

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

Let's take our Bibles and turn to I Corinthians, chapter 11. This is going to be a day you will need to have your Bibles open and in front of you because I want you to take a look at the side screens or at the program notes. I want you to look at the title of today's message. If you are looking for a heated debate among believers, you came to the right place. If you want to get into an old-fashioned church fight, you just bring up this particular topic. The Role of Women in the church is a battleground and it has been for years. And the man who is at the center of this is none other than the apostle Paul. Paul has been vilified as a chauvinist, as a sexist, as a bigot, not only for his words here in I Corinthians 11 but also in I Corinthians 14, Ephesians 5, I Timothy, chapter 2, on and on it goes because we see that through the hand of the apostle Paul, there is a clear and definite opinion in scripture about the role, not only of men but the role of women.

Not that long ago, I had a woman come down front and she said, "Why is it that you are always teaching from the books of Apostle Paul? Didn't you know that Paul is responsible for the repression of women?" Is that true? Is it true that Paul is single-handedly responsible for the biblical view of the repression of women? Is he a sexist? Is he a chauvinist? What we must keep in mind whenever we crack open this book, whenever we begin to study scripture, that it is the Word of God. We cannot divide it; we cannot bifurcate it into sections of man's opinion or God's revelation. It is all of God's revelation. We might not always like what it says; we might not always like the conduit, the author from whom God uses to say it, but it is the Word of God. Let me remind you of II Peter 1:21, "For no prophesy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." You see, what we have here in I Corinthians is God's Word, his authoritative word on the subject of both the role of men and the role of women. What we need to do, what our responsibility is, is to understand it and apply it, not filter it. Many times, we like to filter what the Word of God says through culture or experience or feeling—wrong starting point! What we do is we come to it, we learn it, we apply it and we change to it—that is the Word of God. And certainly that is what we are going to do as we come to I Corinthians 11, 2-16, and look at the hotly debated topic.

I think the best approach for us when we come into a text like this is that we need to see the discussion in a wider context, and especially this discussion. We need to see it in the wider context of the Book of I Corinthians. Now if you have been following through this study for the last several months, you know that the last section, chapters 8-10, we were in a topic of Christian liberty—Paul helping us to understand the gray areas. Now he switches and from chapter 11 all the way through to chapter 14, he is on a brand new path. He is on a brand new topic and what he is going to do is to help us understand what it means to be people who offer correct worship to God—to offer in a sense of correct assembly, a correct church. If you look at these chapters, 11-14, it is as if he is answering the question how over and over again from chapter to chapter. For example, how are we to conduct ourselves as men and women? How are we to pray? How are we to proclaim the Word of God? How are we to understand the Lord's supper? How are we to utilize spiritual gifts? How are we to build each other up in love? How are we to understand the

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

gifts of tongues or the other sign gifts? How, how, how? That is what he is answering all the way from chapter 11 through 14. But he starts by answering the question, how are we to understand the role of men and women in the church. Now I think the best way for us to do this is just take this apart verse by verse and go through it and have an understanding of it in the context and the culture of the day. And then we are going draw out some principles.

So let us start in verse 2; we are not going to get very far. He says, “Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I deliver them to you.” Stop right there. No we are not even out of the gate and we have to stop. I will tell you why. Because what Paul is doing is— he is commending them for asking him for clarity on this issue. Remember what the whole premise of the Book of I Corinthians is based on. Remember, if you don’t, just hold your place here and come back with me to chapter 7, verse 1 for a moment. We learn something about the church of Corinth and why the Book of I Corinthians was written in chapter 7. He says, “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote:”... do you remember this? Remember that the church of Corinth had questions that were going on within their congregation. There was division, there was turmoil, there was issue and so they write their founding pastor, Apostle Paul, a list or a letter of questions and what he does is, he writes back to them answering those questions. That essentially is the Book of I Corinthians. But the word “now” can be thought of or seen as a marker throughout the Book of I Corinthians when Paul is answering the specific questions of the Corinthian church. We see it all throughout the book. For example, look over in verse 25 of chapter 7, he says, “Now concerning the betrothed...” or concerning the unmarried, he answers a specific question about that. Look over in chapter 8, verse 1, “Now concerning the food offered to idols”...he is answering a specific question about food offered to idols or about the gray areas of Christian liberties. Skip by chapter 11...we are going to come back. Chapter 12, verse 1, “Now concerning the spiritual gifts...” He is answering specific questions they had about the gifts and we could go on and on. Chapter 15:1, 15:12, 16:1, on and on and on. We see this word “now” as a marker.

Well, look back at chapter 11:2. What is the first word that you see? Now. Not only is he starting a new section but he is making reference that he is about ready to answer a specific question. It is obvious that the church at Corinth had questions about the roles of men and women in their congregation. And how Paul jettisons out from this original question is in the next verse, verse 3, by offering them a principle. He does not give them an answer to their question because that would be locked in time and space. Rather he gives them a principle that is much larger and transcends time. In essence, what we see here in verse 3 is a principle that you and I can apply today to our own life. So what is the principle?

Let us look at verse 3. He says, “But I want you to understand”...which is an idiom that the Apostle Paul uses. He says, I do not want you to be uninformed—he says that same thing in chapter 12:1. He says, “I want you to know” ...this is important...I want you to

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

get this. I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband and the head of Christ is God. Stop right here. Here is the principle. What Paul is laying down is a principle based on submission—that submission permeates the entire biblical structure of God; that none of us can escape the concept of being in a position of submitting to someone else. Why? Why is this so important? Let me lay it down this way—you might want to write it down. Submission is a foundation in the scriptures as a way of producing harmony. Submission is a way of producing harmony so in the biblical context, submission is like a strong foundation. It does not matter if it is in an individual relationship between man and woman. It does not matter if it is in the home; it does not matter if it is in society. It does not matter if it is in government. It is a foundation that leads to harmony and this is where Paul starts. It is as if he is saying to the Corinthians, first, let me help you understand how important it is to understand your role. Let me tell you how important it is to submit to those roles. Now look at verse 3. We see that submission is important to the human to human relationship. We see that submission is important to the human to God relationship. We even see that submission is important to the God to God relationship. Why is that? Because it all is building a foundation that leads to harmony.

Now let me help you break this down. Look in verse 3 and you notice the word “head” is repeated three times. The head of every man is Christ, the head of the wife is her husband, the head of Christ is God. What is going on here? Well, “head” is the Greek word, *kephalē*, and it can be translated one of two ways. It can be translated “essence” or it could be translated authority. Now some people like to look at this and say, well, obviously Paul means the concept of essence but that really does not make sense to the context. I will tell you why. Because the last phrase, the “head of Christ is God” does not make sense if you translate head to essence—the essence of Christ is God. God did not create Christ; he did not create the Son. The trinity is made up of equal parts, different functions. Jesus was not created by God; you cannot use the word “essence” to define head in this context. So what are we forced to do? We are forced to define it as authority or as one who is over—person of rank or leader. That makes sense because what is Christ? Christ...look at the text...says he is the head of every man, he is the leader of every man. Colossians 1:18 says He is the head, the authority over the church. What is the biblical role of man? The biblical role of man is that he is the head, the leader of his wife. Headship is even established in the trinity, is it not? What do we see? That the head of Christ is God. In other words, what did Jesus willingly submit to throughout his earthly ministry? He said it is not my will be done but, what? Your will—he is speaking to the Father—Your will. He willingly submitted to the Father. Why? Because this is the foundation of harmony.

Now let me show this to you throughout several passages of scripture. Hold your place in I Corinthians and come with me over to the I Peter, chapter 2. Whenever we build a biblical theology, we build it on the texts of scripture that are available to us. And so, if we have an understanding, a need of understanding of submission, we go to the passages

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

that teach submission. We put these together; we come up with a biblical theology. See how that works?

So let me just take you to a couple of them. Let me show you submission in the context of the government where Peter is writing now—I Peter, chapter 2, verse 13. Notice what he says: The subject, or submissive, it is as if he is saying, “Believers, be submissive for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to emperors as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.” He is saying, I want you to be submissive to the governing authorities that I have placed over you. Now notice, he does not say anything about the legitimacy of the government; he does not say anything about the morality of the government; he does not say anything about the morality of the leaders in the government. He says: Your role as a believer in the economy of God is to submit. Now why? Look at verse 15: “For this is”...what does it say?...“the will of God.” This is God’s will for you. Why? Because it brings society into harmony. Now when you think about this in context of I Peter, it blows your mind. Because here we have a government that was tyrannical toward its people and was slaughtering the Jews and yet Peter says you have to be submissive.

Now understand this. Come over to Ephesians, chapter 5. Ephesians is tucked neatly between Galatians and Philippians. Ephesians 5, we learn about submission in the home and now we are at verse 22. Again, we see a similar pattern. What does it say? “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head” ...the leader... “of the wife even as Christ is the head...” the leader... “of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” What a great picture of submission! We submit to Christ as the church, harmony is built; wives, you submit to the husband, harmony is built in the home.

I’ll continue, what is the role of the husband? In verse 25, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” We each have defined roles. Submission permeates the entire biblical structure, do you see that? If Christ does not submit to the Father, salvation is impossible. If we do not submit to Christ, redemption is impossible. If people do not submit to those in authority over us, then society is impossible. If the wife does not submit to her husband, then the marriage is impossible. If the husband does not submit to Christ and love his wife, then the whole family structure is impossible. It is all predicated on submission.

But listen, what is in the biblical context? What is submission predicated upon? Look at verse 25, Ephesians 5:25; it says, “The husband ought to love his wife as Christ loved the church.” What is submission predicated on? Love. You see, it is not predicated on some power struggle; it is not predicated on this concept that there is this inferiority person and this superiority person and here is the great clash. You see, society, culture would like to make you think that. Culture would like to say, well, look at the scriptures. Look at how antiquated it is—it portrays women, poor women in this submissive role. No!! Not at

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

all. The idea is that submission is predicated on love; it gives the idea that you have been given a divine role to play and, in that divine role, it produces, not anarchy; it does not produce anything other than, if properly lived within but harmony. That is what it naturally will lead to. Why? Because the entire biblical structure is built upon that. In fact, if you want take it one step further, just turn with me to Galatians. You are going to be heading north in your Bibles; you are going to be heading back toward the Old Testament, Galatians, chapter 3, verse 28. What do we see? Paul makes a remarkable statement. He says, "There is now neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Do you know what this tells us? The biblical principle of equal, in essence, different in function. Did you get that? The biblical model is that we are equal in essence, different in function.

Now flip over to I Corinthians, chapter 11. The problem in the Corinthian church was role clarity. They did not understand their biblically defined role. In fact, when you unearth the history of what was happening in the Roman emperor and, specifically, the Corinthian providence, you find out that in Corinth, a woman's liberation movement had arrived. And there were women who were shaving their heads in protest to the Roman government and all of this is moving forward at one particular time when the church at Corinth is being birthed. And they were fighting for women's rights. What is interesting is whenever I have the conversation with someone who talks about how scripture gives the sense of repression to women, they really do not understand the culture that the scripture comes out of.

Remember what we have learned in the past? There were three groups of people that were involved in the culture of the Corinthian church and the Corinthian society—there was the Jewish culture, the Greek culture, the Roman culture, all coming together. And in all three of those cultures, women were repressed. In the Jewish culture, women were not even allowed to come into the central temple to worship—they had to stay in the outer courts. In fact, if you read the Old Testament, that is why it is called the "court of women". Why were they in the "court of women"? Because they were not allowed in the court of men on the inside of the temple. In the Greek culture, if a woman's husband died and she becomes a widow, if they did not have any support, they were relegated to the streets. In fact, many of them had to adopt a lifestyle of prostitution just to survive. That was the Greek culture. The Roman culture was not much better although they did make some progressive moves but they still repressed women to second-class citizens. But in the Christian culture, everything was starting to change. Paul was not a repressor of women; rather God used Paul to be a liberator of women within the church, the Christian church. You say, how do you know that? Well, a number of facets but just look at the text we are looking at in verse 5. What does verse 5 tell us? That a wife prayed and prophesied in the assembly of the believers. In other words, she was taking an active role within the congregation. Just by the way, praying meant speaking to God in the house of men—public praying. Prophesying is not some kind of strange utterance that does not have any sense of formality to it but prophesying literally means speaking

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

to man in behalf of God. And I could show you scores of examples of women being used by God in the early church, praying and teaching in a public forum.

You see what God was doing was liberating the women to a place that culture was not even liberating them to. Yet the problem is in Corinth, women were taking it too far. In fact, they were moving beyond God's boundary. They thought they no longer needed to be under anybody's authority. Why is this? It is because the Corinthian women were being influenced by the Corinthian culture. And you can pick this up in the text so follow now with me beginning in verse 4. We are going back to the text now. "Every man"... Paul writes... "who prays and prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays and prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head." Stop right there. What is Paul saying? Paul is saying: Listen, you have to be careful not to be attached to the culture. What were the Corinthian women doing? They were coming into the assembly and you know what they were doing? They were taking off their head coverings. Now you might be able to picture this in your own mind because many middle Eastern women still wear a type of head covering or veil. Do you know what the origin of that really is? The origin is a defining of roles. Women wore head coverings; men did not. What Paul is saying is that you live in a culture that defines your roles; you are to define that role even in the church. Let women be women and men be men; do not try to cross over to any other boundary. You have been given a God-given role; function within that. He says that if you are going to take your veil off, then you might as well shave your head. You say, what does that mean?

Well, I did some study on this. There were two types of women in the Corinthian culture that would take off their veil. The first type of woman who would publicly remove her veil was a prostitute. She would do this in the market square so that she could make herself visible or known to men. The second kind of women who took off their veil were those who historians call Roman feminists—just like the feministic movement that started in the late 60's and moves up into today. This was a feministic movement that was rolling out in the Roman Empire. And these feminists would literally shave their heads in protest to the Roman government. And you hear what Paul was saying? Paul was saying: Listen, women, if you are coming into the Corinthian assembly of the church and you want to demonstrate your equality or move outside of your God-given role by taking off your veil, then why don't you just go ahead and shave your head and join the march because that is what you are doing. It is as if you are showing up and you are protesting. The problem is that you are not protesting the government; you are protesting God who has given you these defined roles. Do not protest; that is what Paul is saying.

We pick this up in verse 7; go there. We can sense where Paul is moving in his argument. He says, "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

glory of God, but woman is the glory of a man.” Now he is using an argument from creation—Genesis, chapter 2. He is going back there. He says, “For man was not made from woman but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman but woman for man. This is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head....” Then he adds the strange phrase, ..“because of the angels.” What Paul was doing is that he says, let me just remind you of your gender roles and how God has set that up. Men, do not cover your heads because that is not what your culture does; woman, do not uncover your heads because that is not what your culture does. Maintain the definitive roles; let a man be a man and a woman be a woman. You say, what does this strange phrase, “because of the angels” mean in verse 10. You need to understand what you are studying this morning, I Corinthians, chapter 11:2-16, is some of the most difficult passages to translate in the entire book. It is not so much because it is a hot topic; that is not the issue. This is just some very difficult translative work to do. It is hard to understand what Paul means in some of his phrases. You have to understand the culture; you have to understand the history. But you also have to understand some biblical concepts and theology. Most scholars think and most commentaries will say that this idea of the angels has to do with the limitation that God has designed into angels. Now let me make it clear. We are not going to, when we die, become angels. You have to take that image out of your mind. You are not going to become a fat little baby cherubim with wings flying around. You are a person; you are going to be person. There is an angelic realm; there is a human realm. Got that?

But we are different from the angelic realm; what do we know about the angels? The angels, the scriptures tell us, are not married or are given in marriage so they live a life of singleness. There are not little angel families up there; there are not little angels out dating one another. This is not like angelmatch.com trying to hookup in the heavenlies. That is not going on. They are single so they do not understand this interesting relationship between men and women. It is as if God has told them to watch this; I am going to set up over all of humanity this principle of submission but you are going to watch it unfold willingly in the home between a woman and a man. And so it is as if the commentators, the scholars are saying it is as if the angels are peering over the heavenlies and are watching submission live out in the home. And I think in that context, we understand what Paul is saying because, remember, what is Paul doing to this entire section? He is clarifying roles.

In fact, if you want to see one of the most beautiful passages on the mutual dependencies of our roles of men and women, look at the next set of verses, 11 and 12. Paul says, “Nevertheless...” of everything I just built on the creation account... “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;” Rather a... “woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.” It is as if Paul is saying, listen, this is not about superiority and inferiority; men, do not get on your high horse with the idea that you have been given a position of leader. You cannot get too high because you come from a woman so do not forget that. It is as if Paul is saying, let us level the playing field here; you each have been given different roles to play but you are

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

equal in essence. It is as if he is saying, do not follow the culture, Corinthian women, and dismantle what God has setup to create harmony because it will not create liberation, it will create disharmony if you go against the patterns of God.

In fact, you can see that in verses 13-16. He says, “Judge for yourself; is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?” And by the way, in that culture, it was a disgrace for men to have long hair. It was a role classification for men to have short hair and women to have long hair. And he says in verse 16, “If anyone is inclined to be contentious, ...” in other words if anyone wants to argue this with me... “we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.” And he says, do not even bring it to me because I have given you an example out of nature. I have given you an example from creation. I have given an example from God’s standards. He says: It is a shut case; women be women, men be men, defined by God in their roles. This is what leads to harmony

The question we have to ask is, how do we apply this? How do we take this ancient practice and bring it into the modern world. First we have to answer the question: Are women to wear head coverings as a sign of submission? And the answer is no. This was clearly a cultural concept for the Corinthian church that Paul is speaking about. Occasionally, I will meet groups of people who have a conviction otherwise. And they will wear a type of veil over their head or a doily. Have you ever seen that? Where does that come from? It comes from this passage, I Corinthians, chapter 11. I think it is a mistranslation, a misunderstanding of this text. I think clearly Paul is referencing what was going on culturally but that is not something that transcends into other cultures. There is a greater principle that is going on here. There is an underlying principle that we really need to understand. And the principle is the idea of submission.

How does submission work into the modern role for men and woman? Before we leave, you have to understand what submission means. Submission does not mean servitude. That is not the biblical concept of submission. I have spent this last half hour, forty minutes, helping you understand that we are equal in essence, different in function, right? So submission does not mean servitude. You have to get that into your mind. Submission is a military term that literally means to line yourself up under someone else. That is all that it means; you willfully line yourself up under the leadership of somebody else. Do you know what that means? Men, submission does not start with the women; it starts with you. You have to be worthy of following. You have to be worthy of someone lining their life up underneath you. You see, first, you must submit to Christ before you ever expect your wife to line herself up under you. You must be a godly, mature man worthy of being followed. That includes in your spiritual life, in your emotional life, in your financial life, in your physical life, being a part of the family. If you do not lead well, your wife cannot follow well. You limit her role so submission always starts first with the man.

Series: 1 Corinthians

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Corinthians 11-2:16

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 04.02-03.11

You say, alright, how is the woman to practice biblical submission today? Remember what we learned in the church of Corinth; that the removing of the veil was really an outward sign of something wrong at the heart level, right? So what is submission today? Submission starts at the heart level. This is Paul's principle. It is a willingness to follow; that is biblical submission. Christ, willingly followed the will of the Father. We willingly follow Christ. Does that mean, women, that you do not have voice? Does that mean you do not have influence in your home? No, you absolutely have a voice; you absolutely have influence. The Lord has given you tremendous gifts to partner with your husband. It is a partnership equal enough, different in function. In fact, there is an old Greek proverb that goes something like this: The man is the head but the woman is the neck that turns the head. You get that? Here's the thing. Women, use your influence well to partner with your husband as he leads you. Men, lead well; women, follow well, and there will be harmony in the home and it will translate out of the home into society, into the world. Why? Because this is the biblical structure of submission. Proper submission leads to harmony.

Pray with me. Lord, this is a difficult text to try to unpack in a short period of time but I pray that your people will not only receive it but learn from it, that are wise to what our culture would like to do in dismantling of the biblical roles between the man and woman and fight against that. May the man surrender willfully to the leadership of Christ and be godly leaders in their homes. May the women of Crossroads willingly line up under the leadership of their men and partner with them to bring you glory. Our desire is to be a people that follow after a biblical principle and to rest there. To submit our lives to the Word of God and then wait for the blessings that come from that submission—that's what I pray for your people. I pray, Lord, that they would submit to your Word and then you would bless them for their submission. May it happen individually, may it happen in the family, may it happen between husbands and wives, may it happen with children to parent, may it happen across the board that we might reflect the biblical pattern and ultimately give glory to you. We pray these things in Christ's Name. Amen.