

The Subordination and Equality of Women

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:2–6

Code: 1844

First Corinthians chapter 11. And I tried to delay it as long as I could but finally I just really ran against the wall, and I couldn't think of anything else to get out of it, so here we are. And it has to do with the subordination and equality of women.

First Corinthians chapter 11, in our ongoing study of 1 Corinthians. And I know some of you are going to think that this is – you're going to be sitting there thinking, "Boy, does MacArthur love this; I can just tell. He's just all lit up, and he's really eating up every thought here.

But I want you to know that I recognize that this is the kind of subject that becomes intensely practical. And you're going to be wrestling with your own self all the way through it. I'm not so concerned that it be a wonderful homily with kinds of beautiful points and sub points and that it work out in that manner. I'm only interested that you understand the importance and the meaning of the section from verse 2 to 16 of 1 Corinthians 11, or we'll not be able to cover all of it this morning. It's a lengthy section. There are many things in it. There are some very, very difficult aspects to this particular Scripture.

And the amount of time invested in this will probably not be reflected in what comes out just because I'm going to try to simplify it as much as I can, but it is a very difficult portion because you're dealing with a cultural situation that is hard to reproduce. And to try to understand exactly what the situation was in the city of Corinth secularly, what it was in the church of Corinth in terms of the spiritual life, what was going on in the mind of Paul, and push all of that up into the modern day is not easy. We don't have a lot of background.

And then, to distinguish between what is cultural and what is fact, in terms of God's divine and universal principle, becomes the real issue in the passage. And we're going to endeavor to do that, today and next Lord's Day, and to kind of tuck away this 11th chapter and the first 16 verses anyway into our minds and understanding.

But let me begin with some thoughts to help you understand why we need to deal with this so very, very carefully. The roles of men and women have become a battle ground today. And I think all of us are aware of this. We are constantly hearing about the battle for women's rights. And I'm sure if it goes far enough, we'll have a men's lib to try to gain back some of the ground that's been lost just because society tends to always want to equalize itself.

I think Satan is feverishly involved in upsetting the divine order any way he possibly can. And it's clear, as you study the Bible, that God has a divine order in society related to man and woman. And of course that is manifest in marriage, it's manifest in the Church, and it's manifest in every dimension of human life. And God's basic pattern is there are two factors in society: authority and submission. And God has designed that men be given the position of authority, and women the position of submission.

It is generally then true that a man, whether he be married or single, must think of himself as someone who has been given by God a responsibility for authority in one sense or another. And a woman, whether she is married or single, must recognize the fact that in general, as a woman, she must have a spirit of submission to all men.

Now, we don't want to carry that too far, or you're going to get yourself in a lot of trouble. But the idea is that the spirit of a woman is the recognition that she is in the position of subjection to men whom God has given authority in the world.

Now, if some of you are already ready to bail out, stick around because there's a lot more to say. And what I'm going to do is not give you opinion. If I gave you my opinion on this subject, I couldn't live with myself. I'd have to duck for the next six months. So, rather than give my opinion, I'm going to just share with you what the Bible says and let you know that this is not anybody's opinion; this is God's authoritative statement on the subject.

What has amazed me, however, is that the Women's Liberation Movement has found its way into the Church. You know, in general, for the most part, the Church is stupid about the revelation of God. It doesn't know the Scripture. So, it tends to want to jump on every bandwagon. And if there is any kind of a movement in the world, just wait, and it'll get into the Church. And it's no different with the Women's Liberation Movement.

We now have Christian feminists, whatever that might be. Christian feminists who are advocating the fact that there is only in Christ equality. And they wave the flag of Galatians 3:28, that in Christ there is neither male nor female. And on the basis of that, and on the basis of 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 7, that a husband and a wife are heirs together of the grace of life, they postulate the fact that there is no such thing as authority and submission between men and women either in marriage, in the church, in business, in education, or any other dimension.

In fact, there are many people who definitely and strongly feel that Paul was nothing but a male chauvinist. And believe it or not, there are even some so-called Christian people who write books and say that in essence. That whenever Paul got on this subject, he, in his background, had a bad relationship with his mother or been burned by some lady or something, and so, he was – he was – whenever he comes to this subject, he stops giving revelation and fires out his opinion. And so, they arbitrarily would exchange the revelation of God for the opinion of Paul every time he talks on this subject, which is rather handy if you want to get rid of it.

Maybe someday in history people are going to see Paul for who he is, the great emancipator and protector of women as God used him to show that though there is – and mark this – though there is a diving distinction in the roles, there is no distinction in spiritual life. There is no distinction in the essence. There is no distinction in the person; there is no distinction in the worth of the person. There is no distinction in the emotion, or the intellect, or the will, or the mind, or the capacity, or the ability between men and women in terms of what they can accomplish or who they can relate themselves to God. There is only a distinction in the role that they are assigned within the framework of society. Women are not inferior to men in terms of essence, in terms of personality, in terms of thinking, in terms of anything other than the role that they have been assigned.

You work at a job, many of you men. You are not in any way inferior to your boss. In your intellect, you might even be more intelligent. In your education you might even have more. In your aptitude, you might even be superior. And all he has over you is a different title because he's been there long enough. But in order for you corporation to function, somebody's got to call the shots, and somebody's got to carry them out.

In the church, you have elders and deacons. Elders are not spiritually superior to deacons; they have a different function. We hope there is a spiritual equality in there. And the same is true with a man and a woman. Just because you are the head of the house doesn't mean that you are in any sense superior and she is inferior in essence or in person or personality, but simply that you have been assigned distinct roles. And I think God has accommodated the personality and the strength and weaknesses of both to those roles.

And it's interesting to me that the people who always use 1 Peter 3:7, "Heirs together of the grace of life," want to wave that banner, but they don't want to take the phrase before it in the very same verse which says, "Honor the woman as the weaker vessel." Now, how you can possibly just take what you want out of it and ignore the rest, you've also got to conclude that Peter threw in his own opinion now and then and had the same problem.

And several books have been written recently on the Christian biblical feminist movement, and I feel that the Church is really going to have to face this issue. There are many churches now that are battling the issue of should we or should we not have female elders. People ask me, "What do you think about women pastors," and I always give them the same answer, "I never think about them." There's this desire to force into leadership in the church women simply because this is what's happening in the world. The Church wants to accommodate itself to society. And so, these books are coming out, written by women and, in some cases, by men saying that whenever the Bible says this, it's either cultural, it's either Paul or Peter's opinion, it isn't inspired by God, or we're misinterpreting it.

Now, those who listen to such writers are going to be confused. And you're going to have to come up with the same conclusion that they do. In every case, they ultimately have to say, "Not all of what Paul said is the revelation of God; some of it was his own opinion, and when he gave it, he was wrong." So, in other words, eventually they must deny revelation. And once you've done that, you've really let the cat out of the bag. Then they become the judges of which part of Paul is inspired and which is not. And, of course, that's a deadly, deadly tack.

Now, let me show you some Scriptures to reinforce the concept that you're going to learn in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. First Peter chapter 3. I have mentioned it; let me read it to you. First Peter 3:1, "In the same manner" – that is in the same manner that we are submissive to Christ; in chapter 2 he's been talking about that – "In the same manner that the church is submissive to the shepherd and bishop of our soul, in the same manner, you wives be in subjection to your own husbands." Now, that's a simple statement. "Be in subjection to your own husbands." Verse 7 that I mentioned to you, "You husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge" – in other words, try to be understanding with your wife; it's important that you understand her – "giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel" – there's a key thing – "as being heirs together of the grace of life" – and that simply means as enjoying God's wonderful design in marriage. So, you see, there's submission in verse 1, and a weaker vessel in verse 7.

Now look at 1 Timothy chapter 2, and let's see another Scripture that relates directly to this particular subject. First Timothy chapter 2, verse 11, it says this, "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection." Women, again, are connected with subjection. Verse 12, "I permit not a woman to teach, nor to take authority over the man, but be in silence." A woman is to be in subjection; a man is to be in authority. There's that same duality. The man is in authority; the woman is in subjection. And he's talking here particularly and specifically about the church when it comes together in its assembly, its unified meeting such as you're experiencing right now, this particular Lord's Day.

Women are not to teach; they are to learn. They are not to take authority in the church and rule over men. That's very, very simple; it's very, very clear. Couldn't confuse anybody.

Now, these people say, "Yeah, but that's just cultural. Paul is accommodating Timothy to the particular culture in which he had to minister."

Oh? Verse 13 would end that, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve." That's not cultural. God made Adam first, and then He made Eve to be a helper for Adam. That's the way it's always been. And further, "Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." The woman is the submissive one by creation and by virtue of her weakness in the fall. That confirms her submissive role.

You can't say, "Well, it's only because of culture."

It's because of creation. It is the way God intended it from the very beginning. Now, I take you further to 1 Corinthians. We're there this morning. Let's look at the 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians, in another particular context related to the assembly of the church, connected with prophesying and speaking in tongues here. First Corinthians 14:34, "Let our women keep silence in the churches: it is not permitted to them to speak, but to be under obedience as also says the law." What law? The law of God. It is not just creation; it is God's Old Testament law that women are to be submissive. This is God's New Testament standard as well. The law of God says women are to be silent in the churches and not take authority. Here in this case not to prophesy or speak in tongues.

Now, verse 35, "If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it's a shame for women to speak in the church." Now, it doesn't mean that a woman can't get up and give a testimony or make an announcement or something like that. But women are not to take the role of ruling the church and take the role of being teachers of the church. "If they need to know anything, let them learn by asking their husband."

Now, a husband's part of the problem with women is they come and ask you, and you never know the answer. And it behooves you, if they're going to be submissive, to make sure that you rule for God in your home by knowing something. It's very difficult for a woman to do what she ought to do if you don't do what you ought to do because she can't find any answers in the biblical pattern unless you're obedient.

And they'll say again about this, "Oh, that's just cultural again." Or else they'll say, "No, you see, here's where Paul wasn't inspired; he was getting a little upset here and just shooting off his opinion."

Oh? Look at verse 37, "If any man think himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge the

things that I write unto you are the” – what? – “the commandments of the Lord.” Now, either Paul’s a liar or he’s not. He has just made a statement about women in submission, and he says, “What I’m saying is a commandment of the Lord, and anybody who’s spiritual, you better acknowledge it.”

Now, I conclude that the people who don’t acknowledge these truths as commandments of the Lord are not spiritual. If they’re saved, they’re carnal. Now, that’s basic. The relationship of men and women, whether in marriage, in business, in the church, is founded on the very same principle, the very same revelation of God. And the only way to get around it is to deny inspiration. And when you’ve done that, you’ve made Paul into a liar because he specifically knew that that might happen. So, he said, “What I’m saying is indeed the commandment of the Lord.” Really, you can take the books that say that and throw them away, because they don’t have an argument.

Now, apparently, going back to chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, apparently they weren’t clear on this concept in Corinth. And there was the potential of a Women’s Liberation Movement. Now, we don’t know how involved it was, and there’s been a lot of discussion and studying history to try to figure out how far it had gone in Corinth. But at least it hadn’t gone so far that they were smug and indifferent about it. At least they’re asking the question here in chapter 11. They had asked Paul to answer this question, undoubtedly, because this is the section of 1 Corinthians where he is answering the questions they asked in the letter to them – to him I should say. So, at least they’re open. And we don’t know how far – but apparently, they had at least had to – some kind of a Christian feminist movement.

And what it amounted to was this: in the society in Corinth, women who were proper, women who were modest, women who wanted to make a statement publically and visibly about their submission to their husband, women who were feminine, women who were genteel and wanted to take the role that was assigned to them in their society wore a veil as a symbol of their submission. And that was the symbol, to be veiled.

Now, that particular symbol varied from culture to culture. But in the Corinthian culture, veils were the sign of a woman’s submissiveness. She was covering herself. She was leaving herself unexposed to other men by saying, “I belong to my husband; I want no other than my husband; I see to attract no one other than my husband. I’m after nothing but what my husband provides for me. It is irrelevant that you even see me; I’m not interested.”

Now, that’s how they stated that. Now, we state that in different terms. By the way women dress today, they are either saying, “Look at me, I’m very interested in being looked at; check me out.” And even when they’re married, they’re saying, “Check me out. I either enjoy being checked out, or I may be looking for somebody else.” Or you see a woman who’s very, very modestly dressed, and it may be that she’s making the statement – not always true – but it may be that she’s making a statement, “I am already taken, and I could care less about whether you’re interested or not.”

And there are ways in society in which we declare that. You see? It’s true. And in that society, the way a woman showed her submission to her man, the way a woman showed the simplicity of purity and subjection. Even single women, who were submissive at that point to a father or whatever, simply, in submission, covered themselves. That was the feminine way.

But what apparently happened in the Corinthians’ situation was sort of an abusive Christian liberty.

Some of the women, feeling that they were free in Christ, began to throw away their veils. You know, it wasn't burn bra, it was burn your veil. See?

You know, whenever you see a woman today who doesn't wear a bra, or dresses in that manner, that woman is not a submissive woman. That woman is not radiating a dependence on a man. She is announcing something to everybody who sees her, and that something is, "Look at me; I'm interested in something other than what I've got, or at least am flirting with it."

And so, there are ways in our society that that statement can be made or not made. In that society, when the veil was on, a woman was taking the place of submission; she was honoring the sanctity of a woman's virtue, and of marriage. We would even go further in to say it was the custom in the Corinthian society for prostitutes to be unveiled because their business was to make sure they got seen. How could they drum up business if they had a veil on? And so, they would throw their veil aside.

There is another interesting historical note that we find in studying the Corinthian situation, Eerdman points this out; and that is that there were women in the Corinthian society, and in much of Roman society, who were making statements against the sacredness of marriage. There was a feminist movement, even on a broader base, in the Roman Empire, and women frequently would take their veils off and cut their hair. And the cutting of their hair to look like a man, and the throwing away of the veil was a protest against the inequality of men and women, and it was a statement of their antagonism toward the sacredness of marriage.

So, you see, what we're seeing today isn't anything new. It's nothing new at all. You can read it in history. And so, in the Corinthian situation, the church was right in the midst of a society that was struggling with this very issue. And the word that Paul gives to the church, simply stated, is this, "Look, whatever standard your society sets up as the way in which you manifest a submissive spirit, you abide by that standard so that society knows you are following the God-ordained pattern. If it's a veil, wear it; don't throw it away. Last of all, don't throw it away in the name of Christian liberty."

Now, you see, this is a problem like meats offered to idols that we've studied in the last few weeks. It isn't a problem today. You threw your veil in some drawer the day after you got married and haven't pulled it out since. And we don't – that isn't our particular thing. We're not a veiled society.

And some people have made this to mean hats, but the word "hat" doesn't even appear here. And for many years, people thought it was a sign to go to church without a hat. Now, that isn't what it's saying. You can go to church with a hat, that's wonderful. You can go to church without a hat. That isn't the point in our society; that isn't saying anything.

But in their society, a veil was a very, very important statement. In fact, it's true today in many places in the world. I know when I was in the Arab countries, particularly in Amman, Jordan, you saw many, many women – and also in Cairo – many women who were veiled. And eventually, in Amman, I asked the significance of it. And the significance was that it's a sign of modesty and subjection I was told. A woman who does not want to flaunt herself, a woman who takes the role of submissiveness wears a veil as an expression of that submission and modesty. That's precisely what was going on in the city of Corinth, and Paul simply says in this chapter, "If that's the custom, you do it, because it is important that you be submissive, and it is important that the world know that you're maintaining that

standard because it's a divine one.”

And you know as well as I do, people, that God has set down a certain style of life that is going to radiate a believable testimony much more than what we say. Right? And when the women in the church there would throw their veil away, all that would do would be open the door to misunderstanding.

Now, remember, dress is very cultural, and we have to keep it in mind. And what is proper in one place is not proper in another place, and you've got to make some adjustments. But the principle here is that women should conform in matters of dress to that which society says is the mark of a modest, submissive woman.

And, you know, every time I see – and there used to be a big deal on this – unisex – they used to have stores where you could buy unisex clothes. I just recognize that it's difficult – in fact, you know, as I thought about this, over and over again, I had a hard time trying to figure out a modern illustration because we don't have much difference anymore. I mean you can't tell from the back anymore, because of the hair. You can't tell the kind of – it's hard to tell. One good thing today is beards. I've been thinking about growing a beard just so there wouldn't be any confusion. Next thing you know, all the men get beards, women will go out and buy artificial beards, you know, so they can...

You know, it's very difficult, in our society, to find an up-to-date thing because the distinctions just aren't there. I've heard people say, “Well, it's a sin for a woman to wear pants because it says in Deuteronomy 22 that a woman should never wear that which appertaineth to a man.”

But beloved, in Deuteronomy 22, men wore dresses. That doesn't make any sense at all. It's just that today, it's very difficult to make a distinction. Now, there are ways. And you know something, men? We better work on them and make sure there's no doubt, because we want the world to see the pattern that God has designed. Don't seek to look like a woman, men. And women, don't seek to look like a man. Maintain the femininity that God has designed. That's what he's saying here.

Well, I'm just preaching. I don't know where I am in my notes here. Verse 2. Verse 2, that's where I'm going to start. “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you.”

Now, Paul starts out with a word of praise, and that's good, because whenever you get with a very difficult subject, you always ought to be real nice. And that helps it a little bit. And he does that. He says, “I praise you, brethren.” He couldn't praise them for everything, because he'd just given them ten chapters of stuff he can't praise them for. He's about to give them five more.

So, there is – there's not a lot of things that he can praise them for, but he says, “I praise you for this, that in all things you remember me. At least you're open to asking me my opinion. I'm glad that you remember to consult me. I do praise you on that. And secondly, I praise you that you keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you.”

And I think what he's saying there, and I'm not going to give you all the background, except to say if you check the word there “ordinances,” it's the word “tradition.” And as it's used in 2 Thessalonians

2:15, it is used to speak of doctrine. And whenever the word “delivered” is used, it is used in connection with teaching content.

And so, what he’s saying there is, “I’m glad that you at least asked me questions, and you have maintained the doctrine that I gave you.” You see, as you read the whole of 1 Corinthians, he doesn’t straighten them out on doctrine. He doesn’t have to tell them about the deity of Christ, or the truth of God, or the ministry of the Spirit – the Holy Spirit, he doesn’t have to discuss the believer’s life pattern as it operates in the yieldedness to the Holy Spirit. It doesn’t go into those doctrinal issues. Because apparently, they were really hanging in on those. Apparently there weren’t doctrinal impurities. Chapter 15 may indicate some misunderstanding about resurrection, but for the most part, they didn’t have questions about the deity of Christ or his saving work. He doesn’t have a grace vs. works section in here.

Doctrinally, they had heard and received and maintained, and they were at least consulting him about things, and he says, “For that I just want to praise you. I just want to...” And it’s a very strong assertion of praise; a very, very strong term is used there.

“But now,” he says, “I want to answer the question you’ve asked me about women in the assembly and about this whole idea of whether you burn your veil or not.”

Now, as we look at this, it’s not going to be any great homiletical masterpiece, but I want to give you several points. Number one is the principle stated. And this is the crux of everything. Verse 3 is the statement that would cover everything. And the rest of it is an explanation of that one statement in verse 3.

And here it is, the principle stated. Later on we’ll see the principle defended and principle responded to and some other points. But the principle stated, “But I would have you know” – and incidentally, that little formula is also used in Colossians 2:1, and it is apparent that Paul used it when he was telling them something he hadn’t told them before. When he says to them, “I would not have you to be ignorant,” he is probably – that’s a different phrase he uses – he is probably saying, “I want to go further in telling you some more about what I’ve already told you that you don’t seem to understand.” But when he uses this phrase, it seems as though he’s saying something new.

“Now, I want you to know, the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.” Now, that’s the principle. The principle is this, people, get it, authority and submission pervade the whole universe. In the relationship between man and man, there is authority and submission. In the relationship between man and God, there is authority and submission. In the relationship between God and God, there is authority and submission. The entire universe is pervaded by this concept. And what is new here is not that the wife is to be subject to her husband. That isn’t new, because the Old Testament taught that. What is new is the vastness, the scope of this principle. That it absolutely pervades everything.

Now, listen, it’s simple. Think of it this way: if Christ does not submit to the Father, then redemption is not accomplished. Man is lost; he is doomed; and God is at war with Himself if the Son does not submit.

If man, on the other hand, does not submit to Christ, then man is lost. His destiny is denied, and

judgment falls on him. If woman does not submit to man in the family, the family is shattered, and society is wrecked. So, God is saying, "These are the principles, everybody. There is a submission principle between man and man, between man and God, between God and God. It pervades everything.

Now, let's look at the first one that he mentions in verse 3, "The head of every man is Christ." The head of every man, not just the Church. Christ is the head of the Church, Ephesians 1:22 and 23, Ephesians 4:15, 5:23, Colossians 1:18 – all of those verses say, "Christ, the head of the Church," "Christ, the head of the Church, "Christ, the head of the Church." And He is the head.

And listen; let me give you a footnote on this. The term "head" means ruler, authority, governor. Christ is over His Church. He rules. He is the sovereign of His Church. The governor of His Church. The one who orders His Church.

You say, "But it says there He is the head of every man."

That's right. He is the ruler of every man in the universe, every man in the world. Some of them don't acknowledge His rule, but it's none the less true. Right? Matthew 28:18, "All authority is given unto Me in heaven and" – where? – "in earth." Christ rules. He rules.

Philippians 2:10 and 11 says that someday, "Every knee will bow." First Corinthians 15:25, "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet." Hebrews 2:8 says that He has been given power over all and all things are made subject to Him. So, every creature is under the authority of Christ. Some are willingly submissive, and they constitute the Church. Some are rebellious, and they constitute the world. But nevertheless, He rules. He rules.

Do you know that Christ even rules the godless, the rebels, for His own ends, to His own purposes? And so, you see, the head of every man is Christ. Christ rules. He is the governor. He is the authority. And even though men rebel, they are someday going to be brought under that authority in judgment.

Second principle, the head of the woman is the man. Man has authority over woman. He's not just speaking of marriage, people. He is speaking of every dimension of living in general. The man must recognize God has given him authority, and he is to accept that and take it and rule for God. And the woman must realize in any relationship that she has been given the place of submission. This isn't wrong. This is the way God made it. This is the way He designed it. You don't play golf with a fishing pole; you don't go fishing with a golf club. God has made people, in the same sense, to do a certain thing, and that's the way they're made, and that's the way they function, and that's the way they're fulfilled. Man has authority over woman.

Now, thirdly, the head of Christ is God. And if you're all going to scream blue murder, "Well, the head of the woman is the man; I don't like that," then you just really have to stop and think about the fact that it says the head of Christ is God, and Christ loved it. You see, Christ was willingly submissive to the Father.

Listen, Jesus loved His Church and gave Himself for it. In that sense the Church is His subject. God loved the Son. "This is My" – what? – "beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

“Husbands” – what? – “love your wives.” It is the authority of love. It is the rule of love. Christ was subordinated to the Father as an obedient Son. He came into the world, He says in John, over and over again - John 3, 5, 14, 17, many places – He says, “I came not to do My will, but the will of Him that sent Me. My meat is to do the Father’s will. There is one that speaks to Me, and it is the Father. And what He says, and what I hear, that I do.” He says, “I obey. I have submitted Myself,” and that was because of love. And the Father had a loving relationship with the Son.

It is not – and mark it – it is not that Christ is inferior to God. In fact, He said, “I and the Father are” – what? – “are one.” There is no inferiority; there is simply a role that is taken. And I’ll tell you something else, think about this, in the truest sense, I as a member of the Church am not even inferior to Christ who is the Head of the Church, because God the Father says I am a joint heir with Christ. And that Christ lives in me. And it is only that I have taken the place of submission, the role of submission.

Someday, when I get to heaven, I will be like Him. So, you see, it isn’t talking about inferiority-superiority, it is simply talking about role. It is simply talking about the position that God has designed. And just so somebody doesn’t scream about the fact that the woman is to be submissive to the man, he sticks it right in between those two other things that have to be true. The Church has to be submissive to Christ; and Christ, the obedient Son, has to be submissive to the Father. And if you want to deny the middle one, then you better be ready to deny the first and the third. See? You better – you’re going to deny all of it or none of it. If you want to deny that Christ submitted to the Father, and you want to deny that the Church is to be submitted to Christ, then you can have the privilege of denying the woman is to be submissive to the man. But if you’re going to grant the first two, you’re going to have to grant the other one.

That’s why I say the whole idea is ludicrous. There’s not even an argument biblically. “They’re making much ado about nothing. Full of sound and fury,” said Shakespeare, “signifying nothing.” So, in stating the principle of subordination and authority, Paul safeguards it from tyranny and selfishness and cruelty by showing the Father and the Son relationship that was totally a relationship of love; and the one of Christ to His Church, again totally sacrificial, and its character is love. So, the principle stated.

Secondly, we’ll just do this one and we’ll quit, the principle applied. This is interesting. The principle applied. Verse 4 to 5, “Every man praying or prophesying” – and those two things mean talking to God and talking to people about God, usually talk – usually prayer is talking to God about people, and prophesying is talking to people about God – “Every man praying or prophesying” – the two dimensions of a possible ministry, vertical and horizontal – “have his head covered, dishonors his head.”

He says, “If you men, if you pray or preach with a veil on, you dishonor yourself.” That’s a dishonor to your head to be covered. “But every woman that prays or prophesies” – talks to God or talks to people about God – “with her head uncovered dishonors her head” – now stop there for a minute.

Now, there are two parallels here. He says, “Men, pray and prophesy with your head uncovered. Women, do it with your head covered.”

You say, "Is this the universal rule? Is this the divine fiat that any woman who ever speaks, whoever prays, has got to reach in her little bag and take out her prayer shawl?"

You know, that's – some people think that. You know, Orthodox – just give you an interesting comparison to that. The Orthodox Jews believed the very opposite. Who is it in Orthodox Judaism that wears the yarmulke? The men. You know the Romans believed the opposite as well? Maimonides says, and I quote, "Let not the wise men, nor the scholars of the wise men, pray unless they be covered." So, the Romans, in their pagan religion, felt that a man had to have his head covered when he prayed. The Jews felt that a man had to have his head covered. You see the Orthodox Jews praying over in Israel, and while they – what is called "genuflect" – they bob up and down, they'll always have a hat on. They'll always have something covering their head. They'll never pray with their head uncovered because that's their custom.

Now, you know, nowhere in the New Testament did Paul ever correct that and did he ever say, "Now you guys take your yarmulkes off. Get rid of your hats; give them to your wife." "She's the one that's supposed to have it on."

No. Why? Because this isn't a universal principle; this is a custom. Paul never said anything to the – to the Jews or the Romans about hats or not hats or covered or uncovered. It was an issue in Corinth. And in fact, Paul, as a Jew, was uttering language here entirely antagonistic to the Jewish custom of rabbinical teaching. The Jew always wore a tallit, a covering. And Paul is saying, "Don't wear a covering."

We say, "Paul, you know the Jews always wear a covering."

Yeah, but these aren't Jews, and if they do, it'll be wrong for their society. It's cultural. Paul isn't laying down an absolute rule to be observed by all Christians. And I just – I read something this week that said that this proves that women should never come to church without a hat. It doesn't prove that at all. That used to be the feeling of many people, and then the hats got so bad, no one could see, and the thing kind of died down a little bit.

But that isn't the point. It's fine to wear a hat. That's wonderful. But that isn't what he's saying. He's simply saying, "Accommodate yourselves to the custom of the Corinthians. If for a Corinthian woman to appear submissive and modest she wears a veil, then women, you wear a veil. And men the opposite." Don't violate customs that have significance in your society. The man and the woman are – to be sure they acquiesce to those.

Now, I want you to notice something, because this has given people a lot of problems here. It says, "Every man praying or prophesying" – it says "Every woman praying or prophesying."

And people will say, "You see? Women can pray and prophesy."

Well, do you know no one ever denied that? No one ever denied that women can't pray or prophesy.

You say, "But you always say women shouldn't preach in the church."

That's right. But it doesn't say in the Bible a woman can't speak to God about people, and a woman can't speak to people about God. It doesn't say that. Now, notice something; some people have wanted to put a modifier in here and have it read this way, verse 4, "Every man praying or prophesying in the church," "Every woman praying or prophesying in the church" – does it say that? No. Why do you want to put that in there? If God didn't need to say it, then why do we need to say it? We don't. Let's leave it out. There is no modifier here to indicate location. It doesn't say in the church, it doesn't say at home, it doesn't say at the this or that place. It doesn't say anything. So, what is it saying then? It is saying this: by omitting any such reference to a place, or a meeting, Paul is simply saying this, "Wherever and whenever it is proper for a man or for a woman to pray or prophesy, make sure that you maintain the distinctness of the role of a man and woman." He doesn't say where it's proper or where it's not proper; he just says, "Wherever it is, do it in terms of the proper appearance."

Now, if you want to find out whether it's proper for a woman to do it in the church, all you have to do is go to chapter 14, and you'll find out. Verse 34, "Let the women keep silence in the churches. It is not permitted to them to speak." Now, that's all you need to know. Right? So, if it says here a woman praying or prophesying, there's one place where she won't do it. And where's that? In the church.

But there are other places where she will do it. She will pray in many different places, and with other people, with other women, with her family, with close friends. There are places where she will speak and proclaim the Gospel to unsaved friends and neighbors and to other women and whatever. But the one place where she will not preach, where she will not lead is in the church. In the assembly of the church, when it comes together in its corporate meeting, she is not permitted, because there God wants to establish the male as the authority to carry out His pattern.

And that's simple to me to just see that what Paul is simply saying here is that, "The idea I'm dealing with here is the covering, not the place that she's supposed to do this. I'll get to that later." Wherever it would be right, she should maintain her modesty and sign of submission. Don't throw away your veil. Don't make a big statement about your liberation. Don't show the world you're independent.

"Now that you're one in Christ, you're no longer subject to your husband." No. Maintain that modesty, especially when you're praying, especially when you're speaking to other people, that they might see that. Women may have the gift of prophecy. I'll tell you who did. Philip had four daughters with the gift of prophecy. Did you know that? It's in Acts chapter 21, verses 8 and 9. He had four daughters with the gift of prophecy.

You say, "Where did they prophesy?"

I don't know where, but I'll tell you one place they didn't prophesy. Where? In the churches. Now, that's simple. So, the custom then, in Corinth, was for a man to be uncovered, bareheaded, and women to be veiled. And unveiled women were either prostitutes, or they were making a statement of protest against marriage or their husband, or they were running around looking for somebody who might be interested in them. Paul says don't do that.

And on the other hand, he says, "But don't men wear a veil either. Don't cover yourselves. People are going to think you're effeminate. He didn't want some custom starting in the church of men covering themselves. And you know who that could refer to? A Jew. Right? What happens if a Jew

comes to the Corinthian assembly? He wants to pray, so he covers himself, and everybody goes, “Hoo-hoo.” You know? “Look at him.” See? “Must be a little hmm – you know?” “He’s acting like a woman.”

“Just don’t worry about it, you people who are Jewish. Throw away your tallit; junk your yarmulke in that society. It’s irrelevant. It’ll only confuse the issue.” See? So, that’s what he’s saying. He’s simply saying accommodate yourself to the society.

Well, he – to the woman in verse 5, “Let every woman that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head” – in other words, she brings shame on herself. And then he says, “For that is even all one as if she were shaved.” That’s as bad as shaving her. Just, you know, taking it all off.

Now you say, “What do you mean by that?”

Well, what he means by that, basically, is this. If a woman is going to take her veil off, she might as well just cut her hair off and join the people protesting marriage, join the feminist movement. And as I told you earlier, it seems apparent in that day that one of the marks of the feminist movement that occurred was the shearing of the hair so that it would be like men’s hair, and that way they were making a statement that, “We’re equal to men.”

“And so, if you’re going to throw your veil away” – he says – “you might as well cut your hair to look like a man.” Now, this opens up a very interesting discussion about hair, and that’s going to be our subject next week. So, you can do whatever you need to do this week to get ready for that.

He says, “Now, you might as well – you might as well” – some of you are going to have a lot of trouble growing it, I’ll tell you that. “You might as well, if you’re going to throw your veil away, you might as well go the whole route. Because, in essence, that’s the way the world’s reading it.” Now, that’s pretty straight.

So, he says in verse 6, “If the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.” In other words, he says, “All right, if you’re going to put your veil away, then shave off your head so that you look like a prostitute and a protestor.”

And they would say, “Oh, I would never do that.”

And then he says, “Put your veil back on. Don’t compromise. You either do it or don’t.”

“Why not go all the way?” he says. And Paul just wants to force them to the bottom line. See? You see, what God wants to do is maintain a distinction. That’s all he saying here. God wants men to be men in the way they look. He wants men to be men in the way they act. And He wants men to be men in the responsibility they take. He wants women to be women in the way they look, the way they act, the responsibility they take. He does not want a mixture. He doesn’t want men looking like women and women looking like men.

Now, whatever that means in our society, people – and it’s tough in our society, because the

distinctions aren't real clear. But remember, it wasn't real easy in that society, when everybody wore a dress anyway. So, it's tough today, too. And Satan has always tried to rub out the line. And maybe it's some little things that you can do.

Every time I see a man, for example, with an earring – you know, I want to go phhtt... That's one sign of a woman in our society. Or makeup, or whatever it is. Whatever the things are that a man can do to look like a man and a woman can do to show herself modest and submissive and genteel and feminine as a woman, let them be done. That's what he's saying. Don't try to rub out the line. Keep the beauty of those distinctions. That's the principle.

So, we've seen the principle stated, the principle applied; next time, we're going to see the principle defended and harmonized. Let's pray.

Father, it's been good to share these things this morning and to just open up our understanding to a very practical area. And, Father, we thank You for the many godly men and godly women that You've given to us here at Grace.

We just pray that we might maintain the kind of testimony to the world and to each other in the way we act, in the way we look, in the responsibility we take to fill that role You've assigned to us in Your grace, knowing that when we do that, You will pour out blessing upon us. We just commit ourselves to You, to that end, for the glory of Christ, in whose name we pray, amen.

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