

*The Whole Counsel of God*  
**Study 13**

**MALE AND FEMALE:  
A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER**

*“God created man in His own image,  
in the image of God He created him;  
male and female He created them.”*

*Genesis 1:27*

Genesis 1.27 gives us the first poetic lines of the Bible. In the previous verse, we hear God deliberating with himself and stating the purpose to create man in his image. Then God’s act of carrying out this purpose is given in poetic form, which suggests a celebration of the crowning creation. The mention that God made them male and female makes this statement stand apart from the statement on the creation of the other living creatures. When God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind,” the narrative goes on to say that “God made the beasts of the earth after their kind...” (vv 24-25), but there is no mention of the fact that the beasts were made male and female. There was no need to mention that. The fact of gender in the animal world is obvious and implied in the statement of the creation of animals. But, this serves to highlight the mention of male and female in v 27. In the case of mankind, the genders have a special significance that cannot simply be left as a biological fact of the species. The second creation account in Gen 2.4-25 confirms our observation from Gen 1.27. In this passage, the theme of the creation of man (v 7) and woman (v 22) mark the beginning and end the creation account. This focus on male and female or man and woman lifts up the subject of gender and makes it a topic of biblical doctrine.

The creation narratives are not doctrinal discussions. They are simply narratives that give the data or the facts with which the doctrinal discussion must work. In the OT the significance of the difference between male and female is assumed. It is not defined or worked out. For this we have to turn to Paul’s letters. The apostle deals with two separate themes taken from the biblical account of creation. In 1Cor 11.2-16; 14.33a-36 and 1Tim 2.8-15, he takes up the theme of the difference in roles between male and female. In Eph 5.22-33 he takes up the theme of marriage. In this study, we will take up the former of the two themes.

The principal text for the apostle’s teaching on gender is 1Cor 11.2-16. In this passage, Paul guides us through the way we are to think of the difference between male and female.

**A. APPROACH TO 1 CORINTHIANS 11.2-16**

We must begin our study of 1Cor 11.2-16 by taking note of the fact that this discussion is part of a letter. A letter is written within a given relationship and addresses specific situations and issues known to both the writer and the recipients that are not stated in writing. This raises a particular challenge to third party readers, which we are. We have to get in on the conversation between Paul and the Corinthians and try to understand the issues and problems being discussed. It is understandable if we try to get at the issues immediately and ask, “What was going on at Corinth that Paul has to address?” Here we have to step back. Paul does not spell out what the problem at Corinth was. As for this problem, we are left guessing. A wiser approach to 1Cor 11.2-16 would be to start by asking, “What is Paul actually doing in this passage?” This question turns our attention to the text to see how the passage works. Now we are dealing with what we have at hand.

## 1. The setting in the letter

1Corinthians 11.2 makes it clear that Paul is beginning a new section of his letter. Now he is turning to traditions that he has delivered to them. Paul ties the discussion in 1Cor 11.2-16 into what follows in several ways.

The discussions on the head covering and the Lord's Supper that immediately follows are tied together by Paul's introductory remarks. In v 2 he begins, "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you." When Paul turns to the theme of the Lord's Supper, he says, "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you" (v 17). This rebuke stands in direct contrast to the praise in v 2.

Paul closed the discussion on the head covering by appealing to the custom of the churches of God, and this refers to the assemblies in other places. These churches of God were referred to in Paul's introduction to the letter in 1Cor 1.2. Paul addressed this letter to the Corinthians "with all who in every place call on our Lord Jesus Christ." This is Paul's way of describing the assemblies of believers. They met to call upon the name of the Lord. The reference to praying and prophesying in 1Cor 11.4-5 and 13 fits in with this.

The theme of the churches of God naturally leads over to the subject of the Lord's Supper, because the NT Christians gathered to break bread (alluded to in v 20; and see Ac 20.7). In the assemblies, the members exercised their spiritual gifts. All that was spoken by the Spirit said, in sum and substance, that Jesus is Lord (12.3). The speech addressed both people (in prophecy, 14.3, 24-25) and God (in prayer and thanksgiving, 14.15).

Paul closes his instructions on the church meeting in a way that ties in with 11.2-16. He appeals to the practice and order of the churches (14.33b) and refers to what the Law says (14.34) which points back to what was taught in 1Cor 11.7-9 from Gen 2. Paul closes by holding the Corinthians to his apostolic teaching and to being in conformity with the word of God as it was received in the other churches (14.36). He also tells the Christians how to treat the person who refuses to recognize the teaching (14.38). This all echoes what Paul said in 11.16.

As we examine 1Cor 11.2-16, we must keep in mind that it is part of a larger piece that extends to the end of chapter 14. Paul is dealing with what goes on in the churches of God (11.16) and all the assemblies of the saints (14.33b). One of his concerns is that the Corinthians see themselves as having the same custom (11.16) and having received the same word (14.36).

## 2. How Paul treats the problem

Paul begins the discussion of 1Cor 11.2-16 with praise for the Corinthians. This praise is set in sharp contrast to the rebuke that he is about to deliver to them in 11.17-34. We should take note that the Lord's Supper was a tradition. When Paul says that what he received from the Lord he delivered to them (v 23), he is referring to tradition. The word *delivered* is the verb form of the word for *tradition*. The Corinthians kept the tradition of the Lord's Supper but did not keep it in a praiseworthy manner. We must read the shift from praise to rebuke back into Paul's discussion on the head covering. This discussion is carried out with unqualified praise for the Corinthians.

The discussion on the subject of the head covering does not involve any reprimand for even direct correction of the Corinthians' behaviour. In the Corinthian letter, Paul is quite frank in rebuking the church for deviant behaviour and very straightforward in telling them how they must change. This kind of corrective note is missing in 1Cor 11.2-16. So, what does Paul point to directly as the challenge at Corinth? He points his finger in v 16 when he says, "If one is inclined to be contentious...." Some party (one or several individuals) was being contentious over the manner of women's headdress. The Corinthians appealed to Paul to gain his insight on the matter, and for this he was very grateful. The apostle begins his answer by expressing his joy over the fact that they remembered him in this matter and saw in this that indeed they were thinking of him when it came to those matters that he handed on to them (v 2). Then he

guides them through the subject. Throughout the discussion, he does not correct their practice but sets before them the points that they are to consider, appeals to their natural sense (vv 5b-6,14-15 ) and engages them to judge the matter among themselves (v 13).

### **3. What is the issue?**

We would like to know what the issue was at Corinth, and this would facilitate our understanding of 1Cor 11.2-16. But, again we have to appeal for restraint. Paul does not spell out how the Corinthians practiced this custom of the churches. We can only work with the text we have before us. The more important question is what is the issue as Paul sees it?

Paul deals with the matter in a balanced way. We can see this if we lay out the points he raises:

The head of every man...the head of a woman...  
Every man praying or prophesying...every woman praying or prophesying...  
For a man ought not...There for the woman ought...  
If a man has long hair...but if a woman has long hair...

If we look closer at Paul's reasoning, we see that the concern lies on the woman's side. Paul reasons from the Corinthian woman's intuitive aversion to cut off her hair and not from the man's revulsion at growing his hair long (vv 5b-6). Paul does not open up what it means for the man to be the image and glory of God but what it means for the woman to be the glory of man (vv 8-9) and gives the fuller reason for the woman to attend to her head (v 10). In v 13 he comes out with it. He does not call the church to judge if it is proper for a man to pray uncovered but if it is proper for a woman to pray uncovered. His closing statement is about the woman's hair and how that bears on the question of the covering (v 15).

The contention arose in the church over the women's headdress and not over the men's. But, Paul does not give his ruling on the matter. Rather, he guides them through the issue so that they as a church can judge the matter. Here we should make a note on the translation. The NASB which we are using reads, "Judge for yourselves" (v 13). The literal translation is, "Judge among (*en*) yourselves," and this is an appeal for the church at Corinth to evaluate the matter and come to a decision. This call for the church to decide the matter is in keeping with the nature of the issue. In v 16 Paul points out that the matter in question is in the area of the custom of the churches, and by engaging the Corinthians to decide the matter among themselves the apostle is honouring them as being one of these churches that has the custom as its own.

For Paul it was not just a "woman's issue." He wants the Corinthians to see that it concerns both the man and the woman and the way the two genders are related to each other in the divine order. Herein lies the value of 1Cor 11.2-16 for our doctrinal study. Paul is using the question of a woman's headdress to work out an understanding of the genders in the divine order of relationships. We will now pursue the way Paul does this.

## **B. THINKING THROUGH THE ISSUES**

We will chart the course of Paul's reasoning to get at how he guides the church through an understanding of gender.

### **1. The order of Paul's thought**

Paul engages the Christians to look at the matter in question from two sides. The problem presented to him is on the visible and physical side: how are women to adorn their heads when praying and prophesying? This is only one side of the issue, and it is the secondary side from the apostle's point of view. He puts forward the invisible and spiritual side as the side from which to look through to the visible and physical side. On the visible side it is a mere matter of the different ways that men and women appear. On the other

side, it is a matter of how relationships are structured; this takes in the difference between men and women but goes higher to take in God's relationship in Christ.

Paul develops his line of thought by moving from the divine order to the visible order in a series of four steps. The order can be laid out simply as follows:

1. Spiritual order: The order of relationships (v 3)
2. The visible difference: What headdress and hair means for the order of relationships (vv 4-6)
3. Spiritual order: The order of the relationship established in creation (vv 7-12)
4. The visible difference: What nature teaches about long hair and how this bears on the question about the covering (vv 13-15)

Paul moves from the spiritual order to the visible display of the difference of the genders. The spiritual order is a matter of faith and not sight, and it is given in divine revelation. The visible display is taken from the natural realm. Paul does not appeal to scripture for the fact that the man ought not to be covered while the woman ought to be. In fact, the OT would not serve this purpose at all, since the priests had to have their heads bound up in a cap or turban. For the visible display of the difference between the sexes, Paul appeals to the women's own sensibilities (1Cor 11.5b-6) and to what nature teaches about dishonour and glory (vv 14-15).

The way Paul moves from the spiritual order of relationships to the visible display of gender difference makes an important point for the church. Paul works with what is true in all decent cultures. There is a built in difference in the way masculinity and femininity are shown and perceived. The controlling power is usually subjective and social. People have a sense of honour and avoid shame or disgrace, and the social order gives this a kind of objective force in that it stands over the individual. Paul sees in this something very natural that answers to what God has revealed in Christ (v 3) and in the biblical creation account (vv 7-12). Paul does not want the churches to simply maintain the display of difference between the genders on mere subjective and social grounds. They are to see the light of revelation shine through what is the natural norm and fill the form of the natural order with spiritual meaning. Behind it lies the deep truth of redemption. The redemption in Christ does not destroy creation and negate what vestiges there are in society of the created order. Rather, redemption elevates the truly natural and gives it the full meaning of divine order of things that is both behind and above all.

## **2. Headship (1Cor 11.3-6)**

Verses 3 to 6 are joined together in the theme of headship. In v 3 Paul states that both the man and the woman have a visible head. Then in vv 4-5 he asserts that the way the difference between a man and a woman is displayed in their heads when praying or prophesying bears on their relational heads. In vv 5b-6 Paul presses his point on the woman by tying her dignity in her hair to the question of the covering. Now we will examine the reasoning in this.

### **a. Paul's contribution (v 3)**

Paul begins with, "I want you to understand (lit., to know)..." By this introduction, Paul is signaling that he is now going to set forth the insight that he will contribute to the discussion which will enable them to see the matter from the correct point of view. We should see this within the flow of thought from v 2. As for their practice, he has praise for them (v 2); but in their struggle over the issue they needed the insight that the apostle contributes.

In 1Cor 1.17, he said that Christ did not send him to baptize but to preach the gospel. He also told the Corinthians that he was determined to be true to this commission. When he proclaimed the gospel to them, he was determined to know nothing among them but Christ Jesus and him crucified (2.2). The apostle is true to this determination in the way he approaches the question of the head covering. His part was not to

give the Corinthians a style of headdress. His role was to give them the truth as it is in Christ and teach them how this is to inform and control all that they do.

Paul presents a hierarchy of relationships in which each relationship has a head so that all the relationships are tied together in a series. Paul does not present a linear progression from the bottom up, i.e., from the woman up to God, or from the top down, i.e., from God down to the woman. Rather, he first states the relational head of the man and of the woman, and then he presents God as the relational head of Christ. Paul presents the relationships in this order in view of his discussion. Throughout the discussion he will be dealing with the man and the woman (in that order: vv 4-6; 7-12; 13-15). But, the relationships in which the man and the woman exist do not complete the picture. The whole hierarchy of relationships goes up to God from whom all descends through Christ.

There is a point of possible confusion due to the Greek language. In Greek the words for husband and wife are the same as for man and woman. So, in any context we must decide whether Paul is speaking of husbands and wives or simply of men and women. To make it explicit, one would have to say in Greek, "his own woman" and "her own man," otherwise the context must show what is meant. The statement, "the man is the head of a woman," could be taken as referring to marriage. But, Paul does not begin with this. He rather begins by saying, "Christ is the head of every man." This statement has nothing to do with marriage, and the phrase, "every man," is not limited to married men. This first statement sets the focus, so that we are not to think of the marriage relationship but of the relationship between the genders.

We have already noticed that Paul does not see the matter of the head covering as a "woman's issue." He treats it as a male-female issue, as a gender issue that involves the man as much as the woman. But, even this is too narrow of a view. Paul sets the issue within the whole hierarchy of relationships up to God. For our doctrinal study, we have to grasp the significance of this.

Paul does not see male and female in a binary or polar relationship in which the one defines the other. Take the north and the south poles. The two work together and define each other mutually. This is not how the apostle presents male and female. They are not like nuts and bolts which are different but simply fitted for each other. In the hierarchy of relationships presented in v 3, the man defines the woman in a way that the woman does not define the man. It is Christ (not the woman) that defines the man in a way that is parallel to the way the man defines the woman.

The perspective that Paul contributes in v 3 is based on his gospel. In 1Cor 8.6 he gives the basic Christian confession of faith that is held by all the Corinthian believers. According to this confession, all things are from God the Father and through the Lord Jesus Christ through whom we exist. It is not the case, as in the Jewish view, that God is in heaven and we are on earth and the relationship between God and people must be worked out in a covenant. The gospel proclaimed that God is related to all within the divine being. On the divine side, there is the Father as the source of all and the Son or the Lord through whom all things come to be. Thus, God is from within his divine being related and all exist as a result of that divine relationship. In 1Cor 11.3, Paul applies this reality to the question of gender.

#### **b. What Paul means by head**

It has been often assumed that by head Paul means a position of authority over someone. According to this understanding, Paul is presenting a series of relationships of authority and submission in 1Cor 11.3. The problem with this view is that it does not fit in with what Paul makes of the idea of a head within a relationship. Paul develops the concept of Christ as the head of the church in Ephesians and Colossians. Here the idea of Christ as the authority over the church is not in view. Rather, Christ is presented as the source of the church from whom the church is supplied (Eph 1.22-23; 4.16; Col 2.19). In Col 1.18 Christ as head is the beginning, the source of resurrection life for all. Christ is called the head of all rule and authority in Col 2.10, and this refers to his role as creator of all rule and authority (1.16). The idea that Christ has authority over the church is not denied, but it is not the point in the metaphor of the head.

In Eph 5.22-33 Paul presents Christ as the head of the church in a personal relationship of the husband to the church as his bride. Here the role of Christ is not presented in terms of his authority but of his act of giving himself for the church and making her perfect. The role of head is to nourish and cherish. Paul works out the relationship between the man as the head and the woman in 1Cor 11.7-9 in a way that fits in with what we saw about headship from Ephesians and Colossians. In creation, the man was the source from whom the woman was made. The evidence is solid and consistent. By head Paul means the source in a given relationship.

The idea that the head is the source does not mean that the one under the head is not in a position of submission. In Eph 5.22-23 Paul sets forth the relationship between the head and the body as one of giving and submission. The submission in view is not the place of taking orders for Paul does not present the head as giving orders. The submission must be defined by the role of the head, and that means it is the position of receiving what the head gives. That Paul sees the woman's side of the relationship in 1Cor 11.3-12 as one of submission is made clear from 1Cor 14.34. Here Paul says that the women are to be subject and adds, "...just as the Law also says." He does not point out in this passage how the Law (the five books of Moses) says this because he is referring to what was pointed out from Genesis 2 in chapter 11.7-9. This shows that Paul assumed that it was understood that if the man is the head of the woman the woman is subject to the man. In our thought world, we pair authority and submission so that we only see submission under authority. This is not the biblical view. Later we will see how Paul understands authority, but now we are pointing out that on the theme of headship Paul works with a relationship of giving and submitting to the role of giving, i.e., being in a receptive position.

**c. The impact one has on his or her head (vv 4-6)**

Now Paul applies the significance of the hierarchy of relationships to the matter in question, the head covering.

*i. Following Paul's argument*

Paul asserts the point that covering or not covering one's own head bears on one's relational head. He makes this assertion in a balanced way for both men (v 4) and women (v 5a).

In each of Paul's statements on the man and the woman, he uses the word *head* twice. It is obvious that the first use refers to the physical head that is to be uncovered or covered. The question that we must answer is: what does the second reference to the head refer to? Does it refer to the person's own physical head or to his or her relational head? The flow of the argument would decide in favour of the latter suggestion. Paul has just put forth the truth that the head of every man is Christ and the head of a woman is the man, and he put this forth as the first truth that is to control our thinking. If this truth controls our understanding of vv 4-5, then it is clear that the head which is impacted is the relational head. If one insisted that Paul is referring to a person's own head, then one would have to argue that one's head is used to refer to one's own person. The idea would be that the man who prays or prophesies with a covered head shames his own person. While the drift of Paul's argument supports the idea, there is no support that Paul used the word *head* with this meaning. He does not use the word *head* to refer to the person. He always uses the word *head* in a relational way. It is the head of the body, whether the physical head or the metaphorical head (see Eph 5.25-33).

Paul backs up the assertion that the woman who prays or prophesies with an uncovered head shames her relational head with a challenge on what she is not prepared to do with her hair (vv 5b-6). He points out that the woman who acts without having her head covered is one and the same with her whose head is shaven and then argues that the significance of the two, head covering and hair, go together.

It is commonly asserted that Paul is referring to prostitutes who were distinguished by having their heads shorn. This turns out to be a rumor among commentators. Research has not supported the assumption. Evidence has been pulled up to show that it was the mark of women in lesbian relationships to have short (manly) hair. Similarly long hair was a mark of homosexuals (Gordon Fee, *I Corinthians*). This suggestion

fits very well in Paul's argument. A woman with shorn hair is denying the relational identity of her womanhood. Here again we see Paul's way at looking at gender. In Rom 1.26 he says of lesbians that they exchanged their natural function or use for that which is unnatural. Paul did not see the use of the female as being for women but for the man. This is not reducing a woman to be a chattel of men. This view is due to the relational understanding of gender. Our identity and function are defined by the divinely established relationships.

ii. *Discerning Paul's point*

Verses 5b-6 shows that Paul is drawing on the point of personal shame. Shame is the result of being stripped of one's dignity. That this is what Paul is working on becomes clear in vv 14-15. Here we see that long hair was a dishonour to men and a glory to women. When Paul said that the uncovered woman is one and the same as she whose head is shorn, he is saying that the issue in the head covering is the same as in the hair. It is a matter of displaying femininity or a woman's glory. In light of this, we are to understand Paul's point.

Paul's logic in vv 4-5a is that the way a person presents him or herself as to his or her gender identity bears on his or her relational head. For the man to take on the badge of femininity is to shame Christ his head. For the woman to remove the badge of her femininity is for her to shame the man as her head. Our gender identity is relational and is to be displayed and communicated, and this display makes a statement on our relational head. This goes beyond the saying, "No one lives to himself." It means that no one has his personal identity unto him or herself.

### **3. Considerations from creation and nature (1Cor 11.7-15)**

Paul's opening assertion in v 7 signals the turn the discussion is taking. He begins, "For a man ought not to have his covered," and then proceeds to give the reason for the moral obligation. He takes up the woman's side in v 10 when he affirms, "Therefore the woman ought to...." Then in v 13 he calls upon the Corinthians to judge the matter among themselves and closes with an appeal to what nature teaches with regard to long hair. In vv 3-6 Paul points out what neglect of the proper display on the head means for the relational head. Now he gives the reason why the Christians ought to have the appropriate display on their heads.

The discussion in vv 7-15 runs parallel to Paul's assertions in vv 3-6. The discussion on the obligation to not cover or to cover the head is based on the order of the relationship between the man and the woman established in creation (vv 7-12) and this corresponds to the affirmations on headship in vv 3-5a. The appeal to what nature teaches about long hair and the genders in vv 13-16 corresponds to Paul's challenge based on what the women are not prepared to do with their hair in vv 5b-6. We can lay this out as follows:

- A1. The relational heads and the covering (vv 3-5a)
- A2. Making the case from cutting the hair off (vv 5b-6)
  
- B1. The obligation concerning the covering of the head and the order of the relationship between the man and the woman (vv 7-12)
- B2. Making the decision in light of what nature teaches from long hair (vv 12-15)

We should also take note of the significant change in perspective and tone in the second part of Paul's discussion. Paul presents the matter of the head covering from a negative point of view in vv 4-6. He points out what is the case if the man is covered and the woman uncovered (what ought not to be). The result is shame to the relational head. In vv 7-15 he looks at the matter from a positive point of view. He presents what *ought* to be: the man is not to be covered and the woman is to be covered. A term that ties this section together is *glory*. The man is the glory of God, the woman is the glory of man and long hair is a woman's glory. This theme of glory stands in direct contrast to the theme of shame that dominates vv 4-6.

The positive perspective that we have noticed is significant for understanding Paul's direction. He does not see the matter of the head covering principally as one of avoiding shame, as if the woman simply had to be protected in her vulnerability to shame. Paul is concerned about avoiding shame, but his real interest is in the glory that is inherent in the man and the woman. We see him moving in the direction of affirming the woman's dignity. In v 10 he represents the covering in a positive and dignified way in terms of authority. In v 15, which is his concluding statement, he affirms the woman's glory.

**a. The created order of the relationship between man and woman (vv 7-12)**

This part of Paul's discussion divides into two parts. The first presents the reasons in creation why the man ought not and the woman ought to be covered (vv 7-10). The second balances the stress on the difference between the man and the woman with the interdependence of the two in the Lord (vv 11-12).

*i. The difference established in creation (vv 7-10)*

This piece of the discussion has a clear structure. Paul begins by stating that the man ought not to be covered (v 7a) and ends by concluding that the woman ought to be covered, though he puts this in terms of authority (v 10). In between these affirmations, Paul states the supporting facts from creation. We will lay this out as follows:

- A1. For a man ought not to have his head covered,
  - B1. since he is the image and glory of God;
  - B2. but the woman is the glory of man.
  - Explanation: For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;  
for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.
- A2. Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head, because of the angels. Note: this is my translation of v 10 which will be explained later.

We must be careful not to miss the flow of Paul's argument through the statements he makes: "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man... Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head...." He is not assigning the fact that man is the image and glory of God as the reason that the man ought not to be covered and the fact that the woman is the glory of the man as the reason why she should be covered. This would be an artificial way of reading the text. Both statements that the man is the glory of God and the woman is the glory of man are the reason why the man ought not to be covered, and from both of these statements Paul concludes that the woman ought to be covered. Paul is not isolating the idea of being the glory of God and saying that this ought not to be covered whereas the glory of man is such that it ought to be covered. It is the difference between a man and a woman established in the fact that by creation man is the glory of God and the woman is the glory of man that calls for the difference in how they present themselves in their heads. This agrees with the drift of the whole discussion in 1Cor 11.2-16. Paul is dealing the difference between the genders.

**The difference between the man and the woman (vv 7-9)**

What is the difference between the man and the woman that Paul points to as being so significant? We should first take note of what it is not. The difference is not considered in terms of what they can or are allowed to do. In another passage Paul bars the women from teaching in the church (1Tim 2.11-15), but in this passage Paul accepts that women do the same thing that men do: they pray and prophesy. These two activities encompass address to God and to the people of God.

The difference that Paul is concerned with is the raw fact of the difference of gender. But, even here we have to narrow our focus. Paul does not look at different characteristics whether physical or psychological.

These do exist and are taken note of in other scriptures (1Tim 2.14 and 1Pt 3.7), but they are not relevant to Paul's case in 1Corinthians 11. Actually, Paul brings it down to something that from our point of view seems quite abstract; it is the difference in the order of creation and not a difference in our experience as men and women. I said that from our point of view this seems quite abstract because it has nothing to do with what we have done or with an event that we can see. But, from God's point of view this is not abstract at all. It is very concrete. It is how he made man and women, and the way he made them is transmitted to each man and woman.

He begins with the male and says, "...he is the image and glory of God." Then he differentiates the woman by pointing out that she is the glory of man. Paul's two terms for the man are image and glory. The first term is taken from Gen 1.26-27 where we read that God made man in his image. The second term refers to what Genesis 2 presents. To see this we have to take note of how Paul contrasts the man and the woman.

Paul does not say or imply that the woman is not the image of God. Genesis 1.27 would speak against this. This verse makes clear that God made man in his image as both male and female. The woman is as much the image of God as the man is. The significant term for Paul is not "image" but "glory". He presents the difference between the man and the woman in terms of glory.

What Paul has in mind by being the glory of someone is brought out in vv 8-9. Here we see that he is thinking of the difference that the creation account in Genesis 2 points out. The man was made directly from God whereas the woman was made out of the man and for the man. Verses 8-9 state succinctly the point made about the man and the woman in Genesis 2. God said that he would make for the man a helper (Gen 2.18), and when he had made her he brought her to the man (v 22). This shows that she was made for the man. In making her, God took flesh and bone from Adam and fashioned it into a woman so that Adam could say that she was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone (vv 22-23). She was made out of the man.

The point in Genesis 2 is not that the woman is a perfect match for the man and so an ideal companion that complements him in every way. This is all true and involved in the creation of the woman, but it is not what Adam focused on and celebrated in Gen 2.23. What he saw was that she was taken out of him and received his nature, and that means that she is not a separate creation from him. He sealed this discovery by calling her *isha* which is the feminine form of *ish*, the word for man. In naming her, we see that Adam followed up on God's work. God made the woman out of the man, and Adam imparts to her an identity from his. What Genesis 2 relates is not a mere fact of the past. It is a reality of our existence. This is in the forefront of Paul's mind in 1Cor 11.7-9. He uses the present tense: man *is* the image and glory of God, the woman *is* the glory of man, the woman *is* out of the man and for the man.

The two-way relationship that Paul points out in vv 8-9 (that the woman is both from and for the man) matches with what we noticed about headship in vv 3-5. The head imparts what is his to the one with whom he is related. The one receiving this exists for the head so that if the man rejects his masculinity or the woman her femininity he or she shames the head. The converse of this is that the man in his masculinity and the woman in her femininity are the glory of their respective heads.

The idea that the woman is the glory of man does not demean her or make her inferior to the man. It actually is presented as the opposite. It certainly did not demean Adam to be made in the image of God. By virtue of being made in God's image within an immediate relationship with God, Adam was elevated to being God's glory. We see that Adam saw the woman God created out of him in a similar way. He celebrated her as having the same nature as he had and as being as human as he was. The difference was that while he was created directly from God she was created from him. It is this difference in order that Paul focuses on, and he sees the woman's dignity in this very order: she is the glory of man.

In the man, God shows who he is in relation to the man as the direct source of man. This makes the man the glory of God. Similarly, the woman displays the special feature of the man that he is the source of a relationship and the identity of the one he is related to. This makes the woman the glory of the man.

## The woman's obligation (v 10)

Paul reasons from what the man and the woman are by God's act of creation to their obligation, what they ought to do. The obligation is to be carried out in the person's physical head. This is quite understandable. We relate personally to others via the head and are personally identified by our head. Paul reasons that what we are in our being (as God made us and related us to each other) imposes on us a duty to display our identity in our head. The man and the woman have no say in what they are. God made the one the glory of God and the other the glory of man. But, they have to take control of their own head, i.e., how they identify themselves in relation to each other. Paul stated the man's moral duty in v 7: "For a man ought not to have his head covered." In v 10 he states the woman's obligation: "Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head."

We know from the overall argument that Paul has in mind the woman's duty to be covered in contrast to the man's duty to be uncovered. However, he throws the balance off. Rather than saying that the woman ought to be covered, he states the woman's duty in terms of having authority. Before we can explain why he shifts his expression for the act of being covered, we have to determine what he even means.

First we encounter a problem in translation. Paul uses the Greek phrase, *exousian echein epi*, which normally means to have authority over. If we allow his words to have their normal sense, we would translate as follows: "Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head." This runs up against the way Paul's argument has been commonly understood. The assumption is that by head Paul means authority and that throughout the passage Paul is arguing that the head covering is a sign of the woman's submission to the man. So, the sense of v 10 has to be turned around from saying the woman ought to have authority over her head to affirming that she ought to be under the man's authority. The preposition, *epi*, is understood as having a local sense and translated with, *on* (in the sense of on top of her head). The word, authority, must be taken to stand for "the symbol of authority". This is how the NASB translates the text: "Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head...." All this leaves Paul's Greek rather cumbersome and going against the natural grain of the language.

There are other considerations that weigh in against this understanding of 1Cor 11.10. Paul never uses the word head in the sense of an authority, and he never says that the man has authority over the woman. Further, Paul does not see the covering as something on (in the sense of on top of) the head. The descriptive terms he uses points to something that veils the head by hanging down from it rather than something that sits on the head. He introduces the head covering in v 14 with a Greek phrase that literally means *down from the head*. His last reference to the head covering is found in v 15, and there he uses a word that means to envelop or wrap around.

It is time that we looked at 1Cor 11.10 again to see if Paul's language can be allowed to have its normal meaning.

We have to begin by determining the way Paul uses the word, authority. At this point we cannot carry out a thorough word study. We only will consider the way Paul views the possession of authority, i.e., having authority. In 2Thess 3.9 he said that he, Silvanus and Timothy had authority, which is rendered in the NASB as "have the right to this." What Paul is referring to is the authority that the ministers of the gospel have to receive their material support from those that they have ministered to. This is the authority or right that a worker has to receive his wages. Paul uses the word, *exousia*, in this way in 1Cor 9.4, 5, 6, 12, 18. As apostles Paul and Barnabas had the right to eat, marry and not to have to work for own material needs. Paul also speaks of the potter as having the authority to make of one lump of clay two vessels with different purposes (Rom 9.21). The only time that Paul speaks of the exercise of authority in marriage is found in 1Cor 7.4. Here he states that in marriage a person, and this applies to the husband as well as to the wife, does not have authority over his or her own body but that this authority over the body is held by the marriage partner. So, the husband has the authority over the wife's body and the wife over the husband's. In all these cases, to have authority does not mean to be able to arbitrarily do as one pleases. Authority is only held within a given relationship or position in which the person is free to carry through the prerogatives of that position. The word *exousia* is used in the sense of liberty in 1Cor 8.9, but even here Paul sees the liberty given within one's relationship with God. By the way, Paul sees the authority of

government in the same way. Those in authority are not free to do as they please. They have a position from God and the mandate to carry out a task for the good of society, and within this office they have the authority to act and carry out their position (Rom 13.1-7).

Now we will briefly look at the expression to have authority over something (*exousian echein epi*) in the NT. To have authority on (over) earth is to have the earth as the sphere in which one is free to act and carry out his role (Matt 9.6; 28.18; Rev 6.8). To have authority over demons or people is to bring them under one's power, subdue them or to rule them (Lk 9.1; 10.19; 19.17; Rev 2.26; 13.7; 20.6). To have authority over phenomena of nature is to control them (Rev 14.18; 16.19). Revelation 22.14 speaks of having authority over the tree of life, by which is meant that one has the right to take its fruit. From this survey we can form an idea of what it means to have authority over something. It is a person's right to carry out his position in relation to that over which he has the authority or that to which he has the right. What he has authority over is his sphere of action and is subject to him.

Now we will apply the understanding of authority that we have arrived at to 1Cor 11.10. For the woman to have authority over her head would mean for her to exercise her womanly position and express it through her head. The head is the sphere of her self-expression and is to be subjected to her as a woman. It does not mean that she has the right to do with her head whatever she pleases. Rights are never, in the biblical view, rooted in the will. Rights are given to a person within the position in which he or she is placed within the divinely established order. To exercise one's rights is to carry out one's divinely given position.

The sense we have given to 1Cor 11.10 fits in well with the flow of Paul's thought. He argued that for a woman not to cover her head and so to dishonour her relational head is one and the same as for a woman to degrade herself by giving up her dignity as a woman (vv 5-6). In vv 5b-6 Paul works on the fact that the Christian woman wants to retain her dignity. She will take charge of her head and the display of her gender identity. In v 10 Paul says that the woman ought to have this authority over her head. We should also take note of the fact that in Paul's thinking for a woman to cast off the badge of womanhood would be an exercise of her will but not of her authority. Paul refers to this kind of a move in 1Cor 6.12 where he says that all things are lawful for him, "but I will not be brought under the authority of anything." A person can exercise his will and come under the authority of something. What Paul has in mind is fornication. A person can join himself to a prostitute at will, but in doing so his body is redefined as being joined to her body, and through this he is making himself possessed by the prostitute. For a woman not to cover her head is for her to give up her authority, i.e., that she carry through what she is, and to be defined in a way that is contrary to her. In Paul's logic, the exercise of authority over her head can only go in one direction, and that is to take charge and display her femininity against the vulnerability of being degraded. This must be the woman's decision.

We should follow the steps in Paul's reasoning very carefully. As for her being, a woman's head is the man. This is stated in v 3 and established in vv 7-9. A woman's physical head is her own, of course, and she displays what she makes of her identity as a woman through her head. This is the sphere of her decision. Paul moves between the relational head and the physical head in two ways. In v 5 he says that what the woman does to her physical head makes a statement about her relational head. In vv 7-10 Paul moves the other way. What she is in relation to the man as the glory of man (and that makes the man her head) imposes on her the moral obligation to carry out her womanhood in the way she displays her physical head. Both arguments that Paul runs, i.e., in vv 5-6 and 7-10, end on the note that the woman must make the decision and carry out the right action (v 6 and v 10).

Now we can explain why Paul decided to express himself in terms of the woman having authority rather than stating the obvious that she should be covered. Paul has been putting the focus on the positive side of the head covering. It is not just a matter of the woman avoiding shame. The woman is invested with glory. She is the glory of man. Paul follows this up by depicting her act of being covered in terms of the exercise of her dignity.

**“...because of the angels”**

Another surprise that Paul adds in v 10 is the added reason that the woman ought to have authority over her head “because of the angels.” The principal reason why the woman ought to be covered is because she is the glory of the man in contrast to the man who is the glory of God. To this Paul adds a secondary reason. It is not difficult to find the basis for this reference to angels in scripture. In the tabernacle, cherubim were displayed in the holy place where the priests carried out their service of worship. This suggested that in the holy place the priests were moving the presence of God and the angels. In Zech 3.7, the High Priest who governs God’s house and has charge of God’s courts is given free access among the angels. This notion is taken up in Psalm 138.1. The Psalmist says that he will sing praises to the LORD before the *elohim*, which is rendered as “the angels” in the LXX, the Greek Bible that Paul and the Corinthians used. Jesus pointed out that the angels watch and rejoice over those who are being saved (Lk 15.7, 10). Paul in Eph 3.10 and Peter in 1Pt 1.12 refer to the angels’ interest in what is happening in the salvation of people and the building of the church.

The one verse that might throw significant light on the reference to angels in 1Cor 11.10 is 1Cor 4.9. Here Paul says that the apostles have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. Paul gives the head covering these two references. In 1Cor 11.5-6 he refers to the spectacle of a woman who gives up her feminine dignity before men, and in v 15 he points out her glory in the eyes of human society. Then in v 10 he refers to her as standing before angels. In light of this, we can appreciate what Paul is doing. He wants the Corinthian women to be honourable before people, but he also wants to give them a higher reason. In the church, which is God’s temple (1Cor 3.16), they are before the heavenly court. The order of the whole created universe, visible and invisible, has an interest in the woman holding her dignity in the created order. This agrees with the drift of Paul’s discussion as we noticed earlier. He is seeking to invest the matter of the woman’s feminine dignity with the highest significance. It is not just a matter of avoiding shame in the eyes of the world.

ii. *The interdependence of the two in the Lord (vv 11-12)*

Paul begins this section with “however”, or it could be translated, “nevertheless.” He will now add a point that will keep what he has been saying in balance. The point he makes is that the two genders, male and female, do not exist apart from each other (v 11), but they exist in a way that makes them dependent on each other. What Paul is asserting puts a check on what we can make of the things he said about the man and woman in vv 7-10. In vv 8-9 he stressed that the man did not originate from the woman and was not made for the woman. Now he points out that this is not to be taken in the sense that the man stands independent of the woman in his existence. We must limit Paul’s statements in vv 8-9 to his one point that the man holds a different position from the woman in the order of creation. He is not saying that the man stands apart from the women.

Paul’s statement that the woman ought to have authority over her head also must be held in check. This does not mean that she can hold her identity now without the man. The two genders are inseparable.

While affirming the interdependence of the man and woman, Paul maintains the difference he pressed in vv 8-9. Notice that in v 12 he says that the woman is “out of” (*ek*) the man and the man is through (*dia*) the woman. Paul wants the difference and interdependence held together. This gives the woman both her place in relation to the man as head and her position as essential to the man’s very existence and identity.

In vv 11-12 Paul draws in the way the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father are related. Our interdependence is in the Lord (v 11), and all is from God (v 12). Our existence in the Lord is not a matter of creation in the past. It concerns our present and ongoing sphere of existence. In the Lord the man and woman are co-related and interdependent. In the Lord the male identity is defined in relation to the female and the female is defined in relation to the male.

Paul insists on the distinction between male and female, but he equally insists that the two cannot be separated. The man’s headship and his position as the glory of God are displayed in the being of the woman who was made out of him. Without the woman, he would lose his relational significance. The woman’s identity is given to her from and in relation to the man. All of this is in the Lord. Paul could not conceive of

a church life, a life in the Lord, where there was only one gender. The very significance of that gender in the Lord would be lost.

**b. What nature teaches (vv 13-15)**

Paul concludes his discussion on the head covering in vv 13-15. In this section we see what Paul is aiming at.

*i. The call to judge the issue (v 13)*

Paul calls the Corinthians to judge the matter among themselves. This is his aim. We noticed at the outset of our study that Paul is not correcting the Corinthians' behaviour. He is, rather, guiding them through the issue so that they can judge the matter themselves.

Paul has set before the Corinthians all that is involved in the question of the head covering. The head covering involves the hierarchy of relationships. What the man and the woman do with their heads bears on their relational heads. Paul also worked out the moral obligation that the man and the woman have based on the order of the relationship between the man and the woman established in creation. To this he added the fact that the two genders with their differences are not separated in the Lord. These are weighty considerations that enable the Corinthians to evaluate the matter.

We should take note of the fact that in v 13 Paul does not mention prophesying as in vv 4 and 5. He only mentions prayer and adds that the prayer is made to God. He focuses the Corinthians attention on the address to God rather than to the people of God. This follows Paul's direction. We saw that in v 10, he added the fact that the woman is to act because of the angels, which reminds the Corinthians that the church is open to the heavenly court. His closing note in v 12 is that all things are from God. The Corinthians are to make the decision not simply by what human beings will see or think. They are ultimately to decide the matter in view of their relationship with God.

*ii. The final appeal (vv 14-15)*

Paul follows the call for them to evaluate the matter with an appeal to what nature teaches them. For Paul, nature is not an order that sets the law of life and is normative for human behaviour. The order that is established in creation is not binding on us because it is inherent in nature. It is only binding because the creator established this order. Nature in 1Cor 11.14 is simply the way things are. Paul is concerned with custom and the human evaluation or judgment on dishonour and glory. This makes Paul's appeal to nature here parallel to what he says in Rom 2.14-15. What the Gentiles do by nature in evaluating behaviour they do by themselves without the law that has been given by God to the Jews. What nature teaches is an evaluation that arises from human judgment apart from any special revelation from God. Nature taught the Corinthians that long hair is a dishonour to a man but a glory to the woman. This was the common and well established view in the world of the NT among Jews and Gentiles.

Paul's concern in vv 14-15 is not so much with the man as with the woman. He addresses the man's side to set up for what he says about the woman, that long hair is a glory to her. The idea of glory here can be illustrated from Ex 28.2. The priestly garments for Aaron were "for glory and for beauty." They were to display the dignity of the priesthood and give the priest a visible dignity. Likewise, the long hair displayed the feminine identity of the woman in contrast to the man.

Paul could count on the Corinthians to agree with what nature taught. The point in question was the head covering. The whole discussion in 1Cor 11.2-16 shows that the Corinthians had no feeling for the role of the head covering. Paul is the one who has to make the connection between their feeling about hair and the covering. He makes this connection in his concluding remark: "...because the long hair is given to her for a covering." Now Paul presents a picture that we can visualize. The word for long hair is *komao* which means to grow or wear the hair long. The word for covering is a compound word that means a wrap around

like a shawl. This agrees with Paul first phrase for the covering in v 4: something that hangs down from the head.

The connection that Paul makes between wearing the hair long and the covering springs a surprise on biblical scholars. The preposition Paul uses to make the connection between the long hair and covering is *anti*. This word means *instead of, in the place of, or in exchange for*. The normal sense of the statement that the long hair is given to the woman in the place of a covering is that the feminine hair style of the Greek women stands in the place of a covering. Commentators have found this a rather abrupt change from what Paul has been arguing and so refuse to accept the simple sense of the language. They suggest that what Paul means is that the long hair answers to or points to the covering and so should be followed up with a cloth covering. Well, this is a matter of wrestling Paul's language down. If the preposition *anti* in 1Cor 11.15 is allowed to have its normal force, what is Paul saying? In vv 5-6 he treats the head covering and the hair length as two separate entities. He still works with this distinction in v 15, for the long hair and the covering are linked by the preposition. But, in v 15 he makes a direct connection between the two. The long hanging hair of the Greek woman actually was hanging down from the head (v 4), it was a covering (v 13) and looked like a wrap around shawl (v 15). Paul says that this natural covering will do.

## **C. REFLECTING ON 1COR 11.2-6**

### **1. What is the issue?**

Now we are in a position to look at Paul's discussion in 1Cor 11.2-16 and see what it discloses to us about the actual problem at Corinth on the matter of the head covering. We will follow certain observations that we can make from Paul's discussion. We have already noticed that he is not correcting their behaviour but guiding them through the subject so that they can evaluate the matter among themselves. The only cause of the problem that Paul points to is the party that was contentious (v 16). A controversy arose over the head covering, and the Corinthians referred this to Paul.

What was the nature of the controversy? The way Paul moves between the themes of the head covering and hair suggests that the controversy was over the use of a cloth covering. Verses 5-6 and 14-15 show that the Corinthians had a keen sense of what was proper hair style for men and women. Paul appeals to this when making a case for them to accept the idea of a head covering. This indicates that the Corinthians had no feeling for the value or meaning of a cloth head covering. Research supports this. The evidence we have shows that Greek women did not normally wear cloth head coverings. Paul does not suggest that he imposed the cloth head covering on them as part of his apostolic tradition. If such were the case, he would have appealed to that, but he never refers to such a thing. So, where did the issue of the cloth covering come from? It was the Jewish custom for women to wear a veil in public. Paul's appeal to the custom among the churches of God suggests that the matter of the head covering came to the Corinthians' attention from other churches. We know that different parties had formed in Corinth and that some were claiming to take their lead from others than Paul. This means that they were adhering to ways of other leaders and branches of the Christianity. One party took up Peter who was the apostle of the Jewish mission, and this at least shows that the Corinthian church was open to issues from the Jewish churches. I am not arguing that the Petrine party was responsible for the controversy. It was Paul's practice to suppress the identity of his rivals. He did not give them publicity and dealt with the issues. All I am showing is that the Corinthian church was open to influences from the East. In a place like Corinth this was explosive, for Paul's letter shows that they were an argumentative bunch with many independent thinkers among them who charged ahead with their own causes without regard to the well being and harmony of the whole church.

The way Paul approaches the subject of the head covering suggests that the idea of a cloth covering was largely rejected at Corinth. This was not just a refusal to adopt the covering but a protest against the very idea of it. This is reflected in Paul's focus on how to think through the issue. Paul labours to bring them to accept the concept of the head covering and then shows them that the Greek hair style which displays the womanhood of the woman serves the purpose of the covering. One of Paul's motives in this is suggested by v 16. He did not want the Corinthians to break away from the other churches by rejecting a notion that was

part of the custom of the churches. Rather, he wanted them to see that what they were doing was indeed in harmony with the practice of other churches.

The way we have explained the situation that Paul was dealing with clarifies a grammatical difficulty encountered by commentators. The closing verse is given in the NASB as follows: "But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God." This does not represent Paul's language accurately. Literally, we are to render it like this: "If anyone seems (or is minded) to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor have the churches of God." The phrase, no such custom, grammatically refers to being contentious. Commentators find it odd that Paul would regard not being contentious as a custom. So, they say that Paul is referring to the contrary practice that the contentious person is arguing for. Again, I contend that we try to work with Paul's language and give him the credit for having been in control of what he was writing. At this point we have to ask, "What is the point of contention that Paul has in mind?" The nearest reference point is Paul's concluding point that the long hair of the Greek woman served as a covering, and that means it stood in for the cloth veil worn by Jewish women. On the practical side and on the matter of custom, this was Paul's contribution to the discussion. Paul anticipated that some, and most likely the party that raised the controversy in the first place, would be contentious over this point. They would argue that the Jewish churches would insist on a cloth covering and so represent their custom a contentious one. Paul is assuring the Corinthians that neither the apostles nor the churches of God have made the matter of the visible covering a matter of contention.

## **2. Learning from the apostle**

We have the saying, "History repeats itself." This insight is stated in Eccl 1.9 "That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun." This has proven to be true on the matter of the head covering. Most churches have not held to a rigorous tradition of the veil. They have left the expression of the difference between the genders to social norms of their culture. But, there are always those who want to revive and hold to the practice of the cloth veil. In a sense, Paul is responsible for this because he gave the custom a place and a sanction within his apostolic writings. By putting his teaching on the head covering in writing and pressing the Corinthians to appreciate the concept of the veil, he kept the Jewish custom before the Gentile churches. So, the issue is still well and alive in Christianity, and as it erupts in controversy we have to go back to learn from the apostle. We should learn from the wisdom of his approach as much as from the doctrine he teaches.

In handling the controversial issue, Paul shows great wisdom. Paul did not react to those who stirred up the controversy. He rather dealt with the matter in principle and with respect for the practice of the cloth covering. He did not take sides and polarize the issue into an either/or situation. He first laboured to bring the Corinthians to see the importance of the principle in the head covering. Then he made them see their own way of expressing a woman's womanhood as functioning in the same way. While the outward form was different, the meaning and the function were the same. Through this Paul fostered a sense of harmony with the other churches.

Paul turned the attention away from the visible issue, the cloth head covering, to the great spiritual issues behind it. It was not just a matter of proper decorum. It was not just a woman's issue. It was about the relationship between men and women and how we understand gender difference. The apostle makes the believers see that their personal identities are relational, and no one exists or functions unto him or herself. He makes the Christians see that what they do with themselves, how they present themselves, bears on those with whom they are related in God's order of relationships.

The difference between the genders is universally felt and expressed. Christians are to be sensitive to that and go along with it. But, Paul teaches us to rise higher. We are to see the divine order behind this. It is especially important to consciously uphold the difference where in the Spirit men and women function in the same way. The balance of the genders must be maintained in the Lord.

### 3. Perspective on gender

Paul has given to the church an important perspective on gender and on what it means to be man and woman. He affirms what Gen 1.26-27 presents. Mankind is first of all seen as existing in a relationship that originates from God. As the image of God we do not hold our identity in ourselves. We have a relational identity that is held by God. Within mankind there is male and female. Paul has stressed both the difference and the inseparable nature of the two. Genesis 2 opens up the view on this male-female unit and shows how God put it together. Here we see the order of the relationship. The order of creation shows us that male and female do not define each other mutually. The man came directly from the hand of God and has his principal relational identity before God. The woman was equally a creation of God, but she was taken out of the man and has her principle identity in the human relationship with the man. This yields an interesting insight on the different ways in which the male and female identity are defined. The woman is designed to see who she is within the human relationship. From a human point of view, she is more relationally oriented. The man is designed to see himself as standing before the divine order that is above the human relationship to impart what he has been given. I will leave this as something to ponder.

The revelation of God in Christ opened up the view on the divine side of the relational hierarchy. In Gen 1.26-27 we only see God relating to man. The gospel shows that on the side of the creator there is a relationship. The Father is God from whom are all things. He is the absolute head who receives from none and only gives. The Father is God as absolutely invisible who dwells in unapproachable light. We cannot see God because our vision is limited to the horizon of that which stands in a position of receiving. The Son of God is the one who receives all from the Father, so that he is equal to God, and imparts and reveals to us what is from the Father. Thus he shares in the Father's glory as head. To us he is the source of all things divine. But, like us he receives all so that we can see him from the side of his submission. The man as a creation is first of all in the position of submission and receiving. But, God created him to be the source out of which the woman was made, and through this the position of head was imparted to him. His headship is analogous to Christ's and not the Father's. The man is not a divine head having within him that which is unoriginated and divine. Only Christ can share with the Father divine headship because he is eternal in his being and relationship with the Father. The man stands parallel to Christ in that he received what he is to be the source of the being and identity of another. The woman is in the receptive position but does not share in the position of head.

What ties Christ, the man and the woman together is that they are all in a position of submission. In fact, the position of submission comes first. Only by receiving from the Father is Christ the head for all that is from the Father. It hardly needs to be said that the man is first of all in a position of submission and receiving. This is an important point. The charter principle of the Bible is not that of human rights. It is the law of submission. Paul stated this in Eph 5.21: "Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." To be human means not to be a head but to be in submission. The woman who is placed only in a receiving position exemplifies the essential human position. We must see the position of head within this submission. Headship is something that man received and it must be held and practiced under the headship of Christ.

Paul's teaching is in deep contradiction to modern self understanding. In the biblical view there is no room for an individualistic view of the human self. Human beings have their identity within a structure of relationships. Our identity is relational rather than individual. Our foundational position is one of being on the receiving end and of being in submission. This is in direct contradiction of the modern idea that the human being is first of all a person with the right to self determination and self expression. In the biblical view, a person has the moral duty to express what God has made him or her, and this display of one's own identity confirms the relational structure of the world. It does not just confirm the balance between the genders but also affirms the relationship between mankind and God.

This relational structure for human identity establishes unity. Male and female are co-related identities and so are inseparable. One cannot have masculinity without the reference point in femininity. This also is true the other way around. The fact that the man has Christ as his head ties the human identity into God. For a Christian it should be clear that one cannot have true male headship apart from the Lord. It is the Lord

Jesus Christ who has fully revealed how human headship is anchored in God. To the degree that men and women define themselves from within themselves, the unity God established in creation falls apart.

In the modern outlook, the bond between people is seen as contractual. It is created by the will of the parties, and is valid only by that will. The biblical understanding that we are considering goes against this. There is a structure of relationships, and this is something that we must realize as established by God and submit to. We are duty bound to express our own identity in a way that confirms that structure of relationships.

The structure of relationships that we are considering cannot be proven by empirical observation. The eye cannot see what sets this structure up. It is something that is revealed to us in scripture and fully confirmed in Christ. For Christians, therefore, it is a matter of faith. The world will not and cannot accept this, for it does not have that faith that comes by the word of Christ. The world will persist in walking by sight and want to derive its understanding of gender and the relationship between the sexes from what is observable and purely human. The result is that a sacred and stable order cannot be upheld. The world's orientation puts the pressure on the Christians to rationalize the biblical order by how men and women function and relate. Without denying the value of making such observations, I want to point out that this is not the basis for what the Bible presents. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is dealing with a situation in which the women do what the men do. Paul does not bring up the consideration that women do it differently or that men do it more competently. Where the women and the men are equally capable, the difference is asserted, not on human factors but on the revealed order of relationships. This makes what Paul presents in 1Cor 11.2-16 a matter of true biblical doctrine.