

## *Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth on I Corinthians 11:2-9*

### **Is it Unscriptural for Sisters to Submit to Brothers?**

Recently, a certain worker has propounded her dissenting views and teachings through the internet. In one of her recent articles entitled “*Cutting Straight the Word of the Truth*”, she criticized a leading brother for saying in his message that sisters should submit to brothers, alleging this to be unscriptural and a wind of teaching. She teaches that (1) based on I Corinthians 11:2-9 and Brother Watchman Nee’s message on “head covering”, the sisters do not need to submit to the brothers, (2) Brother Nee was merely proving that according to God’s ordination in His government, women should wear a physical and material head covering as a sign on their head, (3) man being the head of the woman in I Corinthians 11:3 is limited to a wife’s submission to her husband and to single sisters being subject to their fathers, and (4) God’s system of government is merely composed of ethical relationships like husband and wife, parents and children, masters and slaves, the governmental institution and the citizenry.

An analysis of the article by measuring it against the Holy Word and the healthy teachings we have received from brothers Watchman Nee and Witness Lee shows us how the writer patently missed the mark in all points because: (1) in the Bible, as shown by the ministry, sisters (Christian women) submit to the headship of brothers (Christian men), (2) Brothers Nee and Lee taught that head covering is more than a physical covering on the sisters’ heads, (3) the woman’s submission to man’s headship in I Corinthians 11 is not just limited to wives to husbands and single sisters to their fathers, and (4) God’s system of government is not just about ethical human relationships, but about God’s headship in the universe manifested first in the church order.

### **Head Covering Being Related to God’s Government**

Head covering is about man’s submission to Christ’s headship by following His divine ordination. I Corinthians 11:3-5 says, “But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man praying or prophesying with his head covered disgraces his head. But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered disgraces her head; for it is one and the same as she who is shaved.”

Brother Nee taught us that head covering is more than a mere physical sign; there is an underlying truth and spiritual principle:

“The significance of head covering is that one puts himself under God’s government; he acknowledges this position.... Just as Christ accepted God as His Head, so also every man should accept Christ as his Head. In like manner, the woman should accept the man as her representative head. Head covering means that one covers his head as if he had no head.

“In reality, Christ’s head is covered before God, and every man’s head is covered before Christ. But in practice God requires only that the woman cover her head before the man. This is a marvelous thing! It expresses a profound principle.

“Sometimes I feel that I do not have the liberty to speak to some saints about the matter of head covering because they have no idea about God’s government. You must first understand what God’s government is before you can understand head covering.

“Here, I will say a word to Christian women: God has ordained the man to be the head of the woman. In this day of ignorance concerning God’s authority, God only requires the church to observe this. The matter of head covering now becomes a question of whether or not one is a Christian. In the church God requires every Christian to acknowledge His ordained system of government.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50, Chapter 44, Head Covering, pp. 755-756, LSM*)

“What is God’s goal? His goal is to appoint Christ as the Head so that every man would submit to Him.... This is a basic principle in God’s government. Christ is the Head of every man.... This is not something in the system of grace but something in the system of God’s government. Likewise, for man to be the head of the woman is also something in the system of God’s government. In His government God appoints man to be the head, just as He appoints Christ to be the Head and He appoints Himself to be the Head. All these arrangements have to do with God’s system as a whole.

“God Himself is the Head. He also appoints Christ to be the Head. Moreover, He appoints man to be the head. These are three great principles in God’s government. God is the Head of Christ.

“This has nothing to do with whether God is greater or Christ is greater. It means that God is the Head of Christ in His government. Similarly, Christ is the Head of every man in God’s government, and man is the head of the woman in God’s government. This is God’s appointment and ordination.

“Philippians 2 is very clear concerning this. The Lord Jesus is equal with God in His very essence. But He is the Christ in God’s government. Since He is the Christ, God is His Head. In the Gospel of John, the Lord said that He did only what He saw the Father doing (5:19). He did not come to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him (6:38).... God’s ordination is for God to be God, and for Him to be the Christ. As such He must obey God. As far as their intrinsic persons are concerned, God the Son is equal with God the Father; they are of equal stature and deserve the same honor. As such, God the Son does not have to obey God the Father. However, in terms of God’s government, Christ did not stand in the position of God the Son, but in the position of the Christ, the One sent by God.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50, Chapter 44, Head Covering, pp. 753-754, LSM*)

We should note that head covering is a practice only of Christian women. For unbelieving women to cover their heads means nothing. Head covering carries a spiritual significance and reality only to the sisters. A sister needs to have a head covering, not only physically, but also psychologically, ethically, morally, and spiritually. This is the modesty spoken of in the Bible. To be modest simply means that a female is fully covered in every way.

“Man is not allowed to cover his head. A man disgraces his own head if he covers his head before a woman. Man represents Christ. If a man covers his head, he is, in effect, saying that no man should cover his head before Christ, and that Christ should cover His head before men.” (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50, Chapter 44, Head Covering, p. 757, LSM*)

It is a shame for the sisters' heads not to be covered and for the man's to be exposed, because the sister's head covering is a sign of submission to authority, while man's head bears the image and glory of God as His delegated authority.

The relative positions of man and woman as indicated in their creation, and the placing of Adam in dominion as God's representative, is carried still further by a reminder that the man was created first, and from him God created the woman for the blessing of man (vv. 8-9). However, there is a mutual interdependence which removes all thought of superiority or inferiority (vv. 11-12). "Therefore" (v. 10), because man was given headship, the woman is to "have authority on her head." This does not mean we take head covering as a legal practice. Rather, the sisters should keep the reality of head covering, which is the headship of Christ. Her head covering becomes the visible token of subjection to her God-appointed head, and a restoration through grace of that order which was lost because of the fall.

### **God's System of Government Being Not Merely About Ethical Human Relationships**

God's system of government goes far beyond human ethical relationships. The church is not an organization, but the Body of Christ. We can see God's authority, God's government, in the coordination in the church.

“The highest expression of God's authority is in the Body of Christ, the church. Although God has established systems of authorities in the world, none of the relationships with the government, or between father and son, husband and wife, and master and servant can perfectly manifest authority.... We do not see absolute and perfect submission in these relationships.

“Only Christ and the church have the highest expression of authority and submission.... The church is not only a convergence in faith and love, it is a body. The church is the Body of Christ, and Christ is the Head of the church.... We must be brought into a condition that is like the body submitting to the head. Only then will God be satisfied. This cannot be represented by the husband and the wife and so forth.... If we can only submit to the degree that the children are submissive to parents, or the wives to their husbands, God will not be satisfied. God desires that our submission be like the body submitting to the head.” (*W. Nee, Authority and Submission, pp. 67-69, LSM*)

From 1 Corinthians 11:3 we see that God must work in us until we can submit to Christ in the same way that Christ submits to God.

To teach that the submission of woman to man here is only in the realm of ethical human relationships like wife to husband and daughter to father is to stretch the Bible beyond what it says, for this was not what Paul said and meant. 1 Corinthians 11, like 1 Timothy 2, was not about ethical human relationships but about God's headship in the universe and God's economy for the church, about the normal church life under the divine government.

Brother Lee elaborated:

“The first six problems, dealt with in I Corinthians chapters 1-10, are concerned with the problems in the realm of the human life. The last five problems, dealt with in chapters 11-16, are concerned with matters in the realm of God's administration. This particular problem in chapter eleven concerns the headship of Christ and of God in the divine government. In dealing with the problem of head covering, the apostle took the headship of God, the headship of Christ, and the headship of man as strong ground for his instruction.” (*Holy Bible, Recovery Version, I Cor. 11:3 Footnote 3<sup>1</sup>, LSM*)

If God intended for His Word here to only mean that wives should submit to their husbands or daughters to their fathers, then the apostle Paul could have plainly stated this to be so as he did in other passages of Scripture. But the word cannot be clearer: “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.” (I Cor. 11:3) This is true of God's ordination even from the Old Testament. In the order of creation, Adam was the head to Eve. This was not just for their family but for God's government. The prophetess Deborah recognized this principle. Although God had made her the leader, she took Barak, a man who was neither her father nor husband, as her covering. Under God's government, in addition to the covering of her husband, Lappidoth, she took on the covering of Barak in fighting for God's interest.

“In the divine governmental ordination, woman is under the headship of man. God created the female in this way (Gen. 2:18-24; 1 Tim. 2:13). According to the nature (v. 14) created by God, woman is subordinate to man.” (*Holy Bible, Recovery Version, I Cor. 11:3, Footnote 3<sup>2</sup>, LSM*)

To say that the head of woman is man and apply it only to ethical human relationships depreciates the Word of God. It also poses problems where the sister has an unbelieving husband, where she is a widow, or where a single sister no longer has a father. If this were so, then such single sisters have no need of covering their heads. However, head covering is universal. The significance of this is that the sisters (Christian women) should be subject to the brothers (Christian men) at home and in the church. Just as we do not question why God only chose the sisters to have a head covering, we do not question why God made man the head of woman, why God created Eve for Adam, and why God only chose men to be elders and not women.

In God's system of government, authority and submission is foremost. The church is subject to Christ (Eph. 1:22; 5:24); all men are subject to “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3; James 4:7); everyone is subject to governments (Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13); and, children are subject to parents (Luke 2:51; Heb. 12:9). The Scripture abundantly denotes that wives are required to be subordinate to their own husbands (Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:5-6), even if their husbands are not Christians

(1 Pet. 3:1). Moreover, it cannot be denied that the Bible also plainly teaches that women are subject to men in the church (1 Tim. 2:12; I Cor. 11:3).

Some may argue that God intends that we should all be headed up in Christ, both man and woman. While this may be true, if the Bible intended for women to take Christ alone directly as their head, then there would be no need to say that man is the head of the woman (I Cor. 11:3). Some may also dispute that “woman” and “sisters” are not the same, but both brothers Nee and Lee understood “woman” and “sister” (i.e., a Christian woman) to mean the same thing and used them interchangeably in relation to head covering.

“In verse 10 Paul continues, ‘Therefore the woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels.’ Authority here denotes the head covering, which signifies the authority of man’s headship over the woman. In this verse we have another ground for the teaching of head covering. Head covering is closely related to God’s headship, God’s authority.... For this sake, the sisters should have a sign, a covering, on their head.... It is significant that Paul says that the woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels.... The covering on the sisters’ head is a sign declaring this to the angels.... Not only in the coming kingdom age in eternity shall we be under God’s headship, but even in this rebellious age we submit to His authority. The covering on the sisters’ head is a sign declaring this to the angels.” (*W. Lee, Life Study of I Corinthians, Message 53, pp. 474-475, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“In speaking about head covering, it is not our intention for the sisters to accept an outward practice merely in a doctrinal way.... When a sister puts a covering on her head, she needs to realize the significance of head covering.... The headship of Christ is a matter that concerns all the saints, both brothers and sisters. In 11:3 Paul says, ‘But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.’ First, it is necessary for the brothers to realize that they must be under the headship of Christ. (*W. Lee, Life Study of I Corinthians, Message 53, pp. 476-477, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“First Corinthians 14:33b-34 says, ‘As in all the churches of the saints, let the women be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but let them be subject, as the law also says.’ This indicates that all the local churches should be the same in practice. This prohibition of the sisters speaking in the church means that women are not permitted to teach with authority concerning the defining of doctrine (cf. 1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Tim. 2:12; see note 34<sup>2</sup> in 1 Corinthians 14—Recovery Version).” (*W. Lee, Elders’ Training, Book 7, One Accord for the Lord’s Move, p. 47, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

“God is asking the sisters to be representatives. The sisters are responsible for the sign of submission on their head as a sign to the angels. This expresses God’s system of government. In particular, God ordains that the woman should cover her head while praying or prophesying. The reason for this is that she should know God’s government when she goes to God. Whether she prophesies before men for God or prays before God for men, whether it be prayer, prophecy, going out for God, or going to God, she must conduct these

God-related activities by covering her head. This is for the purpose of expressing God's government." (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50, Head Covering, p. 757, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

"What did Paul say to those who thought that sisters do not need to cover their head and who opposed his words, his decision, and his commission from the Lord? He said, 'We do not have such a custom of being so'.... All the apostles believed that the woman should cover her head.... This is the reason we ask all the sisters in the church to cover their heads in the meetings when a message is given or when they pray. They must do this because God wants to secure in the church what He could not secure in the world. He wants to gain what He could not gain in the universe.... Verse 3 gives us the clear teaching concerning this. God is the Head of Christ, Christ is the Head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman. For this reason, the woman should have her head covered. This is the underlying teaching of this portion of the Word." (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50, Head Covering, pp. 762-764, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

"First Corinthians 11:3 indicates that every sister, that is, every woman (even though such a woman cannot be found outside the church) must realize that she has an individual standing as well as a representative standing. God is the Head of Christ, Christ is the Head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman. Therefore, the woman must have her head covered." (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Chapter 44, Head Covering, p.766, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

Brother Nee's use of "every sister" indicates without a doubt that this applies to all sisters: old or young, married or unmarried.

## **Praying and Prophecy**

Misquoting and misapplying Brother Nee's words concerning God's system of government and God's system of grace in His dealings with man, the writer of the article interspersed the writings from the ministry with her own to make Brother Nee's words support her claims. The words added by the writer, "*God's system of government is mainly composed of ethical relationships like husband and wife, parents and children, masters and slaves, the governmental institution and the citizenry*" together with her diagram completely altered the meaning of Brother Nee's words and thereby twisted them.

"In the church, the woman also has to submit to the man... God appointed man to be the authority as a type of Christ and the woman to submit as a type of the church. For this reason the woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels. Furthermore, the woman must submit to her husband." (*W. Nee, Authority and Submission, pp. 58-59, LSM*) [Emphasis Added]

From the word "furthermore" in the last sentence, it is abundantly clear that Brother Nee recognizes the distinction between women submitting to men in the church from a woman submitting to her husband.

“Since woman is under the headship of man, she should keep her head covered, not exposed, when she touches the divine administration by praying to God or speaking for God. Otherwise, she disgraces or shames her head, as if her head was shaved, because she denies the divine governmental ordination by exposing her head to the observing angels (v.10) while touching the authority of God.” (Holy Bible, Recovery Version, I Cor. 11:5, Footnote 5<sup>1</sup>, LSM) [Emphasis Added]

The reference in I Corinthians 11 is not to a husband and wife relationship. This is not a personal and family matter, but relates to church gatherings, the coming together of the saints (vv. 17, 18, 20). It has to do with praying and prophesying. The woman may be unmarried, or, if married, her husband may not be in the church gathering, or may not even be saved. But this does not alter the instructions. "Disgraces her head" (v.5) refers, not to her husband, but to man in the position of authority in the church under the headship of Christ. Husband-wife relationships are fully dealt with in other passages of Scripture (cf. Eph. 5:22,25; Col. 3:18-19; I Pet. 3:1,7).

Should Christian women pray or prophesy? Undoubtedly they should, but within the sphere set forth by the Word of God. It is plain that the apostle does not in this place prohibit the thing, but finds reprehensible the manner of doing it. What he reprehends is the woman's praying or prophesying uncovered, or the man's doing either covered (vv. 4, 5). Both I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-12 emphasize the truth set forth by the head covering on the women in the assembly gatherings. There is certainly nothing in the Scripture that would forbid women from praying or prophesying, but even then it would seem comely that her head be covered, indicating that she has not been given the authority. God would carefully guard the position of authority delegated to man as the representative of Christ the Head. Just as a Christian woman serving as an elder would surely be "asserting authority over a man," to pray or prophesy with uncovered head would be to usurp the headship.

In I Timothy 2:11, Paul says that a woman should learn in quietness in all subjection. The word "heusychia", translated "quietness" here and "silent" in verse 12, does not mean complete silence or no talking. It is clearly used elsewhere (Acts 22:2; 2 Thes. 3:12) to mean "settled down, undisturbed, not unruly". A different word (σιγαου) means "to be silent, to say nothing" (cf. Luke 18:39; I Cor. 14:34). Paul is advocating orderliness in this verse. For women to keep silent in I Timothy means not to be unruly but to keep the proper order. For sisters to learn in silence and to be in all subjection is for them to realize their position as women. This safeguards the sisters from the presumption of overstepping their position in the local church.

Then in verses 12-13, Paul says, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or to assert authority over a man, but to be in quietness. For Adam was formed first, then Eve." Notice that Paul directly relates the issue of authority with the created order, which was the first reason for the woman to subject herself to man. The second reason is found in verse 14, "And Adam was not deceived; but the woman, having been quite deceived, has fallen into transgression." The reason given for this is remarkable, and shows how, in our relations with God, everything depends on the original starting point. In innocence, Adam had the first place; in sin, Eve.

“Eve was deceived by the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6) because she did not remain in subjection under the headship of Adam but overstepped her position to contact the evil tempter directly without her head being covered. This is the strong ground for the apostle not to permit the sisters in a local church to teach with authority and to assert authority over men. Rather, the apostle directed them to learn in silence and to remain in all subjection. Man’s headship is woman’s protection.” (*Holy Bible, Recovery Version, 2 Tim. 2:14, fn 14<sup>2</sup>, LSM*)

“God’s creation was corrupted by Satan through a woman (Gen. 3:1-6). In principle, the church that God redeemed also was corrupted by Satan through a woman. For this reason, God does not permit women to teach in the church (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; cf 1 Cor. 11:5). This is because, in principle, all heresies were brought in by a woman; it was a woman who brought in the leaven.” (*W. Lee, What the Kingdom Is to the Believers, p. 136, LSM*)

God is a God of order and balance. This principle holds true for all sisters, whether young or old, married or unmarried. In 1981, Brother Lee shared about a (single) sister worker who was even older than him:

“However, no matter how old she may be or how ‘spiritual’ she may be, no matter what she should never forget that she is a sister. I learned a lesson from her that gave me a thorough knowledge of sisters. I do not have a deep trust for the sisters, because sisters are too movable, not so stable, and do not know the bigger picture, ears are very weak, listening left and right, speaking long and short just like ‘child’s play’.... I really feel that the Lord’s word is truly dependable. The principle in the Bible is that sisters need to have their head covered.” (*W. Lee, History and Revelation, Vol. 1, pp. 276-278, translated from Chinese, Taiwan Gospel Book Room*)

Does this belittle women in the church? Not at all. The Lord Jesus was given His authority by God the Father (Matt. 28:18). He was sent by God (John 6:38). He said the Father was greater than He (John 14:28). Did this belittle Jesus? It did not. Women are of great value in the church and need to serve more and more according to the measure given to them.

Does the wife's submission to the husband mean that she is less than the husband, less important, or belittled? Again, not at all. Not having a place like the Christian man in the church does not mean a Christian woman is less of a person, less important to God, or inferior. All are equal before God whether it be Jew, Gentile, free, slave, male, or female; however, we all need to keep the proper order in the church according to the divine ordination. Under this proper order the woman was to bring forth Christ, who is called the Seed of the Woman.

## **Grace Supporting Government**

A faulty understanding of the truth presented in Galatians 3:28 has caused some to imagine that the instructions of I Corinthians 11 are there nullified. While both passages are, of course, divine truth, yet the subjects dealt with are quite diverse. In Galatians the subject is “sonship”, and the position of liberty and blessing grace brings us into.

Distinctions of race, social status, and gender are completely lost sight of "in Christ Jesus"; all receive equal standing and blessing. I Corinthians 11 is about "church order". In Galatians 3:28 God is dealing with man by His system of grace. In I Corinthians 11 and 14 God is dealing with men and women in His church by His system of government so that there is proper order in the church for her building up.

Brother Lee expounded:

"In the church there are both brothers and sisters. In many places, especially today, the sisters are not willing to submit to the brothers. Some sisters have come to me, saying, 'Are not the sisters equal to the brothers? Is there no equality between us? Do you believe that the brothers are greater?' I have even met brothers who stand for the sisters. They say, 'We do not agree that we brothers are above the sisters. We are all human. Why do we have to be different from the sisters?'

"Galatians 3:27-28 says, 'For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.' Cannot be Jew nor Greek indicates that in Christ the problem of races has been dealt with; cannot be slave nor free man means that in Christ the problem of social ranks has been dealt with; and cannot be male and female indicates that in Christ the problem of gender has been dealt with. However, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 says, 'For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ. For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.' Galatians 3 says we have been baptized into Christ, while 1 Corinthians 12 says we have been baptized into the one Body. However, 1 Corinthians 12 does not mention male and female. In Christ, the problem of male and female has been done away with, but in the church there is still male and female. If there were not the problem of male and female, there would be no need to speak about head covering in the previous chapter, chapter eleven, and there would be no need to speak about the position of sisters in the church meeting in chapter fourteen. [Emphasis Added]

"In Christ, the racial problem, the social problem, and the gender problem are all gone. But in the church, while the racial problem and social problem are gone, the problem of male and female still remains. Therefore, when sisters or brothers come to ask why there is a difference between the brothers and sisters, or whether we feel the sisters should submit to the brothers, the only reply is to ask, 'Do you take the headship of Christ? Do you submit yourself to the headship of Christ?' This will solve the problem. If all the brothers and sisters with such a problem would go to the Lord to submit themselves to the Lord and take the headship of Christ, the problem is solved." (W. Lee, *Basic Principles for the Practice of the Church Life, Chapter 3, Section 3, LSM*)

"A church should be the place where God rules among men so that His throne can be established. In I Corinthians 11 the apostle Paul showed that the

meaning of the sisters' head covering in the church is to declare that God is the Head of the universe. God is the Head in the universe, and He has His authority in the universe.... Head covering is not an outward form; it is a real sign of our declaring that by God's grace we recognize God's authority and submit to His authority and to the establishing of His throne among us. This is the reason that the church is blessed. The main reason that the church can be mingled with God and can express God is because the church allows God to sit on the throne and rule within the church. This is an unchangeable principle." (*W. Lee, The Church as the Body of Christ, Chapter 14, Section 1, LSM*)

Concerning the interplay between God's system of grace and God's system of government, Brother Nee taught:

"We have seen that grace can never overturn God's government.... Grace supports God's government; it does not destroy it. No one can be so foolish as to utilize God's grace to go against His government. No one can offend God's government! God's hand continually upholds His government. Today a man cannot overturn his father's authority just because he has believed in the Lord. He cannot overturn his master's authority or the government's authority just because he has believed in the Lord. A man cannot say, 'I do not have to pay taxes because I am a Christian. I do not have to pay duties.' There is no such thing! The fact that you are a Christian makes it more necessary for you to maintain God's government.

"Today we live in the world to maintain His testimony. The Lord has shown us three kinds of heads: God is the Head, Christ is the Head, and man is the head. This is altogether not an issue between the brothers and the sisters. It is basically a matter of government, not a matter of grace. Grace calls us brothers and sisters, but God has another arrangement which has to do with His government. This is God's will, His unique heart's desire. God ordains that He would be the Head, and that Christ would be the One under Him. He also ordains that Christ would be the Head and that everyone would submit to Christ. Now He further ordains that man would be the head and that the woman should have the sign of submission." (*W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50, Chapter 44, Head Covering, pp. 754-755, LSM*)

### **God Values Men and Women for Their Service, Not Their Authority**

Contrary to the perception of the article's writer, the headship of man (brother) to the woman (sister) has nothing to do with a hierarchy or inequality. In her mind, such a word means that Christian women are inferior to Christian men. Authority is not about hierarchical rank or position. God's government in the church has nothing to do with a hierarchy of men, but of each man knowing his standing according to God's ordination and keeping that standing in order to hold on to the Head, Christ.

God values people for their service, not their authority (Matt. 20:25-28). Women are just as important or valued as men. They are honored and rewarded for their work as highly as men are for their work. (Gal. 3:28; I Pet. 3:7; Prov. 31:10-31). The possession of authority does not inherently make one great. People without authority can be just as

great as those who have it. However, the fact that men and women are equally valued does not mean God expects them to do the same work or puts them in the same position. For example, the Bible clearly reveals that only men may be elders in the church. In like manner, we do not have sisters baptizing new ones. Such an arrangement has nothing to do with gender inequality but with God's ordination to keep the proper order in the church. As His servants we do not question God's arrangement, but we honor and uphold it.

There is no difference in the value between men and women, but there are distinct roles. The work of Christ has already removed all distinctions of privilege (Gal. 3:28). Every believer, whether male or female, is a priest to God (Heb. 13:15). As a holy priest (1 Pet. 2:5) and a royal priest (1 Pet. 2:9), we can all serve God in the universal priesthood. However, as in the home, men and women have distinct roles in the church. Church order, like chronological or alphabetical order, has nothing to do with importance. It has been established by God so that all things may be done becomingly and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).

According to I Corinthians 11:3 three headships are here enunciated: God-Christ-man. The thought in headship is authority, control and the related subject of subjection, subordination. The Christian man is under the headship of Christ; the Christian woman is to be under the headship of the man; even as Christ, for the carrying out of the redemptive purposes of God, placed Himself, when here on earth, completely in subjection to the Father. The reference to Christ eliminates all thought of inferiority, for there could never be the introduction or any suggestion of superiority or inferiority in the Godhead. But, that the eternal counsels of grace and salvation might be fulfilled, the Son took the position of subordination during His earthly sojourn. What a perfect example! What an incentive to emulate His obedience!

But while sisters need to submit to brothers in the church, this does not mean that the brothers lord it over the sisters. In Ephesians 5:21-33, which speaks of the husband and wife relationship, wives are exhorted to submit to their husbands, but husbands must love their wives in a sacrificial way like Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. The Bible tells the wives to submit to their husbands, but it tells the husbands to love their wives, not to rule over them. They were made to be a mutual comfort and blessing, not one a slave and the other a tyrant. *Both were to be one flesh* (Gen. 2:24), and this for the carrying out of God's commission. They are reciprocal instruments of each other's production. As it is the will of God that the woman know her place, so it is His will also that the man abuse not his authority.

“Let us see clearly that in the church there is the need of a spiritual order, and this order comes only from the headship of Christ being realized by us in a practical way. Without this, there is no possibility for us to practice the real church life. We look to the Lord for this matter. This is very basic and very vital. If we have this, we have the church life. If we do not have this, the church life is gone.” (W. Lee, *Basic Principles for the Practice of the Church Life, Chapter 3, Section 3, LSM*)

## **Not Having Contention**

People who question the headship of man to the woman in effect also question the headship of Christ over the man and God to Christ, for it is in this order that God had arranged headship. This is only controversial and unacceptable to those who exhibit diminished respect for the authority of God and His Holy Word!

“Verse 16 says, ‘But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the churches of God’.... What is the contention about? Verses 1 through 15 speak about head covering. Thus, the contention is about head covering. But Paul said that it is wrong for anyone to be contentious. The matter of head covering is not to be contested.... For man not to cover his head and for woman to cover her head was a commandment uniquely given by God’s apostles and a custom unique to the churches of God.” *(W. Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 50, Chapter 44, Head Covering, pp. 762-763, LSM)*

“In managing the affairs of the church, God wants the man to be the head of the woman. Therefore, the sisters should learn to submit by the grace of God. If there are some among the sisters who can serve others, they can do the work of this service. But if anything needs to be decided, the decisions should be made by those who are responsible as the elders.... Some sisters may have the gifts and may be respected by other brothers and sisters, but the question of position and authority is more important in the Bible than the question of gift, and the question of God’s truth is more important than the question of ability.... Why do the sisters have to follow this procedure? The reason is that the sisters tend to be emotional and are easily deceived. The elders are there to protect the sisters. If everything concerning the church is decided by the brothers, the sisters will be protected and preserved in their covered position, and they will avoid many problems.... The elders have a responsibility to properly oversee the matters related to the sisters. While the sisters are standing on the ground of submission through submission to Christ’s authority, the elders should not shun their responsibility through fear of offending the sisters or of arousing suspicion. Of course, there are limits to the authority of the elders. But we must not forget that Barak was before Deborah and became the head covering to Deborah (see Judg. 4:4-7).” *(W. Nee, The Assembly Life, Chapter 1, pp. 27-28, LSM)*

### **The Example of Deborah and Barak**

“Prior to the history recorded in Judges 4 and 5, the people of Israel had never had a female leader. Then, suddenly, God raised up a female, Deborah, as a judge of Israel. Regarding this, we need to realize that in the Bible, whenever God does something which stands out as being extraordinary, it is very significant. It indicates, first, man’s failure, and then, God’s excellent act. At the time of Judges 4, all the men of Israel had failed God, forcing Him to raise up a woman. That raising up of a female changed the entire condition of Israel.

“According to God’s creation, Deborah was a very capable person. By reading her song in chapter five, we can see that she was full of ability, capacity, insight, and foresight. But such an excellent person was very submissive. God made her the leader, yet she kept the proper order and took Barak as her

covering (Judges 4:6-9; cf 1 Cor. 11:3, 5-6, 10). She realized that she needed a man to be her covering. Actually, Barak did nearly nothing, yet Deborah took him as her 'head covering.' When she took this kind of standing, the whole nation became different. In their miserable situation no one would take the lead to fight for Jehovah's interest, and no one would be willing to follow. But when this excellent, extraordinary woman took the lead to practice the female submission to the man, the entire country came into the proper order. Everyone returned to his or her proper position. Thus Deborah could say in her song, 'Then a remnant of the nobles went down; / The people of Jehovah went down with me against the mighty' (5:13). All the leaders took the lead, and all the people followed; the army was formed. At first, only some of the people followed, but eventually they all followed. From this we see that the entire country came into an excellent order, assuming the proper position before Jehovah." (W. Lee, *Life-Study of Judges, Message 4, pp. 15-16, LSM*)

"Among the people there were great resolutions in heart and great searchings of heart (5:15-16), and they rose up to follow the others to fight for God's kingdom. Because Israel fought under Deborah in a proper order, God fought for them (vv. 14-24)." (*Holy Bible, Recovery Version, Judges 4:4, Footnote 4<sup>1</sup>, LSM*)

### **A Solemn Warning**

The deviating article of this sister is an affirmation that we need to keep to the principle of one publication that Brother Lee led us to practice. In so doing, we will preserve the oneness and one accord among us by keeping different teachings and ministries from coming in to deceive the innocent and unprepared saints and damage the churches. The saints at large must be careful not to read just any writing that comes along, but must expend their time and effort to dive into the ministry books so that they can be equipped with the truth.

This is not the only occasion she has taught differently. Blindsided by her eager desire to serve, she incorrectly insists that the universal service in the church means that "*all the saints, both brothers and sisters, should take part in all the services in the church and in the Lord's work.*" [Emphasis Added] To support her own interpretation of how house-to-house Lord's table meeting should be practiced, she taught that "*in no section of the Holy Scriptures could we find breaking of the bread done in the "temple" or in big congregational meeting of the saints*", disregarding I Corinthians 11:20. To prove her point that a house-to-house Lord's table meeting only requires two or three gathered together, she misapplied the Lord's breaking of bread with the two disciples going down to Emmaus (Luke 24) to be a Lord's table meeting. To project the image of being an Antipas, she erroneously alleged that "*Antipas will be the recipient of God's blessing by way of much spiritual fruits for Christ's multiplication and God's glory,*" in contrast to the biblical record in Revelation 2. To promote her style of house-to-house Lord's table meeting, she developed and elevated a practice into an absolute teaching and yoke that now threatens the Work and the churches. To justify her insubordination to the elders of the church where she serves, she parades her credentials and past achievements, maintaining that as a pioneer of the church she is exempt from submitting to the elders. To bolster her position on certain matters, she exhibits a continuous pattern of twisting words from the ministry or of deforming the truth. These misaiming and errors in

teaching of our sister warns us to take heed to the apostolic injunction for women not to assert authority over men by teaching with authority. Herein is the very need for the head covering in I Corinthians 11.

## A Concluding Word

God has an economy to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people so that they can be built up as the church, His organic Body, to consummate in the New Jerusalem. This economy is His plan and arrangement so that we can gain Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ. The flowing of the divine dispensing in the Holy City issues from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The throne of God is the center of the universe and the center of the New Jerusalem. It is the source from which all divine blessings flow. In order to receive His dispensing, we need to submit to His arrangement and keep the order in the Body to hold on to the Head. For sisters to submit to the brothers' headship simply means for the sisters to follow the brothers who follow Christ. Such following is not dissimilar to our following the leading brothers. The leading brothers are ahead in the order, in the divine arrangement. It is not about position or a hierarchy. To receive the dispensing, we need to submit to the arrangement or we will be cut off.

May we take heed to Brother Nee's words:

“God's works issue from God's throne; God's throne is established upon authority. If we want to serve God, we must know God's authority.... Satan became Satan because he overstepped God's authority. Rebellion is the cause of Satan's fall.... The possibility exists in God's work that in principle we may stand on Satan's side, while in doctrine we stand on Christ's side. All the while, we may think that we are still doing the Lord's work. This is a very evil thing. Satan is not afraid of our preaching the words of Christ. He is only afraid of our submitting under the authority of Christ.

“The greatest demand in the whole Bible [is] the submission to God's will.... God's greatest demand on man is submission. God commanded Saul to smite Amalek and to utterly destroy all that they had (1 Sam. 15). However, after Saul overcame the Amalekites, he spared Agag the king of Amalek, and appreciated the best sheep and oxen and all that was good, and refused to destroy them, hoping instead to offer them as sacrifices to God. But Samuel said to him, “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”  
(*W. Nee, Authority and Submission, pp. 7-10, LSM*)

“All our work need to be done out of submission. Without submission there is no work and there is no service.” (*W. Nee, Authority and Submission, p. 16, LSM*)

And may we learn from the example of Brother Lee's own testimony:

“In 1948...among us there were several sister co-workers who had learned much and who kept their proper place in the order. They kept the proper order to such an extent that I desired to be a sister. It is wonderful to be a sister because a sister can check with the brothers concerning every matter.

We should not think that it is comfortable to be in a higher position. The most comfortable thing is for a person to stand in the position that the Lord has given him. If he remains in his position, he will be satisfied and at ease. We should not think that it is more satisfying to direct people to do things. Being satisfied and at ease is not a matter of directing people or being directed. It altogether depends upon whether or not we keep the proper order.” (W. Lee, *The Organization of the Church*, p. 44, LSM)

God desires that the church be first made the kingdom of God. God has only one goal in the church, which is to manifest His authority in the universe through it. The Lord’s recovery through the local churches is to bring us back to God’s original intention. Today the recovery has reached the stage of the Body. When we reach the recovery of the coordination of the Body and the manifestation of authority, we have reached the final recovery. We need to practice to take the Lord as the Head and to realize His headship among us in a practical way. It is just as wrong for a woman to take man’s place as it is for man to take Christ’s place. We all need to keep the order in God’s governmental arrangement. This is the most beautiful testimony and the most wonderful picture. This is what makes Satan tremble, and this is what will bring down his kingdom.

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