

First Corinthians

May 4, 2025

Chapter 11

The Matters of Paul's Apostleship

"Paul's Example in Apostleship"

Chapter 11:

As Chapter 11 begins, Paul continues to defend his Apostleship. He also teaches how saints should think, speak, and act with lost Jews, Gentiles, and weak or immature saints in the Church. At the end of Chapter 10, Paul instructed the mature saints in Corinth not to offend the lost and immature by doing anything that is lawful but could cause them to stumble. He urged them to do this for the sake of the Gospel and the cause of Christ, hoping to bring them to a saving knowledge of the LORD. He encouraged them to be more concerned about others than themselves for the glory of God. Paul concludes with an example, telling them to look at him as an Apostle and to imitate him.

4. Paul's Example in Apostleship

a) Imitate Me (11:1)

To know how to walk a mature, saintly life, Paul says,

¹ *Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*

"*Be imitators of me...*" What does this mean? Paul is saying, "Follow my instructions. Follow what I am conveying in this letter." He explains how he ministers to the lost and the immature. When engaging with these groups, Paul desires the mature to imitate his plans, actions, and speech without causing offense. In Chapter 10:33, Paul reflects on his conduct, stating, "... *just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of many, so that they may be saved.*" For Paul, starting at the level where the lost are is essential to guide them to the LORD. It is equally crucial to begin at an immature level to educate them in the knowledge of the LORD. All teachers understand that they must start from the point where the lost and immature are to enlighten them, lead them to the LORD, and help them grow in their faith.

"*Be imitators of me,*" Paul says. Why? Paul answers, "... *just as I also am of Christ.*" What a powerful statement that is, and it rings so true. Jesus never expects a lost person to know anything special, to have a certain background, or to obtain some high certificate to come to Him. He meets each lost person where they are and works with them there. The same applies to immature saints. Generation after generation, the lost have accepted the Lord for two thousand years, becoming brand new but immature saints. Year after year, the Lord has His ministers start with the new saints and disciple them to maturity. It is a constant school that begins anew with every new saint.

Paul is then thankful to the saints in Corinth. He says, remember me!

b) Remember Me (11:2)

In verse 2, Paul says,

² *Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.*

How does Paul know that the Church in Corinth still remembers him? We understand that the Church remembers Paul because Chloe, a member of the congregation, sent word to him to

help address the distracting issues in the Corinthian Church. As we have discovered so far, the problems in the Corinthian Church stem from divisions between the mature and immature saints. These divisions arose from what Paul taught them during his time there. What did Paul teach them? He taught them the “*traditions*” of faith in Christ. Some of the saints remembered every “*tradition*” Paul shared. Here, I must admit that this is a very poor translation of the Greek. The Greek would be better rendered as:

“I commend you now, that in all things you have remembered me, and as I delivered to you, the teachings you are keeping.”

The Greek word for *teaching* is translated in our text as “traditions.” It could be argued that the teachings of Paul, which were derived from the teachings of Jesus, constituted new traditions; yet they were more than mere traditions; they were the teachings of Jesus. The term “traditions” *needs to have a stronger* connotation in this verse. Considering what transpired in the Catholic Church within a century of Paul's writing, the word “traditions” took on a tragic significance. In the Catholic Church today, the *man-made traditions* established by the priests often hold as much, if not more, authority than Scripture. Here, Paul is not referring to the *traditions* of the Church; he is addressing the words of Jesus. Within the Church, the saints have preserved the *teachings* of Jesus’ words that Paul delivered to them.

All that Paul taught the Corinthian Church and wrote in this letter stems from the *teachings* of Jesus. Based on this, Paul instructs the Church to “*Remember this.*” He wants them to remember God’s designated authority for the Church and its saints. Clearly, Paul is addressing all the troubling matters that Chloe has brought to his attention. The following issue is no different; it represents yet another troubling matter within the Corinthian Church.

c) Remember This

(1) God’s Designed Authority Line for the Church (11:3)

Paul says,

³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

Here we have God’s designed authority line for the Church and its saints. What does Paul mean when he uses the word “*head*?” First, there is Christ, the Supreme Leader of the entire Church. He is the ultimate “*head*” of the Church. Second, men born male fall under the leadership of Christ next in the line of authority. Women born female come third in the chain of authority within the Church. (Note: You may wonder why I am using the terms “men born male” and “women born female.” As of the writing of this commentary, some people are saying, “not all men are born men, nor are all women born women.” Some men and women believe they were born with the wrong “gender” and have undergone surgery to alter their bodies to match their beliefs. Some of these transgender individuals may repent of their sins against the LORD, expressing regret for their decisions regarding the surgeries, and seek to know the LORD as their Savior. In relation to this verse, these new saints have asked me, “What does God consider me to be, a man or a woman?” My answer has always been consistent: “God makes no mistakes. If you were born male, you are male. If you were born female, you are female in God’s eyes. The way you were born determines your place in this line of authority within the Church now and forever.

Then, Paul explains that even Christ is under the authority of God the Father.

Paul prefaced this chain of authority by stating, *"But I want you to understand..."* The word *"understand"* essentially means *to know*. It should be part of a person's foundational knowledge about the Church organization.

Now that Paul has established the chain of authority—God the Father over Christ, Christ over the man in the Church, and the man over the woman in the Church—he discusses how men and women in the Church are to relate to God the Father and Christ in prayer. Since God the Father and Christ are both in heaven, communication between the Godhead and the saints of the Church occurs through prayer. Paul addresses a man praying first.

(2) God's Designed Authority Line in Prayer in the Church

(a) A Man Praying (11:4)

Paul says in verse 4,

⁴ *Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.*

In an interesting change using the word *"head,"* Paul connects the chain of authority and the physical head of a man in God's designed authority line with prayer in the Church. If a man attempts to pray or proclaim the Gospel with a covered head, he *"dishonors his head."* Does it dishonor the head of the man who is praying? Yes. But it also dishonors Christ, who is the authority over the man. While it may seem a little confusing, a covering on the physical head of a man signifies something special.

Because the LORD was no longer physically present with the Church on earth, the Church relied on men to serve as its spiritual leaders. In earthly bodies, men are not subordinate to women; instead, women are subordinate to men. In a departure from Judaism, where men would cover their heads with a veil, cap, or turban while praying, men were instructed never to cover their heads in Christ. This instruction is clear, yet it has become a common tradition even among non-Christians. I have been privileged to officiate at many funerals and weddings during my ministry. A few years ago, I became close to a tow truck driver who parked on our lot at the Church while listening to the scanner for wrecks in our area. He was lost. At times, I noticed a dozen tow truck drivers gathered in the parking lot. I got to know them all. One day, he asked if I would officiate his wedding ceremony. He had been living with the woman for over twenty years, and their children were nearly grown. But for some reason, they finally decided to marry. At the service in Galveston, more than a hundred tow trucks lined the venue. The wives and children of these drivers were all present. It was a large wedding, providing an excellent opportunity to share the Gospel message. You could smell liquor and weed on all of them.

Curse words flew in their everyday speech, and that was just part of their vocabulary. Then, it happened. I was moved beyond imagination. When I said, "Let us pray," every man took off his ball cap and held it across his heart. Although they were lost sinners, upon hearing the word "pray," they instinctively understood the tradition and instruction of Paul from this verse. None of them knew where to find it in the Bible, but they all recognized the proper behavior during a prayer. When a Christian saint prays, he should not have his head covered.

Notice that Paul pairs the word *"praying"* with *"prophesying."* The same standard applies to *prophesying* as it does to praying in the Church. We should take a moment to define *prophesying*. At this point in the timeline of the Bible, only one group of men is able to prophesy about the future: the Apostles who were still alive at the time. It was 57 AD, and we are unsure how many Apostles were still living then. Peter is undoubtedly still alive because he wrote his two letters to the Jewish Christians in Northern Turkey in 65 AD. John is still alive since he wrote his Gospel, three letters,

and the Revelation before he died in 98 AD. As for the others, we do not know. Paul and Peter will die on the same day in Rome, June 29, 67 AD. Nonetheless, John was the last Apostle to die. With his death, the ability to predict the future ended. Jesus foretold the future and endowed the Apostles with the gift of prophecy. However, the Apostles did not have the authority to pass this ability on to their disciples.

When Paul uses the word "prophecy" in this passage, he refers to the saints standing in the Church to teach what is recorded in the Word of God. It does not mean predicting the future; rather, it signifies conveying what is documented in Holy Scripture.

With that said, what about when a saintly woman is praying?

(b) A Woman Praying (11:5)

Paul says,

⁵ But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.

Notice that the woman is not prohibited from praying or teaching what is found in Scripture. However, she is limited in that when she is praying or teaching Scripture, her head must be covered. Unlike other women in Corinth who are not part of the Church, her head should not be shaved. Having her head uncovered is considered a *disgrace*. Why? Because a covered head symbolizes subordination. Men are to be the leaders of the Church on earth; women are to be subject to the men in the Church, not the leaders of the Church.

When Paul states, "*for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved*," he conveys a lot to us. Although we haven't reached that point in this chapter yet, in verses 14 and 15, Paul will address us.

¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

When Paul uses the word "nature," he refers to the instinct inherent in all humans from the beginning of Creation. A woman's long hair is her glory, and it is given to her as a covering. In Paul's day, long hair on a woman marked her sex/gender and, as some have said, served as an ornament of the female. By shaving her head, a woman relinquishes her symbol of femininity and submission to men within the Church, as directed by the LORD. Shaving the head was equivalent to trying to present oneself as a man when she is, in fact, a woman. However, it's important to note that in Corinth and Greece, it was common for women to wear their hair short. Therefore, Paul indicates that even in Corinth, if a woman with short hair enters the Church and becomes a saint, she must cover her head while praying and prophesying if her hair is cut short. If her hair is long, that serves as her covering; she does not need to wear an additional head covering. Yet, Paul still has more to say regarding the woman's head A Woman's Head (11:6)

Paul says,

⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.

In verse 6, the Holy Spirit uses Paul to prophesy about the future of all the Churches worldwide that will be established. If a woman stood in the Church in Corinth without a head covering, in the cultural context of the Greek regions of the Roman Empire at that time, she might as well have cut off her hair. In other words, if she cuts her hair short like a man's, then her hair is no longer her glory, making it improper for her to pray or teach without a covering on her head.

But then Paul looks at the rest of the world and says, "*But if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.*" How will the Holy Spirit address this through Paul?

Let us focus on his words, "*if it is disgraceful.*" The Roman Empire stretched from Britain to India, but Corinth's customs were not uniform throughout it. In some regions, it was customary for women to wear their hair short. This was certainly true in Africa and Egypt, where Churches were also being established. However, in Israel and the eastern countries, it was considered a disgrace for a woman to wear her hair short, cut, or shaved. In that context, Paul advises that to ensure she complies with the customs of the Church and does not offend those who might visit, if her hair is deemed too short—even if it is actually long—"let her cover her head" with a veil or scarf of some kind.

(c) A Man's Head (11:7)

Now turning back to sainted men in the Church, Paul says,

⁷ *For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.*

Here, we observe the necessity for the woman's head to be covered due to her position and relationship with the man. A man needed to keep his head uncovered because of his position and relationship with God. The man was created in the image of God. The woman was taken and formed from the side of the man. In Genesis 1 and 2, we must remember that man was not created for the woman; rather, the woman was created for the man. In creation, man had a direct relationship with God. The woman was created in a direct relationship with the man. Paul outlines these truths next in God's designed authority structure in creation between a married man and woman.

(3) God's Designed Authority Line in Creation

(a) The Origination of Authority (11:8-9)

Speaking of the origin of authority in marriage, Paul says,

⁸ *For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.*

The woman was created for man's benefit. The man was not made for the woman's benefit. The woman was meant to be the man's helper. Nevertheless, man bears the greater responsibility; he is accountable for the woman.

(b) The Symbol of Authority (11:10)

Paul now speaks of the symbol of authority on the head of the woman. He says,

¹⁰ *Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*

Her symbol of authority is her covered head, whether by her long hair, veil, or scarf. However, Paul states that the reason for this symbol of authority is "*because of the angels.*" What does that mean?

In the book of Hebrews, we learn of the "*ministering spirits*" among the saints.

Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

These ministering spirits are sent to assist the saints of the LORD in the Church.

Warning: Some commentators suggest from Genesis 6 that the sons of God engaged in sexual relations with the daughters of men. This theory proposes that the *sons of God* were fallen angels.

In a lesson on Sunday, June 4th, 2023, titled "Can You Explain the Nephilim in Genesis?" I expressed my regret for not taking the time to include the reason that the "*sons of God*" mentioned

in Genesis 6:1-8 refer to the godly line of Adam, who *“called upon the name of the LORD”* for their salvation. Consequently, they were not angels, as many have suggested. I want to add this brief addendum to that lesson to clarify why I believe they were the godly line of Adam. Now, there are only ten verses in the entire Bible that use the title *“sons of God.”* Two of those verses are in the Nephilim story in Genesis 6. If you recall, Genesis 6:2 states, *“the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose.”* Genesis 6:4 notes, *“The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.”*

In the lesson, I explained why they represent the Godly lineage of Adam based on the context of Genesis Chapters 1 through 6. However, keep in mind that nothing found in one part of Scripture should contradict the wording in another part of Scripture. This is a crucial point to always remember when studying the Bible. Since the Holy Spirit divinely inspires the entire Bible and guided the men who wrote the words on the pages for us, no word, phrase, title, verse, sentence, paragraph, chapter, book, or storyline will ever contradict something stated elsewhere in the Bible. For example, the Holy Spirit would never lead a writer to use a term like *“sons of God”* to describe evil, sinful, fallen angels in one passage and then use the same term in another to refer to the faithful followers of the LORD. In other words, the Holy Spirit consistently employs the same terminology in the same way and for the same purpose throughout the Bible wherever those words appear. There is one exception to this point: when the Holy Spirit instructs the writer to record the words of a false prophet or teacher, these are written exactly as the false prophet or teacher said them. For instance, in Jeremiah, the prophet Hananiah prophesied, *“Thus says the LORD,”* claiming that the Babylonian Empire was about to fall and that the exiles would soon return to Jerusalem. As we continue to read the context, we discover that Jeremiah responded, *“Amen and amen,”* but the LORD did not speak those words. Jeremiah told Hananiah that because he proclaimed, *“Thus says the LORD,”* when the LORD had not actually said those words, Hananiah would die shortly. Hananiah did die soon after, and the Babylonian Empire did not collapse for nearly three decades. Therefore, the Holy Spirit was always careful to clarify when the words of man did not originate from God. Context is essential for understanding how the Holy Spirit's wording is intended. Consequently, we must examine the context of the other eight passages that include the phrase *“sons of God”* to support the notion that these sons were humans, not angels. As we review these eight verses, I will also include a couple more verses that feature variations of the title *“sons of God.”* Since we will approach these verses in the order of the Books of the Bible, our next verse appears in Deuteronomy, and it does feature a slight variation.

Deuteronomy (One Verse)

In Deuteronomy, the third reference to those who would be called the “sons of God” appears in one verse. Deuteronomy 14:1 states, *“You are the sons of the LORD your God; you shall not cut yourselves nor shave your forehead for the sake of the dead.”* Clearly, this title refers to humans, not angels. Although the phrase is “sons of the LORD your God,” rather than simply “sons of God,” it is evident that the intent behind these phrases is the same. In Deuteronomy, Moses reiterates the laws to the Israelites before they cross the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land. Over several chapters, Moses conveys various laws. When he reaches this part of his message, Moses cautions the Israelites against adopting the godless customs of the Canaanites in the land, who cut themselves and shaved the sides of their heads in worship of Molech, a false god. In the worship

of Molech, children are sacrificed in the flames of his bronze belly. If they cut themselves or shave their heads as part of Molech worship, they are engaging in idolatrous practices.

Cutting of the flesh was the original form of tattooing. The skin would be incised in a design, and the resulting scar would create a flesh-colored tattoo. Among the earliest mummies discovered to date, this form of tattooing appeared exclusively on women across various cultures. It is believed that such facial tattooing symbolized high status, preventing the woman from being mistaken for a commoner. As for the intriguing history of tattoos, the Old Testament was completed and compiled as the WORD of GOD prior to the realization that ashes could be applied to fresh cuts, staining the scar permanently. By the time of Moses, the tattooing practice in many cultures began to include men of status within tribes. Under the LORD's law at that time, Jews were instructed not to engage in these idolatrous practices, as they "*are the sons of the LORD your God.*" Thus, we find the first mention after Genesis that the "*sons of God*" refer to the descendants of the godly line of Adam through the Jews, rather than through Cain's line, and they are human, not angels.