

Parson to Person

1 Corinthians 11 – Part 1

(Submission in the Created Order)

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:1–16 NKJV).

Chapter breaks

The various chapter breaks in the Bible are at times helpful—at other times not so much! This is one of the occasions where a chapter break is poorly placed. The injunction, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (vs. 1), is clearly pointing to the previous instruction—not the following.

The expression, *“Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you”* (vs. 2), might be a better segue. This expression may properly point to the previous verses and likewise to the next.

It is of note that Paul gives *“praise”* to a group who were in such need of rebuke. In this case, his praise may refer to the fact that the Corinthians were asking about the issues he has been and will continue to address.

Imitate Me!

“Imitate me” is a stunning statement! Some might think that Paul was quite arrogant to suggest this, but it should not be the case. Paul was not arrogant! He knew that his practice was correct and that the Corinthians would do well to follow his example. Notably, the injunction to *“imitate”* was related to the way he handled the previous issues of regarding idols, eating foods sacrificed to an idol, walking in love toward a weaker brother or sister, refraining from any participation with idolatry, and becoming the conscience of the unbelieving world. All these actions Paul faithfully demonstrated.

Behavior with the Church Gatherings

At this point in the book of 1 Corinthians we begin to see Paul move toward church polity. It is apparent that there were church gathering issues desperate for address.

Paul has previously addressed personal matters. Those included carnal internal conflict, immorality, Church discipline, marriage, divorce, remarriage, and the recent topic of idolatry. The issues regarding order within the Church gatherings include leadership, the need to honor one another (and the Lord) when participating around the Lord's table (communion), the proper use of spiritual gifts, the high watermark of love, etc. God is a God of order—and disorderly conduct needed correction.

Spiritual Headship, Submission, and the Divine Economy

The church in Corinth was deeply influenced by the local culture. This is always a problem. When the Church is greatly influential in a community, that community is blessed. However, when the culture dictates to the Church, everyone suffers! We must also be mindful of our call as the “conscience of the world.”

Feminism

In Corinth there was a “feminist agenda” that began to influence the roles and relationships within the Church. The “women’s liberation movement” of Corinth was certainly a counter correction of the deeply troubling attributions given women in the Judeo/Arabic/Greco/Roman cultures. Specifically, most women were considered property, often treated as just above a slave. They were effectively second-class citizens—not treated as God intended.

Complementarianism—Not Egalitarianism

Man and woman were created to interrelate by male-led complementarianism: *“And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him’”* (Genesis 2:18). However, we are not called to egalitarianism. Egalitarianism suggests that there are no distinctions between men and women, no gender roles, and no assigned authority designations. The egalitarian philosophical position has led to problems in the church, the family, and society. Some would suggest that transgenderism is a manifestation of the spirit behind egalitarianism.

The pattern of biblical headship is communicated in Paul’s declaration: *“I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”* (vs. 3). The statement is both governmental and insightful. It shows that there is an established order but also that subordination does not indicate inferiority—for *“the head of Christ is God.”* No thinking Christian would suggest that Jesus is less than God incarnate. He is not inferior.

All people are morally and spiritually identical, of equal worth and value. However, men and women are not equal. Moreover, they cannot be equally offered the same positions and/or opportunities. God has mandated distinctions between the two genders (see 1 Timothy 3:1–13, etc.).

Chauvinism

Many believe that the Bible advocates chauvinism. Although much can be said about the origins of what we call chauvinism, the fundamental definition (for our discussion) relates to the thought that men are superior to women, and therefore women are thought to be substandard and/or inferior. This is far from Biblical truth. However, God does have an order for all of creation. The roles of men and women are no exception.

No Role Reversals

The roles of men and women are defined throughout the Scriptures—as is the role of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The distinctions men and women must all recognize is twofold:

- 1) We all will always be subject to the Lord. This is and should be considered a great blessing!
- 2) When the curse has been removed, (it would appear that) the subservient role of women (a characteristic of the curse), and the leadership responsibilities of man over women (likewise a result of the curse) will be no more. This is unclear in the Scriptures—but seems fitting.

The Curse

As mentioned above, the male/female chain of authority is part of the curse. Therefore, as expected, we don't like it. Many men resist and/or fail in leadership. Many women resist the male leadership model and its subsequent sub-ordination. We all hate the curse and all it brings—that's the point! Jesus wants us to hate the curse—thereby seeking Him for deliverance.

As long as the curse remains, so will human governance, leadership, and submission. The model and practice is necessary and beneficial.

The Eternal Nature of the Divine Economy

The eternal nature of God the Son does not in any way suggest that Jesus is any less than the Father, and is in no way greater or less than the Holy Spirit. However, in the economics (system of organization, operation, or distribution) of the Godhead, Jesus is the eternal God subject to the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the eternal God subject to the Father and Son. (See John 3:16–17, John 6:40, and 1 John 4:9–10 where God sends His only begotten into the world, and John 15:26, John 16:7, and John 14:26 where the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit.)

The economic methodology of the Godhead does not suggest any differing purpose or plan in the Godhead. It does not suggest any disunity of any kind. It is simply the system by which God has organized His methods and purposes.

All three persons of the Trinity are One. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are of the same personality, nature, purpose, and essence. However, each member of the Godhead functions in differing but unified roles and activities. Our salvation is based on the Father's power and love, the Son's death and resurrection (see 1 John 2:2 and Ephesians 2:6), and the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration and sealing of the believer (see Ephesians 4:30 and Titus 3:5).

In a similar way we can understand the harmonious unity and functionality of mankind—without violating the economics of spiritual leadership and submission.

Next week we will develop thoughts on the traditions Paul explained: head coverings, and the distinct roles of men and women in ministry. We will also consider the desegregation of men and women in “the faith”—and in the general assembly of believers in the Church Age.

I love you all,
Pastor Paul