

## **Understanding Headship and the Head Covering** 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

### **Introduction**

A. In Sovereign Grace Ministries, which happily for us includes Living Hope, we hold as a core belief the authority of Scripture. We live by this book (it says it, we believe it and we do it).

1. It is not an accident that the first article in our statement of faith is about the Bible.

We accept the Bible, including the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God. The Bible is the only essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Being given by God the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice, and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded, or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation, or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture. Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith, Article 1

2. You might think our statement of faith would begin with God. The only sure revelation we have of God is what He has spoken in this book.

B. Notice that our statement of faith places emphasis on reverent obedience. The Bible is our rule and guide for doctrine, practice, life and godliness. Knowledge alone is insufficient.

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV) And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

John 3:36 (ESV) Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

C. We may then say that the Christian life (the life of God in the soul of man) consists in two parts.

1. Knowing the Word of God.

2. Doing (or obeying) the Word of God.

James 1:22 (ESV) But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

D. All of this brings us to two timely questions from this text in 1 Corinthians 11.

1. Do we know what 1 Corinthians 11:2-2-16 says? Do we know what it means?

2. Are we obeying 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?

E. The title of this sermon is **Understanding Headship and the Head Covering**. My aim is to help us answer those two questions positively.

**I. What does this text say? What does God intend for us to know and do?**

- A. Any commentator that is honest will acknowledge the text has difficulties. But we think we can get the main point even if we can't answer every question.

No one disputes that the text is complicated, and there are some dimensions of the text that will always elude certainty (such as the reference to angels in v. 10). Nevertheless, the burden of the text may still be discerned by readers today, even if we cannot solve every question. Thomas Schreiner in JBMW, Vol X, Issue 1, p 17

- B. An overview of the text.

1. Paul has been answering their questions from chapter 7 (marriage and singleness) through chapter 10 (meat offered to idols).
2. Now Paul turns a corner in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul commends the Corinthians for remembering him and the teaching Paul has delivered. They are serious these Corinthians.
3. Paul always seeks to encourage and commend before bringing correction. Paul encourages their zeal while moving towards bringing correction to them.
  - In 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 Paul will address the traditions regarding women.
  - In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Paul will address the Lord's Supper.
  - in 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul will address spiritual gifts.
4. Things may be bad but the situation is not completely dismal. Paul sees grace.

- C. The common topic found in chapters 11-14 is their gathered times of worship. That seems to be the issue here in our text.

1. In verse 3 Paul establishes the principle of male headship.
  - I am not a language expert but I do question the ESV using husband and wife here. I think it may be better to use man and woman (singles aren't disqualified).
  - The Bible teaches the leadership role of the husband and the submission of the wife but on further review I'm not confident this text does that (others do).
2. In verses 4-6 a man should not have his covered when he prophesies or prays but a woman should. Why?
  - The issue is clearly honor. What shows honor? What is honor?  
"A valuing, high regard, great respect, esteem"
3. In verses 7-10 Paul explains further why he wants woman to wear head coverings but the men should not.
  - The reason is rooted in creation. God made the man from the dust of the earth but woman was taken from the side (or rib) of man.
  - Man was not created for woman but the woman for the man (inflammatory!!).
  - Verse 10 refers to angels (probably good angels who assist us in worship and desire to see the creation order upheld).
4. In verses 11-16 Paul concludes his argument.
  - The woman is not independent from the man or vice versa.

- Nature itself is appealed to meaning this. Men do not desire to be feminine nor do woman desire to be masculine.
- Long hair on man is disgraceful but on the woman it is her glory.  
  
Ex: How long is long? The point is this. Two sexes. Masculine and feminine. We are largely losing this distinction today.

**II. What does the text mean? We will answer in two ways.**

A. In Corinth, it meant this.

1. No head covering for the guy. No long hair either (what is long?).
2. A head covering (probably a shawl) for the women. Also, no loose, long hair. Hair was kept up in those days by proper women.

B. For us today, the head covering does not mean anything, at least to most of us.

1. Sadly, a head covering may be worn and the wife is anything but submissive.
2. Therefore, I personally reject the idea of women at Living Hope wearing a head covering. We prefer the reality to the symbol.

Ex: But if you press on saying this is for today, describe an appropriate head covering. A lace doily? Kleenex? Shawl? Veil?

3. God knows how to give detailed instructions. If this was crucial, God would have communicated what it looks like.

C. An old saying comes to mind. Sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees.

1. The head covering is like a tree. You may miss the larger reality.

Paul desires the women to adorn themselves properly because their adornment in the cultural world of the first century signaled whether they were submissive to male leadership in the gathered assembly. What applies to the church today is not the exact cultural practice commanded (whether Paul speaks of a veil, shawl, or hairstyle). It is the principle that women should conduct themselves in public worship with a demeanor that affirms and supports male leadership in the church. Thomas Schreiner in JBMW, Vol X, Issue 1, p 21

2. So are you, Living Hope, obeying this section of Scripture? Yes!

**III. Arguments you may hear to the contrary on this text.**

A. It says wear a head covering so wear something, anything.

1. The gospel applied in a specific culture was what mattered to God and Paul.
2. Similar expressions of faith.

Ex: Washing feet (the point is servanthood).

Ex: Greet with a holy kiss (the point is greet one another).

Ex: How often we have communion (the point is have it).

B. Egalitarians bring forward their arguments because they are opposed to male headship.

1. Since the Bible says don't wear jewelry or braided hair, and you do that, you should be able to see that headship is a dead issue as well.
  - The Bible doesn't forbid jewelry or braids, rather, it forbids gaudy excess that calls attention to oneself.
2. Just as the church has learned women don't need to wear head coverings we should discover that male leadership is not necessary.
  - Male headship is not a symbol but a reality. It is a fundamental, ongoing attitude that characterizes life. Granted, not for all (probably not even for most).

*Discovering Biblical Equality* is the result of a collaborative effort of a diverse group of evangelical scholars united by two convictions: that the Bible is the fully inspired and authoritative Word of God, and that it teaches gender equality in church, home and society. *Discovering Biblical Equality - Complementarity without Hierarchy*, p 11

- If you get that the fruit is not good. The homosexual agenda will advance. It is a logical necessity. You can't say there is no difference but there's a difference.
3. Headship means superior - inferior. Not so! We affirm equality in creation.  
Ex: Fine china is more valuable than a hammer. Jesus was not inferior to the Father in being God (human dimension was).

### Close

- A. If you desire more detail on this topic, I'd suggest the following resources.
  1. Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth by Wayne Grudem
  2. Recovering Biblical manhood & Womanhood by Piper & Grudem
  3. *Discovering Biblical Equality* by Pierce and Groothuis (edited by Fee) attempts to cover the egalitarian position.
- B. Live according to your conscience. Freedom is yours.
  1. Live for the sake of the gospel.
  2. Give no room to legalism.

### Pray