

Dancing Together: Step One, Who Gets To Lead?
1 Corinthians 11:3-12

PRE-INTRODUCTION

The next few sermons, beginning today, must be taken together. We are going to get into the weeds a little bit. We have to break apart some of the details of what it means to be man and wife. Since this task will require careful progress, and several sermons, I realize that each sermon will produce unanswered questions. If this happens, be patient, write your questions down, and hold onto them. They will likely be answered in the following weeks. If not, when our series ends, we will be giving everyone a way to have remaining questions answered.

INTRODUCTION

The Corinthian church was having a problem. In their culture, women wore head coverings as a sign of their womanhood. Men did not wear them, as this would be feminine. The problem they were having was that women were discarding their head coverings in church meetings, causing offense to many of the men and women there. Jesus never barred women from all the teachings He gave. They had equal access to Him, to the Holy Spirit, and to salvation. The traditions of the Pharisees that made women second-class citizens were set aside by Jesus. The Christians knew this.

What the Corinthian church was wrestling with was not equality of women, but sameness. If women are equal to men in all things, doesn't that mean that they can function the same in all things? So, why should women have to wear a head covering to speak in church? The men don't have to. It doesn't seem fair.

This problem in the Corinthian church provides an excellent case study for us to understand the leadership of men in marriage, while maintaining that men and women are equal in Jesus. Paul's resolution to the problem of the head coverings gives us the eternal principles we need to apply to our culture and to any culture.

Let's read the text, and then examine it, seeking the eternal principles within.

TEXT: 1Co 11:3-12

3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head,

5 but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.

6 For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.

7 For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.

8 For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.

9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

*10 That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.
11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;
12 for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.*

Now, some of you might be wondering, because you love God and love the Bible, “Do I have to wear a head covering in church? After all, Paul told the Corinthian women to do so. What about us?”

Before we answer the cultural problem of the Corinthians, let’s look for the underlying principle that Paul bases his answer upon.

(When studying the New Testament, we can struggle to know what is culturally mandated and what is not. The key is to look for two things when studying a New Testament passage. First, look for the original intent of the author. What is he trying to say? Second, look for the eternal principles that underlie the cultural applications. Paul, in particular, is very good at answering practical and immediate issues by pointing to the underlying principles. Let’s do the same ourselves.)

First, let’s identify the eternal principles that underlie Paul’s teaching.

The Underlying Eternal Principles:

1. God established an order of authority in creating mankind, including male leadership in marriage.

The Bible reveals that God is orderly. He establishes leadership in every realm –among the angels, among mankind, and even within the Trinity. Paul reveals this permanent order in verse 3:

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

God the Father is the head, or leader of Christ (God the Son). Christ is the head of every man. And the man is the head, or leader, of a woman –presumably his wife.

Note here that leadership does not imply greater value, for God the Father is the head of God the Son, and the Son is equal to God in all things. Likewise, God ordains the order in the marriage, the wife equal to her leader, the husband. He has responsibilities as leader, she as wife. Neither is more valuable than the other. (Of course, Christ is greater than the man, because He is also God, and the man is not!).

This kind of thinking might seem unusual to us, as we live in a very disconnected society. People are seen first as individuals, not as members of a family. Often, we know people for years, and never know their parents or their brothers and sisters. This is not how God intends. God intends that most people will be married and identified very much by their families. So, for

example, a woman, when she marries, is identified with the family she forms with her husband. Before that, her leader is to be her parents, with her father being the leader of the home. The same is true for her brother, by the way. Boys are to be led by their fathers until they're married. Then, they were, like the women, to identify with the new family they formed by marriage.

This sort of family-centered thinking has been the norm through all time. Individual-centered thinking is a modern invention, ironically most prevalent in post-Christian democracies and communist nations. The only people still living in family-centered societies are those that are religion-based or tribal (like India, Arab nations, etc).

In God's plan, each family was to have leadership. The Law of the Old Testament reflects this understanding that each family was to be managed and led. This is why, in Jewish families of ancient times –and in families in India, and in Muslim countries today—if the father died, the oldest brother became the leader of the family. The distinction of being the first born meant being second in command, at the ready to assume leadership and authority for the family if need be. The idea that each person, being an individual, was to be a person disconnected from family leadership was seen as an unfortunate exception. Orphans and people tragically without family were to be absorbed into other families and cared for by the kindness of society in general.

As for the marriage, the man is the head of the woman, the leader in the marriage. This is not because he is the smarter of the two, but because his qualification is his maleness only.

2. God created male and female with the intent of male leadership in the marriage.

Things work best when they are used for the purposes the designer intends. When it comes to humanity, the designer is God. He did not arbitrarily determine the order of creation, nor how male and female were to interact in a marriage and family. Rather, He fashioned the male to behave a certain way and to fulfill certain functions. Likewise, He fashioned the female to behave a certain way and to fulfill certain functions. If these roles are reversed, manipulated, or disregarded, then difficulties will ensue.

7 For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.

Here we have the interesting idea that the man is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man. We know from Genesis that the woman bears the image of God, just as the man does. So what is this business about the "glory," of man? I'm not certain, but I know that it is not intended to be an insult to women. Glory is a word that can refer to an emanation, as in light or beauty. Glory is something that makes one famous or demonstrates praiseworthiness. I don't know exactly what Paul means here, but I know this: he is referring to the order of creation, because of what he says next:

8 For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

The man was not made “from” the woman, but “from” man. Man was not created “for” woman, but woman “for” man. These prepositions, for and from, point to the creation of male and female. God told Adam that He would make a helper fit “for” him. He did not take dust from the ground to make Eve, but rather took “from” Adam a rib and fashioned the woman.

According to this text, then, God created man and woman in this manner to demonstrate that man was to be the leader in the marriage, and therefore in the family.

So, as Paul is seeking to answer a simple question about the practice of head coverings in Corinth, he reaches back for eternal principles to guide his answer. These principles are not cultural, but permanent. In other words, every church, in every age, must find a way to honor the leadership of men in the home.

3. Man and woman are interdependent and equal in value.

Paul is very cautious not to give men the impression that they are more important than their wives simply because Adam was created first, and Eve created for Adam. So, he finishes his teaching on this subject by adding a balancing principle. Look here:

11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; 12 for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

This need not be said in order to answer the question about head coverings, but Paul feels it is necessary to remind the Corinthians that only Eve was taken from Adam. From that point on, every man comes from the body of a woman. There is to be a humility in the leadership of a man who realizes he is to lead a team of equals: his wife, and later, his children. (More on what leadership of a man is to look like in a future message).

The Practical Cultural Application:

Head coverings for Corinthian women was a societal tradition, as was women having long hair. The head coverings meant that a woman was under the authority of her husband or father. People read this text and say, “Well, then shouldn’t women today wear head coverings in church?”

Actually, some people do. They see this text and believe that when prayer is happening, or when a woman speaks in front of the church or prays, she should wear a covering. I have been in services where a woman would take out a lace cloth and place it on her head when praying. In another example, Mennonite women wear head coverings while in church. Likewise, in traditional African American churches, the women wear hats throughout the service. I respect all these expressions of faith as these women seek to understand and obey the Bible. However, I do not believe that a head covering is necessary. Why not? Because in our culture, a head covering does not symbolize a man’s leadership and authority. It doesn’t symbolize

anything at all, really. But Paul told the Corinthian women to wear them. What we must look for is the principle Paul used that led him to this application.

In our culture, by way of contrast, the head covering does not symbolize male headship. But we do have a cultural expression of male headship, and that is in marriage where the woman takes on the name of the man she marries. The daughter takes her father's name, and keeps it as a surname until the time of marriage.

So, I would say that since head coverings do not communicate authority of men in our culture, Christian women are not displaying rebellion against the created order by not wearing them. I would add though that Christian women should not spurn their husband's name when marrying for the very reason that the feminist world says that they should. By taking a man's name in marriage, the woman is not losing her identity, as many feminists claim, but is rather signifying that she is one with him, and that he is the leader in the home.

We Proclaim Christ

And here we must stop, even though having established male leadership in the family, there are many questions still to be answered. I realize that what we have covered thus far, stating that the order of creation assigns leadership to men in the home, is controversial in this world.

I hope to speak everything that I say in love, but we don't want to be too careful. Rather, we want to tell our friends and family the truth, plainly and innocently, and let God work with that. We must not try to manage everyone's reaction, or walk on egg shells in these matters. Rather, we must follow the example of Paul, who spoke on difficult things, but made it clear that Jesus Christ was the center of his message:

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (2Co 4:1-5 ESV)

Likewise, when we speak these truths about gender to our friends, family and co-workers, let us do so by attaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not by being so clever that no one is offended. What we want the world to know is that when a man or woman dies, he or she can have hope of eternal joy with God if he or she has faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus came to die for sinners. This simple truth saves souls. If people don't get what we are saying, then there is a spiritual battle going on, and we are fighting for them! Satan is blinding their minds.

Tell people what you believe, in love, and in kindness. And make sure you let them know that the One who taught you these truths isn't really a preacher or a teacher, but rather Jesus Himself, and tell them of His tremendous love for you, and for them.