

Sermon: Women's Role in the Church - A Biblical Paradigm

Text: **I Corinthians 11:2-16 ESV**

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: There may not be any more emotionally-charged topic, today, than what we are looking at this morning. Certainly there are discussions on doctrines, on baptism and spiritual gifts which can become heated, but when we start talking about women's role in the church (and they are sitting with us) free expression of one's thoughts and beliefs may go unspoken. This issue is increasingly a divisive topic and has literally caused churches to split.

Years ago the **Episcopal Church in Boston** ordained the first black woman bishop - so much for tradition and biblical dogma.

Unlike the **Eastern Orthodox** who allow their priests to marry, the **Roman Catholic Church** has resisted that. Now there is a movement to allow women to be priests.

Other churches like **United Methodist**, even Global Methodist, **Presbyterian**, **Disciples of Christ (Christian Church)** and even some **Baptists** will ordain women as preachers and elders (mention **Saddleback, Rick Warren and SBC**). Yet some of our acapella Church of Christ brethren will not allow a woman to pray or lead songs and never lead in a devotional or, God forbid, preach in the assembly. Now, I am not here to demean others' views of sharing the gospel.

Liturgy has been infiltrated in some churches with the influence of different "women's movements. Back in the 80s I heard for the first time "Our Father and Our Mother" as a beginning to the Lord's Prayer.

I do want you to understand that biblical positions in some areas are not always as clear cut as some might say! Let me give you a taste of what we will look at today.

These are not easy topics to settle because of our previous backgrounds, prejudice, and received teachings. Years ago Lincoln Christian Seminary had a semester-long course on just what we are trying to decide this morning in 35 minutes. This was controversial then and even more so, now.

I want to look at three basic myths that affect how we view a woman's role in the Church. And out of the ashes, I hope we can resurrect a paradigm (pattern) of behavior for all Christian women.

Much of the information in the N.T. that is used to malign the Apostle Paul comes from textual areas that were addressing problems concerning worship in the first century, such as our passage in **I Corinthians 11**, this morning.

Here is a verse from my primary preaching text and two other texts of interest:

I Corinthians 11:5 ESV 5 but every wife[woman] who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.

Footnotes: [a] I Corinthians 11:5 In verses 5–13, the Greek word *gune* is translated wife in verses that deal with wearing a veil, a sign of being married in 1st century culture.

I Corinthians 14:33-35, 40 ESV 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

I Timothy 2:11-13 ESV 11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; **In our text we will see Adam then Eve.**

Christianity's roots are deeply tied to Judaism as well as being aware of the cultural context. In the ancient synagogue service, a woman could play no significant part:

1. She was not counted toward the quorum (10 males) - Etz Chaim *Tree of Life* service we attended a few years ago
2. A woman was forbidden to learn the Law (*Yentl*, by Barbra Streisand) "A man came to synagogue to learn, a woman to hear, at best."
3. A woman sat off to the side out of the way in the gallery more as an observer than a participant.

There are a number of facets to the contemporary issue. One side would say that a woman should be allowed to pursue any avenue of service/ministry that she wishes. Others like the late Roger Chambers would have disagreed. In "The Sissification of the Church," p. 5, he wrote this: The sissified Church wants to do formally what it has done actually in hundreds of congregations--turn over leadership to the women. This is a dreadful offense to godly women and a threat to their dynamic, legitimate ministries. Weak men want to escape the responsibility that God has given them in the Church and in the home; women who are the product of third generation matriarchies have no idea how to be in submission to any man, husband in the home or elder in the church."

Let's read our primary text this morning from **I Corinthians 11:2-16 ESV** which is certainly about more than "Head Coverings."

I Corinthians 11:2-16 ESV

Head Coverings

2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. (Blomberg, p. 217 - "If verse 3 suggests that the authority of a husband over his wife parallels that of God over Christ, *and that is hardly an adversarial relationship*, then certainly one is struck by the mutuality of the relationship far more than by any act of subordination. Still both are present. The historic, orthodox view of the Trinity, supported by the New Testament, involves ontological equality (equality of essence or being) combined with functional subordination (submission within role differentiation)."³ **But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife[gune] is her husband,[aner] and the head of Christ is God.** 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 5 **but every wife[c] who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.** 6 For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. 7 For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 **That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.[d]** 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; 12 for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

Footnotes: [c] **1 Corinthians 11:5** In verses 5–13, the Greek word *gune* is translated wife in verses that deal with wearing a veil, a sign of being married in first-century culture

[d] **1 Corinthians 11:10** Or messengers, that is, people sent to observe and report

Contrary to some representations of Paul and his relationship to women, Paul actually elevated the position of women in the Church. The first myth that needs to be dispelled is that:

I. Paul Hated Women.

A casual reading of **Romans 16** would indicate to even the most careless reader that Paul had respect and love for women.

The Apostle Paul entrusted Phoebe (**Romans 16:1**) with the letter to be given to the Roman Church. Four of six times Priscilla (Prisca) is mentioned before her husband, Aquila, in the N.T. as in **Romans 16:3**. Prisca risked her life for Paul, and in **v. 13** the mother of Rufus is said to be like a mother to Paul. Other women are listed as hard workers in the Lord.

Anyone who would make such a ludicrous claim as Paul hated women has not read: **I Corinthians 7:14 ESV** 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

I Peter 3:1-2 ESV 1 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct.

Here are two principles that are equally true:

“It is not enough to talk the talk; one must walk the walk.”

“It is not enough to walk the walk; one must talk the talk.”

Afterall, faith comes by hearing “the Word of God.”

Paul did not hate women at all, but held them in high esteem. They were not underlings, but co-workers in the Gospel of Christ. The second myth about the Church we want to destroy is:

II. Men and Women Are Valued Differently.

I believe, there are times when trying to elevate roles in the church, it is for the purpose of establishing a higher worth for individuals. With all the talk about equality and equity in the culture we sometimes use that as a hermeneutic, a method of interpretation, for reading our Bibles. We must be careful not to interpret the Bible with newspaper in hand, listening to social media.

Galatians 3:28 ESV 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Obviously there still are these differences in ethnicity, social standing, and gender - no matter what the culture tries to dictate. This verse Paul wrote is speaking of the equality that is found in Christ and in the context of our redemption (salvation). All differences and barriers are demolished when we are talking about the saving blood of Christ.

Because of the cultural understanding of what is important as it relates to men and women and gender and pronouns and the like, the world has confused function with relationship, love vs. control, and role with value.

What a person does (his/her function) does not establish worth. Jesus on the cross showed us what we are worth. He also showed us our value to Him there. Our response/our relationship to His overture of love and sacrifice is what matters; and our submission is a result of our love.

Mormons and others tie a woman's marital condition to her salvation chances. This is utterly wrong and unscriptural. Real salvation from the hand of Jesus is where we all are on an equal footing.

Illus. Looking through this section of scripture I thought about Paul's evaluation of the Body of Christ - what we call the Bride of Christ. His inspired thinking was that everyone was equally important, no matter what his/her function.

I Corinthians 12:12-27 ESV 12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, **but that the members may have the same care for one another.** 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

A very frequent word in N.T. Scriptures is the word **δουκωνος** which can be translated different ways, but commonly “servant.” It is a role we all are to live.

Illus. I thought back to the early 70s when I worked at People’s Building and Savings Association. Bill Eickhoff, V.P., told me once: “you work with us, not for us.” It was a collegial atmosphere where we all worked together.

Was there a difference in authoritative structure? Yes, of course.

Was there a difference in function/role? Absolutely!

Yet, all of the functions were important, and our abilities to do what we were meant to do, reflected on the owner. The janitor, tellers, my job (as treasurer), and others were all important and vital to the health of the Association.

What we *do* in the Kingdom is not nearly as important as *why*!

Why do women, or men for that matter, want to be Elders - **I Timothy 3**

Deacons - **Romans 13:4, 15:8, 16:1**

In **Romans 13:4** God’s servant is the government.

In **Romans 15:8** Christ has become a servant.

In **Romans 16:1** Phoebe is a servant, not a deaconess or a minister.

It used to be in Christian circles that Elders, Preachers and others were talked about in terms of authority and ruling over others. We even today still hear the phrase in some churches: “ruling elder.” Yet a quick canvass of N.T. Scriptures will uncover what being an Elder or Pastor is really about. It is about caring and guiding and keeping others safe. The criteria for all of us is probably best explained by Jesus in **John 12:26 ESV** ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

It can never be about serving self. Those that desire a position or function of any kind within the church so they can be seen and praised by others will have their reward only here on earth.

The last myth to consider is:

III. We Need to Change the Church for the Culture.

This, of course, is just the opposite to what we *should* do. The Church should be the change-Agent.

Actually God has established an order to His Church in her worship. Many of the spiritual gifts in the Corinthian Church were abused because they became all about the person being noticed and maybe even envied, than God being worshipped.

In the Corinth church there was a problem. There was a misunderstanding about head coverings for women. The instructions regarding these coverings, whether a veil or just the woman's hair, were given to distinguish Christian women from slaves and adultresses. In addition, women were to worship God in such a way that focused attention on Him, not on themselves.

The Church must be different than culture to ever be noticed as a solution to mankind's dilemma. I do not mean like the Amish who have misunderstood the impression they are making on unbelievers. Our differences, however, have to be based in God's Word, not convenience, not what is necessarily easy, or culturally accepted. We live to please God, not mankind, if those are our only two choices.

The Church of Jesus Christ will never be strong as long as we weaken it through *unbiblical* change and adjusting to the latest social truth.

**The answer is submission to the created authoritative order that God ordained:
GOD-----CHRIST-----Man-----Woman**

The Church is a theocracy and is governed by her monarch and Sovereign - all for the Bride of Christ's good. The Church is not a democracy but an autocracy where the Head loves us and is willing to sacrifice for his people. The Church is not a place where we vote on the truth, but where we follow and DO the truth as we understand it.

Conclusion: Ben Witherington III wraps up this section in his commentary: *Conflict & Community in Corinth, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, pp. 237-240. There are 5 major issues:

- 1. Paul affirms that both men and women may pray and prophesy so long as both reflect the glory of God. Since woman is the glory of man and her hair is her own glory, she must cover her head so that only God's glory is reflected in Christian worship.**
- 2. The word (*kephale*) translated "head" could rightly be rendered "leader."**
- 3. Whatever may be true in the order of creation, it is clear that men and women are mutually interdependent not independent, "in the Lord," and that they all ultimately come from God.**
- 4. The argument about nature and hair is meant to bolster Paul's contention that the distinctiveness of male and female should be outwardly manifested especially in Christian worship.**

5. It is possible that both male and female were wearing head coverings as a result of cultural norms and that was causing problems. Paul is not interested in baptizing the status quo or normal Roman practice. He is setting up new customs for a new community, and these customs are deeply grounded in his theological understanding of creation, redemption, their interrelation, and how they should be manifested in worship.

“For Paul, equality in Christ has more to do with whose one is than with who one is.”

Furthermore, Paul’s vision of headship or leadership involves the leader in being the head servant -- the *oikonomos* or household servant in the house of God. In Christ, Paul thus inverts the world’s order of who must serve and who will be served.

See John 13:1-17 ESV

There is much to say about the importance of biblical tradition over man’s traditions. Also we should cling to the established teaching and interpretation of the Word of God.

If you ever believe a never-before-heard understanding of Scripture, do not be fooled by slick presentations or by people with no real understanding of God’s Word. **Verses 2 and 16** are like bookends to this section of Scripture, and Paul is simply trying to tell them that novel or culturally-accepted understandings should not be followed.

II Timothy 2:2 ESV 2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men,[and women] who will be able to teach others also.

Paul would say things like: **I Corinthians 11:23 ESV** 23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,

I Corinthians 11:2, 16 ESV 2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. 16 If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.