LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 11 :1-16

Women and head coverings

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hey there, we're back with more of our study in 1 Corinthians, and we're going to be tackling the first 16 verses of chapter 11 this time. So let's go ahead and read these chapters. And by the way, this section of 1 Corinthians can be challenging, because it's going to deal with head coverings for women. And I know this is an issue, interestingly enough, just this last Sunday, Sue and I sat in church, and in the row in front of us was a woman with a head covering. It wasn't a hat.

She was wearing a partial scarf over her head. And I didn't get a chance to talk to her, of course. I would have liked to have done so, but you see it from time to time. And so we're going to talk about it in this study. Let's read the verses.

Now you'll remember, we kind of took verse 1 as a completion of last time's study, but we're going to go ahead and read it again. It says, Now I commend you because you remember me and 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 the wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman. For as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

Judge for yourselves if it is proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered. Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, 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. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

Let's pray. Father God, open our hearts, give us understanding, help us, Father God, to walk in wisdom. We pray for your direction and to hear your voice, and we ask it in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Amen. Now, this arguably can be a contentious passage because of the issue that Paul raises here about women keeping their head covered.

And so we need to look at this and we need to say, well, is this legit? I mean, should women be covering their head? I mean, what happens if a woman prays with her head uncovered? What happens if a man prays with his head covered? Is it truly shameful for a woman to have short hair?

Is it shameful for a man to have long hair? Well, when we look at this passage and really look at it, we begin to see that there are some keys to understanding what the Apostle Paul is saying here. And he begins in verse two by commending the believers in Corinth because they are keeping or remembering the traditions that he had delivered to them and passed along to them. Now, you need to really take a moment here to think about that because he's talking here about traditions, all right? That's an important word, even though the New Living Translation uses the word teachings, far and away, the translation, the best translation is traditions.

It literally means in the Greek a handing down, something that has been handed down. So these are traditions. These are things that culturally were extremely important to the Apostle Paul, and yet he calls them traditions, and that is very important. Now, that again is a key to helping us to decide how we're going to look at this passage. But there's something else in this chapter, or rather this section, since we haven't covered the whole chapter, that gives us some further insights.

Paul is saying a lot of really good and true things about the relationship of man and woman, and many of the things that Paul says, and we'll go over these things, are very good. But I want you to take note of verse 10, because again, this verse is critical, just like verse 2 that says, these are traditions that are passed down, not doctrines, traditions. And then in verse 10, he says, that is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head. Now, I want to ask you a question. Obviously, in Paul's culture, a head covering on a woman was a symbol of authority.

Brazen women, harlots, prostitutes, would go around with their head uncovered, and that was considered shameful in Paul's society, in his culture. A woman who was married and sought to honor her husband, would cover her head in public, to show that she had a, an authority over her, meaning specifically her husband. The question that you and I have to address is, is that still true? When you see a woman wearing a hat, or if you see a woman even with some kind of a head covering, scarf or, or something like that, do you look at that woman and do you say, that's a woman under authority? Honestly, it just doesn't mean that in our society today.

A woman wears a hat, usually for fashion, unless she's part of a religious persuasion that has determined to take this passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, as applicable for today. But you know, those who are not part of that religious persuasion, they see those people, you know, when Sue and I lived for 35 years, in the area of Ontario, Oregon, and the Mennonite women were a common view. Now, not all Mennonite women or Mennonites, as a group, believe in head coverings, but the ones that lived around Ontario did. And we saw them every day in the grocery store, at the gas station, you know, you name it. They were very prolific in that particular area.

But not once did I ever see one of those women who either had a white or a black cap on their head. Never once did I say, there's a woman under authority. What I said to myself was, there's a woman who's part of a religious persuasion that believes that it is improper for a woman to go out in public with her head uncovered. That's what I thought. And if I saw a woman who wasn't part of that religious persuasion wearing a hat, same thing.

I wouldn't think to myself, now there is a woman who is under authority. Never once. I would think that she was wearing a hat for fashionable reasons. So in our culture today, unlike Paul's, it no longer means that a woman, let me put it this way, it is no longer a sign of authority. And that's what Paul says here in verse 10.

That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head. In Paul's day, that's exactly what it was, and it was irreverent and disrespectful to a woman's husband for her to go out in public with her head uncovered. It is not today. It doesn't mean that at all. And that is how we know, again, Paul starts this whole section by talking about keeping traditions, and then he refers to it as a symbol of authority.

And we know by these clues in these first verses of chapter 11 that Paul is talking about a cultural thing. Now, as we go back and look at these verses, he says in verse 3, Now, this is absolutely true. This is not a cultural statement. This is a biblical statement for all time. This is the order that God created, all right?

There is a headship role that husbands have been given over their wives, okay? And this is an important thing for all women, and men, to understand, right? And what Paul goes on to do is address these issues using the cultural norms of his day. And that's why he goes on in verse 4 to say, Again, if a man had his hat on, or the shawl, or whatever a man wore over his head, that was culturally considered disrespectful. It is not today.

If a man is wearing a baseball cap today, and he's in church, and he prays out loud, it doesn't mean that. Now, there are some people who still believe that it is disrespectful for a man to wear a hat indoors. But that is not a belief based on religious kinds of reasons. It's just considered disrespectful. It's considered disrespectful if a man keeps his hat on during the Star Spangled Banner or the Pledge of Allegiance.

But again, that's not religious reasons. But Paul is talking about religious reasons, okay? And that's why he goes on in verse 5 to say, Well, again, no one would think that today. If a woman stands up and prays, and she's not wearing a head covering, no one is going to think that her actions are disrespectful toward her husband, because a head covering is no longer considered a symbol of authority. So let's talk about this.

What is a symbol of authority? What does communicate that a woman recognizes that her husband—not just a woman, but a married woman, a wife—what is it today in our culture that communicates respect? Well, there's other things, aren't there? It's how she speaks, how she dresses. Is she dressing provocatively?

If so, that is considered disrespectful toward her husband. If she flirts with other men openly, that would be considered very disrespectful of her husband. If she speaks critically of her husband or disrespectfully of her husband, that would be obviously an act on her part, showing disrespect, dishonor. There are a lot of things today that mean the same thing as a head covering meant in Paul's day, and this is what women need to think through. How do you show honor to your husband, ladies, those of you who are married?

How do you communicate that you are honoring your husband in your speech, in your dress, in your everyday actions? That's what really is the takeaway. It's the principle here that we should be focusing on. The principle is respect and honor. Because of the position that God has given to the husband, which as Paul tells us here, is to be in a position of headship over his wife.

Verse 6 says, 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, and again, it's not true today. It's not disgraceful

for a woman to have short hair. It might look a little odd sometimes if a woman's going around bald, but it's not considered disgraceful. It's not dishonoring to her husband.

Then he says, Let her cover her head. And then he repeats, A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God. But woman is the glory of man. And so he's giving the reasons why in his culture these things were practiced as traditions and so forth. He goes on in verse 8, For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.

Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That's true. That's true. The things he's saying are true. And that is why he says, verse 10, again, a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head and so forth.

And that's what it was in Paul's day, in his culture. And there are still cultures today, I guess I should mention that, where a woman covering her head is still considered a symbol of authority. It is not in the United States of America. It is not in Canada. It is not in the UK.

You know, there are people who live in all of those countries who believe in head coverings. But by and large, culturally, it is not a universal belief. Nevertheless, he says in verse 11, in the Lord, in the Lord, and that's the qualification, he says, woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman. So he's saying that these things, these traditions that he's been talking about are geared toward this age, this time frame that we are living in. For as a woman was made for man, so now man is born of woman.

So the first woman came from a man, but ever since that time, all men have come from woman. And he says, and all things are from God. So he goes on to challenge them to judge for themselves whether or not it is proper for these things to be done in the way that he is suggesting. And then he finishes this section by telling the believers in Corinth that this was something that he shared with all the churches. And if they were going to be contentious about it, then he wanted them to know that there was no other practice among the churches, because in those cultures, these were very important things.

And Paul did not want the believers in Corinth to shirk this kind of tradition so as to turn people off and drive people away from the Christian message of Jesus Christ and him crucified. So this is an important section of Scripture. I wanted to take it by itself so that you understood why today we don't teach in our culture, in our time, that a woman must keep her head covered if she's married and if she's praying or prophesying and that sort of thing. So I hope your discussion is encouraging. Every so often I finish a study and I end up thinking of some things that I wanted to add, and this is one of those times.

On the issue of head coverings for women, you know, I made the point that as the Apostle Paul talks of head coverings in the Bible as a symbol of authority, the point was made that for the vast majority of people, that is no longer the case. However, I wanted to also say that there are pockets of people in this country and also around the world who take the teaching concerning head coverings, and they have adopted the idea that a woman's head covering is in fact a sign of authority. And I just wanted to make the point that for that reason, I would never say to a woman who was wearing a head covering that she shouldn't do it or she should take it off or that her faith is weak or anything like that. If a woman has been brought up to believe that by wearing that head covering she is showing a sign of honor, respect, to the authority that is over her in her life, I would not try to change that. That's something that then she should do if she truly believes it.

The other point that I want to make is that God looks at the heart, and this is really kind of the overall thought that I wanted to bring as a final issue in this study. We learn in the Sermon on the Mount that rather than looking at external things, God looks at the heart. It's in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus tells us that if we hate someone, it is the same as committing murder. If we lust after someone, it is the same as committing adultery. And, of course, those passages, troubling though they may be, remind us that God looks at the heart, and that ought to be the overarching idea concerning head coverings.

Here's a question that I will put to you, and this would be good for you to discuss. If a woman wears a head covering, and she believes it to be a symbol of authority, and yet she in her heart disrespects her husband, dishonors him, and does not recognize his authority from the Lord, what has that head covering done for that woman? That's an important question, because lest we become so fixated on external things, we have to always remember that God looks at the heart. Those were the couple of thoughts that I wanted to add to this study. Let's go ahead and close our time in prayer.

Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for the principle of respect and honor among marriage partners, particularly as it relates to a woman expressing honor and respect toward her husband. And I pray, my Father, that you would help these principles to be made clear as to how we may walk them out in everyday life. We look to you, Lord. Our heart is turned to you through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.