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## **GENDER AND POWER DYNAMICS IN 1 COR 10:31–11:16: AN ANALYSIS OF PAUL'S GOSPEL MESSAGE**

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### **Abstract**

*This study analyzes gender and power dynamics in 1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:16, focusing on Paul's guidance to the Corinthian church concerning cultural practices, gender roles, and their implications for Christian identity and community. The passage addresses eating, worship, and bodily expression, providing a framework to examine the intersection of gender, authority, and cultural expectations in the Greco-Roman context. Employing a narrative-critical method, the article situates the text within its historical and cultural context to demonstrate how Paul maintains ecclesiastical order while affirming the dignity of both women and men in the faith community. The interpretation of the head covering motif is central to this analysis, as it is often misinterpreted as a directive that supports patriarchal dominance. This article contends that the gospel serves as the interpretive key to these dynamics in the Corinthian church. It asserts that Paul's instructions should be understood as a call to respect local customs while promoting inclusivity that transcends traditional gender boundaries. This study contributes to ongoing discussions about gender, authority, and community dynamics in contemporary Christian thought.*

### **Keywords**

*Gender dynamics, power relations, Gospel message, head coverings, cultural context.*

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## Introduction

Christian doctrine prescribes distinct roles for men and women, which are expected to be maintained in all areas of life, especially during church worship. Contemporary accounts suggest that some behaviors exhibited by women in the Corinthian congregation were regarded as disrespectful toward both God and their husbands. While the precise nature of these behaviors is not documented, the situation developed into a significant theological issue within public worship. In response, Paul applies foundational gospel principles, emphasizing the necessity to honor and glorify God in accordance with the example established by Christ.

Scholarly consensus affirms the centrality of the gospel in Paul's thought and practice.\* Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians applies the gospel to various issues undermining the unity and sanctity of the church, including divisions (1:10), pride (1:29–31; 5:2), sexual immorality (5:1), litigation among believers (6:1–11), negative attitudes toward human sexuality (7:1–40), misuse of Christian freedoms (8:1–13), idolatry (10:1–30), and inappropriate conduct in corporate worship (11:2–14:40).

Paul establishes his intention to address each issue in the Corinthian church through the application of the gospel. He articulates this approach in his discussion of the emerging factions, emphasizing that his mission is to preach the gospel rather than to baptize, in order to preserve the transformative power of the cross. The central message of the gospel, described as the word of the cross, is perceived as foolishness by nonbelievers but is recognized as a source of transformation for those who accept it.†

Paul highlights the gospel's importance throughout his letter, making a key statement near the end: "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you ... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures" (15:1–4). He does not just use the gospel as a literary theme. Instead, Paul presents it as the answer to every issue facing the church. Sometimes this answer is clear and direct, while at other times it is more subtle but still brings change.

In this article, we will examine how 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:16 serves as a vital lens through which to understand Paul's gospel message, given its significance in his writings. Here's how we can see the gospel acting as the cohesive thread in Paul's argument:

- i. The essence of the gospel is pivotal for interpreting this section of the letter (10:31–11:2). Indeed, it reflects Paul's utmost concern for the believers in Corinth.
- ii. The core of the gospel lies in Jesus Christ and His willing submission to God (11:3). Among the various appeals made in this passage, the reference to Christ and His relationship with God is of paramount importance.
- iii. Certain behaviors of Corinthian women were seen as dishonorable and disgraceful to both God and their husbands. Regardless of the specific issues at hand, they have since evolved into a matter of the gospel within the context of public worship (11:4–6).
- iv. Paul offers a solution that could be termed a "gospel recovery" of God's design for honor and glory among men and women, emphasizing that no one should claim glory for themselves (11:7–12).

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\* L. Ann Jervis and Peter Richardson, eds., "Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker," *JSNTSup* 108 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 257-360.

† Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., *NICNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 70.

v. The resolution found in this passage rests on Paul's call for wisdom and humility. These qualities are practical manifestations of what it means for the gospel to thrive in the lives of believers (11:13–16).

### The “Gospel” as an Interpretative Key

The expression, “*euangelion*” as a “*dunamis theou*,” which Paul introduced in his letter to the Romans, showcases his understanding of the significance of the early gospel message within his own ministry. Paul aimed to share the gospel worldwide, driven by a deep sense of purpose and determination. His desire to spread this message has motivated countless generations of Christians, fueled by his unwavering ambition and dynamic efforts.

Paul's sense of identity, along with those he invites into a new life, is deeply rooted in what he refers to as the good news or gospel (*euangelion*) (1 Cor 9:12). This gospel is so central to Paul's letters that grasping its essence can significantly enhance our understanding of his work. In many ways, the gospel serves as a lens through which we can interpret his writings. Paul draws from the Old Testament, connecting its teachings to what he perceives as the good news. As noted by Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, Paul does not “wrest the Scripture from Israel,” nor does he “subordinate Scripture to his own belated conceptions.” Instead, his vital task is to intertwine Scripture and gospel in a way that authentically reveals the righteousness of God.”<sup>‡</sup>

Paul views himself as someone who has been “set apart for the gospel” (Rom 1:1), referring to it as “my gospel” (Rom 2:16; 16:25). He recognizes that it is ultimately God speaking through him: “For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin [...] I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11-12). Consequently, Paul serves as a voice for the “gospel of God” (Rom 1:1), which has the backing of the Jerusalem elders (Gal 2:2). They extended the “right hand of fellowship,” agreeing that Paul would reach out to the Gentiles while they would focus on the circumcised (Gal 2:9).

By connecting the gospel's divine origins with the authority given by the elders to share it with the Gentiles, Paul emphasizes both the divine revelation he's received and the communal affirmation of Jesus Christ's message that he delivers. This dual focus underscores the importance of accountability not just to God, but also to the community. Ultimately, Paul stresses that the final accountability for the gospel lies with God: “but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts” (1 Thess 2:4). This perspective empowers those who hear the gospel, allowing them to see themselves addressed by God, recognizing it not as mere human words, but as what it truly is, God's word (1 Thess 2:13).

### The Gospel as Identity Marker

The gospel communicates messages that can be seen as judgments for those who turn away from God's invitation (Rom 10:16), offers promises to those who accept it, and issues warnings to those who twist its meaning. It's clear that there are obstacles that hinder people from fully recognizing the gift God extends through the gospel (2 Cor 4:3). This blindness prevents them from seeing “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). Within our community of faith, the gospel can become distorted when we fall back into the restrictive practices that once held

<sup>‡</sup> Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (eds), *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1993), 62.

us captive, like insisting on circumcision for Gentiles aiming to engage completely in the Christian life (Gal 1:8–9).

### **The Nature of Pauline Gospel**

What is the gospel that Paul refers to? While Paul never directly denies this gospel, he provides some insights through his negative descriptions. For instance, during the controversy in Galatia, he points out that his opponents are “not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:14). He confronted Cephas in front of everyone, asking, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Gal 2:14). This indicates that the gospel does not demand Gentile converts to take on Jewish cultural practices to be considered true Christians.

Furthermore, the gospel is framed as God’s overarching promise that both Jews and Gentiles will be justified before Him through faith in Jesus, as He “declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham” (Gal 3:8). Since God has made such a promise, Paul feels a strong need to share it widely as well (1 Cor 9:16). One significant aspect of the gospel is its emphasis on reconciliation—between humanity and God, and among individuals themselves. He encourages the two women, Euodia and Syntyche, “to be of the same mind in the Lord,” highlighting that their shared ministry is far more important than any differences that divide them (Phil 4:2–3). This call for reconciliation stems from a deep sense of compassion inspired by the gospel and Paul’s genuine care for the people (1 Thess 2:8).

At the heart of the Apostle Paul’s theological framework lies a profound interpretation of the cross of Christ, which serves as the cornerstone of his proclamation of the Gospel and the mechanism through which reconciliation between humanity and God is achieved. This understanding is articulated with particular clarity in 1 Corinthians 1:17, where Paul emphasizes that his mission is not to baptize or to present an eloquent philosophical argument but rather to proclaim the message of the cross. This message encapsulates the central paradox of Christian faith: through the humiliation and suffering of Christ, the power and wisdom of God are revealed, challenging worldly notions of power and status.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:16, the dynamics of gender and power come into sharper focus within the context of the early Christian community. Here, Paul navigates complex social realities, addressing how believers are to conduct themselves in a manner that glorifies God while considering the cultural norms of their time. His teachings highlight the intersectionality of gender roles, power structures, and communal identity, illustrating how the implications of the cross. This is because the cross symbolizes the ultimate act of sacrifice, where Christ, despite being in the form of God, chose to take on human suffering and death for the sake of others (see Phil 2:6-8). This act not only reconciles humanity to God but also dismantles the dividing walls erected by sin, prejudice, and societal hierarchies. In Galatians 3:28, Paul profoundly proclaims that “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ

### **Historical Context of Gender and Power Dynamics in Corinth**

Throughout history, the roles and power dynamics between men and women have been a complex and often contentious topic. In recent years, there has been a growing movement towards gender equality and a reassessment of traditional gender roles in various aspects of society, including religion. In the Christian faith, the writings of the apostle Paul hold significant weight and have been subject to much debate and interpretation. One particular passage that has sparked discussions is 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:16, where Paul addresses the relationship between men and women in the church. In this article,

we will delve into the gender and power dynamics present in this passage and analyze Paul's gospel message.

Corinth was a city in ancient Greece, known for its wealth and indulgence, and was a significant center for the worship of the Greek goddess Aphrodite. The city was also a hub for trade and had a diverse population, including Jews, Greeks, and Romans. The church in Corinth was relatively new, and Paul had established it during his missionary journeys. However, as with any new community, there were many issues and conflicts arising. One of the issues was the tension between traditional gender roles and the newfound freedom in Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul writes, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." This verse is often quoted and used to emphasize the importance of glorifying God in all aspects of life. However, in the context of this passage, Paul is addressing the issue of food offered to idols and the cultural practices surrounding it. In the Greco-Roman society, food was often connected to religious rituals and was used as a means of establishing social hierarchies. Paul's message here is that as believers, our ultimate goal is to honor and glorify God, not to conform to societal norms or seek power and status.

Moving on to verses 11:3-16, we see Paul addressing the roles of men and women in the church. The first thing to note is that Paul begins by stating that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." This statement has been interpreted in various ways, with some believing it supports the hierarchical view of gender roles, where men are seen as leaders and women as submissive. However, others argue that Paul is using this analogy to emphasize the equality and interdependence within the Trinity. In other words, just as God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in essence but have different roles, so too are men and women equal but have different roles in the church.

Paul goes on to address the issue of head coverings for women during worship, stating that it is a symbol of authority and submission. Again, this has been a controversial passage and has been used to justify patriarchal views. However, it is essential to note that this practice was specific to the cultural context of Corinth and may not apply to all cultures and times. Furthermore, Paul's emphasis is not on head coverings themselves, but on the underlying principles of submission, respect, and honoring God.

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:16 provides valuable insights into the gender and power dynamics that existed in the early Christian community. Paul's message is not one of hierarchy or subjugation but of unity, equality, and glorifying God above all else. Hence the gospel message of Paul provides an interpretative lens to understanding the issues of gender and power dynamics in Corinth.

### **The Gospel as a Lens for Understanding 10:31—11:2**

In contemporary biblical hermeneutics, we are taught to begin our interpretation with this recognition that the "modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition."<sup>§</sup> In 10:31—11:16, Paul's primary goal is to address how the Corinthian women conduct themselves during public worship in light of the gospel.<sup>\*\*</sup> It seems that some were praying and prophesying in

<sup>§</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: The Collected Works and New Essays on Anthony Thiselton* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 441.

<sup>\*\*</sup> In the text from 11:2 to 14:40, Paul tackles three key issues that create divisions during communal worship: (1) the topic of head coverings and its relation to worship; (2) the issue of social elitism at the Lord's Table; and



ways that distracted from the message of Christ. It's important to remember that when we seek attention for ourselves, it can hinder both our individual growth and the unity of the church. Our prayers, songs, preaching, and testimonies should always uplift the gospel. Everything we do should reflect our desire to glorify God. Paul emphasizes the importance of humility in worship. Whether we're eating, drinking, praying, or prophesying, we should always keep in mind: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (10:31). Instead of prioritizing our own desires, we are called to humbly follow Christ's example: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11:1).

What exactly did Paul learn from Christ, and what example is he encouraging the Corinthian church to follow? In essence, he wants them to live out the humility of Christ in all areas of their lives, including their worship practices. Worship should be our heartfelt and thankful reaction to what God has accomplished for us through Christ. Thus, the way we worship must reflect a humility shaped by the gospel. Paul challenges the church to examine their current worship actions against the model of Jesus Christ—the ultimate example of gospel humility.

#### Verse 2: The centrality of Pauline gospel

This verse reinforces that the gospel is central to Paul's argument. In this section, he praises the Corinthians for accepting the gospel message that he "delivered" (*paradidōmi*) to them previously. The traditions (*paradosis*) he refers to aren't the early church liturgical practices.<sup>††</sup> Instead, he is emphasizing the gospel itself—the essence of the gospel story as accurately interpreted in light of the Scriptures. We can confirm this because later in the letter, he clearly outlines what he "delivered" to the Corinthians. Paul writes,

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-4).

If Paul is referring to the gospel in verse 2, it clarifies why he quickly shifts from a general commendation to the more specific issues of headship and authority. His intention isn't merely to offer a positive remark before addressing the Corinthians' dishonoring worship practices. Instead, verse 2 serves as a direct call to the gospel, which should shape the worship practices of both men and women within the Corinthian church. Christ's example highlights the importance of headship, authority, and humility, essential elements of worship.

What aspects of Christ does Paul want the believers to reflect? He encourages them to emulate Jesus in bringing honor and glory to God. He urges them to practice humility, shaped by the gospel, within

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(3) the improper use of spiritual gifts, particularly the practice of speaking in tongues. For a thorough exploration of these topics, see David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, *BECNT* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003). See also Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, *NIGTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

<sup>††</sup> For related passages, refer to 11:23 and 15:3, along with 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 3:6. Additionally, check out D. H. Williams, *Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), particularly pages 19–21. You may also find it valuable to look at Stephen O. Stout, *Preach the Word: A Pauline Theology of Preaching Based on 2 Timothy 4:1–5* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), specifically pages 44–46.

the man-woman dynamic as they gather for worship. He wants them to accept God's wise design for authority in relationships aligned with divine order. Jesus stands as the ultimate example of how to engage with God-given headship and authority, guiding where Paul will lead us next.

### Verse 3: *God and His Gospel*

In verse 3, we find the heart of Paul's argument. Jesus Christ serves as the ultimate model of love and humility, demonstrating what it means to submit to God the Father. His willingness to align His will with that of the Father is what made our salvation a reality (see John 5:18-47; Phil 2:5-11). Paul urges all believers to follow this profound example of voluntary submission to God's authority, reflecting the spirit of true discipleship.

Paul writes, "But 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" (v. 3). This passage highlights the foundational hierarchy in relationships: Christ and man; husband and wife; God and Christ. Each pair reflects a gospel-centered approach to authority and submission:

- Christ/man: Every individual, regardless of gender, acknowledges Jesus Christ as their Lord.
- Husband/wife: A wife's willing submission beautifully illustrates the essence of the gospel.
- God/Christ: Jesus' obedience to the Father is what makes the gospel possible.

The theme of submission unites these three relationships. Paul appeals to the inherent goodness of God's design for these connections. It is God's wish that everyone submits to the lordship of Jesus Christ: "The head of every man is Christ." True flourishing in life comes from yielding to the authority of the Son of God. Similarly, for a marriage to thrive, both husband and wife must adhere to God's intent for them. The wife's choice to submit to her husband, recognized as her God-given authority, reflects the humility that defines the kingdom of Christ. The husband's obligation to live sacrificially for his wife is rooted in a life centered on the crucified Christ (see Eph 5:25).

This leads us to the pivotal relationship highlighted in verse 3: "The head of Christ is God." To understand what Paul implies with this statement, we must look further into 1 Corinthians 15, towards the conclusion of his letter. The submission of Christ to the Father's will is not only the basis for our salvation but is also intricately connected to the glory and honor of God the Father, who constitutes the ultimate purpose of everything. As Paul clarifies, "all things are from God" (v. 12b), which helps frame verses 7-9—both man and woman are derived from God. This means that Paul's directives arise not just from social or cultural expectations but are firmly grounded in theological principles. He encourages his readers to view the relationship between men and women as reflective of the dynamic between Christ the Son and God the Father.<sup>††</sup> As Schreiner points out, "We have an analogy between the Trinity and male-female relationships, but not an exact parallel."<sup>§§</sup>

If these three relationships illustrate how submission operates within the divine structure, Paul suggests that our worship gatherings should also reflect the gospel in this light. When the gospel is

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<sup>††</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, in his work "1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary," *TNTC 7*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 224., notes an important point: "We are not surprised to discover that there is discontinuity because the relationship of the incarnate Son (the second person of the Trinity) to his Father cannot be completely analogous to any human relationship, given the uniqueness of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Still, an analogy is drawn" (227).

<sup>§§</sup> Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

absent from our worship, it brings dishonor and shame upon us. Verses 4–6 outline the disgrace that results when we stray from God's intended design.

#### Verses 4–6: Authority, Shame, and Dishonor in Worship

In verses 4–6, Paul directly connects the gospel to how women conduct themselves and present themselves during communal worship, particularly during prayer and prophecy. Richard Hays comments that some women in Corinth were causing shame in the community by disregarding traditional gender distinctions and behaving in a manner perceived as disgraceful or chaotic. Their actions not only brought dishonor to themselves but also affected the men in the church, undermining the God-ordained order of headship.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> It's important for Christians to ensure they don't bring shame upon God or one another.

Paul first turns his attention to the men. When a man prays or prophesies in the worship setting wearing a head covering, he brings dishonor to his "head," referring to Christ (v. 3). These head coverings were probably common in pagan practices or used to flaunt social status.<sup>†††</sup> In an honor-shame culture, Paul makes it clear that such behavior is disrespectful to Christ. On the other hand, Paul emphasizes his main concern regarding women worshipping in the Corinthian church. If a woman prays or prophesies without a head covering, she dishonors her "head," or her husband.<sup>‡‡‡</sup> Here, the head covering likely refers to a veil or shawl of some sort.<sup>§§§</sup> Paul further explores the concept of shame by comparing a woman publicly praying or prophesying to her shaving her head. Schreiner articulates the problem in more detail:

If women choose not to wear head coverings, it would be considered improper, as they would be perceived as adopting a masculine style. Just as having short or shaved hair would carry a similar stigma, women in that time would feel a strong sense of shame if they were to appear in public without a proper head covering. In that cultural context, a woman with a shaved head would be seen as resembling a man, which was socially unacceptable.<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

In the context of that era, a woman's choice not to wear a head covering conveyed her stance on male authority, suggesting that she was not inclined to submit graciously. With this understanding, Paul provides guidance to both men and women regarding established practices in worship, aiming to prevent any offense to others. As Schreiner summarizes,

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians, Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 186.

<sup>†††</sup> Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 227.

<sup>‡‡‡</sup> Hays, *First Corinthians*, 186. It is worth noting that Hays affirms the meaning of "head" (*kephalē*) as "ruler" or "authority," not "source." In his reading, Paul's concept of headship in this passage is one of authority and hierarchy. "The covering or uncovering of the head," he writes, "is not merely a sign of individual freedom, Paul insists; rather, it signifies either respect or disrespect for one's superior in the hierarchy." For Hays, however, the symbolic "gender distinctions" Paul clearly and strongly affirms here do not also entail the relational "subordination" of women to men (184; see 183, 190–92).

<sup>§§§</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Gender Passages in the NT: Hermeneutical Fallacies Critiqued," *WTJ* 56 (1994): 259–83.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 130.



The central message of 1 Corinthians 11:3–6 is that women are permitted to pray and prophesy publicly; however, they must do so in a way that reflects an attitude of respect towards male leadership. In that cultural context, wearing a head covering symbolized a submissive and feminine posture. Therefore, while Paul does not prohibit women's participation in public worship, he emphasizes that their demeanor should be one of humility and submission to male authority.<sup>†††</sup>

#### Verses 7–12: Glory and Gospel Revival

Paul's response to the challenges in the church's worship life centers on "the glory of God" (vv. 7, 12b). It's easy to overlook this fundamental truth, but it resonates with all evangelicals, regardless of whether they identify as egalitarian, complementarian, or still finding their place. The shared understanding is clear: humanity exists to glorify God, and self-glorification is never appropriate.

By invoking the glory of God in the creation of man and woman, Paul makes a profound connection to the gospel. He illustrates a cascading flow of glory—from God to man and then to woman. In this context, "glory" refers to the honor and dignity that one person generously gives to another. God graciously imparts His glory to humanity at creation, yet humanity must not hoard that glory; instead, we are called to return all reverence and honor to our Creator. This same radiant sense of glory is meant to flow from man to woman. When Paul writes, "(Man) is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man" (11:7–8), he beautifully illustrates how the image of God is passed along within the order of creation.

Just as a man should not grasp glory for himself, neither should a woman. No one should cling to glory. The honor described is meant to be shared, ultimately directed back to God—"all things are from God" (v. 12b). This aligns with the broader biblical narrative that all glory, honor, and dignity originate from God, who is continually transforming us into His likeness (2 Cor 3:18). Ultimately, we are being reshaped in the image of the Son, ensuring that all creation will eventually return to glorify God (1 Cor 15:28).

Paul is exploring the principles of headship and glory—essentially authority and honor—as they play out in the relationship between husband and wife. A man honors God by not covering his head, as doing so would imply submission to another being, including his wife, which undermines God's intended design for him (v. 4). If a man were to pray or prophesy with a symbol of authority on his head, it would challenge the relational order established by God.<sup>††††</sup>

Conversely, when a woman prays or prophesies publicly with her head covered, she not only brings honor and glory to God but also to her husband, expressing her affirmation of the divine order in a joyful way. She honors God when she embraces her role as "a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18, 20), recognizing the goodness of God's design. As John Frame points out, "Unlike the man, then, she honors God best by displaying a symbol by which she honors her fellow-creature."<sup>§§§§</sup>

God created humanity to reflect His image, sharing honor and glory throughout creation. However, men and women reflect God's glory in distinct ways: "But woman is the glory of man" (v. 7).

<sup>†††</sup> Schreiner, "Head Coverings," 132.

<sup>††††</sup> John M. Frame, "Men and Women in the Image of God," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 228.

<sup>§§§§</sup> Frame, "Men and Women in the Image of God," 228.

According to God's design, a woman's beautiful and unique role is to honor her husband, not for the sake of self-importance, but as a means of glorifying God. Importantly, she does this not out of a sense of lack as an image bearer, but from a desire to bestow honor and dignity on another, rather than seeking glory for herself. While self-glorification is wrong, it is truly Christlike to uplift others (v. 1).

The husband's role in honoring and uplifting his wife is just as demanding, if not more so, than her act of submission to him. He is called to selflessly sacrifice for his wife, reminiscent of how Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, enabling her to thrive in beauty and holiness (see Eph 5:25). He must take up his cross and prioritize his wife's well-being over his own. In this way, like Jesus, he brings glory and honor to others through his sacrifice. A husband should never seek glory for himself.

So, how can the women of Corinth appropriately honor their husbands? By praying and prophesying with their heads covered during worship gatherings. This act of submission and humility reflects the beauty of God's design in creation and diverts glory away from themselves. John Frame provides insight here: "It is often by submitting to others that we display the ethical components of the divine image. How better to demonstrate God's love, His patience, His gentleness, His self-control, then by submitting to others?"<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> What better setting for this than a worship gathering whose ultimate aim is the glory of God?

Ultimately, Paul's gospel-centered resolution focuses on glorifying God in gathered worship. Every aspect of Christian worship whether it's baptism, communion, Scripture reading, singing, praying, prophesying, preaching, collecting offerings, blessings, or benedictions—should be for God's glory. Our worship practices should reflect Christ's example, who always directed glory back to the Father. Thus, Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church points toward a gospel-centered recovery of God's glory, highlighting His wonderful design for both men and women. Our worship gatherings must be dedicated to giving glory to God and Him alone! *Soli Deo gloria*.

#### Verses 13–16: Gospel Resolution: Embracing Wisdom and Humility

Paul's message is centered around two key concepts: wisdom and humility. These qualities are essential in reflecting what it means to follow the example of Jesus Christ (v. 1). Paul identifies a departure from the gospel when individuals dismiss God's natural design for masculinity and femininity and foster discord in the church's worship practices.

First, in verses 13–15, Paul encourages the church to exercise wise judgment. He invites them to "Judge for yourselves" (v. 13), prompting a cultural discussion on gender distinctions with two rhetorical questions. He asks, does not the natural order illustrate clear differences between men and women (v. 14)?<sup>+++++</sup> Most people can recognize masculinity and femininity in practice. When a man chooses to wear his hair long, akin to women's styles, it brings him shame. In contrast, a woman's long hair is her "glory" (*doza*), symbolizing both her individual dignity and the honor she brings to her husband (v. 7). Furthermore, a woman's long hair serves as a guide for appropriate behavior during worship, highlighting the significance of a head covering in prayer. Ultimately, the act of a wife praying with a covered head signifies her devotion to God and honors her husband—a beautiful demonstration of a life transformed by the gospel.

Additionally, Paul emphasizes humility and the unity that arises from it (v. 16). When he states, "we have no such practice," he points out that other churches within their network do not engage in

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<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> Frame, "Men and Women in the Image of God," 228.

<sup>+++++</sup> Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

disorderly worship. This is the third instance where Paul reminds the Corinthians of common practices in other congregations (see 4:17; 7:17; 14:33). Thus, he is urging them to recognize that being contentious moves them away from the gospel principles they have received. Those who are causing disputes which likely represent a minority are promoting practices that are not only inappropriate but also out of step with the broader community to which they belong.

### Conclusion

The analysis of gender and power dynamics in 1 Corinthians 10:31—11:16 reveals the complex interplay between cultural context and theological principles within Paul's gospel message. Through his writings, Paul navigates the intricate social customs of the Corinthian church while advocating for a vision of equality grounded in the teachings of Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:16 highlight the tension between cultural norms that positioned men and women in hierarchical roles and the radical inclusivity of the gospel that seeks to transcend such divisions. Paul's arguments not only challenge the prevailing patriarchal structures of his time but also invite a re-examination of authority and submission within the Christian community.

Ultimately, the dynamics of gender and power in these verses underscore a transformative understanding of relationships in Christ, where mutual respect and honor supersede societal expectations. This analysis suggests that the essence of Paul's message is not merely about maintaining order but about fostering a community marked by love, unity, and shared dignity. As contemporary readers engage with 1 Corinthians 10:31—11:16, they are encouraged to reflect on how the principles of mutual respect and equality can be lived out in today's contexts, continuing the legacy of the early church's commitment to the radical inclusivity of the gospel.

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