

Church Purity in a Polluted Culture - Part 16

1 Corinthians 11:2-16



"Head Coverings and Worship"

The local church was perhaps the only fellowship in the Roman Empire that welcomed all people, regardless of nationality, social status, sex, or economic position. Some of the women flaunted their "freedom" in the public meetings by refusing to cover their heads when they participated.

Timeless Principles Verses Cultural Application

So how do we interpret such passages that seem to be obscure to us today?

1. Look for the timeless principle or principles that God the Holy Spirit meant for us to learn in the passage.
2. Seek to understand how this timeless principle was applied in the culture that it was written, and whether that application means the same today.

Commendation (11:2)

"I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you." (1 Cor 11:2 NIV)

- Though the Corinthians were not following the traditions regarding women, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts, the situation in the church is not hopeless.

The Principle Stated (11:3)

"Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor 11:3 NIV)

- The Greek word for head (*kephale*), generally means the *ruling or sovereign part of the body*, with the preponderance of meaning in ancient Greek literature referring metaphorically to authority.
- **Timeless principle:** God has created an order, a hierarchy that He Himself follows. *The man is under the authority of Christ, the wife is under the authority of her husband, and Christ is under the authority of the Father.*

The Principle Applied (11:4-6)

"Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered

dishonors her head..." (1 Cor 11:4-6 NIV)

- It was a disgrace for a man to wear a head covering in that culture because that was what women wore, and was an act of worship of their pagan gods.
- It was a disgrace for a woman not to wear a head covering in that culture because that was what a man did and it connoted sexual availability, or simply that she was unmarried.

The Principle Defended (11:7-10)

"A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man..." (1 Cor 11:6-10 NIV)

- The man, in light of the Corinthian culture, was not to have his head covered because he was the image and glory of God, and doing so would mar that image.
- A woman's (a wife's) glory and image was derived from and complementary to that of the man (her husband).
 - For a woman to exercise her freedom to participate in the church without the head covering, the sign of her authority (*exousia*, a liberating term) would be to bring the wisdom of God into disrepute by the heavenly host.

The Principle Harmonized (11:11-12)

"In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman..." (1 Cor 11:11-12 NIV)

- Men and women together in mutual interdependence, complementing each other, bring glory to God (cf. 10:31). Neither should be independent nor think themselves superior to the other.

The Principle Responded To (11:13-16)

"Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, ..." (1 Cor 11:13-16 NIV)

- The bottom line is can you tell the difference between men and women in worship?

Conclusion

1. Are we willing to submit ourselves to our designated headship that was designed by God?
2. Are we willing to maintain, promote, and proclaim gender distinction as God's design for mankind and His glory?