

Sermon Summary | Sunday 31st May 2026 | 1 Corinthians 11.2-16

In 1 Corinthians 11.2-16, Paul addresses a difficult and sensitive subject: men and women, headship, order, and what is fitting in gathered worship. The details may feel strange to us — head coverings, hair, and angels — but Paul’s central concern is clear. Gathered worship should honour the Father’s good order in ways that are fitting, recognisable, and loving. Men and women are equal in dignity, genuinely different, mutually dependent, and together under the headship of Christ.

First, Paul calls us to receive God’s order under Christ. He says, “the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” Whatever headship means, it cannot mean superiority, because the Son is not less divine than the Father. The Father’s headship does not make the Son inferior. So Christian headship must never mean domination, control, or greater worth. Christ uses authority to serve, protect, bear burdens, wash feet, and lay down his life. Any man who hears this passage as permission for status has misunderstood it. Headship in the way of Christ is a summons to humility, responsibility, sacrifice, and love.

Second, Paul calls the church to honour God’s difference in fitting ways. In Corinth, head coverings and hairstyles were not neutral matters of taste. They communicated honour or dishonour, modesty or impropriety, masculinity or femininity, respect or disruption. We should not lift the precise cultural sign out of Corinth and impose it woodenly today. But we also must not dismiss the whole passage as merely cultural. Paul grounds his concern in God, Christ, creation, worship, and the practice of the churches. The sign may change, but the concern remains: gathered worship should not become a stage for self-expression, should not needlessly confuse what God has made distinct, and should honour both equality and difference.

It is important to notice that women are praying and prophesying. Paul does not imagine women as invisible, passive, or unnecessary in the gathered church. Their voices are present and their gifts matter. A church holding this conviction should therefore never be one where women are marginalised, patronised, hidden, or treated as merely useful in the background. At the same time, Paul teaches that our embodied differences are not meaningless. Equality does not require sameness, and difference must never be used to imply inequality.

Third, Paul calls us to remember our dependence in the Lord. He says, “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman.” That is a necessary correction. Men are not self-sufficient. Women are not secondary. Men do not have the church to themselves, and women are not an optional extra. All of us are dependent creatures, and “all things are from God.” Any version of complementarianism that produces male pride, ignores women’s gifts, excuses harshness, or permits control has departed from Christ.

Above all, this passage points us to Jesus. He is the true head of the church. He does not crush his people, but was crowned with thorns for them. He does not use authority to take life, but lays down his life and takes it up again. Under him, men and women alike receive dignity, forgiveness, calling, and hope.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where do I need to receive God’s Word humbly, especially where it challenges my assumptions about authority, difference, worship, or self-expression?
2. How can I help our church become more fully a family where men and women honour one another, listen to one another, use their gifts, and serve together under Christ?