

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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Introduction: In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul lays down the great principle which governs the life of every believer, **“DO IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.”** Whatever a Christian does must be done to bring God glory. In chapter 11:2 through 14:40, Paul’s main concern is public worship. Certainly everything which is done in Christian worship should bring glory to God.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Verses 2-6

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. ³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

- Paul praises the Corinthians for honoring the traditions of worship as he passed them on. It is important to note that Christian worship was unique from both Hebrew and Greek worship. Hebrews did not allow men and women to worship together. Christian worship did. Greek worship often involved priests and priestesses in sexual practices with the worshippers. Christian worship did not. Because of these practices, Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that, in Christian worship, the order established between spouses applied.
- That order was this: Christ was the supreme head of the Church. All should be done to His glory. The man, husband, was under the authority of Christ. The woman, the wife, was under the authority of her husband who was under the authority of Christ. Submission to this tradition/ordering was to

be displayed in Christian worship in that men participated in worship without covering their heads. Jewish men always wore a yarmulke when they worshipped. The bare head separated Jewish worship from Christian worship. Christian women always covered their heads in worship. In those times only prostitutes would appear in public without head coverings.

- Paul says that to violate these traditions was rebellious against the order God had established.

Verses 7-11

⁷ 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 did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹² For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

- Paul appeals to the order of creation to support his argument. Man was created first. Woman was created second and then only because the man was lonely and needed a helper fit for him. Man was created for God. Woman was created for man. His argument is that it is proper for a wife to show respect for her husband because this is how God ordered the universe.
- There is a great deal of discussion among Christian scholars throughout the ages as relates to the meaning of these verses. Some argue that this is a lasting principle and that women should, to this day, cover their heads in public worship. Others argue that the practice of head coverings was related to some particular practice in the first century churches about which we are unaware. Therefore, women do not need to cover their heads in worship today. As these arguments are ages old, it is unlikely that their resolution is currently at hand. Further, no one knows what the reference to angels in verse 10 means. Perhaps it means that the angels are offended when they look down on public worship and see people acting in rebellion to the created order of God. Certainly, the principle stands. In public worship everything must be done to bring God glory.

Verses 12-16

¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵ but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

- Men and women are not independent of each other. Each must live so as not to cause the other to stumble (see 1 Corinthians 10:32). It is important that proper decorum between husbands and wives be shown in worship. Greek men wore their hair much the way men do today. Greek women refrained from cutting their hair. Their hair was their glory. For a woman to cut her hair or shave her head (verses 6-7) was considered disgraceful and rebellious. The point is that the order established by God in creation should be observed to honor God in public worship. To fail to observe this order is contentious. Therefore, among Christians, there is no other practice. Christians seek to bring God glory in everything.

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