

## 1 Corinthians 11:2–16; 14:29–36 and Husbands & Wives in the Church

### Prayer

### Introductory Questions

- How would you summarize the Bible’s teaching on gender roles *in marriage*?
- In what ways should we apply that teaching *when the church gathers*?

### Introduction

First Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:29–36 are two passages that clarify how men and women should relate to one another when the church gathers—with a significant emphasis on husbands and wives in that setting.

In the lesson called “Ephesians 5:15–33 and Marriage,” we stated that men and women have *many commonalities* (such as bearing God’s image), and God outlines *different roles* for them in marriage. *Complementarianism* is the teaching that males and females *complement* one another in marriage and the church. With respect to marriage, (1) God calls men to lead their wives and wives to submit to their husbands, (2) males are equal to females in personhood and value, and they should treat one another with love and respect, and (3) husbands should be the ultimate servant-sacrificers in their marriages; they are to love their wives by laying their lives down for them, as Christ did for the church (Eph. 5:15–33; 1 Pet. 3:1–7). Married couples express these dynamics both *privately* and *publicly*. This lesson focuses on *the public dynamic*.

Two truths about life in the first century help us understand the passages we will study.

1. “During pagan religious ceremonies, priests—Roman men with a high social status—pulled their togas over their heads when they led by praying or sacrificing. If socially elite men in the Corinthian church covered their head when they prayed or prophesied during corporate worship, they would be highlighting their social status instead of highlighting Christ,” who is the church’s metaphorical “head” (authority) (Naselli, *ESV BEC, Vol. 10: Romans–Galatians*, 312). If a man *covered* his physical head in this way, it dishonored his metaphorical head (Christ).
2. “A woman’s covering her head socially indicated that she was married. A thin headscarf or head covering symbolized a married woman’s modesty and chastity [refraining from extramarital sex] and submission to her husband,” who is her metaphorical “head” (authority) (*ibid.*, 313). If a woman *uncovered* her physical head, it dishonored her metaphorical head (her husband).

In this lesson, we focus on two passages of Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16; 14:29–36. We conclude by summarizing how husbands and wives relate in the church.

## 1. Authority & Submission in Marriage and Interdependence

We have included headings below to track Paul's argument (ibid., 313–318).

<p><b>Introduction:</b> “2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold fast to the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” (1 Cor. 11:2)</p>	<p>Paul commends the Corinthians' obedience to the traditions he taught them.</p>
<p><b>Reason 1:</b> “3 But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman [his wife], and God is the head of Christ.” (1 Cor. 11:3; cf. “wife” vv. 5, 6, 10, 13)</p>	<p>The husband-wife relationship should reflect the authority structure between the Father and the Son.</p>
<p><b>Main Argument:</b> “4 Every man who prays or prophesies with something on his [physical] head dishonors his head [Christ]. 5 Every woman [wife] who prays or prophesies with her [physical] head uncovered dishonors her head [her husband].” (1 Cor. 11:4–5a)</p>	<p>A man who prays or prophesies with his head <i>covered</i> dishonors his head, Christ. A wife who prays or prophesies with her head <i>uncovered</i> dishonors her head, her husband.</p>
<p><b>Reason 2:</b> “Since that is one and the same as having her head shaved. 6 For if a woman [wife] doesn't cover her head, she should have her hair cut off. But if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her head be covered.” (1 Cor. 11:5b–6)</p>	<p>It was culturally disgraceful for a woman to pray with her head uncovered.</p>
<p><b>Reason 3:</b> “7 A man should not cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God. So too, woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman came from man. 9 Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man.” (1 Cor. 11:7–9)</p>	<p>While both men and women are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26–28), men and women must be attentive to how their behavior honors or dishonors their respective “heads.”</p>
<p><b>Reason 4:</b> “10 This is why a woman [wife] should have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels [or messengers].” (1 Cor. 11:10)</p>	<p>The angels (or messengers) of the churches are watching, so we must behave properly.</p>
<p><b>A Statement about the Interdependence of Men and Women:</b> “11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, and man is not independent of woman. 12 For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman, and all things come from God.” (1 Cor. 11:11–12)</p>	<p>Though men and women are different, they are nonetheless interdependent: neither would exist without the other. God is the Creator and source of all things.</p>
<p><b>Reason 5:</b> “13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman [wife] to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her as a covering.” (1 Cor. 11:13–15)</p>	<p>It is culturally disgraceful for a wife to pray with her head uncovered. Even nature testifies to differences between men and women.</p>

<b>Reason 6 &amp; Conclusion:</b> “16 If anyone wants to argue about this, we have no other custom, nor do the churches of God.” (1 Cor. 11:16)	Neither Paul nor the churches of God had any other practice.
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- Why did God build authority and submission into so many of our relationships?
- How can husbands fight against the temptation to abuse their God-given authority?

## 2. Prophecy and Interpreting Prophecy

Naselli (360–361) outlines the pattern of Paul’s argument as follows:

- “[**A**] Two or three prophets should speak, [**B**] and the others should evaluate.” (1 Cor. 14:29)
- [**A**] “30 But if something has been revealed to another person sitting there, the first prophet should be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that everyone may learn and everyone may be encouraged. 32 And the prophets’ spirits are subject to the prophets, 33 since God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” (1 Cor. 14:30–33a)
- [**B**] “As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but are to submit themselves, as the law also says. 35 If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, since it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Or did the word of God originate from you, or did it come to you only?” (1 Cor. 14:33b–36)

Prophecy is the act by which someone shares spontaneous revelation from God with others. Paul states that [**A**] “two or three prophets should speak” (v. 29a), which he elaborates in [**A**] verses 30–33a. There he emphasizes orderly, prophetic ministry for the collective good. Paul states [**B**] “the others should evaluate” [the prophecy] (v. 29b), which he elaborates in [**B**] verses 33b–36. “Women, of course, may participate in such prophesying; that was established in chapter 11. Paul’s point here, however, is that they may not participate in the oral weighing of such prophecies”; in those situations, they must be “silent” (v. 34) (Carson, ““Silent in the Churches,”” 194, in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Piper and Grudem (eds.), 2021 edition). In other words, men should weigh/evaluate prophecies to determine if they align with God’s Word (v. 34; cf. 1 Tim. 2:12–14). Women must not undermine men’s leadership by weighing their prophecies or disrupting order in the gathered body in other ways (v. 35).

- Explain verses 33b–36 in your own words. Why are these teachings so important?
- What are examples of false prophecies? “An example of false prophecy is if someone claimed God said \_\_\_\_\_.” How does God’s Word address the issue?

## Sound Doctrine: Husbands and Wives in the Church

Below are suggestions to guide men and women, with a focus on husbands and wives.

1. **Strive for personal holiness and cultivate an intimate, godly marriage.** For all men and women, your participation in the gathered body is directly related to your private habits for Christian growth (including reading God’s Word and prayer). For husbands and wives, your public ministry is the overflow of your private relationship with one another. Therefore, create habits of reading the Word together, praying together, communicating about your lives, apologizing to and forgiving one another, and enjoying physical intimacy.
2. **Apply passages like 1 Corinthians 11:2–16; 14:29–36 in culturally appropriate ways.** We must recognize the differences between (a) **universal or supra-cultural (transcending culture) teachings** and (b) **cultural expressions of those teachings**. Paul taught, “Greet one another with a holy kiss” (Rom. 16:16). *Greet one another with love* is the universal teaching; *greet one another with a holy kiss* is a cultural manifestation.

A man submitting himself to his head (Christ) is the universal teaching; a man praying or prophesying with his head *uncovered* in public was a cultural manifestation of that teaching. How, then, should men express that universal teaching today? Men should avoid praying or prophesying in an elitist way or while dressed inappropriately. For example, it would be disgraceful for a man to pray within a Christian community dressed like a Buddhist monk or dressed like a woman. Instead, he should pray and prophesy in an orderly way—in humble submission to Christ and his Word (Naselli, *ESVBECC*, 318–319).

A wife submitting and being faithful to her husband is the universal teaching; a wife wearing a head covering in public was a cultural manifestation of that teaching. How, then, should wives express the universal teaching today? If a Christian woman attends a Christian gathering within a culture that believes wives *should* wear head coverings to communicate submission and faithfulness to their husbands, then that woman *should* wear a head covering. However, even if the absence of a head covering does not communicate independence from her husband in a given culture, there are ways that wives can apply the universal teaching from Scripture. In all cultures, a married woman should dress modestly (not seductively), not flirt with other men, and avoid *publicly* challenging her husband after he prays, prophesies, or teaches. In many cultures, she should wear her wedding ring to communicate that she is married and consistently sit near her husband.

3. **Seek to minister as a couple in the gathered body.** While not the focus of this lesson, Christian husbands and wives can minister together in powerful ways, not unlike Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18; 26).

- What comments and questions do you have about this lesson?
- What is one thing you can do in response to this lesson?

## Prayer