

# Distinctions and Glory – 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (Part 1)

**Introduction** – Proverbs 25:2 says “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*” In God’s providence, this passage has been given to us in such a way that there is a need to carefully search out the matter. All manner of interpretations exists and so we will proceed with great prudence and respect for the text before us.

Contextually, it is helpful to note that Paul still is concerned that the church conduct itself with love (1 Cor 13) and for the common good (1 Cor 12). The specific application is in the context of corporate worship where they are to be orderly and dignified, with proper distinctions of the created order which reveal the glory of God through His image bearers. Their “*tendency to see themselves as virtuoso spiritual soloists is nowhere more evident than in their behavior in worship: Paul recalls them repeatedly to perceiving worship as a corporate action of the community that requires complementary participation by all*” (Hays).

**Good Traditions** (v2) – Paul had delivered to the Corinthians instructions on the corporate worship service and now corrects the church in several areas (throughout chapters 11-14). These are the God-given structures of order that should be observed everywhere (v16, 23, 14:33, 40). When he wrote to the Colossian church, he praised their good order (*taxis* – Col 2:5), a military term of rank and file orderliness. In contrast, he was not pleased with the lack of order among the Corinthians (11:17ff).

**Headship** (v3) – “*Head*” here in this context means covenantal representative, someone invested with authority and responsibility to lead in order to bless (John 17:1-2). We can see that Paul is not discussing everything there is to say about headship. For instance, elsewhere he teaches that Christ is the head of the whole church (Eph 5:23), but in the next verses he is talking about the distinctives of particular relationships while praying and prophesying. Notice that headship is unavoidable whether we like it or not. This is the created order. Her head is “*the man,*” not men in general, and so this is her husband. Notice also that the head of Christ is God which teaches us that authority and submission among equals is not part of the fall.

**Praying or Prophesying** (vv4-6) – Throughout 1 Cor 11-14, prophesying refers to the special gift of prophecy, a gift among others that we will see has ceased with the completion of the canon of Scripture. It is possible that “*praying*” in this passage is not referring to the general work of prayer but to another spiritual gift, the “*praying, or speaking, in tongues.*” These gifts were manifested with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 in fulfillment of God’s promises of Joel 2 (Acts 2:16-18). Regardless, when these activities took place in the worship service, the creation ordinance of these image bearers, male and female, and particularly husband and wife, were to be evident.

**Heads and Coverings** (vv4-6) – When a man is praying or prophesying, he is to have his head uncovered, but a woman is to have her head covered. For each, to do otherwise, dishonors his or her head. Remember, his head (in this context) is Christ and her head is her husband. She has shamed her head so much she ought to go ahead and shave off all her hair. In other words, if she is going to dishonor her husband, then she should cut off his glory-symbol and be consistent (this will connect with v15 later).

**Iconic Headship** (vv7-9) – We know that marriage is a representation of the gospel and the ultimate marriage of Christ and His bride. We also know that the corporate bride is meeting with her husband in a covenantal worship service in a special way, with Word and Sacrament and the Holy Spirit. Husbands and wives are always representing this, but especially as they gather to worship together, they are to declare this gospel story in metaphorical ways. There is a connection between a man’s physical head and Christ and a corresponding connection between a wife’s physical head and her covenant head, her husband. Man came forth from God and so is the shining forth, the glory, of God. Woman comes from man’s side and so is the shining forth, the glory, of man. So a man’s glory is not his hair, it is his wife. Also (v9) we see that man was made first and then woman in order to complete and glorify man. He is unglorious and primitive; she is glorious, proclaiming the glorious eschatology of the bride of Christ.

**Because of the Angels** (v10) – This glorious declaration of the gospel, revealed in the distinct roles of husband and wife, including how they adorn themselves, is revealed to angels who are turning over the rule of the heavens and earth to a Man, to Jesus, and to His church/bride (1 Cor 6:3). Man is made in God’s

image and that image of man is male and female, the archetype of husband and wife. There needs to be a sign of authority on the bride/church and this is symbolized by the woman's long hair (we will see in v15).

**Mutual Glory-giving** (vv11-12) – Is the “*authority*” on the woman a sign of her authority or a sign of authority over her? I think these verses make clear that she has a sign of authority over her (from her husband) that she wields as her authority with him. He has authority over her because she came from his side. And she wields that glorious authority by bringing forth man from her side. And all of this comes forth from God, the rainbow of giving and returning glory (John 17:1-5, 22-23).

**What Nature Teaches** (vv13-16) – Paul has grounded his argument on theological and creational truths and not on the cultural situation of Corinth. He now adds that even nature teaches that a man's long hair is a dishonor to him, for his glory is not to be on him – he is to bestow that glory upon his wife. She is his crown and glory (Prov 12:4). Verse 15 “*a glory and a covering*” calls forth the promised picture of the restored tabernacle and the Shekinah glory that covered it, or her, the dwelling place of God with men (Isaiah 4:2-5).

**A First Pass of Observations** – ...for we will dive into this more. But for now...

*First*, while there is no longer male or female with regard to our oneness in Christ (Gal 3:28), the distinctions of our image-bearing, male and female, and especially as husband and wife, remains and in fact glorifies the gospel story. Men worship without any self-glory, and women worship as under an authority which glorifies.

*Second*, the glorious covering for a woman is her long hair. Long and short are relative terms and so we must treat them that way. A woman's hair generally should be longer than her husbands; it should adorn her modestly, beautifully, and gloriously, and of course there will be individual and cultural differences. However, she should be careful that the culture is not speaking first or primarily. Her hair is the covering and so she is not required to wear a hat or other covering, but she may in order to accentuate (but not to hide) the glory.

*Third*, these distinctions are to reveal more glory, not less. Theologically, we are all part of Christ's bride and so His glory rests upon us. At the same time, we are all sons of God and so all of us approach without any self-glory (uncovered), but in the glory of the name of Jesus given to Him by the Father.

Our marriages, our homes, our worship, are to be places of gracious glory bestowed and returned, of honor and authority covering and wielded, in such a way that eternal life is brought forth and cultivated – to the praise of the gracious glory of God.