinth was the woman's authority or right to pray and worship etc because it demonstrated her submissiveness to God's universal principle.

The sign is clearly implied in the word authority because of the obvious reference is to the head covering mentioned in verses 4-7. In the culture of Corinth a woman was to wear such a sign as an indication of her submissiveness to her husband.

What exactly does Paul mean when he refers to angels here? The basic meaning of angel is messenger. Paul it seems is speaking about the holy angels who are God's ministering servants (Hebrews 1:14). These angels are totally and immediately obedient to God and their purpose is to serve God's people.

Throughout Scripture God's angels are shown to be creatures of power but it is always a derived and submissive power. Angel's are a supreme example of submissiveness; they are submissive to God and obey him. Because these angels serve God's people they would be shocked and offended if a Christian woman in Corinth refused to wear a head covering, thus showing their refusal to submit to God's pattern.

The angels were present at creation (Job 38:7) and are invisible watching over God's people and they would therefore be offended at any violation of the ordered established by God at creation. In our day we probably never think about angels but Paul shows that we ought to think more of them and women should show their submissiveness in culturally expressive ways for the sake of the angels as well of course as her desire to obey God and His structured order to society.

2. THE PRINCIPLE IS HARMONISED (vs. 11-12)

If Satan cannot get people to deny or disregard God's word he will try to get them to misinterpret it and carry it to extremes that the Lord did not intend. Lest men abuse their God given authority over women Paul reminds them of their equality and mutual dependence.

Man's authority over a woman is a delegated authority and a derived authority given by God to be used for His purposes and in His way for the benefit of both men and women. Man as a fellow created being has no innate superiority over a woman and has no right to use his authority in a tyrannical or selfish way. Male chauvinism is no more biblical than feminism. Both are perversions of God's plan.

Far from oppressing women the church has been their greatest liberator. In Greek and Roman societies most women were little more than slaves, they were seen as the possessions of their husbands who often virtually bought and traded their wives at will. It was largely because of the inhumane treatment of women that feminism became so popular in the Roman Empire. In many Jewish homes the plight of women was not much better. Divorce had become too easy and commonplace and it always depended on the man, the woman's view was rarely considered.

Some Jewish men held women in such low esteem that they developed a popular prayer in which they thanked God that they were not born a slave a Gentile or a woman.

But in Christ all believers' male and female are "in the Lord" (v11) and are alike under the authority of the Lord. In God's eyes women are as important as men their roles and functions are different but they are equal with men in worth in spiritual life and in importance. Women are not independent of men and men are not independent of women (v 11). Men and women are complimentary in every way in life but particularly in the Lord's work and in the church.

Men and women function together in a divinely ordained team in order to further the purposes of God. They serve each other and they serve with each other and in this regard then there is neither male nor female for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

In the history of the church, women have played a key and vital role in the life of the church. In our modern world in many places faithful women have kept the church alive with little or no support from men. Many of our Mission fields would not exist if it were not for women willing to pay the price and go and live in foreign lands to share the good news of Jesus with those who have not heard.

Every church needs godly men and women and a church without both is not and cannot be an effective church. A man's God given authority over woman does not make him independent of woman nor does the woman's submissiveness make her solely dependent. No! Paul says that neither is independent of the other, men and women need each other we are mutually dependent.

God created both men and women. The first woman was created from man but since that time every man has been created through a woman (v 12). More importantly is the fact that everything comes from God (v 12). Men and women have different roles but not different in importance. Women are equal to men in the world, in the church and before God. That is God's wise and gracious harmony and balance. Men and women fulfil different roles yet are equal in nature, personhood and spirit. God created both men and women for his own glorious purposes.

Women are to submit to men and there are certain functions that they cannot fulfil within the church for example they cannot be Elders. However women fulfil other very important roles and function. For example many women fulfil the role of nurturing and training children as they bring up the family working alongside their husband.

Our men today were mainly shaped by their Mothers who spent hours with them at home shaping them and training them. But women can only fulfil these important roles by depending on their husbands and likewise men cannot fulfil their God given roles and duties in society and in the church without being dependent on his wife.

So you see one compliments the other, one is the head, leader, protector and provider and the other is the helper, supporter and companion.

3. THE PRINCIPLE IS RESPONDED TOO (vs. 13-16)

Paul asks the Corinthians to disregard his apostolic authority for a moment and to judge for themselves what is right (v 13). God does not only give the principle of authority and submission in his divine revelation but it is self evident from what they observe from the practises of Corinth. The cultural practise of a woman's covering her head as a sign of submission to men is a reflection of God's created order.

Does not the very nature of things at Corinth teach this principle (v 14)? Paul says that if we look around Corinth common sense will tell you that women's hair is longer than men. That is proper and that is why it is frowned upon in Corinth and in most societies when men were seen with long

hair. On the other hand when a women's hair was beautifully dressed in Corinth then it brings glory to God.

Instinct tells us that hair is important to a woman that why she spends so long on it. It's an inbuilt God given instinct that reflects something of God's glory. In fact God has made women in such a way that they should have longer hair than men, it was one way of telling the difference in societies like Corinth. God has given a woman's hair as a covering (v 15); it is her natural covering, a covering that reflects her submissiveness. So Paul is saying that in Corinth both nature (the women's long hair) and custom (the wearing of a head covering) reflect God's universal principle of man's role of authority and a women's role of submissiveness.

Now as we try to apply all that we have been learning it is clear that the issue here is not about the wearing of hats in church but it is about accepting our roles as God given and seeking to live our lives in such a way that reflects our roles in life. So for a woman she must make sure that her dress sense reflects her position in God's order. It should be clear that she is a woman by the way she dresses and by the way she even does her hair.

Likewise men should always dress in masculine ways and express their God given authority in loving and responsible ways. God wants women to express their submissiveness in loving and responsible ways too. There should be no question about who has overall authority. No question that men have that key role and if we look at a married couple or at men in general and cannot answer who is in overall authority clearly then there is something wrong.

Either men are not taking their roles of authority seriously or women are not taking their roles of submissiveness seriously. When there is a blurring of the edges then conflict and trouble will be seen in society, in marriages and in the church.

As in every age and every church some of the believers at Corinth were not satisfied with their roles and wanted to disregard them or modify them to suit themselves. Paul anticipated this objection he knew some would be inclined to be contentious concerning this matter (v 16) but he makes it clear that he has nothing else to say that would make his case any more convincing than what he has already said.

In concluding his argument we should note that Paul has established that women are to be submissive to men because of the godhead (v 3) because of the design of men and women (v 7), because of the order of creation (v 8), because of the role of women (v 9) and finally because of the angels (v 10) and of what is natural (vs.13-14).

There is no other pattern to be followed, the argument for male headship and female submissiveness is absolutely convincing and every Christian and every church has to work out the very clear principle into everyday life situations. For the Corinthians that meant the wearing of head coverings for women. For us it means making sure by our dress code that we show the differences between men and women and making sure by our lives and attitudes that people know that man is the glory of God and woman is the glory of man and as a result both men and women will bring glory to God,

There is great confusion about the identity and roles of men and women in our own society. As Christians we need to show our society that men and women are made in the image of God and that both are precious and valuable in His sight. Christian men need to show our society how to exercise God given authority and headship without being overpowering to our wives and to women in general.

Women need to show to our society what submission really means so that people can see it is submission and not slavery.

Only Christians truly understand the proper God ordained roles for men and women and it is always sad when Christians fail to work out in practice the principle of male headship and female subordination. Let us ask God to help us to live God's way as men and women in our society in our homes and in our churches.

Amen