

A study of various texts offered for the purpose of dialog regarding the use or  
limitation of women's gifts in the LCMS

**I Cor. 11:3 -11**

**V. 3** says “the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

From **John 1:1** we read that the WORD became flesh i.e. Christ. It was God who brought the world and mankind into existence with His Word. Thus we understand that Christ is equal to God and LCMS teaches such. The words “the head of Christ is God.” really only make sense if we understand “head” to mean source. Christ is the source of Every Man. The source of the woman is man; the source of Christ is God.

In the Greek, the same word means man or husband. And the same word means woman or wife. **V. 4** says every man/husband who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. He dishonors his source who is Christ. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head i.e. her source, man/husband. The words “it is just as though her head were shaved” are saying it would be as if the man/husband was in relationship to a prostitute, rather than an honorable woman who respected the custom/requirement of the head covering.

In the culture of the day, the woman is being told not to disgrace her husband or perhaps men in general. The Greek culture before Christ and for hundreds of years afterward has been revealed as an abomination of oppression of women. There was a very specific message being communicated in the many cultures which required women to be veiled. Women were not only unequal they were regarded as inferior and were considered property. They were blamed for sins to which men were prone and considered evil because they caused men to lust. Their femaleness made them unclean. The veil communicated that they were the property of a father, brother, or husband. The prostitute was considered public property and therefore she was not to be veiled. A woman caught in adultery was to have her head shaved.

Like upper-class Greek women, Roman women were veiled as were Hebrew women. Greek women only went out for funerals of relatives, weddings and religious festivals. The religious festivals were suspect to many of the men because the women's cults promoted a freedom from the strict traditions for women. For Dionysus, the god of wine, religious rites were celebrated by both men and women, unlike most cults which were gender separated. It was known for its uninhibited ecstatic rites. In these rites, women unloosed their hair and went into frenzied dances. The cult of Isis which was popular among all classes of Italian women in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. also included these ecstatic rites and the letting down of the wrapped and plaited hair style of the respectable woman.

Actual practice of traditional behavior and written laws from the Twelve Tables dating from 500 B.C. which reflected thinking about women apparently was changing among urban Roman women and the Jews as well at the time of Christ and the first century and were not as stringent. Most certainly the restrictions for women from trade families or countryside were likely not as strict. It is not a far fetched deduction that as women experienced even more freedom in becoming Christian, the whole congregation had to deal with the message that being unveiled at worship was giving to the surrounding society that judged them.

**V.7** says a man ought not to have his head veiled “since he is the image and glory of God but the woman is the glory of man?”

He is to be clearly male because how he represents himself will reflect on Christ (or give honor to God). In one of the cults, the priests castrated themselves, wore their hair long and loose and dressed as women. In another the men shaved their heads. I believe Paul was saying to them that how they appeared at worship needed to communicate their distinctiveness from the cults, a clear differentiation between male and female as well as reverence and decorum. How the woman behaves will reflect on and give honor to her husband.

**V. 8** “for man did not come from woman, but woman from man” and **V. 9** says “neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. **V.10** “for this reason a woman ought to have authority on her head.” Translations that say “a symbol of” is not actually in the Greek. Therefore, it does say she has authority.

But for what reason? Perversions of Christianity were forming during this 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. called Gnosticism. It included the teaching that it was the woman who was created first and that her maternity included both gods and men without male assistance. Eve then taught the mysteries of life to Adam. These beliefs came from Alexandria in Egypt. Paul’s correction in “woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman, for as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman” speaks both to cultural patriarchy and Gnostic beliefs. They are to share authority. They are to be the partners that God made them to be. Together they are to be co-rulers as we are told in Genesis.

He continues in v. 11 with “but everything comes from God”. This is a **reiteration of verse 3**, “the head/source of every man is Christ, and the head/source of the woman is man, and the head/source of Christ is God.” Now the ideas/verses fit together.

Most certainly Paul is speaking in **verses 6 – 10** about customs rooted in Greco/Roman culture for hundreds of years previous and which continued, because in **v. 11** he differentiates by saying, “**in the Lord, however. . .**” Now Paul is speaking to our new relationship in Christ. How can it be ignored that now he is challenging custom and their understanding of subjugation of woman to man and perverted teaching by saying (**v.12**) “woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman; for as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman?”

**V. 13** he says “judge for yourself: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a

disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair it is her glory? ” In these words he is clearly speaking to how they, at that time, believed men and women reflected their gender appropriately.

Reflecting ancient beliefs and customs of the veil for women was the still recent custom – mid 1960’s - of women demonstrating respect by wearing hats. The custom of men showing respect by removing the hat is almost gone in our society. The length of hair for women or men is of no consequence any longer (v. 14 – 16). But the concept that the relationship between men and women is now different “in the Lord” remains a principle for today. The words in **I Cor. 11: 4, 5** which say, “every man who prays or prophesies . . . and every woman who prays or prophesies” cannot be ignored. There is no restriction on the authority of women. The point is that **when men and women** pray or prophesy they are to do so with respect for each other as husband and wife, men and women, and for their source/Creator who is Christ/God.

Is praying and prophesying by **both** men and women in the new Christian church important? I believe it absolutely is as we examine how gifts of women are accepted in LCMS in the 21<sup>st</sup>. century. **Eph. 2: 19 – 21** says “. . . you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God **built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets**, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.” Having read that both men and women are to pray and prophesy with decorum in dress and respect for each other, here we are told that both men and women are the foundation upon which the church was built and only with both male and female “in the Lord”, will it (the church) grow spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

In **Eph. 3:4** Paul says, “In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.” This revelation **revealed by the Spirit of God came to apostles and prophets, clearly both men and women.**

**Eph. 4:11 – 13, 15b** talks about the gifts He gave when he came to earth and says they were that some would be “**apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity to the full measure of Christ . . . as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.**” In the argument for the order of creation, being *first* takes on great importance. Should we argue that this is a list of who comes first by order of importance? If so, then prophets are more important than pastors and teachers. They are next in authority to the apostles.

**I Cor. 12:24b – 28** “. . . But God has so arranged the body . . . giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, (no pastors mentioned here but from **Eph 4:11** we would gather that preaching and teaching were considered one and the same), then deeds of power, then . . . Interestingly there does seem to be a

hierarchy here. Do I need to say again that females were prophets at the time these words were spoken?

Paul's term "individually members of it" may have been more significant than we take it today. The individual woman within the clan and tribe of the Jews and the woman within the paterfamilias of the Romans was subjugated to the good of the whole. The value of an individual Greek wife or woman was not even considered. For a woman it must have been very joyful good news indeed to be counted as part of the body of Christ

What about **I Tim. 2: 8 – 15**: These verses create a puzzle and treasure hunt in determining meaning. "I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray. . . ." We know, of course, from **I Cor. 11** that women prophets prayed publicly so this is apparently being said specifically to the men. It is a transitional phrase from the previous admonitions. The men are to pray for everyone and they are to do it without anger or argument. The women are again admonished to dress modestly and to do good works (which reflect on God). Then, "let a woman learn in silence". By custom/law, they were not taught Torah (though some fathers did teach their daughters), but now they are encouraged to learn and many would have been starting from baseline zero. Greek women would have been just as uneducated. This is not to say that no women were literate. Upper-class Roman women were known to educate their children. Women from trade families conducted business and would have known some mathematics and may well have been literate. (Priscilla is an example). But note that the assumption here is that the women are now learning along side men. Also the cultic practice of Greek and Roman women gave license for a very different kind of behavior. Paul tells them to learn but instructs that silence, a voluntary quieting, was necessary.

"I permit no woman to teach or have authority over man (husband?). This is a very curious statement indeed, because we know that Priscilla was a teacher and taught Apollo who had a ministry in Corinth. And as stated, upper-class Roman women or perhaps those who showed a special ability to learn were educated. A statue was recently discovered paying respect to her in Ephesus. Her name is mentioned before her husband's which would signify her prominence in the teaching.

But if we remember how revolutionary Christ was and how *culture changing* his teachings and treatment of women were, this personal letter of Paul's to Timothy may have been a cautionary proscription. The Christians were being judged and persecutions were happening at this time. Paul may well have been concerned that they do not bring unnecessary trouble into their midst by angering men who were deeply offended by women gaining a new position of authority.

The next verses are especially confusing, ". . . yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness with modesty." This verse has been debated in all denominations. Is the verse better translated "she will be saved through the birth of the child (meaning Christ)" or "she will be brought safely through childbirth"? Ephesus was known for the worship of Diana (Artemis) who is portrayed with multiple breasts indicating her role as mother and foster-mother. Because many died while giving birth in those days, women looked to Artemis for safety in childbirth. Paul may have been redirecting their fears and pleas for safety from Diana to the Lord.

Then there are more instructions for administration in chapter 3. In **Rom. 16:1** Phoebe is called deacon. So is this really written to just men? **V. 8** appears to be specifically written to male deacons. However, though translations have often rendered **v. 11** as “their wives must be serious” it is just as likely correct that this means women deacons are worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

In **I Cor. and in I Tim.** we have comments and answers to questions we have not heard voiced. Why specifically were they concerned about these issues? We can decipher that Gnosticism was a major problem to which this letter addresses itself. The Nag Hammadi documents which are Gnostic writings, taught that Eve came first and that her maternity included both gods and men without male assistance and that she instructed Adam in the mysteries that she knew. The last verses regarding childbirth fit this picture better. The Gnostic myths may have appealed to some women and they needed to be corrected. “I am not permitting women to teach” very well could be referring to the women who were perverting apostolic doctrine with these myths. It could also reflect the pressure of society. As Christians waited for the return of the Lord and began to realize it may not be in their lifetime, the church began to take on structure. The freedom women had in Christ begins to collapse within structure that reflects the culture in which they lived as each year passes and as persecutions begin to afflict the church.

**I Tim 6: 1ff** Paul speaks about slaves. They are instructed to honor their master, so that the name of God and the teaching not be blasphemed or slandered. We no longer use these verses to argue for slavery but recognize it as speaking to the circumstances as they were. Men, women, and slaves who became Christians were to conduct themselves with honor and respect others according to customs for the sake of the Gospel. We have come to see that God’s Word and intent continued to reveal itself in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Christians, thankfully, have become outspoken advocates for the abolishment of slavery wherever it might exist in the world. In the U.S., Christians work toward abolishing prejudice because of color. Why do we treat the previous verses about women differently?

**Acts 6: 1-6** and the story of Stephen refers to the disciples increasing in number. It is very apparent this included women since the issue is the widows being overlooked. The disciples were Jews who were of two groups, the Grecians who spoke Greek and were more Grecian in their outlook and the Herbraic Jews who spoke Aramaic/Hebrew and preserved Jewish custom and tradition. Stephen saw more clearly than others that Jesus’ teaching would change custom. Christ scolded the Pharisees and the disciples themselves because they were so “dull” in understanding this. They just didn’t seem to get what was most important. It was not the outward behaviors but rather the inner heart. **Mk. 7:18-19, Mt. 23:25-26; Lk. 11:39-41.** I believe we must consider whether as disciples of the 21<sup>st</sup> century some are again concerned with tradition and custom which have been made into laws that bind us rather than freeing the heart and mind of disciples who wish to serve.

References used in study and preparation for Final CTCR/consultants September 29-30, 2008 meeting as well as for the study of texts from Ephesians, I Corinthians, and I Timothy

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