

Sunday, July 2, 2017—I Corinthians 11:3-6 What's the Deal with Head Coverings?

Introduction/Review

- Last Sunday we began our study of I Corinthians 11, one of the more confusing chapters in Paul's epistles if not the entire Bible.
- My objective last week was to set forth some ground work from which we could tackle our discussion of the chapter. At the outset, this morning it seems prudent to review the following highlights from last week before moving forward with new information.
- Verse 1—believers follow Christ today when they follow the instructions given by Christ to Paul for the church. We do not follow Christ today according Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John. Rather we follow Christ according to information he revealed from heaven's glory to the apostle Paul.
- Verse 2— is the beginning of a paragraph that runs through the end of verse 12. In my opinion, this is an important first step to making sense out of the first half of chapter 11. Verse 2 serves as the topic sentence for this paragraph. Verses 3 through 12 are Paul's elaboration of the topic.
- Recall our discussion of the following "chain of command" established in verses 1 and 2.
 - Paul follows Christ.
 - Christ "delivered" "ordinances" unto Paul for the body of Christ to follow.
 - Paul "delivered" the "ordinances" to the Corinthians.
 - The Corinthians "remember" Paul by keeping the "ordinances" that Paul "delivered" unto them.
 - When the Corinthians follow Paul by keeping the "ordinances" he "delivered" unto them they are in fact following Christ.
- *Ordinances*—"A rule established by authority; a permanent rule of action. An *ordinance* may be a law or statute of sovereign power." (*Webster's 1828*) "An authoritative instruction as to how to proceed or act; an established set of principles; a system of government; authority; discipline. *Obs.*" (*OED*)
- In the New Testament, the word translated "ordinances" (*paradosis*) in I Cor. 11:2 occurs 13 times in 13 verses. Of these 13 occurrences, it is translated "tradition" 12 times and "ordinances" 1 time by the King James translators. Many times, the word is used in a negative way to describe the religious traditions men add to the scriptures.

- II Thessalonians 2:15—in this verse Paul uses the word “traditions” to refer to what he had taught the Thessalonians.
- II Thessalonians 3:6—when Paul uses the word “traditions” he is referring to the set of instructions he gave to the churches for their “orderly” functioning. Where did Paul get these instructions from? He got them from Christ.
- I Corinthians 11:2—the “ordinances” that Paul “delivered” unto the Corinthians were for their “orderly” functioning as an assembly both personally and collectively.

I Corinthians 11:3

- **But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.**
- *But I would have you know*—Paul wants the Corinthians to “know” the three things identified in verse 3. These three statements elaborate on “ordinances” that Paul “delivered” unto the Corinthians for their “orderly” functioning.
 - I Corinthians 11:17-18
- *The head*—Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* offers 31 different definitions for the English word “head.” Within the context of I Corinthians 11 the following is the appropriate definition:
 - “A chief; a principal person; a leader; a commander; one who has the first rank or place, and to whom others are subordinate; as the head of an army; the head of a sect or party. [Ephesians 5:23](#).”
- I Corinthians 11:3—Paul is establishing three headships that the Corinthians need to know about.
 - “The head of every man is Christ”
 - “The head of the woman is the man.”
 - “The head of Christ is God.”
- This pattern is part of the created order.
 - I Corinthians 11:8-10
 - Genesis 2:18-25
- Ephesians 5:21-25—the entire marriage relationship is based upon this dynamic.

- Verse 21-24—wives serve the Lord by submitting to their own husbands. Likewise, the husband is described as being the “head” of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. Lastly, wives are instructed to be “subject” to their own husband “in everything.”
- Verse 25—the husband i.e., the man is to love his wife “as Christ also loved the church.”
- I Corinthians 11:3—a failure to understand verse 3 will result in a failure to understand verses 4 through 12. Paul is not saying the men are better than woman or that woman are inferior to men. Rather he is establishing a spiritual chain of command like what we observed in verses 1 and 2.
 - Verses 1-2—Christ, Paul, the Corinthians
 - Verse 3—God the Father, Christ, Man, Woman
- When the Corinthians didn’t follow Paul they weren’t following Christ. The same is true for men and woman when they don’t honor their prescribed spiritual head.

I Corinthians 11:4

- **Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonoureth his head.**
- Does this verse mean that every man who prays with physical hair on his physical head dishonors his physical head? Is this verse mandating the men must be bald or have no hair?
- Based upon verse 3 who is the “head” the man is in danger of dishonoring? The Lord Jesus Christ.
- How would a man cover his head in this context? It would be to place anything or anyone between him and his head the Lord Jesus Christ.
- More specify, given the totality of the context when men allow woman to usurp the authority that God has given them they dishonor the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - I Timothy 2:12
 - I Timothy 3:1—in keeping with I Cor. 11:3 men are given the responsibility of running the local church.
- I Corinthians 11:4—when a man does function in the role/headship that God has ordained he brings honor to his head i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 11:5

- **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.**
- According to verse 3, who is the “head of the woman?” The Man. So how would a woman pray with her head “uncovered?” She would be seeking to usurp the authority and headship that God has placed in “the man.” She would be stepping out from underneath the God ordained headship of verse 3 and seeking to replace it with her own headship.
- *for that is even all one as if she were shaven*—this part of the verse makes it clear that Paul is not simply talking about a woman’s physical hair. Notice carefully that the woman is not ACTUALLY shaven in this verse. Rather it says that when she seeks to act in an “uncovered” manner it is as “if she were shaven.”
- Therefore, Paul is using the woman’s hair as a physical illustration of a spiritual truth. Think about how woman are about their hair? They will touch and braid each other’s hair.

I Corinthians 11:6

- **For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.**
- *For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn*—following the illustration, if a woman is going to refuse to walk according to verse 3 Paul says, “let her also be shorn” i.e., have all her hair cut off.
- *but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered*—if a woman would be shamed by being shaven in a physical sense she needs to make sure she is covered in a spiritual sense.
- Ladies Paul is using your hair as a tangible spiritual illustration. What are you more concerned with? Your physical headship or your spiritual headship?
- Genesis 3:16—the sin nature in a woman is going to be to rebel against the authorities that God has placed in her life.

Concluding Thoughts

- I Corinthians 11:2—why did Paul deliver “ordinances” to the church?
 - II Thessalonians 3:6—when Paul uses the word “traditions” he is referring to the set of instructions he gave to the churches for their “orderly” functioning.
- I Corinthians 11:17-18—what is Paul concerned with in Corinth? Their orderly functioning.

- I Corinthians 14:40
- I Corinthians 14:34-35—within the context of the spiritual gifts there was an orderly function. The women in Corinth were out of order.
- Next time we will look at all the women who helped Paul in his ministry.