

# Christ the Head

1 Corinthians (CGS#21) – 11:1-16

**INTRODUCTION:** This Sunday, we begin the section of 1 Corinthians, chapters 11-14. In this larger section, Paul focuses on corporate worship in the Corinthian context. This section also includes two of the most difficult chapters in the whole letter to interpret. Why? Well, two reasons really. First, Paul is writing to a context that is so radically different from ours in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These differences take time for us to both understand and sort through as modern readers. And second, there is something going on in Corinth that Paul is addressing without having to spell it out completely. He knows what he is talking about. They know what he is talking about. We are reading it much later and trying to figure out what was really going on. We really feel this tension when it comes to the conversation about head coverings in this section of Chapter 11. Paul is clearly talking about a cultural element that was clearly understood by Paul and his first-century readers. But for you and me, we are left wondering if this instruction is binding for all believers for all of time, or if it is simply a cultural dynamic that is unique to the Corinthians. Well, we have church history to help us make sense of this one. It was merely a cultural thing. But then, he makes statements about Christ and God, and men and women. Are these statements cultural only, or are they core theological truths? They are core theological truths. How do we know this? Unlike head coverings, Christians have held them as core over the last 2,000 years.

Ok, so we know that in this section we aren't to get tripped up over the idea of head coverings, but we are to dive into Paul's words on headship. Let's make sense of it. The Greek word that Paul uses here for "head" is *kephalē*. It literally means source. And when we misunderstand what Paul is saying about both the Godhead and men and women, it can be very destructive. However, Paul is actually expressing a beautiful and dignifying theological truth here. Paul **is not** saying that Jesus is less than God or that women are less than men. **Instead**, he is stating the biblical truths that Jesus, as the Son of God, is begotten of God (Jn. 3:16). We understand this to mean that Jesus and the Father are of the same stuff (the fancy Greek word is *Homoousios*). The same is true of men and women. Paul is simply reiterating the biblical creation account where God causes Adam to sleep, takes a section of his rib, and creates Eve (Gen. 2:18-25). It is important to note here just how radically different the biblical story of creation is from the Greek story. In Greek thought, women were not only created after men, but they were created of much lesser stuff. Yet, in the biblical view, men and women are created of the same stuff and are endowed with the same dignity, personhood, and equality while being unique and distinctive as men and women. See, what Paul does here is he reverses the power structures of the world by teaching biblical truths. Yes, it is a confusing passage, especially for us modern English readers. But when we begin to understand it in context, there is something amazing that gets unlocked for us. Then, when we look one more layer down, we remember that the Corinthian problem was pride that led to divisions and fighting. So Paul roots them in truths that are to quell their pride and promote unity, fellowship, and peace among the body. He literally tells them "don't be contentious" in Corinth or any other church (v.16). And then there is verse 1, they are to "imitate Christ." By working from what is biblically clear through what is unclear, we come to see that while Paul addresses head coverings, this passage is really about being rooted in our identity in Christ. An identity that should drive us to humility, service, and grace with one another. And, an identity that should look distinctively different than the world around us. In this way, we are reminded of a truth we've already heard from Paul, **you are who you are because of whose you are**. In other words, you are to increasingly look, act, and think like Christ, your savior.

**GETTING STARTED** – As you begin your group time, take time to answer this question together: What makes extending humility, service, and grace so difficult? Why is it powerful when we do?

**IN THE WORD** – Let’s dig back into the passage. It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God’s Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God’s Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

**Observe:** Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

**Principles:** From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

**Apply:** Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God’s Word. Remember, we believe that God’s Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday-Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

**Note:** Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions about the article of faith we are studying that week.

1. What did you hear God’s Spirit say to you through the passage this week? How does it encourage you? How does it sharpen you?
2. How have you seen God at work in your life this week? Have you enjoyed him? Have you heard his voice and the leading of his Spirit? Big ways or small ways.
3. Paul comes back to the issue of pride for the Corinthians. What makes pride such a sneaky thing in our lives? How do you actively resist pride? Or how should you actively resist pride?
4. Paul tells the Corinthians, “Don’t be contentious.” What does contentiousness look like in the church? What forms of contentiousness are “socially acceptable” but Paul would tell us otherwise? How do we resist being contentious?
5. What does courageous obedience look like in your life? In other words, how are you wholeheartedly pursuing God’s priorities and plans for your life and not just settling for the lowest moral threshold?