

Christians Gone Wild!  
**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, week 25**  
Under Authority Like Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:2–16)  
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*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 Corinthians 11:3

Some of the most important and heated theological debates in all of Christianity today are about issues of gender, such as feminism, homosexuality, female pastors, women in combat, and gender roles in marriage. The three positions on gender roles are egalitarian feminism, hierarchical chauvinism, and complementarian chivalry, which is the position of Mars Hill. One of the most hotly debated texts on these matters is 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Because Paul references Genesis, we will begin there.

**Creation — Gender principles from Genesis 1–2**

- God made the man first as the head of the human race
- Men & women were both made by God
- Men & women are equal because they are both God’s image-bearers
- Men & women have different roles; the woman is the man’s helper and was named by him as an act of his leadership
- The difference in gender roles affects all of life, including home and church
- God declared gender distinction “very good”

**Sin — Gender conflict from Genesis 3**

- The gender roles were reversed
- The woman led her family into sin
- The man sat by passively and permitted sin
- Gender conflict and mistrust has ensued ever since, with wives struggling to rule over their husbands and men often responding abusively through passivity or anger
- As the head, God holds men responsible to lead their families in love like Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:2–16; Ephesians 5:21–33; Colossians 3:18)

**Redemption**

<sup>2</sup>*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.*

The Corinthian church sat amidst a non-Christian city that was greatly confused on gender issues and rife with chauvinism, feminism, and homosexuality. Speaking through Paul, God provides seven principles that are applicable to similar problems in our own day.

**1. The Trinity is our model for relationships.**

<sup>3</sup>*Now I want you to realize that the head of every man [or husband] is Christ, and the head of the woman [or wife] is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

This verse is one of the key texts for what theologians call *functional subordinationism*. It is the biblical teaching that our Trinitarian God exists as a community of equals with different roles and deference for authority within the Trinity. Other Scriptures also illustrate this principle, showing how Jesus Christ recognized the authority of God the Father while remaining equal to God the Father (John 3:17; 4:34; 6:38; 8:29; 12:49). Because men and women are made in God's image, women are called to respect the authority of their husbands in the same way that Jesus respected the authority of God the Father.

The meaning of the word "head" in this verse has been hotly debated. But its most common use in Scripture is in reference to a position of authority. Jesus is called the head of the church because He has authority over the church (Colossians 1:18; 2:10, 19; Ephesians 1:10, 22; 4:15; 5:23).

## **2. Men and women are to respect godly authority.**

<sup>4</sup>*Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.*

<sup>5</sup>*And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. <sup>6</sup>If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.*

In the church, only godly people who rightly respect authority should speak or lead in any way. For men, this means they respect God's authority and are responsible heads of their own homes. For women, this means that, though they cannot be a pastor (1 Timothy 2:9–3:7) or preach (1 Timothy 5:7), they can speak/prophesy and serve in public leadership providing they respect the authority over them (e.g., father, husband, male church elders). At Mars Hill women will read Scripture, speak but not preach, lead congregational singing, give testimony, and serve communion in our corporate worship gatherings. Some have argued that because the women could prophesy they were teaching as preachers, but the two are distinguished functions (Romans 12:6–7; 1 Corinthians 12:28–29; Ephesians 4:11) and prophesying is subordinate to church leaders (1 Corinthians 14:29).

Apparently women were wanting to be spiritual leaders in the church but did not respect authority and were therefore simply feminists. Paul says that such women are acting shamefully like the whores and lesbians of that day (e.g., Numbers 5:18 speaks of a woman with her hair down as an adulteress; Deuteronomy 21:12–13 relates a woman with a shaved head to humiliation and mourning). In our day, the equivalent would be a married woman who takes off her wedding ring, dresses like a stripper, and expects to stand in front of the church and be respected as a spiritual leader. Such women dishonor their "head," which includes their own reputation, their husband or father, and their God.

## **3. Men should embrace their duties as men.**

<sup>7</sup>*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. <sup>8</sup>For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup>neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*

Paul rebukes cowardly and effeminate men who are unwilling to stand up to the duty of living as the glory of God and lovingly lead their wife and family.

Today, this would include men who sleep with women they don't have the courage to marry, husbands who won't take spiritual responsibility for their family, and men who fail to provide for their family.

#### **4. Angels are our examples for authority.**

<sup>10</sup>*For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.*

This verse is likely an ancient colloquialism that is unclear to us. But, because the angels were the first to either obey or rebel against God's authority, Paul may be saying that if we disregard God's means of authority over us we are following the example of angels who became demons.

#### **5. Men and women need each other.**

<sup>11</sup>*In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.* <sup>12</sup>*For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.*

Unlike androgyny and homosexuality, God says that we were made male and female to complement one another.

#### **6. Men should be masculine and women should be feminine.**

<sup>13</sup>*Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?* <sup>14</sup>*Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him,* <sup>15</sup>*but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.*

In that day, men did not have long hair unless they were effeminate and/or gay. Contrary to popular paintings, Jesus did not have long hair but short hair. The principle here is that men should look like men and women should look like women. In our day, this would forbid men from going drag and women from going butch. In Paul's day, godly women would either pile up their hair on their heads or wear a head covering to show that they respected authority.

#### **7. Gender roles are not subject to cultural preference.**

<sup>16</sup>*If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.*

In conclusion, to properly apply the teachings of these Scriptures to our own day, we must recognize that there are universal biblical principles that get worked out with particular applications. For example, in that day women would show holy femininity by having long hair and/or head coverings; in our day godly women have culturally equivalent ways of showing their character, such as dressing modestly.

**Verses for next week:** 1 Corinthians 12:1–31