

# “The Image and Glory of God”

## The Eighteenth in a Series of Sermons on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

*Texts: 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; Genesis 2:15-25*

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**W**e live in a culture dominated by celebrities—people who are famous for being famous. Madonna, Paris Hilton, Lindsey Lohan and Brittany Spears are household names not so much because of their talent or accomplishments, but because of their ability to shock us by defying societal convention. People are interested in them because they offend our sensitivities. Believe it or not, Paul is dealing with much the same thing in the Corinthian church. In an age in which women were not to be seen or heard, Paul recounts how what some have called a first century woman’s liberation movement brought great distress to the Corinthian church.

As we continue our series on First Corinthians, we come to chapter 11. Apparently, when composing their list of questions to Paul, the Corinthians asked the apostle about certain aspects of public worship. In light of these questions, Paul turns his attention to matters of proper conduct in worship (1 Corinthians 11) before addressing spiritual gifts in chapter 12. After praising the Corinthians for holding fast to his teaching (v. 2), Paul raises the matter of headship to describe three important relationships: man/Christ; woman/man; Christ/God, as the basis for his discussion of head-coverings, or more likely, hairstyles (vv. 4-5a), as these relate to male headship and the modesty of women in the churches.<sup>1</sup>

The cultural background here is important. Unless we understand the circumstances in Corinth, we will not understand Paul’s response. While the general principles are clear and binding upon Christians in different cultures throughout the ages, the specific cultural issues Paul discusses are not always clear to us. The rebellion and immodesty which was symbolized by the long, flowing hairstyles in Corinth, may be symbolized by another hairstyle in another culture. This is why we must not concentrate on the specifics in terms of application, but the general principles. In Greco-Roman culture, a woman’s hair was often the object of male lust. This is why in much of the Mediterranean world women were expected to cover their hair (or wear it up) as an expression of modesty and proper etiquette.

In first century Greece, upper class women would show-off their social status by wearing their hair in provocative hairstyles. Paul must address this matter because this was causing great consternation among the Corinthians. Upper-class fashion and working-class sexual/social mores both coexisted in the Corinthian congregation. Now there was conflict. Further complicating things is the fact that Greeks often bared their heads in public, while Romans tended to cover their heads. Which was proper?

Upper class women and female celebrities in Corinth were quite emancipated. Archeological evidence indicates that women even participated in the Isthmian games, competed in chariot races, the 200 meter race and contests for lyre playing. These women were well-known throughout the region and viewed as celebrities. These women set fashion trends and saw nothing wrong with going without a veil or a head-covering in public, while working-class women, Romans, and Jews all covered their heads in public, the Jewish women even veiling their faces. The conduct of these Greek women was seen as an offensive flaunting of social propriety. Paul will not allow such behavior to disrupt worship.

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in, Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 499.

In verse 1, (which is the conclusion to Paul's discussion of Christian liberty), he writes "*Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*" If we do everything to the glory of God, we are free to eat and drink what we wish. However, doing everything for the glory of God means that the strong must be careful in the presence of weak and avoid doing anything which may cause the weak to stumble. Like Paul, we should all follow the example of Christ, and put the good of others before our own, so that we gain a hearing to preach the gospel, by which they may be saved.

Next, Paul reminds the Corinthians that Christians have no business flaunting public convention and causing disruption.<sup>2</sup> As he states in verse 2, "*Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.*" Paul begins with a word of praise and refers to the fact that the members of this congregation thought of him often and prayed for him on a regular basis. They accepted his teaching ("the traditions"), which was the memorized oral tradition that had been given to Paul, which he, in turn, passed on to the Corinthians. This was not stuff Paul had made up, but "tradition" (the teaching of the apostles and the facts of the gospel) which was passed on to him and which he taught the Corinthians.

Paul continues 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.*" The sentence stands in contrast to Paul's compliment of verse 2 in the form of a mild rebuke. Paul sets out three instances of headship (man/Christ; woman/man; Christ/God), to illustrate the proper order of things. *Kephale* [headship] is a hotly debated term and probably means something like "source" as in the head of a river.<sup>3</sup>

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is probably not talking about a man's authority over a woman (headship as "authority"), but is referring to an event in redemptive history—that the woman was formed from the man as described in Genesis 2:21-22 (our Old Testament lesson). The man is the source of the woman. This interpretation is confirmed by verses 8-9, when Paul returns to several terms of the analogy. Man was formed by Christ at creation. Christ derives his authority from the father who sent him (Christ was not created, of course, but sent by the father in his incarnation and whose will is the source of Christ's redemptive work). But we must not press the analogy too far, however, as none of these relationships are identical.<sup>4</sup> Paul is concerned to show how certain relationships are based upon one party being the source of the other and how shame coming upon one, therefore brings shame upon the other.

Once we have considered this, we are in a position to explain why women must be careful about their appearance in public worship. As Paul says in verse 4. "*Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.*" As we will see in verses 7-12, the creation order lies at the heart of Paul's argument. Since the man was created first, Paul begins his discussion with men, whose heads must remain uncovered, or else they pray or prophesy improperly. While this might be a reference to long hair in the form of an androgynous hairstyle (perhaps associated with male temple prostitutes who decorated their own hair to be like that of fashionable women or to imitate female temple prostitutes), more likely Paul is referring to the practice of men covering their heads during prayer or preaching while pulling a toga up over the head, or perhaps wearing the Jewish prayer shawl.

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<sup>2</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 149.

<sup>3</sup> Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 501. Cf. Morris, 1 Corinthians, 149.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 149.

One possible application of this is that since man is God's image and glory (v. 7), men are not to veil that glory in worship.<sup>5</sup> Another possible interpretation is that Paul wished to avoid Jewish practices (praying or preaching with a head covered by a prayer shawl) which would have presented a legalistic image to Gentiles who did not understand Jewish practices. Yet another possible interpretation is that men covered their heads during the time of mourning, and Paul does not want men to pray and preach as though they were in mourning, when, in fact, Christ was raised from the dead and has ascended on high. Then, there is also the possibility that members of the Isis cult wore head-coverings and Paul wants Christians avoid looking like cult members.<sup>6</sup> Whatever was in view here, Paul's point is that for men to cover their heads while praying or preaching would bring shame to Christ (their head).

As for women, Paul adds in verse 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.*" The one thing which jumps out at us is that women prophesied in the Corinthian church as did men. Throughout the Mediterranean world and Greek culture in particular, women were not educated and certainly did not speak in public. Plutarch urged women to remain silent as a sign of modesty and virtue. Jews even regarded it a sin for women to participate in religious teaching. Yet, Jesus clearly allowed women to sit at his feet (cf. Luke 10:39-42). It is Christianity which advanced the cause of women, while paganism oppressed women, denying them education, treating them as mere sex objects or even as the property of their father or husband.

The fact that the Corinthians were allowing women to participate in religious instruction was itself quite remarkable, even more so that they could actually prophesy. Prophesying is probably Spirit-inspired utterance on the meaning of a biblical text—in the sense of insight into the biblical text as well as boldness in proclamation. Paul does not prohibit the practice of women prophesying, and he describes how women should be dressed when doing so. While men are not to cover their heads (such would bring shame to Christ), women are not to uncover their heads (which brings shame to men).

Paul's comments here create a problem because later on in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul writes: "*the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*" The solution to this apparent contradiction (women can prophesy, but can't speak in the church) may be as simple as the fact that in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is speaking of women prophesying to other women, or as Calvin thought, they were prophesying in services other than the regular worship service on the Lord's day (i.e., what we would call a "Sunday School class"). In any case, it is clear from what Paul teaches elsewhere that only males may be called to the office of elder and minister of word and sacrament (cf. 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1-13). Whatever prophesying women did does not usurp the authority of the elders, who must evaluate all such teaching.

Whenever a woman prays or prophesies in public, her head must be covered, or else, she brings shame upon her husband. When the latter happens it were as though her head were shaved, which is the ultimate sign of humiliation and shame for a woman in the Mediterranean world. The "uncovered" head may be a reference to "loosed hair" (which a woman allows to flow down her shoulders), which she normally would not have done in public, only in private. Since Paul goes on to say in verse 15 that a woman's long hair is her glory and her covering, as with his discussion of men in verse 4, he may also be

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<sup>5</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 150.

<sup>6</sup> Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 507-508.

referring to a head-covering of some type, but the reference is more likely to a provocative hairstyle.<sup>7</sup>

Paul is not talking about the length of a woman's hair, probably not even to her wearing something on her head (a hat, a covering) but wearing her hair in a shameful manner. Paul does not want women to do anything which causes disruption, which is immodest, reflects an androgynous sexuality, or has overt stylistic ties to paganism and temple prostitution. Paul's makes this point in verse 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.*" If a woman does not cover her head (wear her hair modestly) and so causes disruption, denies her gender, appears immodest, then she should just shave her head (which is the ultimate sign of shame) since her conduct has already brought shame upon herself.

The cultural situation varies from culture to culture. Long hair may be a sign of modesty in one culture and a sign of immodesty in another. But Paul's principle still applies in all cultures—women are to be modest, not hide their gender and appear as males, and are to avoid all stylistic connections to pagan religions or immoral activity. If temple prostitutes in Corinth covered their heads (or wore their hair in a bun), my guess is that Paul would have told the Corinthian women to wear their hair out, long and flowing! Paul does not want Christians to do anything to disrupt worship, cause strife within the church, or which would be visually identified with paganism. The same would hold true of men.

Paul's argument in verses 7-16 is predicated upon his understanding of creation and the priorities which flow from the fact that the man was created prior to the woman. Paul establishes complementary roles for male and female to explain why men should have their heads uncovered in worship (so as not to bring shame to Christ) and why women should cover theirs (so as not to bring shame to men). As he writes in 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 reason for the point that Paul made back in verse 4—that a man should not to cover his head while praying or preaching—is now given. Man is both the image and glory of God, which is a clear reference to the creation account (cf. Genesis 1:26-27).

Even though man's glory is not mentioned in the creation account, for Paul, God's creation of man as a divine image bearer is quite significant. Man exists to give glory to God, and, in fact, does give glory to God by being what he truly is, God's believing and obedient creature.<sup>8</sup> As Paul sees it, before the Fall, Adam reflected the glory of his creator, since Adam was created as divine image-bearer.<sup>9</sup>

For Paul, the female-male relationship mirrors the image of the Christ-Adam relationship in that woman reflects the glory of the man from whose side she was taken.<sup>10</sup> But we must be clear that woman is not made in the image of man but of God (Genesis 1:26-28), although Paul does say she reflects the glory "of the man" (cf. Genesis 2:18-23).<sup>11</sup> While woman is the glory of man, nevertheless she has her own unique

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<sup>7</sup> Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 510.

<sup>8</sup> Barrett, First Epistle to the Corinthians, 252.

<sup>9</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 151.

<sup>10</sup> See M. G. Kline, Images of the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 30, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Fee, The First Epistle of the Corinthians, 514.

role to play, although it is different from Adam's in particular circumstances (such as childbearing, submitting to the headship of her husband).

This is why a man must not cover his head when he prays or preaches (presumably during worship, when the people of God are especially conscious of being in the presence of God) because the head of one who reflects the glory of his creator is not to be covered. To cover his head would bring shame to his creator. Thus, in some sense, man remains an image-bearer and reflects the divine glory, even after the fall. And while he must not cover his head during worship the opposite is true for women. Since the woman reflects the glory of man (from whom she was taken), she must have her head covered appropriately (more on this in verse 15), since God (and not man) is to be glorified during worship.<sup>12</sup> It is when men and women deny (through appearances connected with hairstyle or fashion) the difference between the sexes and that they are the glory of God and man respectively, ironically, they fail to bring glory to God who created men and women as divine image-bearers with complementary roles in creation.<sup>13</sup>

In verses 8-9, Paul directs us to order of creation. "*For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*" According to the creation account, man does not come from the woman, but the woman comes from the man (a reference to the fact that Eve was created from a rib taken from Adam's side—cf. Genesis 2:21 ff). The reason why God created Eve is stated in Genesis 2:18: "*Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'*" Man is incomplete without woman and woman is incomplete without man. Paul is not discussing the equality of the sexes as we moderns keep trying to get him to do. While Paul sees both men and woman as divine image bearers and equal in terms of their standing before God, nevertheless, Paul does speak of a complementary relationship between men and the women.

In this complementary relationship, Adam has a redemptive-historical priority and thereby is given spiritual headship over the woman. Whenever Paul introduces the theme of male-female relationships he is not thinking of Eve as inferior in any sense, but complementary to Adam, who was created first, and from whom she in turn is created. This is contrary to virtually all the thinking of Paul's age which subjugated woman and denied them even the most basic of rights, as well as those in our own age, who think that unless women can do everything men can do, women are still somehow inferior (symbolically).

This leads to the most difficult verse in this section, v. 10. "*That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*" Paul is not teaching that a woman was to cover her head in worship (with a hat, scarf or veil) as a sign that she is subject to her husband, and therefore, an obedient wife. What Paul is saying is that women are not inferior to men, as was commonly taught throughout the ancient world. As Paul sees it, in the new creation, distinctions which were formerly used to create division among the people of God, no longer apply.

Even though women occupy different roles than men, the men of Corinth cannot view women as inferior as in Judaism and Greco-Roman paganism. Women were able to prophesy (v. 5) and for that they need a certain authority. By properly covering their heads with a modest hairstyle unlike that of the emancipated female celebrities of Corinth, Christian women demonstrate that they too are under the authority of God, and that they are not submitting to other "gods" nor participating in idolatrous pagan

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<sup>12</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 151.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, The First Epistle of the Corinthians, 516.

practices and immorality.<sup>14</sup> When Paul speaks of angels he is probably referring to those angels in the presence of God which were thought to veil themselves before God.

Paul's comments are revolutionary and we must not overlook the fact that Paul's complementarian view (different roles but equal status regarding the sexes) would have been rather shocking at the time. In Judaism, women played a very minor role, and were not even counted as members of a synagogue. The world of Paul's day usually regarded women as chattel, although in Corinth, there were many emancipated women associated with paganism or athletic competitions, who were establishing many of the styles creating such trouble in the churches dividing the social classes and causing identification with paganism. It is Christianity that liberates women from oppressive pagan and cultural views which deny that they too are divine image-bearers and thus under God's authority every bit as much as is a man.

This becomes clear in the following verse: *"Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman."* Paul clearly teaches that men and women have different roles (they are created for different, albeit complementary purposes), Paul's point is that under the Lordship of Christ, and by virtue of the way in which things have been created, that neither sex exists without the other.<sup>15</sup> Although man was created first, and has headship over the woman, this is not to be understood to mean that woman are inferior to men, especially when it comes to matters of worship, the context for Paul's discussion here.

According to verse 12, *"for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God."* Once again, Paul repeats his basic point, that woman came from man (in creation), and that men are born through the woman as a result of woman's creation as Adam's partner. Since everything comes from God, all created things are not only to submit to God their creator, but all things have the form and function assigned to them by God. Men and women have been created for specific purposes in redemptive-history with complementary roles. Neither can exist independently of the other, and both are equal before God. I think we risk seriously misreading Paul if we attempt to read him through the lens of contemporary egalitarianism. Paul would have seen no discrepancy whatsoever between holding to male headship in the home and in the church, while at the same time seeing women as equals before God in worship and when it comes to secular vocation.

Paul returns to the theme that much of Christian conduct is to be determined in light of what is in the best interests of others and what will keep the peace of the church, which is the body of Christ. As we writes in verse 13, *"Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered?"* Paul again appeals to the Corinthians, who claim superior wisdom, to do what is right. A woman should not pray with her head uncovered, since to do so risks public identification with pagan religions and temple prostitution, and demonstrates a degree of immodesty which brings shame to men. Since a shaved head was a sign of shame for a woman in Paul's day, Christian women should never worship in shameful ways. Christian women are not to wear hairstyles (or clothing) which is identified with idolatrous practices, pagan religions and with the rampant sexual immorality found throughout the city. The old-fashioned term for this is modesty. But modesty is not frumpishness, but is self-consciously humble and reverent behavior before God.

In verses 14-15, Paul appeals to creation. *"Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair*

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<sup>14</sup> Hays, First Corinthians, 187-188.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 153.

*it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.*” While there are a number of images in Greek history of men having long hair (the Spartans and Greek philosophers and sages),<sup>16</sup> most men wore short hair due to the nature of the work they performed and to distinguish themselves from women (and their low social standing). If a woman’s long hair is her glory, then her hair should be her covering (reflecting true modesty)—and she need not adopt the wild hairstyles of pagan culture to attract undue attention to herself and away from Christ.

Ultimately, the application for men has little to do with the length of hair, but with gender confusion. Paul’s point is that men are not to dress nor wear the hairstyles of women, because God creates us as male and female. Trans-gender and androgynous sexuality is highly problematic for Paul. Part of being a divine image-bearer is to be either male or female, and to deny our gender is to adopt a pagan conception of being human (with a confused sexuality) which brings shame to Christ.

To remind his readers that his basic point is not about the length of man’s or woman’s hair, but the peace and unity of the church, of which gender confusion and visible identification with paganism would have upset, Paul tells the Corinthians that Christian women are to be modest and demonstrate through clothing and fashion their submission to God. While men are to reflect the divine glory by wearing appropriate styles and clothing which have no connection to paganism and idolatrous practices.

As Paul states in verse 16, *“If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.”* Paul will not argue about this, and so he points to universal Christian custom.<sup>17</sup> The Corinthians need to adopt those practices accepted by all of the other churches. This verse, in effect, is a foreshadowing of a specific exhortation he will give in 1 Corinthians 14:40: *“But all things should be done decently and in order.”* Whatever Christians do, they cannot allow food, custom, or fashion to get in the way of the gospel, nor divide the body of Christ, nor disrupt Christian worship.

**W**hat should we take with us from this passage?

Paul, should he give us counsel today, would no doubt warn us about how easily celebrity antics negatively influence what is and is not proper for Christian worship and behavior. Women are to dress modestly, and demonstrate proper submission to their husbands, while men are to demonstrate whole-hearted submission to Christ. Christians are forbidden from adopting styles for hair and clothing which overtly reflect pagan or idolatrous practices. The reason is simple. Men and women are divine image-bearers who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. How can we worship Christ, claim to trust his gospel, and then come to the heavenly table spread before us, while identifying with pagans, idolaters, the occult, or with immoral sexual behavior through our clothing and fashion. We cannot.

Paul is not some legalistic spoil-sport. He is reminding us that while worship is a blessing and a privilege from God, there are covenantal responsibilities (blessings and curses) which come with entering into the presence of God to hear his word and receive his sacraments. Christians must be submissive to Christ, modest in their dress, and concerned for the needs of our neighbors. For we all are made in the image and glory of God, and we must do everything in our power to keep the peace in Christ’s church.

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<sup>16</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 153.

<sup>17</sup> Morris, 1 Corinthians, 154.