

# Disorders in the Worship Life of the Church

## I Corinthians 11:1-14:40

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### “Woman in the Church” (11:1-16)

Disorders had found their place in the family life of the Corinthians. The Corinthians had carried too far their newly found freedom in the Gospel. The situation that developed was similar to all of the ramifications of the “anything goes” philosophy of morals prevailing in our day. “Christian freedom” had become a license for many evils. The Corinthians disregarded the warnings of the example of Israel. They jeered the examples of the apostles. That is why Paul must remind the Corinthians:

1) *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

Those who in faith follow the example of Christ have a right to call on others to imitate them. Their faith-centered lives can serve as sources of inspiration to others. Paul fit into this category because his mind was in Christ Jesus.

2) *I praise you because you remember me in all respects and adhere to the teachings just as I delivered them to you.*

In general, the Corinthian Christians (except for some contentious trouble-makers—v. 16) agreed with that which Paul was about to state. Therefore, Paul begins with a note of praise, commending them for their faithfulness in seeking to live according to the Word which he had previously delivered to them and all Christians through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:12).

Paul’s *παραδοσις* “traditions or teachings” are not of the ordinary, run-of-the-mill vintage. Since Paul’s “teachings” come from Jesus Christ, the church dare never discard them as being “irrelevant” or “too cramped” for the enlightened modern mind and style of life. Indeed, today’s philosophy and style of life may not be patterned after the teachings of Paul. But it does not necessarily follow that these teachings must therefore *disappear from the scene*. Social pressures and newly-discovered ancient habits dare not allow the Christian to bend God’s Word to suit his particular fancy. The child of God will disassociate himself from the everyone’s doing it philosophy of peer and social pressure and ask: “Am I *adhering* to the teachings of Jesus Christ delivered to me by Paul and the other apostles?”

3) *But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

As Paul prepares his readers for what follows he makes it clear that Christ, in his saving work as God’s obedient Son was responsible to the will of his Sender, that man is responsible to Christ, and that woman is responsible to man. Each case has a special relationship. In each case we see a head and a subject to that head who acknowledges that head. Paul is establishing the basic tenet of the Scriptures that woman’s place in the church dare not involve a denial of her

place as God's creature, as woman. In direct contrast to the basic dogma of the Women's Liberation Movement, Paul states that woman has her true place in an order of subordination (God—Christ—Man—Woman). Those who disagree must either join the ranks of Bultmann's demythologizers or step in rhythm with the paraders drumming in protests: "Paul is a male chauvinist pig." Scripture allows neither of these as avenues of escape from the clear revelation of God. *This is the way it is!*

That even Christ, the Son of God, is included in this order makes it quite clear that this "subordination" is *not* something that is *servile* or *degrading*. "Christ is 'subordinated' as the freely-obeying, loving Son who seeks the glory of His Father and finds the goal and climax of his ministry in laying all that his ministry has won at his Father's feet (15:28 & Philippians 2:11)" (Franzmann, *Concordia Bible with Notes* and *The Word of the Lord Grows*, CPH).

Therefore, the argument that woman should be "liberated" from man or "equated" with man because "man is independent" is groundless from the Scriptural viewpoint. Man is *not independent*. His *head* is Christ. To *Christ* he is subject. Woman has another head in addition to Christ, namely, man. This is the arrangement as God delivered it. That man dare not misuse his headship is indicated later in this section and elsewhere in the Bible. There is no room for male *pride* here. Man's example must always be Christ!

4,5) *Every man having (something) down from his head while praying or speaking God's Word brings shame on his head. And every woman while praying or speaking God's Word with an uncovered head brings shame on her head. For she is one and the same with the woman who has her head closely shaven.*

Examine the historical context for a better understanding. In Greek cities of Paul's day the uncovered head of a man was a sign that he was not a slave. But for a woman to appear in public unveiled was the mark of a woman of loose morals. Christianity had brought a new day of respect for woman. The danger was, and perhaps it had already occurred, that some of the women had misused their freedom, flouted the customs of the time, and made public spectacles of themselves. By unveiling themselves they were in fact indicating to some that they were denying their womanhood and equating themselves with men. This practice Paul opposed. It was not in line with the order of creation and the order of subordination expressed above. It created an undesirable image for Christianity, an image that could slow down the progress of the Word.

"It is probable that Jesus and His disciples had their heads covered according to the customs of the Israelites; whence the rule is not universal" (Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testaments* 1759). Paul is not laying down an absolute rule that is to be followed by Christians of all times in regard to covering the head or leaving it uncovered during prayer or worship. He is not telling the ladies of our day: "You must wear veils or hats." Women's wearing of hats has gone out of style, at least in localities that I have observed. They had lost their significance as "coverings." In my years of life I cannot ever recall seeing any lady purchase or wear a hat for the definite purpose of showing her position in regard to man and God! This, however, is not to preclude the possibility that some did—or do. But since a covered head is no longer a mark of man's headship over the woman the woman would no longer be asked to come to worship with a covered heady a veil or hat. *In no way does this change the divine order of man's headship over woman.*

In Paul's day, however, it was different. By covering his head a Corinthian man was denying his position. And by unveiling herself a woman was rejecting her God-given position,

attempting to appear as a man, “arrogating to herself an honor that was not hers” (Lenski), and putting herself on par with the woman who cut off her hair, i.e., *going all out to deny her womanhood*. By so doing both man and woman would be bringing shame on themselves. Therefore, the Greek custom, since it was a meaningful picture or representation of God’s order, was good and proper. It was to be preserved by the Corinthians.

It should also be pointed out briefly that women, too, were granted the gift of prophecy, the ability to present and apply the Word of God in teaching others. Ample opportunities for such service would present themselves. The *public gatherings* of the congregations where men would be present, however, were *not* among these opportunities. Paul speaks clearly on that subject in 14:34. What Paul is saying is this: “Wherever and whenever it is proper and right for a man or for a woman to pray or to prophesy, the difference of sex should be marked. Each remains what he or she is apart from the other” (Lenski).

*6) For if a woman does not cover herself let her also have her hair cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or shaven, then let her cover her head.*

It follows that a woman who insisted on going unveiled might just as well go the entire route and cut off her hair, placing herself on a level with those whose calling was to the world. Yet it was self-understood that this was not the natural thing to do. Paul begins to assert here that it is the intent of God the Creator that the woman should wear long hair as nature gives it to her.

A beautiful head of hair is a natural crown for a woman and makes her attractive to man for whom she was made. To discard it would be shameful to her. It would be laying aside the badge and token of her God-given womanliness. Best, therefore, to keep it unshaven and covered! No questions in regard to shame and honor!

*7, 8) A man ought not cover his head since he is the image and glory of god. But the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man.*

The position of the sexes is based on Scripture’s account of creation. God made man in His own image and in His glory (Genesis 1:26), bearing the visible splendor of God, and ruling by virtue of the power and wisdom granted him by God. Man’s actions should therefore redound to the glory of God, for he is the image that reflects to a degree God’s glorious attributes.

Since man’s head is the most important and expressive part of his body, it should be hid by means of a veil. If man’s covering of his head appears to be a denial of God’s image and glory, it would not be proper to cover the head.

It is different in the case of the woman. The dignity of her position is from man. According to her creation (Genesis 2:21-23), she must be called “man’s glory.” She was made for man as a helper suitable for him. The reverse cannot be said. Paul is only repeating the statement of Adam. “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Adam was formed and created alone and directly by God. Eve was derived from Adam, being made out of one of his ribs. Man’s glory in the world is shown in woman’s submission to him.

*9) For man was not created for woman’s sake, but woman (was created) for man’s sake.*

God *could* have created both in one singular act. But he *did not*. *Later* He created Eve to serve as Adam’s companion and helper (Genesis 2:18,20,21). That makes a difference. The

facts and truths of creation cannot be ignored. Where they are ignored both men and women *embarrass* themselves and *dishonor* God. “It is a subversion of the order of creation if a woman regards her husband as the servant of her pleasure” (Kretzmann). She was created for man’s sake and for his glory. So let her adorn herself with what is fitting for her professing godliness—let her abound in good works (I Timothy 2:9,10). Woman is man’s helper, his supplement to supply that which is needed in his own being. Since Eve womankind has been and is still violently in rebellion against this position of hers, as witnessed by her many attempts to improve on God’s order of creation. These verses together with I Timothy 2:9-15 are most helpful in counseling women and marriages with problems.

10) *Therefore, the woman ought to have an authority (veil) on her head, on account of the angels.*

Paul uses the term *οφείλει*—“ought.” He is not instigating an unalterable law that shall be in effect for all ages, for external customs change from time to time. Only the facts of *position according to creation* are unalterable. And “established customs that beautifully symbolize these facts ‘ought’ not to be changed arbitrarily but intelligently retained until, without prejudice to these facts, in due course, customs change of their own accord” (Lenski).

The covering over a woman’s head was a symbol of man’s power and authority over her. And since God’s good angels were present at the gatherings of God’s people, they were not to be offended by improper actions, such as *displaying disregard* for one’s God intended station in life. “Both the outward dress of the body showing humility in the heart, ...and the external order delight the angels themselves, who also contemplate the order, and look at the conduct of men in the assembly of the Church” (Bengel, *Gnomon*). That the angels do take note of externals is also indicated in Corinthians 4:9—“For we are made a spectacle unto the world, *and to angels*, and to men.” Therefore, actions that are not becoming women (in this case) and men (women and men in all cases) in the Church of God ought to be avoided. Let the angels *delight* in those whom they serve?

11) *Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not without (independent of) man nor (is) man without (independent of) woman.*

Here Paul warns against drawing false conclusions concerning man’s headship. Those who deride Paul’s attitude toward women conveniently disregard verses 11 and 12. Paul makes it clear that he does not *belittle* the state of womanhood. Spiritually, “in the Lord,” there *is* equality. Man’s being “in the Lord” does not *exclude* woman from the same blessing. “There is neither male nor female. For ye are all *one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28).

Men and women have their place as Christians *εν κυριω*. They “live their lives together, complementing each other—Paul leaves no room for male pride when he assigns headship to man” (Franzmann, *Concordia Bible with Notes*).

Peter takes up this same topic of how man should *evict pride* and assume the responsibilities of his headship: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as *being heirs together* of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (I Peter 3:7). In spite of her position in regard to man, God makes it quite clear how high a place he assigns to woman. Check the entire Bible! The Scriptures do not allow any “woman’s movement” to drag Paul and Peter and the New

Testament into the mud in their attempts to drop the veil of their womanhood and deny their womanliness.

12) *For just as the woman is (originates) from the man, just so man also is (born) through the woman. And all things originate from God,*

Since at creation woman was taken from man, God used man as the initial cause of being to the woman. On the other hand, woman, according to the order and method that God placed in nature, is the instrumental cause of being to the man, every man since Adam. The womb is her cherished possession. But neither sex has a right to boast about his or her *superiority*, for God is the Creator and the *source* of *all* things. To God both man and woman must give allegiance.

They belong together in the home, in church and in all things and places in which life *εν κυριω* is fostered.

13-15) *Judge for yourselves. Is it proper for a woman with uncovered head to pray to God? Doesn't nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but if a woman wears long hair it is to her glory? For her hair is given to her as a covering.*

One final point to be considered. Paul refers to the good sense of the Corinthians themselves. They are to decide for themselves what is sensible and proper. Paul is certain that when the Corinthians consider the custom they have they will certainly not strive to change it, for it is in keeping with God's order. Paul also refers to creation, to nature. Customs that symbolize and reflect the facts of creation are proper.

Even nature, as God has formed it, must take precedence over sporty or transient fashion and carelessness in one's ways. And something in nature tells us that it is a disgrace for a man to wear *long hair*. That is Paul's statement.

The question that is bothersome for us is: "What is *long hair*?" *Scripture does not answer that question*. In defense of long hair no one can appeal to the examples of those men in the Bible who wore uncut hair because they had taken the vow of the Nazarites. Those were special cases in God's eyes and in the eyes of their beholders. Biblical and historical researchers, however, have unearthed sufficient evidence to indicate that the typical length of men's hair in early Christian times (Paul's day) was *longer* than the more recent "shorn" look to which we have become accustomed, e.g., the essayist's hair-length(!). It is also noteworthy that documented pictures of Martin Luther show that according to our standards he had long hair. Yet Martin Luther was manly, man-like, and carried out a man-sized task. And from our knowledge of his love for God's pure Word we would expect that he would live his life in conformity to the Scriptures, I Corinthians 11:14 not excluded. No, we cannot accuse him of defying this portion of the Bible.

What, then has happened since Luther's day to bring about our present problem? Although it may be coming dangerously close to Adam's "The woman which *thou* gavest to me..." cannot at least *part* of today's "problem" be attributed to the woman? For many years she has ruled over styles and fashion (at least until the 1970's). Part of her fashion was to keep cutting her hair shorter and shorter, thereby *forcing* man to continue to *sheer* his hair to maintain a difference. It has been humorously stated that by the end of the 1960's, since man could no longer cut his hair shorter, man decided to grow his hair longer in the hopes that thereby he could

tell woman something! At any rate, at this stage of the game we are seeing generally longer hairstyles on the part of the women. To her glory! Long live the difference!

But back to the question of “What is *long* hair?” The conclusion of this essayist is that “long” is *anything equal with or longer than* that worn by ladies. It might be easier to take this passage out of the scriptures and use it legalistically. Rather, let us keep it in its *context* and always remember what Paul is trying to say in this section. Isn’t he always saying that the divine order of creation is always in force and should be in evidence? Therefore, the interpretation of this essayist would be worded like this: “*Long hair that makes man look like a woman is not in accord with the true nature of man and brings disgrace to him.*”

It is a disgraceful thing for a man to walk down the street and make others play a guessing game and wonder whether he is a man or a woman. That is the type of long hair that is a shame to man. Another example would be to complain about the “women drivers” ahead of you, only to pass them and realize to your dismay that they are not women after all. Paul does not say: “You have to have a crewcut to be and look like a man.” There certainly are men with well-groomed and cared-for hair that are not a disgrace to their manhood. On the other hand, there has also been a tumult of men with filthy, shoulder-length hair that exhibits a certain kind of sickness (sin) among men who neither understand nor appreciate the Word and their God-given station in God’s world, and who follow a culture dependent on drugs rather than God. Nature itself teaches us: “Something’s not right here.”

However, long hair gives women a special kind of distinction. It is her glory. Man, for whom she was made, will appreciate it. Yet her hair is given to her as a natural covering to remind her of her position over against the husband and in the gatherings of God’s people in the presence of God. If long hair is an honor for the woman, then any proper custom which accentuates this honor should be prized accordingly.

16) *But if anyone deems it necessary to be contentious, we do not have any such custom, nor do the congregations of God.*

Paul expects some contentiousness over this matter. This results when there sets in the disease of leaving the Cross behind in the pursuit of the mirage of wisdom and power. Paul appeals to the example of the apostles and the apostolic churches.

The *Augsburg Confession* writes in the true spirit of this section of the Bible:

It is proper that the churches should keep such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquility, so far that one do not offend another, that all things be done in the churches in order, and without confusion, I Cor. 14:40; compare Phil. 2:14; but so that consciences be not burdened to think that they are necessary to salvation, or to judge that they sin when they break them without offense to others; as no one will say that a woman sins who goes out in public with her head uncovered, provided only that no offense (that which proves a stumbling block to someone else’s faith) be given” (Article XXVIII, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 91).

The summary of this section in the *Biblical Expositor* is also helpful:

There is indeed a fundamental order in the constitution of the world which the Christian must recognize and respect. Man was created first; not woman. Woman was created for man, not man for woman. Man by creation is the image and glory of God, while woman is the glory of man ....

The important point in this passage is that the orderliness which belongs to the very structure and fabric of creation is the proper basis of all other orderliness in this world, whether in public worship or in the life of the family or of the nation.