

# Men and Women: Vive La Difference!

## 1 Corinthians 11:2-7

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The Bible is a book completed over 2000 years ago. It was written over a period of 1700 years by more than 40 authors, each writing from the perspective of their own world and culture. This creates challenges for us as we read it because while truth doesn't change, culture is constantly changing. The culture of the first century when the New Testament was written is much different than our culture today. Interpretation has to take into account what the writer meant when he wrote it and to identify what is cultural truth and what is universal truth.

For example, let's all stand. We say we want to be a biblical church, right? If the Bible says it, then we're going to do it, right? This is a command in Scripture from Romans 16:16, *Greet one another with a holy kiss*. So what we're going to do is turn to one another (Are you ready?) and let's shake a hand. Depending on who you are sitting next to, this was shaping up to be a memorable sermon. We don't greet one another with a kiss because that is not our culture. Christians in Egypt and France and many other places do greet with kisses, but that's their culture. We shake hands and maybe give a hug. The biblical cultural command is to kiss one another; the universal truth behind it is that we must express sincere love to one another.

Our study of the letter Paul wrote to Corinth brings us to a passage laden with cultural and universal commands. This passage has shaped an incredible amount of Christian choices. Have you ever wondered why Amish and Mennonite women wear their hair in a bun? Ever wonder why some Christian men remove their hats to pray? Ever wonder why many historical branches of Christianity have always had women who wore a head covering? All those issues come from this passage and how we interpret what is cultural and what is universal. This is a complicated and difficult section of Scripture and I am going to do the best I can and then we'll all go shopping for hair buns. Let me read our section today:

*Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. 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. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 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. 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. 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. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (1 Corinthians 11:2-10)*

Paul is addressing yet another problem in the church and it has to do with, male and female problems. How should a man express his masculinity in culture and how should a woman express her femininity in culture and why should we care?

### The Universal Truth (Verse 3)

The universal truth is found in verse 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.* Paul begins by explaining the nature of these key human relationships. Man to Jesus and Man to woman. The foundation of both of those relationships is THE central defining relationship of all relationships which is Christ's relationship to God, or to use the Trinity language, God the Son's relationship to God the Father.

Let's start there. The *head of Christ is God* or the head of God the Son is God the Father. The word he uses to describe the relationship is "headship." It is the same word that he uses to describe man to Jesus and man to woman so we better know what that means. The meaning of the word is debated. Does it mean "source" so that the Father is the source of the Son or does it mean authority as in the Father has authority over the Son and the Son submits to the Father?

Dr. Wayne Grudem did a definitive study of the over 2000 times this word is used in all Greek literature and found that there is not one unambiguous use of the word *kephale* as "source" when applied to a personal relationship. There are many where it is clear that it means authority (Colossians 2:10, "[Christ] is the head of all rule and authority"). Headship means to relate to another in terms of functional authority.

So we go back to the Trinity. The Father is the "head" of the Son meaning that in this relationship of divine equals, there is a functional relationship where the Father has a role he fulfills as relational head and the Son has a role he fulfills as relational equal, but willing submitter to the headship of the Father. Equals in being, essence, and worth and yet fulfilling different functions in the Godhead. This Trinitarian relationship is the most glorious and beautiful relationship in the entire universe. The Father and the Son do not see it as a matter of duty, they delight in their roles and they delight in the other fulfilling their role.

- *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:17)
- *So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."* (John 8:28-29)

So we see that the concept of relational headship is not culturally created, it is grounded in the eternal nature of God and by His purpose, designed into the fabric of His creation which reflects the glory of the Godhead.

This is particularly true of human relationships. By God's design, they reflect the beauty of relationship between the Father and the Son. An example Paul gives in verse 3 is the relationship between man and Jesus. Jesus is the creator and the Savior. Our relationship to him is willing submission to His servant leadership and authority. The relationship between man and woman is the key example and provides the basis for the rest of the chapter. There is debate about chapter 11 whether it is man and woman or husband and wife. The Greek word for wife and woman is the same. The ESV goes with husband and wife but I don't think it's clear enough to say definitively. So let's develop what this passage is saying about manhood and womanhood and then we'll figure out these head covering commands.

## **Man was created first; woman was created for man and from man (Verse 8)**

If you are familiar with the account of creation, then you know that Genesis 2 tells how God created man but there was no suitable helper or companion for man. My old pastor Kimber used to say in his marriage messages, "There was a he-pheasant and a she-pheasant; a he-rhinoceros and a she-rhinoceros; but there was no she-Adam." Adam was alone and God said it was not good for man to be alone and purposed to make a suitable helper for him.

Did God know before He ever created that there was going to be both male and female humans? Of course. So why did He create one before He created the other? Why not just create them at the same time? Paul says here and in 1 Timothy 2:13 that the order of creation was to establish the nature of their relationship. Just like the Trinity, total equals in all categories of personhood yet functionally different with the man in a place of headship in the relationship. The order of creation establishes it. Adam first, then Eve.

Paul also says in verse 9 that *woman was created for man*. This again hails back to the creation account where God said He would create Eve *for* Adam; she a suitable helper for him. *Man was not made for woman but woman for man*. This goes against the grain of modern feminist thought. Yet 11:9 says it clearly, *Neither was man created for woman but woman for man*. All of this is for a reason that the intra-sexual human relationships would look like the glorious intra-Trinitarian relationships.

## **Man is an expression of God's glory, and in the human relationship, woman is an expression of man's glory (Verse 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.*

The wrong way to view this is as a statement of value. That is not at all what Paul is saying here. Other passages make it clear that both man and woman are made in the image of God. In that sense, both are equally for the glory of God. This is not a value statement of personhood; it is a statement of glory. Man exists to bring honor to God and does so when his manhood is expressed as God designed and intended. In the human relationship, women are a wonderful and praiseworthy compliment to man because femininity is the beautiful complement to masculinity.

You agree with this point even if you don't realize it. Husbands, how many of you are wise enough right now to verbally acknowledge that you married way better than you deserved? How many of you married up? I was talking with my best buddy growing up and we were talking about how great his wife is. He said, *Yep, in marrying her I out kicked my coverage*. I have another friend who gladly embraces years of people bewildered at how on earth he landed the wife he did. Any good and godly wife is that to her husband. She's way more than he deserves. Or we could say it this way, the glory of her personhood brings praise to her husband. She is his glory and when a husband sees his wife as a glorious gift and way more than he deserves, there is something inherently good and right about it. It is God's truth!

That's what Paul is saying here. *Men, we are in a relationship with God where our existence as image bearers brings glory to God AND the existence of the stunningly beautiful inside and out creatures known as women brings undeserved glory to us in our God-ordained position of headship and co-image bearers of God.* (Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 516).

I hope you are getting a sense that maleness and femaleness, manhood and womanhood is way more significant than merely body parts and plumbing; there is a deep and divine glory in biblical manhood and womanhood. So to review:

### **Biblical Manhood**

Head of wife/woman (v. 3)

Created first (v. 8)

Image and glory of God (v. 7)

### **Biblical Womanhood**

Made from man (v. 8)

Glory of man (v. 7)

Created for man (v. 9)

## **The Cultural Truth (Verses 4-6)**

### **Why did Paul care so much about head coverings?**

Here's where the cultural dimension of the first century has to be understood. Like many places in the world today, women wore head coverings in Corinth. It was essentially a shawl draped over the head. This is very fashionable even today in the Middle East and India. A head covering in the first century was more than a stylish dress; it was a sign of submission to cultural norms and expectations for a woman. Women wore head coverings. The only women who didn't wear them were prostitutes and mistresses. A woman without a head covering was a woman considered to be dressing like a man. This would be akin to coming to church and seeing all the men wearing dresses. That would make the local newspaper. *At Bethel Church, the men are dressing like women!* Apparently what was happening at Corinth was that in the public worship service, women were removing their head coverings. That doesn't mean anything to us but it was scandalous in that society. The newspaper in Corinth may have read, *At First Church of Corinth, the women are dressing like men!* They were perhaps insisting on their freedom in Christ to do it or applying the teaching that in Christ there is neither male nor female but we are all one. We don't know.

The cultural issue was women removing their head coverings and looking like men, but the universal issue is God's intent for the celebration of distinctions in manhood and womanhood.

*Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.* (Verse 4) Every man who eschews the cultural norm for manhood dishonors his head (i.e. Christ and God who didn't make a man to act like a woman). *But every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.* (Verse 5) In other words, the man or husband is not honored by a manly dressing wife. "Is this your brother?" "No, it's my wife." *It is the same as if her head were shaven.* (Verse 5) It is the same as if she looked completely like a man with no hair at all. He will say in verse 15 that a woman's hair is her glory. Why? Because in most cultures a woman's hair is part of what makes her look like a woman.

Women, have you ever wondered why you care so much about your hair and men don't so much? Is that just cultural? I don't think so. All women have a thing about their hair. This passage would suggest it is connected to womanhood itself. A man who goes through chemo and loses his hair isn't overly concerned about it but when a woman loses her hair it's a big deal. Her hair is tied to her femininity and identity as a woman.

So do you see what Paul is saying? Headship doesn't have anything to do with the head itself but with gender identity. For a man to "cover his head" (dress like a woman) demeans the glory of God in him as a man. For a woman to uncover her head in a culture where the expectation is covering it is to demean the glory of her head/husband for whom her femininity is a glory and honor.

Let's take a quick look at verse 10 and then we'll move on to application. *That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.* (Verse 10) I read the best scholars and commentators I could find on this and the unanimous opinion is that we have no idea what that means. I am just going to leave it at that.

### **How Does This Apply to us Today?**

#### **The differences between manhood and womanhood are to be preserved and celebrated**

Our culture is flowing the opposite way. Women are encouraged to be more masculine and men are encouraged to be more feminine. This is true in role distinctions in marriage and in the church. The role of a biblical husband and father is viewed as hopelessly patriarchal and similarly a biblical woman and wife is scorned as completely outdated. As men become more womanly and women become manlier, God's design for heterosexual reflection of what He is like is blurred and lost. That's the real issue. Sexual personhood is a derived glory; we derive it from the glory of the Godhead. When our differences are forsaken, the glory of them is lost as well.

So in the church and in our homes, we need to look for opportunities to celebrate the unique glory of manhood and womanhood. Parents, affirm glimpses of masculine servant leadership you see in your boys in the way they relate to their mom and sisters. Encourage them to honor them with table manners that honor the family gathering and honor mom. Encourage them to hold doors, clean sidewalks, and other things that teach them that women are to be honored and cherished. They might just start getting the idea early on that there is something very special about a woman. And model that yourself in the way you treat your wife.

Similarly, teach your daughters how to relate to men in ways that are healthy by teaching modesty in dress so they learn their bodies are holy and reserved sexually for a husband. Affirm their special interest in beautiful things and the creating of beauty. Praise them for inward beauty of character more than their outward appearance. Dads, take daughters on dates and help them to learn to talk and relate in healthy and holy ways to a man.

In the church, let's praise and affirm one another's unique gifts and abilities; men in exercising servant leadership when called for and women bringing the beauty of kindness, tenderness, and love to our church community. In the church, when the males are men and the females are women, there is much to celebrate and enjoy in one another. Let's celebrate those differences, not blur them.

#### **Everything is theological including how we present ourselves**

Paul's concern in chapter 11 was that by taking their head covering off in that culture, women were making a theological statement that wasn't true. It is not true that gender doesn't matter to God. We might accuse the Apostle of being picky and small minded here. But don't forget verse 31 from chapter 10, *Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do [including how you express your gender in culture] do it all to the glory of God.* (I Corinthians 10:31, with additions)

I don't want to see all the men of our church in dresses. Most of us don't have the legs for it. But beyond that, in our culture that is theological heresy. God the Son doesn't aspire to be God the Father and men shouldn't give any indication that they want to be women. Or

that our women want to be men. This passage is a reminder to us to look at everything in our lives, even the way we present ourselves in culture and make sure that as Christians who believe in three distinct persons in the Triune God, that the glory God intended to be seen in human sexuality is on display in everything I do. Whether you eat or drink, or make gender distinct selections, do everything in a way that displays the fullness of the glory of the Triune God.

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