

## Session 6 – Paul, the Created Order, and the Role of Women in the Church (Part 2)

### (I Corinthians 11:7 – 12)

“For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman but woman for man.” I Corinthians 11:8

- I. The context of reference to the created order in I Corinthians 11:7 – 12.
  - A. We will return to I Corinthians 11:2 – 16 later in our study and will focus specifically upon Paul’s injunctions regarding the role of women in the public assembly. In this session, we will focus upon Paul’s reference to the created order (vs. 7 – 10).
  - B. I Corinthians 11:7 – 10 is the second direct reference Paul makes to the created order as it relates to the role of women in the church that we will study. (Paul indirectly addresses the created order in Galatians 3:28 and directly in I Timothy 2:11 – 13. In actuality, I Corinthians was written before I Timothy.)
  - C. As with I Timothy 2:8 – 15, the context is propriety in the public assembly (whether this was the actual worship service is unclear and we will return to this during a later session). The consensus of commentators is that women were acting during these public assemblies in ways in which they would not act outside gatherings of the church (that is, in public). Men may also have been acting inappropriately, i.e. they may have covered their heads.
  - D. The evidence for a specific heresy is much less evident in I Corinthians than in I Timothy (though this is debated). Rather, the general abuse of freedom in Christ, especially during worship, is the dominant problem in the Corinthian church. Chapters 11 – 14 address this abuse, such as undisciplined behavior during the Lord’s Supper and the disruptive behavior of persons with the spiritual gift of tongues.
- II. An analysis of I Corinthians 11:7 – 12.
  - A. As with I Timothy 2:8 – 15, the Greek words *aner* and *gyne* may either refer to husband and wife or man and woman. Many believe that the context suggests husband and wife in this passage though the most straightforward reading is man and woman.
  - B. The Jewish custom was for women to pray with their heads covered. The Greek custom was for women to pray with the heads uncovered.
  - C. Some suggest that this passage may address the way women wore their hair (cut short or flowing long) but the majority believe this passage refers to the use of a head covering, such as a shawl (see below).
  - D. According to the traditional view:

1. The concept of “glory” is that of reflected glory (man is created in the image of God). In Genesis 1:27 God created male and female in His image (man and woman are made in the image of God to reflect His glory). In the Greek world (and the Jewish world), however, the man (husband) was the head of the woman (wife). Paul seems to be saying that the woman (wife) reflects the glory of man (husband). (v. 7)
2. Paul argues from the creation, not the Fall.
3. Paul is referring in v. 8 to Genesis 2:21 – 23, where woman is made out of man’s rib (side).
4. One should always honor and respect the source from which one came.
5. Woman was created for man (Genesis 2:18, 20). Therefore woman should honor man.
6. Woman should have a sign (v. 10) of her honor for man, namely a head covering.
7. Paul is using a “chiasm” (a crossing over similar to I Timothy 2:13 - 15): (a) man ought not to cover his head (v. 7); (b) since he is in the image and glory of God; (b') but woman is the glory of man for woman was made from man (vs. 8 and 9); (a') for this reason a woman ought to have authority on her head (v. 10 looking back to v. 7 and meaning that Paul does refer to the head covering).
8. Verses 11 and 12 emphasize that role and headship are not related to worth. “...as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.” (v. 12)
9. Even the angels testify to the created order which establishes male spiritual leadership. (v. 10) The angels were witnesses to and rejoiced in the creation. (Job 38:7)
10. Addressing the specific violation of honor for men in Corinth also addresses a general principle of male spiritual leadership.

E. According to a more modern view:

1. Any interpretation must derive from an understanding that Genesis 1:26 – 28 clearly states that both man and woman were created in the image of God.
2. It is clear that women in Corinth were praying and prophesying during the assembly.
3. Paul may be “overstating the case” earlier in this passage. (v. 6) to make a specific point about propriety in worship at Corinth. . If the woman (wife) is not going to act like a woman (wife) by covering her head with a veil, then she might as go all the way and shave her head as a man (husband) would shave his head.
  - a. We should ask the question, “Why is the issue of head covering in Corinth so important to Paul?”
  - b. The probable answer is that these women were attempting to exercise their new found freedom in Christ in an overzealous way. They may have even believed that they had achieved a resurrection existence. (I Corinthians 4:8, 15:12)

4. Paul brings these women back to the understanding that societal factors continue to be important, just as he does in Romans 13 and 14.
5. To make his point as strongly as possible, Paul uses analogy in verses 8 and 9 to instruct about propriety in worship. He, on the surface, makes a very clear and rabbinical argument, namely “man is superior to and has authority over woman, therefore...”. But the underlying meaning is that the women in Corinth should submit themselves to the social order so that they might maintain order and win others to Christ (“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God...” [vs 10:31, 32])
6. Verse 10 suggests that the veil is not a veil of submission but *exousia* or “a sign of authority” (and very well may not mean the authority of man over woman). This is the power given by Christ to His disciples (an active power given to the person, not the power of authority over the person) and in other places *exousia* is used to suggest freedom (e.g. I Cor. 8:9). Note that Paul contrasts independence (v. 10) with interdependence (v. 11).
7. Paul is arguing that wives who have been set free in Christ are not to flaunt their freedom, especially in the worship services but rather are to show respect to their husbands. By the same token, husbands are to show submission to Christ. (Remember, the church at Corinth was guilty of many improprieties during worship, not just women who were unveiled.)
8. In verses 11 and 12 Paul therefore restates the principle that he initially stated in Galatians 3:28.

### III. Lessons from I Corinthians 11:7 – 12 regarding the role of women in the church.

- A. Paul was constantly addressing the tension between freedom in Christ (I Corinthians 1:4 – 9) and the potential abuse of that freedom I Corinthians (e.g. I Corinthians 11:17 – 22).
- B. Some women in Corinth were clearly disrupting the worship services. This disruption was an abuse of the freedom of these women in Christ.
- C. Paul constantly pleads in I Corinthians for propriety and order based in love (I Corinthians 14:40).
- D. The debate from I Corinthians 11:7 – 12 regarding the role of women in the church derives from Paul’s use of the Genesis narrative to back his argument for the proper behavior of men and women during worship services.
  1. Is Paul appealing to an established order which defines the roles of men and women (that is, male spiritual leadership) based on Genesis and which is inherent in the creation, or
  2. Is Paul using a rabbinical argument (analogy) to encourage women to not abuse their freedom in Christ?
- E. The weight one places upon one or the other of the two arguments above depends upon what context in which the passage is read.
  1. If one reads Genesis 2 as establishing male spiritual leadership and I Timothy 2 as a statement affirming male spiritual leadership, then I

Corinthians 11:7 - 12 should be read as an additional affirmation of the divine order established at creation. This divine order, if accepted, will lead to love and harmony among members of the church and in marriages.

2. If one reads Genesis 2 as not establishing male spiritual leadership and one reads Galatians 3:28 as signifying that Christ as re-established the divine harmony present at creation, then I Corinthians 11:7 – 12 should be read as an analogy applicable to the specific situation in Corinth. Bowing to the societal prohibitions of the day in the light of freedom in Christ will lead to harmony and love in the church.
- F. One factor which holds, whatever interpretation is accepted, is that the action of these women must be viewed as occurring in the presence of God as well as others (because of the angels, v. 10). She recognizes before the angels the supremacy of God.
- G. Regardless of how one interprets this passage, the purpose of the passage was to establish love and harmony in worship between men and women, suggesting that whatever role women assume in the church is a role in harmony with men.

#### References

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