

## 1 Cor 11.1-16 Also Gen 1. 24-31

### 19.8.2012 Barrowby

#### Introduction

Long hair or short hair? Head covering or not?

A strange passage -- possibly one of the most difficult in the New Testament to understand.

Partly because we don't quite understand the meaning of some of the words -- which have multiple meanings, -- and partly because we can't know fully what customs and cultural styles were around in Greece in the first century AD.

I mentioned in a previous sermon that in this letter Paul is answering questions which the Corinthians had put in one of their letters to him.

It seems that one problem they had was brought about by the new freedom they had found in becoming Christians.

Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians that all Christians must regard each other equally -- there was no longer "slave and master or male and female" for all are one. And no doubt he had told the same at Corinth

For example, We see from verse 5 the new status of women -- who were praying publicly in the church services alongside the men and prophesying publicly in the services. (Hardly allowed under Judaism or all the other religions of the time)

But the Corinthians weren't sure how far they should take this freedom. So it seems in what we might call a trivial issue of hair, that some men were going to church with long hair, and some women had cut their hair short and were not wearing the normal Grecian headdress. (What they would have made of punk hairstyles -- who knows). This was all very counter cultural -- especially as women with uncovered heads and short hair were usually the city's prostitutes.

Now, we could just put this down to a cultural thing -- few people today, for example, are wearing hats in our worship.

But in dealing with this trivial issue Paul actually brings up a very much bigger issue -- that of the relationship between women and men - with the inference - at least at first reading, that a woman is under the authority of a man?

Paul talks about 'headship' -- a relationship between people, and also between people and God, and between Christ and God the Father, but in the same sentence he also uses 'head' for the hairy bit at the top of your body.

So does the New Testament teach a woman is under the authority of a man

#### Headship

Well it would seem so wouldn't it -- quote verse 3 "*Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*"

#### What is Headship? What does it mean?

We generally assume that headship means being 'the boss', having authority over someone.

The person in charge of a school is the Head Teacher. The Good News Bible uses this assumption when it says 'the husband *is supreme over his wife*'. The 'head' is the one with the brains, the reason, the leader.

But this is our twenty first century use of the word 'head' as a metaphor.

In first century Greek society, the source of thought and reason was seen as being the heart, not the head.

The head was the source of life, of origin.

We use this idea when we talk of the head of a river, meaning where it starts from. Someone being the head of someone else did not mean an unequal relationship between one in authority and one in submission to that authority, but that the first person was the source, the origin of the second person.

In Genesis God is the creator of mankind. He makes them as both male and female, equal. He is the source of them. Mankind is both male and female.

Both male and female are distinct from and complementary to each other, but there is no distinction made between male and female in being 'the image of God' or in doing what God commanded them, to subdue the earth.

So using the Greek metaphorical use of 'head' might change how we read verses 3 and 4. Not that Christ is the boss of men, and men of women, and God of Christ; but that all men, mankind, comes from Christ, and that women comes from man (as in genesis chapter 2), and that Christ comes from God.

Christ is also called the source of all things in John 1 - "Through him all things were made", and Paul speaks of Christ as being the head of the church in the

context of his being before all things and the source of creation in his letter to the Colossians.

So, no we can't assume from this passage that the term 'head' means authority over each other, or that some people must submit to others.

Versus 11 and 12 seem to reinforce this "equal but different" approach to the male-female relationship

QUOTE

11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

How does all this help us to understand this passage better?

Well, if Paul isn't saying that men are in charge of the women (the authority model) maybe what he is saying is that there should be a clear distinction between men and women, even though they worship together in unity.

We started the reading at verse 1 of chapter 11, which is sometimes placed at the end of the previous block of teaching. Maybe we would do well to ignore the modern punctuation and chapters, and return to the three verses that proceed this reading.

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God - even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

Be sensitive to others in our worship-- something Paul expands in the next three chapters.