

“But I Would Have You to Know”

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

This passage is one of, if not the most difficult passage in the Pauline Epistles (and, to some extent, in the New Testament as a whole). Part of the difficulty is that it seems to contradict other portions of the New Testament, and it is clearly contrary to much of what is seen in society today – influence that has permeated every facet of the modern church.

One of the truths that this text teaches is that just because someone does something in the name of the Lord, or in the name of the church, doesn't make it right – no matter who they are and no matter where they are. In fact, that seems to be the underlying purpose of this text. The church in Corinth had a lot of good things going for it, but it had adopted a lot of things that were not scriptural and were not being done to the glory of God – 10:31. Remember that the final portion of verse 33 reads, “that they might be saved.” And then this text immediately follows – that is not coincidental. A lot of what the church has done in the age's past, and especially what is being done today in the name of “the church,” is being done outside of clear scriptural mandates and ordinances.

Whether we like this or not, whether it fits our political correctness or not, whether it fits our personal opinions or views or not – this is truth, nonetheless, and will be taught as truth regardless of the consequences.

Keep in mind, the Bible does not, cannot, contradict itself, so if portions of this seem to contradict other portions of Scripture, understand that it does not.

One basic principle of Bible interpretation (hermeneutics) is that for any seeming contradiction, the overwhelmingly clear mandate of Scripture is the foundation – the more obscure are to be interpreted within that light.

Because I am a biblicist, and I believe the Bible is to be taken as literally as possible unless the context clearly indicates otherwise, this portion of this letter will be viewed in that light. What it says is what it means.

Verse two serves as an introduction to this portion – as a verse of transition, if you would. It maintains that same principle of doing all things for the glory of God, but transitions to another area of ministry than what is dealt with previously.

The Apostle was praising the church (the leadership in particular) for considering all that he had taught them, both in person and in writings, and that they had kept most of those “ordinances” that he had taught as he had “delivered them.” What he gives in the verses that follow are areas in which they were still lacking.

What follows is dealing with public worship – a church service, if you would – and there was a certain way in which things were to be done so “that [others] may be saved.” The whole point of this text is to make sure we, as a church body, and as individuals members of that body, don’t do anything that would cause unbelievers not to come to Christ, nor do anything that would cause a believer to stumble.

There are certain things that are “right” that the Apostle Paul wanted them to know that they needed to correct.

I. THE RIGHT ORDER – VS. 3

A. "The word [for 'head'] κεφαλή in each case means the head next above. This must be borne in mind, for Christ is THE HEAD of the Christian woman, as well as of the Christian man. God is the Head of Christ, not only according to His human Nature: the Son is, in his Sonship, necessarily subordinate to the Father: ... From χριστός [Christ], the order descends first: then, in order to complete the whole, ascends up to God." (Alford).

Ephesians 1:22

²² And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

B. "The head of every man is Christ"

1. The word for "head" is used 76 times, and the overwhelming majority of those times it is speaking of the physical head of the body. When it is speaking metaphorically is where the debate is found.
2. Considering its use in ancient Greek writings of the Apostle Paul's day will help us with an understanding of its use in this text. "[The] linguistic evidence, which suggests that the idea of 'authority over' was not native to the Greek κεφαλή [head], has led numerous scholars to see behind Paul's use of the 'head' either the meaning 'source, origin' or 'to, crown, completion.'" (See "Hard Sayings of the Bible," page 600-601 for a more in-depth study of this usage.)
3. Not only is Christ the supreme authority

(as seen in other texts of the Bible), he is the source of man because we are made by Him. It was He that formed Adam out of the dust of the ground with His hands.

Colossians 1:16–18

¹⁶ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Genesis 2:7

⁷ And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

C. "And the head of the woman is the man"

1. If the word for "head" does, in fact, mean source or origin, then this verse fits better with the rest of this text – especially vs. 8-9.
2. This is not to say that there is not an order of the sexes taught in Scripture, but this is dealing with more than that.

1 Peter 3:7

⁷ Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that

your prayers be not hindered.

3. This is not to show authority as much as it is to simply state a biblical, creational fact – woman was taken from man; man was the “source” for the woman.

Genesis 2:22

²² And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

1 Timothy 2:13

¹³ For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

4. Some versions of the Bible, and some very gifted scholars have this, as well as Ephesians 5, speaking of husbands being the head of the wife, but that analogy doesn't fit in the entirety of the passage as well as does the meaning of “head” being source or origin. And, making the “man” here the husband, and “woman” the wife, also seems to be outside the confines of the usage of those two words in the rest of the passage. Although the Greek word used here for both “man” (άνήρ) and “woman” (γυνή) are translated in places as “husband” and “wife,” respectively, the times they are used in that way it is abundantly clear from the context that it is referring to husband and/or wife.

Ephesians 5:22–23

²² Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

D. "And the head of Christ is God"

1. The analogy of supreme authority or even general authority breaks down if used here. This is speaking of subordination of position rather than power or authority of one over another.
2. When God the Son came to earth to become a man, He subjugated Himself as such and became subordinate to the Father, in that He had to follow the same rules and physical laws as mortal man (except in those occasions where those laws were rescinded to demonstrate that He was God – miracles, for instance).
3. That said, He never stopped being God – equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit.
4. The only definition of the Greek word for "head" that fits here is that of source or origin. The Father was the source of Christ's being and work on earth.

John 1:1-4

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

² The same was in the beginning with God.

³ All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

⁴ In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

John 1:14

¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,)

full of grace and truth.

John 8:42

⁴² Jesus said unto them, *If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.*

John 13:3

³ Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

John 16:27

²⁷ *For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*

E. "It would therefore seem best to translate 1 Corinthians 11:3 as 'I want you to understand that Christ is the source of man's being; the man is the source of woman's being; and God is the source of Christ's being.' When read like this, it lays a solid foundation for, and sheds light on, the rest of the passage..." (Hard Sayings of the Bible).

II. THE RIGHT DECORUM – VS. 4-7

A. These verses have as their foundation the word "dishonoureth."

1. The word for "dishonoureth" (καταισχύνω), in this context means "to offend against decorum" (Zodhiates). In its general use, it means to shame, make ashamed, confound, dishonor, or disgrace.
2. Suffice it to say, there is a right way and a

wrong way to look and act in the worship of our Lord. There may be a lot of history and background for this text, but the basic principle is still the same today. The culture of dress and look is what's in view, and that should be the standard today as well. What is considered to be the decorum for worship today? Do we dishonor ourselves, and, more importantly, do we dishonor our Lord?

B. The next point to consider in these verses is the issue of "praying and prophesying."

1. This seems, without much debate, to be dealing with public worship, especially if one takes the second portion of the chapter into context.
2. Within that public worship, it is seen as containing two parts – public prayer and public "prophesying." The issue of prayer is self-explanatory.
3. For the New Testament church today, the term "prophesy" would point to the preaching and teaching that is done in a public forum. Although there were still those prophets that were still receiving revelation of future events from the Lord, when John finished the book of Revelation, that particular part of the ministry of a prophet ceased, and the ministry of proclaiming the Word of the Lord became the principle use of the word.

Matthew 7:22

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord,

have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

Acts 13:1

¹ Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 15:32

³² And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

1 Thessalonians 5:20

²⁰ Despise not prophesyings.

C. Next, we come to the most difficult and controversial point in these verses – the issue of “man” and “woman” praying and prophesying in public worship.

1. Don't forget – the Bible cannot contradict itself, and the clearest of the texts is where we should draw our understanding from and use them as a light on the more difficult ones.
2. There are two other relevant texts to this one – one just three chapters later in this letter to the Corinthian believers (which we will study in detail when we get to that passage), and one in First Timothy – a letter written to “Pastor Timothy” on how women ought to behave in a worship service. There is no ambiguity, no vagueness in either one of those texts, so

this one before us must mean something other than allowing women to preach in a worship service. What has happened in theology today (and for many decades in the past, for that matter) is that many have used THIS text as the litmus test, and made the other two read something different because this one fits their theology better. Interpreting Scripture like that is poor, at best.

1 Timothy 2:12

¹² But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

1 Corinthians 14:34–35

³⁴ Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

³⁵ And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

3. Following are notes from my doctoral dissertation on the text in 1 Timothy 2:9-15:

a) Women are to look godly – vs. 9.

(1) *"Adorn themselves" – more than just how a woman is dressed. It is dealing with the whole appearance of the woman, from her hair to her shoes (1 Pet. 3:1-6).*

(2) *"In modest apparel" - the word for modest (κόσμιος) is "well arranged, seemly, modest." It comes from a root*

word that is used of the way God fashioned the universe with everything in place and for a purpose; how He ordered it and made it beautiful.

"Apparel" signifies a long robe which reaches down to the feet. This is not saying that is all women can wear to church, but it is signifying a woman is to cover anything that would distract, which is a serious problem in the modern worship service.

The phrase, "adorn themselves in modest apparel," is teaching that women are to dress in such a way as to portray Christ, not the world. Immodest apparel, then, would be anything that draws attention to the body, rather than to the Lord. This is a principle that is to be carried throughout life, not just in church.

(3) The middle and end of verse nine give detail to help understand the first part.

b) Women are to act godly – vs. 10-14.

(1) Verse ten sums up verse nine. Women are to come to church attracting attention to their godliness, demonstrated by their good works, without attracting attention to their person, or body (Prov. 31:31; Acts 9:36; 1 Tim. 5:9-10).

(2) In the next five verses (2:11-14), Paul is letting Timothy know that women are not to have a place in the church in which they would, by their position, have any authority over men. This was not for that time only, as some teach.

This is a truth that has been held down through the ages, from Bible times until now. It is not saying that woman should not teach; just not teach men in a setting where pastoral authority would be exercised.

- (3) *As to their position in the church (2:11), women are to learn in "silence" (quietness), "with all subjection" (ὑποταγή). Their position is one of subordination to that of a man, as it relates to teaching. This is so counter-cultural that it is difficult for even godly ladies to understand, but the reason this is in the Bible is to make sure the Word of God is able to accomplish its purpose without hinderances from those that may cause conflict by being "out of place" in the church.*

There are some that teach verse twelve in a way that would lead women to believe they are to be silent in the church, period. They teach that women are not to speak at all in a service, outside of singing hymns. Some go as far as to say that women are not even to give a personal testimony of what the Lord has done for them. That is not what is meant at all. "Silence" (ἡσυχία) "has to do with maintaining quiet in the assembly, and does not forbid a woman to take an active part in the work of the church in her own sphere and under the limitation imposed upon her in the contextual passage" (Wuest).

- (4) *Paul starts verse twelve with the statement, "I suffer not" (do not allow). He is speaking as the apostle that founded the church in Ephesus, and*

with the authority God gave him in that position. Some say that this was his opinion. Even the Bible in Basic English interprets it as "in my opinion." This was not his opinion; this was the Holy Spirit giving truth to the church through him. The word for "suffer" (ἐπιτρέπω) always means to allow somebody to do something they want to do. Using the negative with the word "suffer," it is clear that Paul is emphatically stating that the Holy Spirit is instructing the church to not permit, or allow, a woman to teach.

The term "teach" (διδάσκω) in this context is pretty straightforward: to teach in a position of authority as a pastor. That is the primary point that is being made: women are not to be pastors. The word is most often used in the New Testament in connection with teaching doctrine to others and is a responsibility only men are to have. As a reminder, this is speaking of teaching in public worship, specifically in position of pastor/teacher. If this meant that a woman could not teach at all then 1 Cor. 11:5 would be out of place: "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven." The Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) would also be a contradiction, of sorts, based on the statement that those that win others to Christ are to teach them all things that Jesus commanded. Other scriptures, like Acts 18, 2 Tim. 3, Titus 2:3, would also be apparent contradictions to this verse, if women cannot teach at all when it comes to

biblical things. The Scriptures allow women to teach, just not in the authoritative way as a pastor/teacher.

"To usurp authority over" (2:12) comes from a single word (αυθεντέω) that means self-doer, master, autocrat (a ruler who has absolute authority); to domineer. This is the only time in the New Testament this Greek word is used. It is a word that is used in other classical Greek writings where it deals with having, or exercising, dominion over; or have authority over. "A woman should attempt nothing, either in public or private, that belongs to man as his particular function" (Clarke).

The issue of "silence" comes back in view in the last part of verse twelve: "to be in silence" (quietness, stillness, tranquility). Not mute (unable to utter anything at all) but keeping silent as opposed to teaching. At the time of the writing of First Timothy, women were becoming bolder and more vocal in the church, and they were not accepting the teaching that they heard, so the admonition is they were to accept the teaching of the Word of God from those qualified to teach in the church, and be in "quietness" with it; that is, do not stir up trouble over it (Acts 22:2; 2 Thess. 3:12). "Some of the women in Ephesus probably overreacted to the cultural denigration they had typically suffered and took advantage of their opportunity in the church by seeking a dominant role in leadership."

(5) Verses thirteen and fourteen give the reason women were forbidden to be in

authority over men in the church: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." Verse thirteen is the God-ordained order from the very creation of the world, and it is still the order. Adam (man) was first formed (first in order, first in authority, first in rank, chief), then Eve (woman).

Verse fourteen is, in part, why man has the authority to teach and to lead the church, and why women are to be in subjection to the leadership of the God-ordained man He has put in authority in the church when it comes to doctrine and teaching: because the woman was deceived and was in the transgression. Eve was deceived, Adam was not. He chose to take of the fruit willingly, without deception, and because of that, mankind was plunged into sin. The truth remains, however, that Eve was deceived, and part of the curse upon the woman for that deception was that she would be in subjection to man. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. The word for husband in this verse is the Hebrew word most often translated as man. It is a very common word (used 1,714 times) and the vast majority of times it is translated as man, in various forms. Only sixty-six times is it translated husband. The point to be made, within the context of 1 Tim. 2:14, is that, even though husband is the right word to use in Gen.

3:16 for the curse on Eve, it draws on a much larger context of Scripture that women, because of the curse, will be in subjection to men. And that is especially true within the church order, as God has given it.

D. The issue, then, is what is meant by the head being covered or uncovered.

1. There are two Greek words used for "covered" in this text.
 - a) The first one in verse four (κατά), speaking of men, is a very common word that means down, or down from – indicating motion from a higher to a lower place. In relation to the covering on a man's head, it is speaking of a head covering that would have descended down from the top to the bottom – we would know this as a veil. This was not only not common but was something shameful for a man to do in that culture.
 - b) The second word for "covered" (in various forms) – κατακαλύπτω – means to cover with a veil or something which hangs down. This is a compound word with the first part being the word from verse four – down from – and the word καλύπτω, to cover.
 - c) The word for "uncovered" is this same Greek word – κατακαλύπτω – with the alpha privative at the beginning to negate it.
2. Vs. 4 – men who take part in public worship – whether it be as the speaker or participant – were to do so with their head uncovered. That was the standard issue of

decorum of the time that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth.

- a) The reason for this is found in verse seven – for “he is the image and glory of God.” The idea of “glory” in this text points back to the source or origin of man being Christ, and that of woman being man (in creation) – something we will come back to when we study that verse.
 - b) It seems that at the time of the church in Corinth in particular, with what had been said already about their liberty in Christ, and that they were all equal in Christ (for salvation), that some of the leadership may have been wearing a head covering to show their “solidarity” with women (and women, conversely, were uncovering their head to show their equality with men in leadership). This is what is addressed here.
 - c) Although the decorum may have been different then, for the pastor/teacher to stand in the pulpit, in the place of God for the people of God on earth today and dress in a way to show they are just trying to be relevant to the culture is as equally appalling to the Holy Spirit and to the work of the Lord.
3. Women who do so are to have their head covered, showing deference to both their subordination to the Lord, to the Word of God, and to the authority that God has designated in the church.
- a) The issue of them “prophesying” – or preaching/teaching – in a public worship service is not especially addressed here, as much as simply demonstrating they were

to follow the decorum God had established.

b) Some today, and several theologians of the past decades, have used this text to show that God did not rule against women pastors. This does not show that at all. This simply points out that no matter what part of worship in which women are taking part, there was a right way to do so. The issues of preaching/teaching are addressed elsewhere. Women are not prohibited from teaching – they are just prohibited from doing so in a position of authority that only the pastor has (1 Tim. 2).

4. The latter part of verse five and verse six bring out a culturally relative point from that day and that city. For a woman to be “uncovered” (unveiled) in public was an indication she was a harlot.

III. THE RIGHT VIEW – VS. 8-12

IV. THE RIGHT ATTITUDE – VS. 13-16