

Wow, we're treading on dangerous ground here this morning... All this talk of hats and veils and hair-do's and heads and who's the head of who... Maybe **I** should have some headwear on this morning – a riot helmet might be the go.....

If there's a passage that can get a male chauvinist to climb aboard his high horse, or bring the blood of a militant feminist to the boil, this one's gunna do it every time...

Based on this passage, some denominations cling to a rule that ladies have to wear a hat in worship, whereas other churches will throw this passage out entirely, and say "It means nothing any more – it's just a sign of the times when they didn't know any better, and men oppressed women..."

Wow... What does it mean for us today?

I'm going to be upfront with you:

Today's bible reading is one of the toughest passages in not only 1 Corinthians (which is a tough book to preach from), but in the whole of the bible. And the reason it's so tough, is because it's difficult to nail down exactly what it means. It's largely speaking in metaphors...

It's whole theological underpinning, is given as a metaphor:

When Paul says :

³ 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.

, he's using the Greek word κεφαλή (Kephale), which means "a literal head" – a "cranium"...

But because of the way we use our English word "head", in this context, we **don't** think of it as a literal head – we think of it in terms of headship, like a "head master" or the "head sherang". – the ruler; authority; boss; chief; principal; supreme; most important....

And so we tend to understand that 1 Corinthians 11 is talking about "headship", without us ever realising that this whole assumption, is based upon our **English** understanding of the English word "head". Whereas here, the Greek word "κεφαλή", means a "literal head". But of course he's using the literal head as a metaphor...

And that's why so many Christians and so many churches disagree on this passage and its interpretation, and how it applies today...

*About 40km East of Warwick, on the Great Dividing Range, is a place called "The Head" – not because 150 years ago, a sailor went to the toilet there (nautical term for toilet), but because just around there, is the very beginnings of the Condamine River. It's the **head** of the river – the **source** of a river – the **top** of the river system, which by the time it meets the ocean, will have travelled thousands of kilometres, through 3 states.*

And the Greek word, "head" **can** be used as a metaphor, to mean "source". So, it **could** be saying God is the source of Christ; Christ is the source of man; man is the source of

woman.... And that is true. But is **that** the *key point* that Paul's making here? It might play a part, but I don't think that's fully it.

The New International Greek Testament Commentary explains it like this:

*The problem about translating κεφαλή as "head" [is]... **in English-speaking contexts "the head" almost always implies leadership and authority, as in headmaster, Head of School, Head of Department, head steward..... [but the Greek term in a metaphorical sense was used more]... not as authoritative leader in charge, but as one who is "prominent, foremost, uppermost, preeminent."***ⁱ

So, for example, (I'm not a beer-drinker), but beer drinkers like to have a nice head on their pot of beer. Now, the head of the beer, isn't its source – it's not the authority of the beer. It's the top bit. It's the bit which sticks out. It's that which is prominent. (that white frothy bit of foam, on top of the amber ale).

Our physical head, is both that part of us which is most conspicuous, and that part of us, by which we are most readily distinguished or recognised.ⁱⁱ That's why our passports only require the photo of our head – it's our identity.

Our very identity, of who we are – our honour and respect, is represented here, at our head.

It's that prominent bit of us:

- The husband should be seen as prominent with his wife. The wife's identity, is bound up in that of her husband.
- Christ should be seen as prominent, in relation to the man. The man's identity, is bound up in that of Christ.
- God, is prominent, in relation to Christ. Christ's identity, is bound up in the Father.

A fair bit of what Paul has to say in this letter, is warning the Corinthian church about the way they've been seeking prominence for themselves. And when **we** seek prominence for **ourselves** (at the cost of the other), that brings dishonour – It brings shame... It's like we're **seeking** honour, and wanting to be the ones who are recognised - the ones who are prominent, but it works in the opposite... It brings shame.

This whole discussion, is about “prominence” and “shame”... When we act in a way that makes **ourselves** prominent, it dishonours (or shames) others... And this passage, is specifically, all about how the loss of gender-identity, is commonly an expression of self-promotion.

And all this talk about hats and hair-do's and heads, can all be summarised like this:

“Let men be men, and women be women.” And we do it to honour each other, to honour ourselves, and to honour God.

So there you go: in a nutshell, that's a simplification of one of the most complex and confusing bits of scripture, that I've ever had to preach on. And some of you might be satisfied by that. Most of you won't be. And in the time I've got this

morning, I know I cannot satisfy all of your questions, but let me give a bit of an explanation

In the Roman culture, which was very prominent in Corinth, it was the custom that respectable women, and especially married women would wear a veil or a hood. It denoted respect and respectability. It said “Hey, don’t ‘have designs’ on **this** woman – she’s not available (taken).”... Whereas a woman without a veil or a hood, meant she was “*potentially or actually sexually available*”ⁱⁱⁱ. It was like putting out the welcome mat for advances from men... It would give a similar impression as dressing like a tart might today...

And likewise, for a **man** to wear a veil (or a hood), was to dress in a way that was distinctly feminine. It would be like a man wearing make-up today, or having his hair dressed in a manner similar to a woman...

Now, in Christ, we have immense freedom. And before God, we are all equal – we are all sons of God – heirs of the Father, joint heirs with the Son. But “equality” does not equal “sameness”. I don’t know if you’ve noticed or not, but men and women are different. Men are not better than women. Women are not better than men. But we **are** different. God has made us that way. And we need each other. V11 ... in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹² for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

Alright, as men and women, we **need** each other. And men need the women to be women, and women need the men to be men...

Now, that pretty much goes against the whole gender-neutral push that is part of the current social engineering of our society, where the lines of gender are being blurred and we're being told that there is no difference between men and women....

And so when Paul says:

⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head,

he's saying "When men (especially in worship) display themselves as being 'effeminate', or when they seek to hide their masculine gender, they're sticking out like a sore-thumb – they're making themselves prominent... And isn't that so much the way? Isn't "flamboyance" often associated with men who are homosexual / metrosexual / or who project a sexless or effeminate image...

Prominence... And it dishonours his head. It brings shame on himself, because when he denies his gender, he denies what it means to be human – his place in God's creation... And by making himself "prominent" (and maybe flamboyant), in worship, it dishonours God.

Likewise, V5 says:

⁵ but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours **her head**

Anthony Thiselton puts it like this:

*In vv. 4 (men) and 5 (women) the principle remains the same: self-advertisement, especially if it relates to perceptions of the worship leader as an object of sexual attraction, diverts attention from God who should be the **centre of undivided attention**. To employ a dress code which hints at sexual availability while leading worship is unthinkable.^{iv}*

Let's put this in modern terms for today.

I think we've already covered the men – Anything that we do, that draws attention to ourselves, particularly putting out an effeminate image, dishonours who we are, and it dishonours God. It makes ourselves the object of our worship, rather than the God who created us...

What about women? We don't use veils or hoods anymore, to identify marital status or to signal sexual availability... How do we do it today???

Well, it's still tied up in how we dress... I don't want to sound like 'a prude', but women can wield a lot of influence on a bloke... And when a good sort, dresses in alluring attire, they're make themselves very prominent. And it's more than just looking nice – there's nothing wrong with a woman looking nice... But when a woman dresses provocatively, she's making herself prominent – She's making herself, the centre of attention, when our intention should be given entirely to God... And especially if a married woman dresses provocatively, she's not only dishonouring herself, but she's shaming her husband....

So there you go – I’ve made my prudish statement for the day.

How else, do we signal our marital status and availability?...
How about a wedding ring? The wedding ring says “I’m married. I’m not available. I’m joined to my husband”. Or if you’re a man, it says “I’m joined to my wife – **I’m** not available.”

But some women are willing to wear a wedding ring, but not willing to take on the surname of their husband. And I might upset a few people today, but I would suggest that when a woman decides to keep her own surname, that says a lot about her desire for her own prominence, and it dishonours her husband...

These are all practical examples of how we shouldn’t be seeking prominence for ourselves.

Let men be men. Let women be women. And we do it to honour each other, to honour ourselves, and to honour God.

And that’s why Paul then, gets into this whole area of shame.

When a wife self-advertises (by her manner of dress), and asserts herself as independent of her husband, it’s shameful.... It shames her, and it shames her husband... And so Paul says, if she’s going to be shameful, she might as well have her hair cut right off...

In pretty much every society, a woman’s hair, can either be a source of glory for her, or a source of shame.

When we were newly-weds, and running on a tight budget, it dawned on me how much we were spending on hair dressers. And somehow I managed to talk Robyn into letting me have a go at cutting her hair. After all, how hard can it be? I figured I'd just cut the big chunks off, to get it somewhere near the length it needed to be, and then I'd spend some time tidying it up... Anyway, I got as far as cutting the big chunks off, and I said to Robyn, "I'm not finished yet. I just want you to have a look in the mirror and let me know if that's short enough for you, and then I'll do the tidy-up and make it look nice." And she looked in the mirror and burst into tears. She wouldn't let me any-where near her, to finish it off. She was shamed. Her hair, in the state that it was, was shameful to her... And she wouldn't be seen in public, until a friend of ours who is a hairdresser, fixed it up.

Short hair – cropped hair – shaved head, for most women, is a source of shame... Maybe not so much since Sinéad O'Connor became famous, but for most women it still is.

OK, so basically what he's saying, is (for both men and women) putting yourself out there, and self-advertising – making ourselves prominent (especially in worship), is shameful, because worship should be all about God.

Righto, let's move on.

When we come to worship, who are we here to worship?
God. We come to glorify God.

When V7 talks about how man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man, he's talking about the **created order** and the **source** of where we are created **from**. It's got nothing to do with women being any less than men... *It's like the **eldest** child is no better than the **youngest** child in the family, but they **were** born in a different order, and thus have a different role, and different expectations.*

God is glorified through His creation.

Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

God is glorified through His creation. And we know that God created man **and** woman, (male and female he created them). ...

But God **did** create Adam first. When God created man, he said "This is very good". But He knew something was missing. Something was needed to complete Adam. And so he created Eve. He took a piece of Adam, and God created Eve. And this time, it was **Adam** who said "WooHoo!!!!!!"... That's the Australian version.

Genesis 2:23 ...

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

What's he doing there? Adam's seeing Eve as a piece of himself, and his glory – she's **from** me, and she's **for** me...

And if, in worship, men see women for **their** glory, our worship is directed to the wrong place...

Let's bring it forwards to today. If a man's wife, goes on show as his stunning "trophy wife", that's man seeking his own glory... "Wow, look at the hot babe I'm married to".... He wrongly sees glory being for himself...

Women are not meant to be trophies. And certainly not in the context of worship. Everything we do, we should be doing for the glory of God.

Righto, V10. This passage doesn't get any easier (or any less weird), as it goes on.

¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

And yet, in the Greek, it doesn't have the word "symbol". It literally says:

"Because of this, a woman ought to have authority (or power) upon her head, or it could mean "keep control of her head", on account of the angels....

So, it can be interpreted so many different ways...

Some people say, that by a woman wearing a veil or a hat in church, that's a symbol of her husband's authority over her.

And yet, as it's written in the original Greek, it **can** be more an indication of “the **woman** having authority or power or control, **over** her head”. When we don't go about self-advertising and promoting ourselves – When we maintain honour and dignity – When we dress modestly, and don't seek attention for ourselves,,, – there's the power.

Whether you're a man or whether you're a woman, you're in a good place to pray. You have power to pray – you have power to prophesy, when we don't promote ourselves as being the foremost; When we don't dress shamefully; when we don't behave shamefully,,, we're in a good place to pray and prophesy... Why? Because we're putting God first, and our worship is wholly for Him.

And it's important for us to be in that place (where we don't elevate ourselves), because of the angels”?

Satan is a fallen angel. Why did he fall? Because being one of God's top angels, wasn't good enough for him... He wanted more than that. He wanted to promote himself, and place himself in the position of God...

Did you know, that when we come together to worship, it's not just human worship. The Angels join together in worship with us. When we pray, the Angels join in our prayer. When we sing, the Angels join in our song... They're watching us; they're interacting with us, and we're examples to them... . . . Worshipping God, without self-seeking, and without self-promotion, is a witness to the angels.

I think we've gone far enough today...

How much do we make worship about ourselves? Let's make worship all about God. Let's not be self-seeking; Let's not go elevating ourselves, or promoting ourselves... And let's be very aware, that the way we conduct ourselves in worship, impacts others in their worship...

So, let's worship God in humility. Let's present ourselves in modesty.

"Let men be men, and women be women." And we do it to honour each other, to honour ourselves, and to honour God.

Let's leave shame behind, and direct our worship to God, and not ourselves.

ⁱ Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

ⁱⁱ Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thiselton, A.C., 2000. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.

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