



## Parkway Fellowship

1 Corinthians: Practical Advice to a Divided Church • Understand Gender Roles in the Local Church •  
1 Corinthians 11:1-6 • 04/07/2019

### Main Point

Our gender affects our worship and how we seek to imitate Christ.

### Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Besides physical differences, what are some other differences between men and women?**

**What are the dangers of stereotypes?**

**What things are considered more “manly” and others more “feminine”? Which of these are simply a product of culture and which are biblical? How can you tell the difference?**

A difference between male and female clearly exists. Biblically speaking, this isn't simply a matter of chromosomes. However, distinguishing between what is “manly” and what is “feminine” is not always easy. Once, it was considered manly for a woman to wear pants. Pink used to be boy color, then it was a girl color, now it seems that either sex can wear pink. Some think that sports are a boyish pursuit, but that is unfair to women athletes. Others think pursuit of the arts is effeminate, but that is unfair to male artists. The church needs to be precise when we speak on matters of gender. We need to emphasize that male and female are of equal worth and equal stature before God. At the same time, we must seek to honor what the Scriptures teach about our uniqueness as male and female and the roles that come with them.

### Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1.

**Why might it be important to remember this verse before we talk about our roles as men and women?**

**What sorts of things did Paul do that we ought to imitate?**

Before we get into the discussion of male and female roles in the church, we must first remember that our goal as men and women is to be an example of Christ to others. Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitated the Lord Jesus so that they in turn might serve as examples to others (see Phil. 3:17 and 1 Tim. 4:12). Our goal is not to belittle women or to exalt men. Our goal as Christians is to model for others the humility, respect, love, and mercy that Christ modeled for us. It may look different from male to female, even person to person, but the goal is always to model Christ-likeness.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-3.

**What are the traditions that Paul delivered to the Corinthians? If you do not know for sure, what would you speculate that they were and why?**

**Why might it be offensive to some women to read that “man is the head of the women” or “the husband is the head of the wife”?**

**How has male-headship been abused? How can we argue for equality if we see the man or husband as the head?**

These verses are very difficult for us to understand in our context. Although we do not know for sure what Paul meant by “the traditions” in verse 2, he likely referred to the tradition of the gospel itself. That is the most important tradition of the church, and despite their failures in other areas, the Corinthians were being faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Verse 3 also poses difficulties because of translation. The word translated “man” can also mean husband. Further, the word translated “woman” can also mean “wife”. Most likely, Paul teaches here that the burden of leadership should mainly fall upon the men (see also 1 Tim. 2:12-13). All of Jesus’ appointed apostles were men, and all the pastors that Paul appointed in the churches were male as well. (For example, Titus and Timothy.) When the church chose leadership in Acts 6:3-5, the church chose seven men for the duties the apostles outlined. Of course, women should not always remain silent or else they could not pray or prophesy under any circumstance. Women, too, played key roles in both Jesus’ and Paul’s ministry efforts.

It is important to note that Paul says that “God is the head of Christ”. We know that Jesus Christ is co-equal and co-eternal with God. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. For this reason, we know that Paul cannot be teaching that women are somehow lesser than men in essence. Distinction does not mean inequality.

**How is it that a man prophesying with his head covered would dishonor his head?**

**Why is it a disgrace to the woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered?**

**Why would it be disgraceful for her head to be shaved? Was this problem a Corinthian cultural problem or is it applicable today? If so, how?**

This passage assumes that both men and women might prophesy and pray in the context of the local church, and that a certain decorum ought to be followed. While it is often disputed what “prophesying” might mean, we know that it is at least the sharing of the Word of God. This does not necessarily mean that everyone was preaching in the church but that people were giving testimony to God’s Word and God’s work in their lives. The most likely way to understand this passage is that it is mainly referring to local Corinthian customs. Perhaps head covers were considered womanly as dresses would be considered feminine today. If such is the case, then it would have been scandalous for a man to wear one, and it would have been shocking for a woman to be without one. What would the modern application be? Simply that men should dress and act according to the cultural norms of manhood and womanhood according to the cultural norms of our day as well, with the purpose of not distracting others from worship. We should not seek to be shocking in our dress and conduct. Rather, we ought to be examples of modesty and humility.

## Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Considering our current culture, how ought we to conduct ourselves as men and women that might set us apart from the world?**

**How could you, as either a man or woman, do a better job of respecting and showing humility toward those of the opposite sex? Could we better live in such a way that others would not be frightened or suspicious of our leadership?**

**What do you need to change in your life so that others could safely imitate your example?**

## Pray

Offer a time for group members to pray aloud, and ask the Father to help us be examples of Christ. Ask Him to help us live in such a way that others could safely imitate us. Finally, pray that God will make us sensitive to one another as human beings, and that He would keep us from harmful stereotypes. Finally, thank the Father for our salvation through Christ, and that everyone, whether male or female, is a co-equal heir to the promises of God in Jesus.

# Commentary

## | 1 Corinthians 11:1-6

11:1. Paul's admonition to imitate him was justified inasmuch as he was an apt imitator of Christ.

11:3. Paul issued a principle for application in corporate worship—the principle of voluntary submission to authority. As Christ is the head over the church, He certainly has supreme authority over every man (cp. 3:23; “you belong to Christ”). The phrase “head of every man” means “authority over” and fits the letter's dominant theme of submission to Christ. God is the head of Christ refers to the Father's authority over the incarnate Messiah, who as the God-man voluntarily submitted to God.

11:4. The situation in this verse assumes a public setting where corporate worship was taking place. Paul applied the principle (“Christ is the head of every man”) to the praying man. Outward manifestations of piety should not dishonor a believing man's head (“Christ”). The phrase “with something on his head” is literally “having down alongside the head.” This refers not to a hat but to the Roman practice of pulling down the toga over the head while bowing for pagan worship, to prevent distractions. Because of the association of this practice with pagan worship, a male believer dishonored his true head (“Christ”) when he covered his physical head with the toga. By imitating pagan practice, he shamed Christ and himself.

11:5-6. In the first century, a woman would speak with her head uncovered only in private settings. For example, women sometimes led prayer with their “head uncovered” at pagan clubs meeting in private homes. Paul did not give a reason why women in the church at Corinth were uncovered. It may be that they brought into the church religious practices that paralleled habits in the pagan meetings.

Paul explains why a Corinthian woman's uncovered head dishonored her head. A woman who prayed or prophesied with her head uncovered was one and the same with the one having her head shaved. Paul equated the shame of a “head uncovered” (imitating the practice in pagan private religious clubs) with the shame of a person who publicly expressed pagan dedication (i.e., to have her hair cut off or her head shaved). Pagan women at Corinth sometimes sheared their hair and dedicated their locks as a token of worship or fulfillment of a vow to a god. In the Corinthian setting, the “uncovered head” paralleled practices in pagan clubs and thus blurred the divisions between devotion to the true God and false gods, resulting in dishonor to a believing woman's husband and to Christ.

## Reading Assignment for Next Week:

### 1 Corinthians 12:1-27