

NO MORE EXCUSES!

A SYSTEMATIC REFUTATION OF THE CREEDS THAT DISCOURAGE THE
COVERING OF WOMEN TAUGHT IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1-16

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BY: A. A. BIELER

Introduction

•This study started out as a short assignment for a hermeneutics class: make sense out of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16. But, as I started to apply the hermeneutic principles I had learned in the class, I began to deduce that this was a commandment that somehow wasn't being taught in the Lord's church. But, could a lowly novice be right and a thousand churches be wrong?

I immediately started quizzing gospel preachers, investigating why they didn't teach headcovering for women. Their responses and casual remarks were shocking: no two men gave me the same reasoning, and some stated beliefs that strongly contradicted the others! One preacher claimed that covering was a cultural practice of the first-century and is no longer binding, while another claimed that headcovering is indeed binding, but that the covering is long hair! Even worse, I found some preachers teaching these contradictory doctrines at the same time! (Several of these men have since claimed that I have misrepresented them, apparently because you are being "presumptuous" if you believe a preacher means what he says, or if you believe what his relatives tell you. My advice to you is to get your preacher to commit his beliefs about this topic to paper, if he will.)

The only common thread I found was that each preacher offered a different reason why this commandment wasn't relevant for the church. Only one commentary I found had the courage to admit the evidences supplied in other commentaries were inadequate. If you search out the various commentaries and sermon outline books for yourself, you will see the same things.

"But they all with one accord began to make excuses..."

(LUKE 14:18)

How can a group of men who believe different things each come to the same conclusion? Justifications are the key. What is a justification? Webster defines it as "the act of defending or explaining or making excuses for by reasoning." What is an excuse? Again the dictionary tells us that an excuse is "a defense of some behavior."

When men and women who study the Bible find this passage, they naturally begin to wonder why it isn't being obeyed. Those who actually care what the Bible teaches begin to seek out men to explain these passages and to "defend or explain" why covering isn't being done. What do they find when they ask these priests, pastors, and ministers why it isn't being obeyed? One of literally dozens of various complementary and contradicting responses. This Baptist disagrees with that Lutheran. This Catholic disagrees with that Mormon. This Presbyterian disagrees with that Pentecostal. This gospel preacher disagrees with that gospel preacher. Yet they all somehow agree to not teach women to cover their heads.

In the parable of the Wedding Feast, the master gave one simple order: "*Come, for all things are now ready.*" The men so offered didn't want to come! Instead, they made "a defense." One man used oxen as his defense, another used land, another a new wife. *But they were all defending the same unlawful behavior.* The lame excuses satisfied those men, but they enraged the master.

Jesus combated uncritical "common

knowledge” with the truth in Matthew 5 & 6, when he challenged the doctrines of the Jews who had “heard it said.” The justifications of the false-teachers excused such sins as dishonoring parents, abuse of the poor, using the temple as a money-making business, swearing false oaths, and worse. In each case, the Law of Moses gave an ordinance for the Hebrews to follow, and these men found a way to “defend or explain” why they did not follow those laws as they were given. The Scribes and Pharisees preached a self-serving doctrine that could not bear the weight of God’s truth, but relied solely upon their position as religious leaders and intimidation to justify their disobedience.

As will be shown in the following study, these “defenses and explanations” are undermined by one inescapable flaw: they cannot be taught from the Bible. This apparently cannot be stressed enough. To hold a positive position on headcovering, one needs only open the Bible and read the passage aloud. The Spirit gave us all the timeless and sacred reasons we’ll ever need to understand this ordinance. Only for the men and women who do not wish to cover do these plain passages of the Bible become “difficult.” Only by invoking the failures of human wisdom (itching-ears, poor commentaries, uninspired scraps of ancient literature, proof-text, the liberal hermeneutics of culture-vs-Christ, word-of-mouth doctrines) do these creeds of disobedience find any support in the churches.

1. “I heard the veiling of women was just an ancient custom we no longer keep, like ‘foot-washing.’”

Summary: Those who offer up this excuse are attempting to equate headcovering with the ancient custom of washing a traveler’s feet (John 12:3), which is no longer widely observed.

The “Purposes & Substitutes” Problem

- It is true that the washing of feet and the veiling of women were both ancient customs, and it is true that Christians rarely wash another’s feet today. It has, however, been persuasively argued that we continue to keep the spirit of the example.

Foot-washing was a function of hospitality; bare feet get filthy from the road. The purpose for cleaning dirty feet was, for a widow, part of several activities that show a history of hospitality to others. This is also indicated by her helping the sick, lodging strangers, and other good works (1 Tim 5:10). Since most nations now have access to socks and shoes, feet rarely get that filthy from travel, and washing clean feet is simply pointless. But there are still other practical ways to be hospitable today that are just as humbling and useful (like washing dirty socks), and true Christian widows will perform these acts. It should also be said that there is no good reason for any Christian today to refuse washing feet, especially if they need cleaning (in fact, this author personally saw to the blistered feet of another at the time of this writing). The only reason that could be offered for refusing the act is “pride,” an unsatisfactory response at best (Proverbs 13:10).

If we wish to compare headcovering to foot-washing, we must now ask: “What is the purpose of covering or uncovering the head?” According to Scripture, a man must not have something on his head when he prays or prophesies because men are the “image and glory of God” (1 Corinthians 11:7) and that every man “dishonors Christ” if he covers his head when he prays or prophesies (1 Corinthians 11:4). Likewise, it is written that a woman should be covered because women are instead the “glory of man” and that she would dishonor her man (husband, father, guardian, etc.) to go uncovered in prayer or prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5). So Paul has revealed that the purpose of a man keeping his head

uncovered is to reveal God's image and glory, and thus honor Christ before His head, God the Father. The reason a woman covers her head is to cover man's glory before God, and thus honor her authority.

This begs another important question: "What modern custom can replace the act of uncovering or covering the head while simultaneously keeping the purpose of covering? What custom can replace the exposure of God's image and glory (a man's head) to honor Christ and the concealment of man's glory (a woman's head)?" The answer is "none." Logic concludes that, unlike with the case of foot-washing, there is no satisfactory substitute for women covering, nor for men taking covers off, nor a practical reason to find one. Once again, the only real reason that could be offered is "pride."

The "Everything is Ancient" Problem

- As is seen in the first flaw, it isn't the extreme oldness of foot-washing that discourages it, but the practicality. The custom of headcovering may be ancient, but there are plenty of ancient customs churches still keep, and worse, there is no Biblical precedence for many of them.

One relic kept in the churches today is the installment of pews in buildings, the pew being invented in the 14th century and popularized in the 15th.^a Even though far more comfortable, economical, and practical group seating has developed over the past 600 years, and despite the lack of Scriptural support, the tradition of pews continues to be consciously associated with worship well into the 21st century. Likewise, our churches frequently celebrate weddings between young Christians. But the special dress, the bridesmaids, the rings, the flowers, the flower girls and ring bearers, the cake, the candles, and the vows are all ancient traditions of the Hebrews, Pagan Greeks, Babylonians, Arabs, Romans, and

Egyptians.^b Even the officiating minister is a continuation of a traditional "priestly" role the Catholics acquired from the heathens.^c It should go without saying that there is absolutely no New Testament commandment (explicit or implied), nor a single practical reason, to observe any of these archaic traditions, some of which predate the Law of Moses.

It is true that in areas where the Scripture is silent on personal behavior, we are free to exercise customs that do not contradict the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:23), but whereas the Scripture is silent on these traditions, it is not silent on the role of headcovering. So Christians are using the age of headcovering to disregard the commandments, while maintaining other aged traditions that have no place in the Bible. To associate Christ's religion with antiquated seating or primitive marriage traditions, while at the same time stripping religious significance from an "old" God given ordinance is just plain hypocrisy.

Even more significant to this argument are the reasons Paul gives us for a woman being covered:

- Men with Covered Heads Dishonor Christ (1 Corinthians 11:4; John 5:22-23): *May men decide how to honor Christ?*
- Men are the Image and Glory of God (1 Corinthians 11:7; Gen 1:26): *Are men no longer the image and glory of God?*
- Women Are Glory to Men; Women Cover to Honor Their Heads (1 Corinthians 11:5,7; Eph 5:22-25): *Are women no longer a glory to men? Do women no longer need to be concerned with honoring men?*
- The Shame of Baldness Should Be Felt When Uncovered (1 Corinthians 11:6; Isa 3:24): *Are women no longer ashamed of being bald?*
- Woman was created for man and

should show the angels a symbol of authority (1 Corinthians 11:9-10; 1 Peter 1:12): *Are angels no longer the servants of God?*

- A Woman's Hair is a Glory for Herself, Not God (1 Corinthians 11:15a; Song 7:5): *Is a woman's hair no longer a glory for her?*

- Creation Teaches that Women Should Be Covered (1 Corinthians 11:15b; Rom 1:20-21): *Do we no longer look into creation to find God's handiwork?*

- Everyone With Paul and Every Faithful Church Rejected the Custom of Uncovered Women (1 Corinthians 11:13,16; Eph 4:4-6): *Is the re-creation of first-century churches no longer our goal?*

Contrary to the idea that each of these reasons for covering are conditional to a particular time, each reason given by the Spirit of God is truly timeless.

a. *The History of Pews* (Cambridge, 1841)

b. *Carry Me Over the Threshold: A Christian Guide to Wedding Traditions*; Seleshanko (Zondervan, 2006)

c. *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*; Muir (Cambridge, 1997)

The "Apples & Oranges" Problem

- In addition to the previous flaws, there is a still more important "apples and oranges" issue with this excuse. When discussing the Biblical significance of the washing of feet, careful study will show that it is a function of fellowship and a matter of showing hospitality. But can the same be said of headcovering?

In 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul reveals to us when the head is to be uncovered or covered; while a man or woman prays or prophesies. Neither praying nor proclaiming the inspired word of God can be considered matters of hospitality, but as any serious study will reveal, these are indeed acts of worship (See: *Introducing the church of Christ*; Star Publishing, 2004). We are no longer speaking of ordinary social customs,

but behavior associated with the way men and women come before the Father in worship. Hospitality is apples and acts of worship are oranges—they cannot be equated. This is very significant.

Let us imagine that a teacher came into your congregation and said,

Jesus only used grape juice and unleavened bread because of the Passover traditions of the Jews; it's simply all He had around at the time. It is more important to have the 'cup' with some 'bread.' Therefore, when observing the modern Lord's Supper, we can safely replace the outdated grape juice with a culturally-acceptable coffee drink, and replace the outdated unleavened bread with the inexpensive white bread of our culture.

Then he boldly states,

Let's face it, people think we are weird because we sing hymns. The singing of hymns is an ancient custom that developed before mankind invented the far more popular compact discs and iPods. So in order to keep up with the customs of the 21st century, we will now end the practice of congregational singing and instead observe the modern custom of listening to recorded music.

And to top it off,

When Paul told those Christians that they should be benevolent, they were living in a society that had no charities or food stamps. Christians were the only people who cared for the poor and sick. But we now live in a world where governments do care, and are much better equipped to aid the poor and the sick. That frees us from the burden of giving.

One can only imagine the outcry from the brethren at the declaration of such heretical doctrines, yet here we have the identical teaching! Because covering is an “ancient” custom it is fine to disregard the Scriptures, despite the rules of covering (for males and females) being a requirement of an act of worship in the exact same way as the “ancient” elements are associated to the Table (Matt 26:26-28), as the “ancient” participation of the congregation is to the nature of worshipful singing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), and as “ancient” benevolence is to pure religion (James 1:27). Where is the outcry? Our brethren don’t seem to believe praying properly is a big deal.

One who wishes to discard nearly anything found in Scripture on the basis of “antiquity” could do so just as easily as many have done with 1 Corinthians 11. Sadly, our brethren are compelled to discard something so basic to the life of a Christian. What could be more important than presenting ourselves before God in prayer exactly how he tells us to? We are supposed to be recreating the first-century church. What possible thing could a man scrounge out of the history books to justify modifying the worship of our Lord as shown to us in the Bible? Comparing ancient acts of worship with ancient customs of hospitality (or fellowship, or greetings, etc.) is clearly a faulty method for determining religious commandment.

2. “I was told Paul was only trying to establish worship customs directly opposed to contemporary Pagan worship customs.”

Summary: This excuse is an attempt to associate the teaching of headcovering as opposition to the uncovered women of first-century Pagans, thereby claiming that since first-century Pagan worship has largely ended, the need for covering has ended.

The “Which Witch” Problem

• It is no stretch of the imagination to believe that Paul and the other apostles would be opposed to Pagan worship, making this a convincing argument for many. But which system of heathenism was Paul supposed to be contradicting? It is a gross oversimplification to assume that there was a single set of “Pagan” worship customs in the first-century. When someone states that Paul was opposing “Pagans,” they are in fact throwing a net over literally hundreds of cults and superstitions, from an equally varied number of nations.

Ancient Corinth was a Greek city, ravaged in 146 B.C. by Rome, and rebuilt in 46 B.C. as a Roman colony. Under Roman rule, Corinth became a major center of trade by Paul’s time, having one harbor to Asia and another to Italy. Like all cities specializing in international commerce, it became a melting pot of cultures, akin to modern-day Rotterdam or New York City.^a To claim there was a single style of worship favored by the heathens ignores not only the superstitions of the various tribes that made Corinth their home, but also the variety of worship styles within the official Greco-Roman cults themselves. One may as well claim there is only one type of worship in modern-day San Diego.

It is true that some cults once uncovered their female priestesses and mystics, but there were also many cults that required coverings for women during times of worship. The virgin priestesses of Vesta (“Vestal virgins”) wore a square piece of cloth that covered their heads, or a headband. Devotees of Demeter wore a gray woolen covering upon their heads, Athena’s Amazon worshippers wore helmets, and the keepers of Saturn’s temple wore cloaks of Galatian scarlet over their heads.^b Added to this was the religious complexity of immigrant Egyptians, Barbarian slaves, Asians, Africans, Jews, Spartans, Samaritans, Armenians, and other ethnic

groups, plus the Gnostic (and similar) mystery religions, not to mention the assorted teachings of popular philosophers.^c

The strongest blow to this excuse is that Paul never mentions any Pagans at all! So, given the complexity of first-century religion in Corinth, and the first-century world in general, this excuse has been rendered moot.

a. *The Urban Development of Ancient Corinth*; Schroeder (University of Michigan, 1965)

b. *Apologetic and Practical Treatises, Vol. 1; Tertullian/Dodgson* (Parker, 1842)

c. *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation*; Cornford (Courier Dover, 2004)

3. “I thought Paul was only requiring the rebellious Corinthian women to keep a Corinthian custom, not anyone else.”

Summary: Those who offer up this excuse believe that uncovered women were ignoring a cultural taboo of the Corinthians, thus Paul was only chastising women who were challenging social norms, not revealing an ordinance for the modern church.

The “Poor Scholarship” Problem

• The only evidence that ancient women of Corinth were required to be covered in public anyone typically bothers to provide is taken from just two passages by Plutarch. From his work “Moralia, The Roman Questions 14,” Plutarch asks the reader:

Why do sons cover their heads when they escort their parents to the grave, while daughters go with uncovered heads and hair unbound?... Or is it that the unusual is proper in mourning, and it is more usual for women to go forth in public with their heads covered and men with their heads uncovered?

In his “Sayings of Spartans” he pens:

When someone inquired why they took

their girls into public places unveiled, but their married women veiled, he said, “Because the girls have to find husbands, and the married women have to keep to those who have them!”

Clever readers will have already noticed that Plutarch, instead of making a statement about headcovering being a fact, is inquiring about the customs himself. He was conjecturing that *perhaps* they were doing something, but he was as unsure as we are! Furthermore, these quotes were penned by a Pagan priest around A.D. 110, *fifty years after the Corinthian epistle* in question. So this argument is based on a quote taken out of time and out of context. Sounds silly now, doesn't it? What makes Plutarch's quotes even more useless to the issue (if possible) is the fact that he is making inquiries into second-century Roman funeral customs and female Spartan fashions, not the daily clothing customs of first-century Corinthian women.

The so-called scholars who rely on Plutarch's quote about Roman and Spartan women in the *Moralia* also conveniently ignore another tidbit about the Romans in the “*Moralia*” and another of the Spartans from his “The Comparison of Numa with Lycurgus”:

For in fact the skirts of the frock worn by unmarried girls were not sewn together at the lower part, but used to fly back and show the whole thigh bare as they walked. The thing is most distinctly given by Sophocles: “She, also, the young maid, Whose frock, no robe yet o'er it laid, Folding back, leaves her bare thigh free, Hermione.” And so their women, it is said, were bold and masculine, overbearing to their husbands in the first place, absolute mistresses in their houses, giving their opinions about public matters freely, and speaking openly even on the most important subjects.

But formerly women were not allowed to cover the head at all... the second [to divorce his wife] was Sulpicius Gallus, because he saw his wife pull her cloak over her head.

Women were not formerly allowed to cover the head at all! Headcovering was so offensive that a man divorced his wife! How amazing that this tidbit never makes it into the commentaries! And as for the Spartan women, do they sound like any women you know? Despite the myths perpetuated by feminists of headcovering being a “universal symbol of ancient modesty and male oppression,” of women being practically slaves, and (as was shown by the flaws of the “The ‘Which Witch’ Problem”) the truth is that Corinth was a social melting pot with a great many cultural ideas of propriety and fashion. The Jew, the Greek, the Roman, the Barbarian, and every other man in Corinth would each have his own cultural and personal biases regarding the dress and behavior of women. Just as the wide religious gaps of Corinth makes blanket statements about heathenism false, the wide ethnic gaps of Corinth makes blanket statements about culture or the treatment of women plainly false. The Greeks of Corinth, for instance, had no desire for constant veiling:

It was not the normal custom for women in Greek and Roman cultures to be veiled; thus, it is hard to see how their being unveiled in worship could be regarded as controversial or shameful.^a

It used to be asserted by theologians that Paul was simply endorsing the unwritten law of hellenic and hellenistic feeling for what was proper. But this view is untenable. To be sure, the veil was not unknown in Greece. It was worn partly as adornment and partly on such special occasions as match-making and marriage, mourning, and

*the worship of chthonic [underworld] deities (in the form of a garment drawn over the head). **But it is quite wrong that Greek women were under some kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public.***^b

It is hard to see how being uncovered in worship would be shameful in the cultural context, Mr. Hays, but not in the religious context. The veil was a matter of fashion for the Greeks, akin to the modern necktie or scarf. This differs greatly from the observant Jews and other Oriental peoples who also made their home in Corinth and usually covered their women as a matter of modesty (see: *Babylonian Talmud; Mishnah; Dio Chrysostom's Orationes*). The difference of customs shows that there was no grand compulsory headcovering for women, especially in Ancient Greece. So in truth, no one can make a reliable statement about the supposed cultural taboos of Corinth. Thanks to our study of Greco-Roman cults, evidence indicates that first-century Roman men and women probably approved the fashion of covered heads for both sexes in religious or temporal contexts. Conversely, Greek men and women probably had no problem with uncovered heads in any context, and Oriental men may have been covered in temporal and religious contexts, while Oriental women probably covered their heads anytime they went outside of the home. Anyone may guess how Barbarian tribes could have dressed their females! Since there is no true literary evidence for Corinth's compulsory covering of women, it is better to trust in the Bible over the scant, uninspired quips of dead Pagan priests.

a. *Interpretation: First Corinthians; Hays (Westminster, 1997)*

b. *Theological Dictionary "KATAKALUPTO"; Oepke (Kittel, 1964)*

The “Which Culture is Best” Problem

- Now that we have actually investigated the

culture of Ancient Corinth and discovered a multitude of differences by race, it is no surprise that we find Paul dealing with the issue of headcoverings for men and women. Members of each culture in the church would be unsure of when to cover and when not to cover in their new religion. This is where the Scripture really shines, as opposed to the “wisdom” of men.

As we look at the probable cultural make-up of the Corinthian church, we find men with totally different ideas of modesty and fashion. The Romans covered male and female alike, or not, as styles ebbed and flowed. The Greeks were more interested in intellectual and physical improvement, giving very little thought to dress. The Semitic tribes, including Hebrews, had a long-standing tradition of admiring fine clothes and covering women from head to toe, even covering their faces so much as to expose only one eye. One may only speculate upon the dress of Barbarian women, but archaeology shows that Germanian, Celtic, and Scythian women probably wore the same clothing as men, and that none but Sarmatae women wore dresses up to the Middle Ages.^a Slaves of any race could only wear whatever their masters (or Christian brothers) would supply. Why is this significant? Because the Bible is very specific about when the headcovering is to be removed or worn—*when praying and prophesying* (1 Corinthians 11:14-15).

This just makes more sense when we look at 1 Timothy 2:9 & 1 Peter 3:2 and the rules of modest hair-dressing. Why would a woman’s coiffure be an issue if she was compelled to wear a veil all the time? Whatever she may have done to her hair would go unseen, since that customary veil would cover it up. Furthermore, why would she bother working so hard on fancy braids when a veil would hide her glorious locks? If Paul was so concerned with the taboos of Corinth, why were preaching and praying

the only times covering or uncovering becomes a requirement? Why was the uncovering of men mentioned if a culture of covered women was at issue? The answer is simple. Because, despite the custom of the Semitics, a woman could go without covering when not praying or telling forth God’s inspired word, thus having her hair exposed at other times, and a Semitic man would need to remove his usual covering when doing the same. Despite the customs of Romans, men should no longer cover their heads with a toga, yet women would need to be covered. Despite the unconcerned attitude of Greeks toward clothing, men and women must now be conscious of modesty and what covers their head when they pray. In all of recorded history, including the Old Testament, not one culture can be shown to have both required men to be uncovered and women to be covered only when praying or speaking on behalf of deity. Paul is not endorsing any one nation’s practice at all, but is revealing a single custom for a nation that supplants them all: Christ’s Kingdom.

a. *The Dictionary of Art; Turner (Grove, 1996); COWA Surveys and Bibliographies (University of Michigan, 2006)*

The “Archeological” Problem

- Besides the lack of literary evidence in compulsory covering of women, there is the fact that not one bit of archeological evidence from Corinth, Greece, or Rome supports the doctrine that first-century women were covered as a rule either— no urns, nor busts, nor mosaics, nor statues, nor frescos. Yes, there are artworks of covered women, but there are just as many (or more) that show women uncovered. Those who would make of a case that the women of Corinth always went covered must explain all this uncovered artwork! The reason for all this uncovered art is clear when one makes even a brief study of Rome’s “Julio-Claudian” and “Flavian”

dynasties.

The Julio-Claudian dynasty is a reckoning of the Roman Empire from 27 B.C. to A.D. 68 (precisely when the church of Christ was being established), named for the descendants of Caesar Augustus.^a It is during this period that we see an explosion of artwork depicting important Roman women and “goddesses.” In her book “Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68,” S. E. Wood catalogs an impressive number of images and quotes about the tastes of these trend-setters. As would not surprise any Hollywood hairdresser, the writings, the statues, the urns, the paintings, even the coinage from the Julio-Claudian mints, each show these women proudly displaying bare heads. This was, of course, because the women wanted to display their marvelously intricate braids and curls, woven with jewels and pearls. This display of vanity is proof that at least the wealthy female citizens in first-century Roman cities (including Corinth) dictated what went upon their own heads, not men.

This can also be confirmed by Scripture. Paul tells the Christian women of Ephesus (a Roman city) to “**...adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing...**” (1 Timothy 2:9), and Peter similarly says to Christian wives “**Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing...**” (1 Peter 3:2). It was a choice a true Christian woman made correctly, and a choice Gentile women made poorly, but it was (and is) the woman’s choice nonetheless. The vain self-adornment by Gentile women condemned by Paul and Peter continued into the Flavian dynasty, and well into Constantine’s rule. These women were walking around with their heads *uncovered* to display braided and styled hair. Thus Paul, contrary to today’s popular opinion, wasn’t an advocate of a

custom where women covered, but was clearly opposed to a custom that would permit many women to go uncovered in prayer and prophesy.

a. *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Roman Empire*; Nelson (Alpha Books, 2001)

The “Liberal Hermeneutics” Problem

- As was already discussed in the flaws of the “Pagan Worship excuse,” we have with this excuse another case of adding to the Bible. What makes this flaw particularly heinous requires an understanding of Biblical hermeneutics, a science of literary interpretation, and a science too few put to use.

When logically studying Scripture, one of the fundamental rules is that, *if the Bible is indeed the inspired truth of God, it must harmonize with itself.*^a This means if an interpretation of a particular passage is true, then passages dealing with the same subject matter must agree with that interpretation. So in order to test the idea that Paul was only concerned with the culture of Corinth, the first thing we must do is find another passage that deals with the same subject as 1 Corinthians 11.

1 Corinthians 14 should do well. In verses 34 & 35, Paul tells us to “*Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak...*” and that, “*...it is shameful for women to speak in church.*” Here is a passage that deals with Corinthian women, how they are to behave in worship, male/female relationships, the order of creation, shameful behavior, and an ancient culture. Now let’s see if the same cultural argument against headcovering can be applied to women speaking in the church:

In the Greek culture, women were discouraged from saying anything in public, and they were certainly not allowed to confront or question men publicly... In addition, women of that day did not receive formal religious

education as did the men... In this instance, Paul was asking the Corinthian women not to flaunt their Christian freedom during worship. **The purpose of Paul's writing was to promote unity, not to teach about the role of women in the church.**^b

In groups, I have jokingly been reminded that "women are to be silent" but have seldom been assured that women and men are equal. **In this enlightened age, some people still don't believe that women and men are equal, and many feel a woman has no business speaking in church.**^c

Paul may have wanted to "gradual into" the equality that he talked about in Galatians. Remember that the women were still the property of their husbands, under Roman law. Paul was very sensitive to the culture in which he and the early Corinthians lived. Living the Christian life, then even more than now, involved walking a tightrope between the freedom that they had in Christ and the constraints of their society. Also, **Paul possibly may not have been ready, personally, for the social revolution that the full practice of freedom in Christ would have brought.**^d

The early Christians chose not to dilute the gospel message, but attempted to demonstrate the social acceptability of Christianity. Inevitably, this meant bringing Christian attitudes toward women more into line with those which prevailed in the wider community. By the end of the fourth century such social pressures [sic] seem to have led to the neglect, or perhaps even suppression, of the ministerial roles of women within the church. **But this is to be regarded as a response to a set of specific historical circumstances encountered during this early period in the development of the church,**

rather than something which is permanently binding on all Christians.^e

As for the passages now found in the New Testament epistles of Paul, concerning women's non-equality with men and duty of subjection, **there is no room to doubt that they are bare-faced forgeries, interpolated by unscrupulous bishops,** during the early period in which a combined and determined effort was made to reduce women to silent submission, not only in the Church, but also in the home and in the State. **A most laudably intended attempt to excuse Paul for the inexcusable passages attributed to his authorship has been made by a clergyman, who, accepting them as genuine Pauline utterances, endeavors to show that they were meant to apply only to Greek female converts, natives of Corinth, and that the command to cover the head and to keep silent in public was warranted, both because veiling the head and face was a Grecian custom, and because the women of Corinth were of notoriously bad character.**^f

"How," asked a conference participant, "do you deal with the fact that women are told to be silent in First Corinthians fourteen?" ...In responding to this question, I reminded the audience of the eleventh chapter of that same letter where the apostle Paul gives instructions on hair... **Paul argues that women should not pray with uncovered heads, a rule that none of the conference participants were following. My intent in this response was to show the difficulties of lifting rules out of the Bible and applying them directly to contemporary life. There are many rules and laws in the Scripture that are so bound to the customs and**

the culture of the time that they are inapplicable today...⁹

Women preachers, prayer leaders, teachers, and song leaders can be found usurping men in nearly every Protestant denomination, including so-called churches of Christ. Furthermore, governments, schools, companies, and families are now commonly overseen by women alone. You must now acknowledge that it is no longer a shame for a woman to rule or speak publicly to the churches of Western society, but is instead considered a sign of enlightenment. Worldly women flock to preachers who can find ways to modify unpopular Scripture in their favor. Therefore, if it is true that the changes in popular culture override Scriptural arguments not bound to culture, then women may indeed preach and pray aloud in churches today. But if women are never to be preachers to men, based on the reasons given in Scripture, then they must also be covered in prayer and prophesy. Whatever is true for one is true for the other. Was Paul only concerned with a temporary cultural rebellion in Chapter Eleven? Then that was his concern in Chapter Fourteen! Was Chapter Fourteen meant to be binding for all time? Then so too was Chapter Eleven:

*The first reason given for the restrictions on women is the order of creation, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" ([1 Timothy] 2:13, NKJV). **This certainly cannot be said to deal with just a local, temporary cultural situation or with a grumpy old man. This goes all the way back to the sixth day of creation and makes a fundamental argument for the headship of man over the woman** – "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (cf. **1 Corinthians 11:8-9**)^h*

Why did Paul refer to the creation order in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 if this is simply a cultural

custom of Corinth? First Corinthians Eleven indeed "makes a fundamental argument for the headship of man over the woman," but why? Just as the "fundamental argument for the headship of man over the woman" made in 1 Timothy 2 is the *reason* why women must not have authority over men, male headship and the order of creation are the exact same *reason* for women being covered in prayer and prophesy:

*"For man is not from woman, but woman from man. **Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head...**"*

(1 Corinthians 11:8-10)

The reason women exist is because *God made them for men*. Let that soak in a little. Feminists HATE the very idea, and therefore HATE following the Bible. But just as the remainder of Scripture denies a liberal interpretation of Chapter Fourteen by appealing to the immutable creation (1 Timothy 2:11-15), it also denies a liberal interpretation of Chapter Eleven by applying the same rule. Headcovering is not subject to culture, it is subject to the fact that women were created for men. A fact that has not changed. A fact that will never change, no matter how hated it is. If a Christian is applying the arguments of creation only to Chapter Fourteen, but not to Eleven, he is practicing the hypocrisy of a "double-minded, double-tongued man" (1 Timothy 3:8, James 1:6).

a. *Hermeneutics, a Text Book*; Dungan (*Gospel Light*, 1888)

b. *Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Corinthians*; Barton, Osborne & Veerman (Tyndale House, 1999)

c. *A New Testament View of Women*; Stephens (*Authors Book Nook*, 1980)

d. *If My People Who Are Called Baptists...: A Layman's Challenge*; Dodd (Self-Published, 1996)

e. *An Introduction to Christianity*; MacGrath (Blackwell, 1997)

f. *The Woman's Bible*; Stanton (Revising Committee, 1898)

g. *Reformed and Feminist: A Challenge to the Church*; Van Wijk-Bos (Westminster John Knox, 1991)

h. *The Role of Women in the Lord's Church*; Ted Clarke (*Fulton County Gospel News*, Nov 1997)

The “Every Church” Problem

• Once again, we find the Scriptures have provided a simple yet powerful way to eliminate this false doctrine in one little verse. After asking if it is a proper activity for women to pray uncovered, he states: “*and if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.*” (1 Corinthians 11:16). Although some will argue this verse means that headcovering wasn’t the custom, and others say it shows it was once a universal custom, those arguments are immaterial to this flaw, so the meaning of that verse will be dealt with in another section. Of more importance to us is what this verse implies. It is a declaration that everyone Paul associates with and every faithful church all agree on one thing; either they all kept the custom of covering, or none of them did. There is no middle ground, and that is the significant point.

Why is this significant? If every single faithful Christian and church *DID NOT* have a custom of covering their women, then no faithful Christian in the world was keeping the custom of headcovering at all. This would by necessity include churches among nations we know for a fact required women to *always* be covered, nations such as Tarsus, Jerusalem, Armenia, Persia, etc. So if we believe that no church anywhere covered their women (even ones located in societies that definitely covered women), it was therefore fine for *those* Christian women to ignore *their* cultures. But here was Paul, telling the women in Corinth not to rebel against culture and instead be covered. That is a glaring contradiction! Either Paul wants Christian women in Corinth to keep the Corinthian culture and be the only church that breaks the Christian custom, or Paul wants them to be like every other church and flaunt the supposed headcovering culture of Corinth. There is only one church, or there are culture-defined denominations. Which is it?

That’s ruinous to the “Culture of Corinth” excuse, but what if the opposite is true? If every single faithful Christian and church *DID* have a custom of covering their women, then Paul was telling the contentious that regardless of whatever culture Christians may be found in, a true Christian church is *always* expected to keep women covered in prayer and prophesy. This also destroys the idea that Paul was limiting his remarks to Corinth alone, since it is a custom that all faithful churches in every sort of culture (including the vain, uncovered Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cultures) were keeping, as taught by Paul’s statement. Either way, whatever the culture of Corinth may have been, it clearly meant nothing compared to the universal custom of the church of Christ.

4. “I was told that Corinthian prostitutes went uncovered, so Paul was telling Corinthian women not to look like prostitutes.”

Summary: Those who offer up this excuse believe that, unlike proper ladies, only prostitutes went uncovered in the first-century. Thus Paul was only chastising women who were dressing like Corinthian prostitutes, not revealing an ordinance for the modern church.

The “More Poor Scholarship” Problem

• Probably the most common rationalization offered up by the brethren and the denominationalist alike, this excuse is the ideological twin of the previous excuse of the “Culture of Corinth” that has been well refuted, and has many of the same flaws. Case in point, just as there is a dearth of literary evidence to support the claim of compulsory veiling of women in Corinth, also severely lacking is any evidence for unveiled women being considered Corinthian prostitutes.

For decades, the “logic” of preachers and teachers has been that (1) *the temple of*

Aphrodite in Corinth had “a thousand temple-courtesans” as slaves,^a (2) Pagan cults required priestesses to worship with their heads uncovered, (3) prostitutes in Corinthian cults must also have been priestesses, so (4) decent “non-harlot” Christian women always wore a veil to be opposite of them. These teachers, asserting that prostitution was a common practice in the rites connected with Aphrodite (also Artemis), particularly at Ephesus and Corinth, have used these prostitutes as proof Paul was more concerned with women coming out of such immoral cults bringing their immoral cultic ways into the body of Christ than creating an ordinance for the modern church. Furthermore, it is taught that Christian women were only told to cover as to not be confused with the Pagan harlots that continued in these cults and the society as a whole.

This would seem right if true, but *it is not true.* Professor S. M. Baugh found that ancient sources on such prostitution have been greatly misinterpreted as contemporary Greco-Roman practices. Baugh found no evidence for cultic prostitution being practiced at Ephesus or Corinth at all.^b He reviewed inscriptions naming priestesses of Artemis at Ephesus and concluded these inscriptions offer not only zero evidence of cultic prostitution by priestesses but, on the contrary, indicate that the priestesses were daughters of Ephesian nobility that served the goddess (since the inscriptions state “in purity”). The ancient sources quoted by advocates of this doctrine actually discuss cultic prostitution being practiced *in foreign countries several centuries before the first-century*, such as was done in ancient Armenia.

Worse, the quote taken from “Strabo’s Atlas” concerning Corinth’s “thousand courtesans” was written *thirty years before Paul’s epistle.* It also was not written concerning the current state of first-century Corinth, but *the history of Corinth four*

centuries before it was even conquered by Rome. This history was based on word-of-mouth, since no one from that time still lived, nor does he quote any documents himself. Strabo also states that the contemporary temple of Aphrodite of his day was small and relatively poor, not a palace full of courtesans, which is also confirmed by archaeology.^c Did the temples employ prostitutes? Certainly, but certainly as a means to provide cultists with wealth or pleasure—there is no evidence that they served as priestesses.

Along with the common myth of Paul’s interest in temple prostitutes being perpetuated by poor commentaries and word-of-mouth, there is only one literary indication of the lack of headcovering ever being linked directly with prostitution. From 12th century B.C. Assyria, in the time of Tiglath-Pileser, the Middle Assyrian Laws preserved on clay tablets contain a law requiring all Assyrian women to cover their heads in public, with the exception of prostitutes, who are forbidden to cover their heads.^d So here is the original source for the myth that only a prostitute in Corinth went uncovered, yet it is useless as evidence since (1) it is dated *over one-thousand years* before the time the Corinthian epistle was written, and (2) it was an Assyrian law, not a Greek law.

What makes all this so significant is the fact that human knowledge is so terribly unreliable. The excellent research of Professor Baugh shows that the doctrine of Corinthian cult priestess-prostitution, already widely disseminated in churches today without any Scriptural support, is unsupported by historic documents as well. Combined with this is the fact that there is also no evidence of standardized heathen worship between Greco-Roman cults that would show the prostitutes of every cult went uncovered as a rule, or even if any did. As was already shown in the flaws of the “Culture of Corinth” there simply is no

literary evidence that any Greeks or Romans wore veils in public as a function of law or modesty, nor to prevent association with prostitution. Naturally, if this is not the case, then proponents of this excuse should be able to easily provide us with historic proof.

- a. *The Geography of Strabo; Strabo/Sons* (William Heinemann Ltd., 1966)
 b. *Cult Prostitution In New Testament Ephesus: A Reappraisal*; Baugh (Evangelical Theological Society, 1999)
 c. *Corinth: The First City of Greece; Rothaus* (Brill Academic, 2000)
 d. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*; Pritchard (Princeton University, 1954)

The “Uncovered Artworks” Problem

- When deconstructing the “Culture of Corinth” myth, the evidence of archaeology was very useful. Indeed, the abundance of bare-headed females in the art of Julio-Claudian Corinth is even more devastating to the “Corinthian Prostitution” excuse.

When looking through the various museums and catalogs of first-century women uncovered in Corinthian artwork, women depicted in flattering statues, relief work of women carved into family tombs, in frescos, in artwork on urns, in mosaics, stamped on coins and intaglio, or cast in bronze, all appear with no veil and with finely styled hair.

The identity of these women is usually a mystery, such as the “Portrait Bust of a Roman Matron” from A.D. 41–68 on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, found on the Italian Peninsula. But the archaeology department is confident that:

...the imitation of imperial hairstyles by contemporary Roman women was common throughout the Roman period, and this work is one of many examples in which private portraits were strongly influenced by official images of the imperial family.

Furthermore,

distinctive and elaborate hairstyles were a major aspect of female

portraiture throughout the imperial period. Because imitation of imperial portraiture was so prevalent in privately commissioned portraits, modern scholars are able to date otherwise unidentifiable portraits by making stylistic comparisons of the treatment of the hair with well-documented and datable imperial examples.”^a

This is the method used by archaeologists to date both male and female artwork to the first-century. For specifically Corinthian examples of this nature, we can now look to the museums.

On the bronze coins struck in Corinth, Agrippina Major is shown in profile, proudly showing us her elaborate braids, a hairstyle which dates her coin at around A.D. 20. Her daughter, Agrippina Minor, follows suit around A.D. 50 on a coin of her own, with another fine batch of curls. In the journal “Corinth: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Volume XII, The Minor Objects,” Gladys Davidson catalogs nineteen different female heads from the first- and second-century Corinth (artifact numbers 395-415). Each one is bareheaded, displaying the same elaborate curls of their Italian counterparts. In fact, most of the uncovered artwork we find is made in the image of some woman in government, or at least very wealthy ladies. So not only are there many examples empire-wide that show women going without headcovering, the women of Corinth do the same, as these women are proudly going without them. Are these women, honored mothers, wives, sisters, and cousins of noblemen, the characterizations of revered “goddesses,” are these ladies being depicted as prostitutes? It does not really matter how many pieces of art show covered women, the ridiculousness of the idea that *any* noble women would display themselves as common harlots, along with the well-

documented information from Rome and Greece concerning the hairstyles of first-century women, has demolished the fictional doctrine that uncovered Corinthian women were viewed to be prostitutes.

a. *Timeline of Art History* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000)
From the Staatliche Museen, Berlin (inv. no. 1802)

The “Roman Laws” Problem

- Beyond the flaws in this excuse pertaining to historical literature and archaeology, there is the actual legal dress codes for prostitutes given for subjects of the Roman Empire, of which Corinth was subject. Prostitutes were expected to register with the state and pay taxes, and were forbidden by law from wearing the *stola* (the usual dress of freeborn women). Also banned were shoes, purple robes, jewelry, and the colorful ribbons that Roman women used to decorate their hair. The law instead required harlots to wear sandals (how odd Paul never condemns sandal-wearing!), and to wear the togas of men, but togas made with a floral-pattern. They were also expected to dye their hair yellow, red, or blue. There is no mention of headcoverings whatsoever, and the few laws that existed were seldom enforced. Many harlots wore prohibited clothing. Others wore their togas in outrageously bright colors, while others wore nearly transparent robes of gauze. Still others chose to wear no clothing at all, rather they sat outside of their brothels in the nude, waiting for customers while tanning in the sun. Unlike the common brothel slaves, the expensive and glorified courtesans of the nobility wore clothes as fine as any lady, and dressed how they wished.^a On the other hand, women who weren't harlots would frequently wear the revealing togas of men, dye their hair yellow or red, or wear red and blonde wigs made of slave-hair to look more like the attractive young girls captured from Gaul, Germania, and Britannia. This issue of wantonness is

also dealt with in Roman law:

If anyone accosts young girls, even ones dressed as slaves, he would seem to have committed only a minor offense— and it is even less serious if they are got up as prostitutes and not dressed like respectable matrons. Still, if a woman was not dressed in matronly clothes, anyone who calls out to her or who entices away her chaperon is liable to an action for injustice.^b

Ulpianus doesn't feel a bit sorry for young girls who dress like tramps and foreign slaves, nor is he surprised such would be harassed by ruttish males. We also find that many prostitutes went unregistered to avoid paying the high taxes, and disguised themselves to hide from diligent publicans. Publicans were therefore constantly on the look-out for women who may be unregistered harlots, making it unlikely that Christian women would dress in a way that would attract unwanted legal problems. It clearly took much more than a missing headcovering for a woman to be identified as a harlot by Roman society, and we see that women of the Roman Empire, prostitute or otherwise, so blurred the lines of fashion that there really was no such thing as a hard and fast “prostitute's uniform.” Most ironic and fitting is this quote from John Calvin, a poor theologian to be sure, but an astoundingly accurate sociologist:

So, when it is permissible for the women to uncover their heads, one will say, “Well, what harm in uncovering the stomach also?” And then after that one will plead [for] something else: “Now if the women go bareheaded, why not also [bare] this and [bare] that?” Then the men, for their part, will break loose too. ...So if women are thus permitted to have their heads uncovered and to show their hair, they will eventually be allowed to expose

their entire breasts, and they will come to make their exhibitions as if it were a tavern show... In short, there will be no decency left, unless people contain themselves and respect what is proper and fitting, so as not to go headlong overboard.^c

John Calvin's "Girls Gone Wild" sermon, c. 1540. How did Calvin know what the women of the 20th and 21st centuries would be getting up to? Because unrighteous women blurred the lines of decency in century-one, in century-sixteen, and it still takes baring a lot more than a head to make a girl look like a prostitute.

a. *History of Prostitution; Sanger (Eugenics Publishing, 1937)*

b. *The Digest, 47.10.15.15 (Ulpianus)*

c. *Men, Women and Order in the Church: Three Sermons by John Calvin; Skolnitsky (Presbyterian Heritage, 1992)*

The "Time to Cover" Problem

• Once again, a study of the flaws of the "Which Culture is Best" and the "Apples & Oranges" problems have given us the key to another flaw. Those who teach that Paul was condemning women for looking like prostitutes are ignoring the Bible, which clearly says women only need to cover when praying or prophesying (1 Corinthians 11:5,13). Where is the verse that reads "*But every woman who walks in the way with her head uncovered dishonors her head,*" or the verse that reads "*Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to leave the house with her head uncovered like a prostitute?*" The diligent student has already discerned that Paul makes no mention of daily headcovering customs or prostitutes, but has only associated headcovering to acts of worship.

Apply this logic to 1 Corinthians 11:5 - "*...every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head...*" In reading this statement, would you say Paul is concerned with a woman always covering her head to avoid looking

like a prostitute, or is Paul concerned with a woman covering her head during worship to honor her male authority? One can draw only three logical conclusions from this verse: (1) *Paul didn't know anything about supposed Corinthian prostitution customs, because he never mentions them and advocates a custom that would permit women to go uncovered like harlots outside of worship,* (2) *Paul is aware of supposed uncovered prostitutes, but never mentions them and condones looking like a harlot at any other time but prayer or prophesy, or* (3) *Paul is teaching Corinthians an honorable worship ordinance that has nothing to do with how Corinthian prostitutes may dress.*

The "Source of Shame" Problem

• As was examined in the "Ancient Custom" excuse, Paul gave several timeless reasons why a man should have his head uncovered in prayer and prophesy, and why a woman should cover in the same acts of worship. One of these important reasons dealt with is shame. But is it the shame associated with playing the harlot? Is it the shame of dressing immodestly in the sight of God? Is it the shame of appearing evil or mocking societal decency? No, it is the shame of baldness:

*"For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But **if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.**"*

(1 Corinthians 11:6)

Commentators and commentaries try desperately to confuse the meaning of this verse, claiming "difficulty" and attempting to distract Christians with notions of slave women or prostitutes being bald, associations with cults, or times of mourning for Pagans. This is unscriptural, unsupportable nonsense right from the

devil, obfuscating what is perfectly clear:

shav'-ing (in Job 1:20, gazaz, usually galach; in Acts 21:24, xurao): Customs as to shaving differ in different countries, and in ancient and modern times. Among the Egyptians it was customary to shave the whole body [including the heads of both sexes] (compare Gen 41:14). With the Israelites, shaving the head was a sign of mourning (Dt 21:12; Job 1:20); ordinarily the hair was allowed to grow long, and was only cut at intervals (compare Absalom, 2 Sam 14:26). Nazirites [male and female] were forbidden to use a razor, but when their vow was expired, or if they were defiled, they were to shave the whole head (Nu 6:5,9,18 ff; compare Acts 21:24)^a

There is also a very good chance that some of the women of the Corinth church were slaves, and slaves were regularly shaved by their Greek and Roman masters:

*The slave also assumed the toga or dress of a Roman citizen, **shaved his head** and put on a pileus: this last circumstance explains the expression “servos ad pileuin vocare” (Liv. xxiv. 32), which means to invite the slaves to join in some civil disturbance by promising them liberty. At the time when Gains wrote, the peculiar rights of Roman citizens were of less importance than they had been under the republic. He states that **all slaves who were manumitted in the proper form and under the proper legal conditions, became complete Roman citizens.**^b*

Shaving was something a slave did as a mark of freedom, and there is nothing shameful about freedom! The word “shorn”

is translated from the Greek word *keiro*, meaning cut closely, to shear, as sheep.^c Paul gives the reader two choices: either a woman covers her hair or it gets shorn off like a sheep in spring.

So if there is no evidence that baldness is associated with societal shame, why is shorn or shaved hair shameful? Ask a woman! According to Global Cosmetic Industry researchers, in 2005 women worldwide spent *51 billion dollars* on hair care products. That’s billion with a “b” and it doesn’t count appliances like curling irons or blow dryers, just lotions, dyes, and soaps. Women world-wide love their hair!

- Fashion Magazines are endlessly devoted to articles, photographs, and advertising for hair-care or the latest hair trends of popular culture.
- Women in the American Armed Forces have been allowed to keep long hair when their male counterparts have not.
- Women suffering from diseases or medical treatments that cause baldness and hair-loss frequently employ wigs and hats to hide the symptoms and cover their shame.
- Female celebrities who shave their heads are mocked by comedians as being crazy or “taking drugs.”
- A bald woman is a shocking device used frequently in the comedies and dramas of popular entertainment.

In his excellent book “Wimples and Crisping Pins: Being Studies in the Coiffure and Ornaments of Women,” Theodore Child gives a grand history of women’s love of hairstyles and hair decorations throughout the ages. A woman’s hair is her glory. Shorn hair is shameful for a woman because shorn hair makes her look strange and feel ashamed. Isn’t this what Paul tells us in verses 7 & 15? Does he not confirm that women are a glory to men, and a woman’s

long hair is her personal glory?

This idea that a woman who refuses to wear a covering to pray should be shorn is comparable to Christ's dialog on sinning:

“And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”

(Mark 9:47)

Does Christ advocate self-mutilation, or is He illustrating the seriousness of sin? Paul is clearly saying the same thing— if you can't get a woman to cover normally, then give her the option of going bald and see if she makes the right choice, since women who go bald tend to cover their shame. Two choices are given; a sensible one and a crazy one. For a woman, being uncovered in prayer and prophesy should be as shameful as having her hair shorn:

“But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.”

(1 Corinthians 11:5)

The shame isn't in being associated with prostitution, it's the timeless shame of looking like a “weirdo.” If women come before God in prayer uncovered, they look as shameful to Him as they would to their husbands if they went out with a shaved head. Don't believe a woman would be ashamed to be shorn? If you are a husband that does not believe, offer to shear your wife's hair for her. If you are a woman, go ahead and shave your scalp to prove Paul wrong.

a. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “SHAVING”; Orr (1915)
 b. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, MANUMISSIO; Smith (John Murray, 1875)
 c. *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, “KEIRW”; Vine (1940)

5. “I thought that long hair is the covering Paul writes about.”

Summary: Those who use this excuse believe that Paul indeed wanted women to be covered, but that the covering was long hair, not clothing.

The “Katakalyptos” Problem

• The greatest problem for those who wish to substitute “long hair” as the covering Scripture demands of women is the etymology of the Koine Greek words translated “covered” and “uncovered.” In this passage, Paul utilizes “kata” and “kaluptos” extensively.

The first problem with trying to make hair the covering is the usage of “kata” and “kaluptos.” In both cases, these words are verbs, not nouns or adjectives. Why is this significant? Paul is not speaking of a particular object, including “hair,” but of an action. This means that, despite what is popular to teach, neither “first-century veils” nor “hair styles” are important to Paul, only concealing and revealing the head are important.

Suppose Mary told her daughter, “Cover your head when you go to the hockey game.” Would you think Mary was telling her daughter to have long hair, or was she telling her daughter to put on a warm hat? If this really were a matter of a woman being required to grow her hair long, then there would be no need for words to describe any action other than the growing of hair, which Paul never uses. In fact, he uses the opposite. He declares that uncovered women be shorn (1 Corinthians 11:6), quite a stupid commandment for women whose supposed sin is having short hair. One may as well expect Paul to demand a thief of ten drachma be commanded to steal 100 drachma as a punishment. And when does one stop shaving this woman? Her hair would be man-like again before it would be woman-like.

Women are to “be covered” and men are to “be uncovered.” Being a long-haired woman or being a short-haired woman is not a function of verbs, but of adjectives. As has already been proven several times before, we know that the covering is external, because it is for specific occasions: when a woman prays or prophesies. A woman cannot “cover herself with long hair” when she prays, then “uncover herself” by cutting her hair when she cooks dinner, then “cover herself with hair” again if she wishes to pray before bed. Furthermore, how could a woman with short hair “be covered” in order to be compliant with the epistle? She would need to wait in disobedient and tedious shame until her hair grew enough to be considered “long.” And what of women who cannot grow long hair, for whatever reason? A cloth covering (including a handy towel or blanket) never incurs these sort of problems, and fits the word “*kataluptos*” perfectly.

The second problem to this idea of hair is the usage of the word “*kalupto*” in other places in Scripture. Everywhere in the Bible, when the word *kalupto* (or a derivative) is utilized, it refers to an external object being the object that conceals, whether literal or figurative:

- Matt 8:24 - “...the ship was covered with the waves...”
- Luke 8:16 - “No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel...”
- Luke 23:30 - “Then they will begin to say to the mountains... ‘Cover us!’”
- 1 Peter 4:8 - “...love will cover a multitude of sins.”

Kata means “down” or “about” and *kalupto* means “to hide,” together indicating “hiding down” or “concealment.” This word, although translated as “cover,” is clearly indicating total concealment by some other thing: a light blacked-out by a pot, men totally hidden from sight by mountains, sins obscured by love, etc. This is further

confirmed by examining the Septuagint and contemporary Greek literature. In the LXX [Greek Septuagint], usage of “*kalupto*” (also: “*apokalupto*,” “*katalumma*,” “*katalupto*,” “*kalumma*,” “*krupto*” “*sunkalumma*,” and “*sunkalupto*”) refers to an external fabric covering that totally conceals over 80 times, but never once to long hair:

- Gen 38:15 - “...she had covered her face...” (with a veil - Gen 38:14)
- Exo 28:42 - “...make them linen breeches to cover their nakedness...”
- Num 5:18 - “And the priest shall set the woman before the Lord, and uncover the woman’s head...” (her hair also uncovered)
- Ruth 3:4,7 - “...and you shall go in, uncover his feet...; “...she came softly, uncovered his feet...” (a blanket)
- Est 6:12 - “...and having his head covered...” (his hair also covered)

Plutarch, in his “Sayings of the Romans” (which other scholars quote so poorly), speaks of Scipio the Younger walking through Alexandria “having the garment down the head” (*kata kephales*), meaning that he concealed his head with part of his toga to avoid being recognized by the people. In verse four, Paul uses the exact same phrase: “*kata kephales echon*...” also meaning an object covering the head.

Since this covering is external, hair cannot be the covering; it is a part of the head (Matt 5:36, Luke 7:44, Luke 12:7, Acts 21:24). Hair is always covered when the head is “*katalupto*” (concealed). The contemporary Greek- and Hebrew-speaking translators of the Law and Prophets understood the meaning of *kataluptos* to be an external covering of some sort. Likewise the students of the LXX and Greek-speaking Christians in first-century Corinth would recognize Paul’s usage of the common Greek idiom referring to an external covering, thus precluding long hair

from being the covering in question.

a. Strong's [G2596] & [G2572]; See also: [G2813] & [G2928],

The “Anti-Peribolaion-Komao” Problem

• The primary source of the “Hair as Covering” myth is found in the typical English translation of 1 Corinthians 11:15 - “*But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.*” It is not difficult to see how this reading would lead people to believe that long hair is the covering God expects.

The first problem is the translation of the word “for” in the “for a covering” portion of the verse. When many Christians see the word “for” being used, it is natural to assume it is the same English “for” as found in the statement “for the remission of sins” of Acts 2:38. We are baptized “to be” saved; women were given hair “to be” covered. The New International Version even “helps” us believe this by translating it “as a covering.”

The Greek word translated “for” and “as” in Acts is not the same Greek word found in First Corinthians. In Acts, the word is “*eis*,” but in the Corinthian Epistle, it is “*anti*.” Greek *anti* is a very special word in the New Testament, utilized by the Spirit for one specific task. Words like “anti-Christ,” “anti-type,” “adversary (*anti-keimenos*),” “contradiction (*anti-thesis*),” all speak of conflict and contrast. In the Septuagint, *anti* is most often used in matters of compensation— one object’s value being compared to a different object’s value. *Anti* is a word of comparison, always used to illustrate similarities between different subjects and differences between similar subjects, as a short study will demonstrate.

In Matthew 5:38, Jesus is quoted as saying “...*ophthalmon anti ophthalmou kai odonta anti odontos*,” or in English “...*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*” This was apparently a common teaching for the Jews, meaning when someone caused an eye or tooth to be lost, they also should lose an eye

or tooth as an equalizer. The word “for” is used again in this case, but can someone cause another’s lost eye or tooth “to be” or “as” a missing part? Was Jesus saying “an eye as an eye?” The other man’s eye, once removed, will not return vision to another blinded eye. If your teeth get knocked out, knocking out another man’s teeth will not fill your empty gums. It is clear that *anti* is used in this case to illustrate that there was a perceived compensational value between the different eyes or teeth of the victim and the attacker.

In Ephesians 5:31, Paul is speaking of the church’s relationship to Christ, and he uses *anti* in a very enlightening way. A man and woman becoming one flesh in marriage is *anti* to the body of Christ. The bride and groom of a Scriptural marriage, although fundamentally different from the church, are similar to Christ and His church. It teaches a powerful lesson on how the church is to regard her Head, and how spouses should regard each other. It is seriously doubtful that preachers who teach hair as a covering would teach that a marriage between a man and a woman was given “as” the church.

Our final and most powerful example comes from Hebrews 12:2, where the inspired writer tells us “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.” Once again, the “for” is “*anti*”; Jesus Christ suffered on the cross “for” the joy set before Him. Only by enduring that horrible punishment could Christ later receive that joy he sought for us all. Although almost exact opposites, the joy is compensation for His obedience to the point of painful and humiliating death. Who now will dare to say that suffering on the cross was filling Christ with pain “as” joy? The *anti* teaches here and elsewhere that the value of joy was worth the suffering on the cross as an exchange. Clearly this word is used by the Holy Spirit to show how two very different objects can be related, especially when used

to teach a spiritual principle. The word *anti* placed before *peribolaion* is not meant to mean “to be” or “as,” but “in the place of,” “against,” or “compared to.” The classic French-language “Louis Segond” Bible of 1910 correctly translates the “*anti*” in verse fifteen “...*la chevelure lui a été donnée comme voile,*” or “...*the hair was given to her like a veil.*”

In one last attempt to show the danger of believing *anti* can be translated to mean “as,” please look at the term “anti-Christ” once more. If *anti* allows for an even trade, that would mean an anti-Christ and Christ are equals. That alone should be enough to give a reader pause.

The second problem is related to the first, since they both produce an outcome opposite of the intended message delivered by Paul. The translators have usually made *katakalypto*, which actually means “to hide down,” say “cover” or “veil.” That translation is not a horrible mistake, but the real trouble arrives with the translation of *peribolaion*, which is also written as “covering” or “veil.”

To say the translation of *peribolaion* is misleading is a huge understatement. Students of Greek may recognize *peribolaion* as being similar to *parabole*, our English “parable.” Both *peribolaion* and *parabole* come from two Greek words meaning “something thrown” and “around” or “near.” The word *peribolaion* literally means “a thing thrown around or near,” and is used to describe an article of clothing like a shawl or cloak. Ironically, this is precisely what the English translators of Hebrews 1:12 translate *peribolaion* to be: vesture, mantle, coat, or cloak (strange they forgot how to do this in the Corinthian epistle...). The word *peribolaion* also appears in the Septuagint, always used to describe a cloak (or garment) or figurative garment (Exo 22:26, Deu 22:12, Psa 102:26, Isa 59:17).

So what precisely is this *peribolaion*, or cloak? Archaeology teaches it was a piece of clothing that went over the basic tunic, an

“outer-garment,” so to speak. Although styles of these garments varied by date and the sex of the wearer, they all shared three things in common: (1) a *peribolaion* was a square piece of cloth that protected at least the neck and shoulders (sometimes the back and chest), (2) it added color to the typically plain “inner-garment,” and (3) it was used as a blanket or luggage when traveling.^a

While the Spirit directs us to have our heads “displayed” or “hidden” by using the verbs *akatakalyptos* and *katakalyptos*, He compares the long hair of a woman to a garment which is cast about the body, *not the head*. A *kaluma* (veil; 2 Corinthians 3:13,) and a *peribolaion* (cloak) are two different items with two different purposes, and they are not interchangeable. Yet by use of *anti*, we can see how a woman’s hair, although different from clothing, can be positively compared to a warm and lovely shawl. This makes even more sense when we again compare *peribolaion* with *parabole*. The purpose of a parable wasn’t to conceal, but to complement. By “casting down beside” a parable when teaching, Jesus *revealed* the truth. His parables didn’t conceal the ideas, but instead emphasized them by encouraging scrutiny. The natural cast-around *peribolaion* of a woman doesn’t conceal her glory, it emphasizes it.

Next are the Greek words “*kome*” and “*komao*,” which are mistranslated in the King James and later English versions as merely “hair” and “long hair,” (likely because of the utilization of the Latin translation, which used “*comam*” [“hair of the head”] and “*capill*” [“hair”]^b).

These Greek words for hair are singular to 1 Corinthians and the entire Bible. For centuries, theologians have tried to figure out why nature would teach that long hair on a man is shameful, not bothering to investigate the Greek words.

Everywhere else in Scripture where ordinary male or female hair is meant, long or short (also including the mundane fur of

animals), the Holy Spirit uses “*thrix*” (Matt 3:4; Luke 7:38; Acts 27:34; Rev 1:14). Yet when posing the question of nature’s lesson, Paul asks the reader if “*komaō*” (not *thrix*) does indeed bring shame to a man. What is the difference?

Both *kome* and *komaō* are derived from the Greek word “*komeo*.”^c The following is a list of Greek words derived from this root:

- *komeo* - “care for”
- *komizo* - Luke 7:37 - “bring”
- *kompsoteron* - John 4:52 - “improve”
- *kosmeo* - Titus 2:10 - “adorn”
- *kosmetikos* - “skilled in adorning”
- *kosmios* - 1 Tim 2:9 - “decorous”
- *kosmos* - 1 Pet 3:3 - “arrange”

All of these words are variations on the theme of tending and improvement, so it is no surprise that *kome* has a similar meaning. As Strong puts it, *kome* is “locks, as ornamental, and thus differing from [*thrix*].”^d In fact, by using the word *kome*, there is more emphasis of the ornamental over the hair itself, and *komaō* is nothing more than a verb-form of *kome*, akin to the verb *komeo*.

Because *komaō* is a verb, and not a noun, it is very improper to translate it as such. This verb is written as a *present subjunctive active*, which is better expressed by the phrase “if has **expressed action** hair.” “Long” is an adjective and is thus not accurate. The fact that it is a present tense verb must not be overlooked. The present tense is described thus: The present tense represents a simple statement of action viewed as occurring in actual time. This man is doing something shameful. Why would nature teach us it is a shame for a man to *lengthen* hair? All men do it! Are only balding men right with God? Since *kome* is the basis for this present subjunctive active verb, the only action available is the common action of all *komeo*-based words: *tending, improving, adorning, or caring for, not*

length. Paul could have easily used “*khaite*,” the actual Greek word for long hair, or the present subjunctive active verb-form of this word for having loose, flowing hair. The words used by Paul do not indicate long hair or ordinary hair, but the ornamental hair typical of women. Paul is simply reminding the reader that styled hair looks shameful on a man, but glorious on a woman.

Is it a cause of shame in our culture for a man to have long hair? No, it is often a measure of attractiveness, as it was for David’s son Absalom (2 Sam 14:25). This is true of many cultures, both historical and contemporary:

- *American Indian* - *American Indian men wore long hair before the arrival western influences on their culture. (In Cherokee legends, for example, males said to be handsome were often described as having “**long hair almost to the ground**”^e)*
- *Asian* - *Chinese men adopted a hairstyle in the 1600’s called a queue, basically a long braid. This style lasted well into the nineteenth-century.^f Common Buddhists have long hair.^g Among the Punjab Sikhs, Kesh is the practice of allowing one’s hair to grow naturally as a symbol of devotion to God and lack of worldliness.^h*
- *European* - *In the middle ages, **shorter hair signified servitude and peasantry**. Long hair was often attributed to freemen, such as the Germanic Goths and Merovingians. In Ireland, English colonists who wore their hair long in the back were considered to be rejecting their role as English subjects and giving in to the Irish life. Irishman, in turn, scolded others of their race who moved into English culture by cutting their hair. Thus, hair length was one of the most*

common ways of judging a true Englishman in this period.¹

- Grecian - Spartan men prided themselves upon their long hair, calling it the “cheapest of **ornaments**” (ton **kosmen** adaranotatos).³

As history shows, nature must be a terrible teacher if long hair on a man is so obviously shameful. Yet, if you ask a typical male on the street if it would be a cause of shame for him to have the elaborately styled hair of a contemporary female from his culture, the answer invariably is “yes”:

As we shall see, **the hairstyles of female members of the Imperial family seem to have influenced slave boys' hairstyles that I have characterized as feminized.** It is important to note, however, that these servile hairstyles generally do not copy female coiffures in all details but only adapt certain elements of them... **Feminized servile hairstyles not only clearly distinguished slave boys from freeborn Roman boys but also served to heighten the androgynous look that Greek and Roman men found so appealing...**

As we have seen, his feminized hairstyle is very similar to that commonly worn by slave boys in the later Julio-Claudian period. It is particularly like that worn by slave boys described by Philo of Alexandria in his *De Vita Contemplativa* (A.D. 50-52), written around the time of Claudius. **In his highly moralizing discussion** of the contemporary banqueting customs of the Romans, Philo distinguishes slaves of three different age groups and comments on their appearance and functions at some of the more opulent banquets. He relates the following:

“Those serving are slaves of the most comely form and beauty, so that one might think that they have come not so much to serve as to please the eyes of their beholders by their very presence... having been washed and smoothly rubbed with unguents and with their faces smeared with cosmetics, their lower eyelids painted, **and the hair of their head nicely plaited in some way being tightly bound up.**”^k

These poor boys were not merely “long-haired,” but had hairstyles similar to women. Nature does indeed teach that a man (of any culture) having a woman’s attributes is shameful for him, from coiffure and clothing to sexual behavior, but nature already already taught us this long ago. There is little doubt that Paul would find *this* custom shameful, but it is still not a custom limited to the Ancient Greeks or Romans.

When we take into account the errors of the English translators, we can better understand the passage and eliminate “difficulty.” The English translation of 11:14-15 should properly read:

Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has tended hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has tended hair, it is a glory to her: because ornamental tresses are given to her in place of a cloak.

Why does nature teach us that hair brings a woman glory? Because unlike a man’s hair, her tresses (*kome*) were given to her like a colorful garment, cast around her neck and shoulders by the Creator to give her distinctively feminine beauty. So how does a woman spending hours on beautification honor a man before the Father? Is this the intended purpose of the verb *katakalypto*? No, the decoration of women is never given as a cover in prayer, but it is a good reason to be covered— because a woman should

glorify God when she prays or teaches, not herself. Why is it that in all the decades of American fashion since the 1920's, the modest headcovering has never come into style? Because it hides a woman's glorious hair! By mistranslating these words, a great confusion has been created where there should be none.

- a. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible "CLOTHING"; Beck & Myers (Eerdmans, 2000)*
 b. *A Copious and Critical English-Latin Lexicon...; Riddle (Oxford University, 1850)*
 c. *Strong's [G2865]*
 d. *Strong's [G2864]*
 e. *Cherokee Myths & Legends; Kirk (Tellico Plains Mountain Press, 1999)*
 f. *The Asian Mystique; Prasso, Sheridan (Public Affairs Press, 2005)*
 g. *Magical Hair; Leach (Royal Anthropological Institute, 1958)*
 h. *World Religions; Fowler (Sussex Academic Press, 1997)*
 i. *Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages; Bartlett (Royal Historical Society, 1994)*
 j. *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities, COMA; Smith (John Murray, 1875)*
 k. *The Warren Cup: Homoerotic Love and Symposial Rhetoric in Silver; Pollini (The Gale Group, 1999)*

The "Metonymy" Problem

• Metonymy is another tool of hermeneutics used to understand meanings, very similar to metaphor or allegory. It is defined as a "figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated..."^a and used frequently; the "Law & Prophets" means Scripture (Matt 22:40), the "Body of Christ" means the church (1 Corinthians 12:27), and so forth. So if the proponents of hair as a covering are correct that the covering Paul writes about in the first part of 1 Corinthians 11 is indeed the hair, then metonymy will allow us to exchange "covered" with "long hair," and show an agreement.

*Every man praying or prophesying, having **long hair**, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with **short hair** dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not **long-haired**, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be **long-haired**.*

If "uncovered" means "not having long hair," then men must never have long hair, and women must never have short hair. In order to qualify as "uncovered," woman's hair would need to be equal in length (or shorter) than the hair of a proper Christian man.

That is a real problem: why would Paul command them to shave the heads of women with short hair? If "uncovered" means having the short hair of men who are "uncovered" before God, then that would mean that Paul was commanding women who were already "uncovered" to remain uncovered by shearing or shaving her. What would be accomplished by shaving the heads of women whose sin is not having enough hair? If I find a woman in the church wearing an immodest blouse, should I remove it and expose more of her skin? Paul even says that it is a shame for a woman to be shaved. If long hair is the covering, it would be impossible to shave her AND let her be long-haired at the same time!

If hair is indeed the covering women must have, it is ridiculous to believe Paul would be advocating the removal of it. Metonymy rules that "having long hair" and "being covered" are not logically interchangeable.

- a. *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4E "METONYMY" (Houghton Mifflin, 2006)*
 b. *The Christian Catacombs of Rome; Fasola (Istituto Salesiano, 2004)*

The "Law of Exclusion" Problem

• Many preachers teach soundly on the place of instruments of music in the church of Christ. One of the pieces of logic utilized by these men is called the "law of exclusion." This law simply states that "when God specifies a certain thing to be done, by the act of being specific He excludes all other things never mentioned."^a There are two types of commands which fall under these guidelines, a *general command* and a *specific command*.

A good example of the general and

specific commands is found in Matthew 28:19, where Christ commands his disciples to “go” and “make disciples.” The “going” is a general command, meaning how the men accomplish this task is up to them; by ship, by chariot, by hovercraft, by bicycle, however they can “go” is acceptable, so long as they “go.” On the other hand, Jesus gave a specific command for how He wishes them to “make disciples”: by “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and “teaching them to observe all things” that He commanded them. That excluded the disciples from making more disciples in any other way. We now know, thanks to these principles, that the specific command to “sing” given to the Ephesians and Colossians by Paul (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) excludes adding musical instruments to worshipful singing. Since Paul is also clearly concerned with other acts of worship (prayer and prophesy), we now must apply the same principle here as well.

“...let her be covered.” Paul states that a woman must cover her head. But with what? There is no specific item named as a covering, only that she be covered. This is a general command, akin to “go.” The Holy Spirit used a word that literally means “to hide something with something else.” When speaking of being covered, Paul never says “be covered with a veil.” Indeed, instead of mentioning a covering tied to a specific culture’s fashions, by not being specific, the “something else” which “hides down” is left subject to fashion and styles from culture to culture. The only rules that apply are the ones already established for Christian clothing: it must be modest, inexpensive, and it must hide the head (including hair) during prayer and prophesy. One woman may wear a store-bought woolen shawl, another a tan polyester snood, another a gifted silk kerchief from China, another a homemade denim bonnet, and none need wear a first-century linen veil. Just like “go” excludes only “not going,” the only thing

excluded by “covered” would be “uncovered.”

However, if long hair is indeed the covering prescribed by Paul for proper worship, the requirement is no longer a general command, but a specific command. If you teach that hair is the covering, then all women are to be covered with long hair, and only long hair, during prayer. If men wish to make long hair the covering specified by Paul, then the law of exclusion forbids women from wearing any external coverings during prayer, or having short hair, and those preachers must teach women it is a sin to be covered by clothing in prayer or to have short hair. This also is true for the women with short hair who are to be “shorn or shaven.” If being uncovered with long hair in prayer is a sin for women, then Paul would be teaching them to sin even more by shaving her, since she still lacks long hair, and cloth coverings are forbidden. According to the law of exclusion, it must be long hair only or an external covering only, but it cannot be both.

a. Instrumental Music in Worship to God; Clarke (Self-Published, 19??)

The “How Long is Long” Problem

- One of the biggest problems of teaching long hair to be the covering is the ambiguity of length, that is to say, “How long is long?” Must it be the prevailing societal concept of long? Must it be longer than the men of the church keep their hair? Is it Greek long, or Hebrew long? Just how does one determine length? This sort of problem with the “long hair” doctrine has created unscriptural sects of the Lord’s church who insist women never be allowed to cut their hair, forcing women to have hair to their feet, and there is another problem with this doctrine, as we shall soon see.

Kome means ornamental hair and not long hair. The “long hair” translation is shown to be false, yet there is little doubt

that people will trust in their versions rather than the Word. So for the sake of the discussion, long hair will be the assumed meaning Paul gives. Since the Bible is the first and best way to determine the length of hair acceptable to God, that must be the first place to look.

As has already been established in verse sixteen, Paul says a woman's hair is comparable (*anti*) to a cloak (*peribolaion*). Also established is the description of the *peribolaion*, an article of clothing that covered the neck, shoulders, and back of the wearer. This translation of *peribolaion* is borne by Hebrews 1:12. If this is true, then Paul's meaning is that a woman's hair (unlike a man's) covers her neck, shoulders, and back—like a cloak. According to the law of exclusion, that description would be the only length of hair acceptable as the covering for prayer and prophesying.

Those who teach hair is the covering now have a problem; what to do with the women whose hair isn't that long. It is highly doubtful that there is a single church in the United States where every female member has cloak-like hair. Even if this definition of length is disputed, there is an indisputably large measure of women coming to prayer with hair lengths equal-to or shorter-than men's hair. Teaching that long hair is the covering necessary for prayer while ignoring those women with hair too short to be compliant is hypocrisy. Once again, we have a man with the pretenses of a "double-minded, double-tongued man" (1 Timothy 3:8, James 1:6).

The "History of Commentaries" Problem

- One thing that both Christians and denominationalists have in common is literature. From those taught by inspired men, to the beginnings of the Gnostic and Catholic denominations, and to the various Protestant denominations of today, there comes a wealth of commentaries written on

the subject of 1 Corinthians (and women in general). If one takes the time to study the various commentaries on the subject of headcovering, an interesting fact emerges: the long hair of a woman was *never* considered by any author of a historical commentary to be the covering of which Paul writes. Not Irenaeus, not Tertullian, not Clement of Alexandria, not Hippolytus, not John Chrysostom, not Jerome, not Augustine, not even Knox, Henry, or Calvin. Neither do they ever argue against such a proposition— it simply isn't an issue. Tertullian in fact mocks the women who:

...amid [the recital of] the Psalms, and at any mention of [the name of] God, continue uncovered; [who] even when about to spend time in prayer itself, with the utmost readiness place a fringe, or a tuft, or any thread whatever, on the crown of their heads, and suppose themselves to be covered. Of so small extent do they falsely imagine their head to be!"^a

He shows us that some of the women of his day were placing tokens of the covering upon their heads in a vain attempt to barely keep this commandment, yet none of them ever dared to say long hair was their covering. Some ancient writers speak of the continuance of covering by the Corinthian women even to their time as weight to the passage, others reject the "new" gauzy fabrics in favor of opaque coverings. From the early church and through the centuries, not one commentator in the history of theology can be shown to issue the "hair-as-covering" excuse, nor can one be found disputing it. Not one can be found that is, until the mid-1800's.

Almost overnight, hair as a covering became an issue to be discussed, covered in various commentaries and periodicals. What is so significant about the 19th century that this issue should suddenly arise? Those who study the Industrial Revolution will know

precisely why that time is significant. It is the period in American and European history when women began to organize and demand the political rights of men. How this affected the Restoration Movement is evident in a letter written in 1860 and signed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lydia Mott, Ernestine Rose, Martha C. Wright, and Susan B. Anthony:

The religion of our day teaches that, in the most sacred relations of the race, the woman must ever be subject to the man; that in the husband centres all power and learning; that the difference in position between husband and wife is as vast as that between Christ and the Church; and woman struggles to hold the noble impulses of her nature in abeyance to opinions uttered by a Jewish teacher, which, alas! the mass believe to be the will of God... We now demand the ballot, trial by jury of our peers, and an equal right to the joint earnings of the marriage copartnership.”^b

What a blasphemy against Christ! The suffrage committees were attacking Christ Himself, because He demands wives be something these women were unwilling to be; humble and obedient (Titus 2:3-5). Every commentary that attempts to teach that the covering decreed by Paul was “long hair” has been written in this sort of shrill, atheistic political climate, a climate we endure to this day. In fact, there is a good chance that many female readers will even now bristle at the thought of being “covered” or being a “good wife,” thanks to the godless philosophy of feminism deeply implanted in our modern Western society. Because denominational leaders were worried about the mass exodus of suffragettes from their churches, they began to adjust their doctrines. Yet all the politics and liberal commentaries in the world won’t change the fact that long hair was never offered up as a excuse to go uncovered until

“liberation of women” entered church dialog.

a. *On the Veiling of Virgins, Tertullian/TheWall (160-ca. 230)*
b. *Appeal to the Women of New York; Stanton, Mott, Rose, Wright, & Anthony (Document, 1860)*

6. “I heard that the veil is a symbol of marriage, or that Paul was only worried about male headship.”

Summary: Those who use this excuse believe that Paul is more concerned with a proper marriage relationship than with clothing.

The “Andros Dia Gune” Problem

- Some translations and commentaries have used Paul’s statements about the relationship of men being the head of women to redefine this chapter into a matter of husbands and wives. Ironically, this poor method of interpretation allows Theologian-A to demand headcovering as a universal symbol of wifely obedience to the husband, and allows Theologian-B to advise a women to forgo the covering if her husband doesn’t wish to press the issue. Clearly, there is something wrong with a method that results in two opposite conclusions.

Although “andros” can be translated as “husband,” and “gune” can be translated as “wife,” both fundamentally mean simply “man” and “woman” respectively. How do we know this? Verse 12: “*For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman...*” The only way a husband could come through his wife is if he married his mother! No, this is a matter for all believing men and women.

This sort of misunderstanding is the result of the damage done to our society by feminism, both of accepting it and trying to use proof-text to combat it. Even the worldly women who rebel against their God-given role must answer to male policemen, soldiers, judges, rulers, and ultimately, Christ. There is no such thing as a woman not under the authority of a man; it is her

part in creation. Unmarried girls are under the authority of their fathers or other male guardians (1 Corinthians 7:36-38, Eph 6:2-4), whether the father exercises it or not. Wives are the responsibility of the husbands (1 Peter 3:7; Eph 5:25-28), whether the husband takes it or not. Widows are the burden of sons, grandsons, or sons-in-law (1 Timothy 5:4,16), whether sons bear it or not. All Christian women are the charges of the elders (1 Timothy 2:11,5:1; 1 Peter 5:2-5), whether elders lead or not. This is not an issue of husbands and wives, it is an issue of covering and uncovering in prayer.

The “Uncovered Man” Problem

- Although some may try to make this covering simply a matter of marriage, as in the veil is a symbol of marriage, one large fact is overlooked: men are to be uncovered. One can see a bit of logic in arguing women were trying to pass as unmarried in the assembly, and that Paul would find that unseemly, but where then would the command for men to uncover come into that argument? While it isn't a stretch to associate a veil to a symbol of marriage for a woman, how does a man being uncovered symbolize marriage for him? And if the veil is indeed a symbol of marriage that a woman would need to display to others to show her status, wouldn't that forbid married men from ever wearing a hat for the same reasons? There is absolutely no evidence, Biblical or historical, to support the idea that married men customarily went without headcovering as proof of their marriage, nor is there any evidence women wearing a covering was proof of marriage (men who covered their women covered ALL their women, including the virgins, and the bright-red Greco-Roman wedding veil was only worn during the ceremony, not after). By including men in this statute, Paul has ruined every sort of excuse that tries to make this about first-century wife customs.

Instead, this is something that both Christian men and Christian women do for the reasons given in Scripture, and none other. When reading the Scripture, pay attention to the “since’s,” the “but if’s,” the “because’s,” and the “for this reason’s” to find out why we should do what God tells us.

7. “I was told that Paul gave us the choice to cover or not to cover.”

Summary: Because a single verse reads “judge for yourself,” some believe Paul was giving Christians a choice to cover or not to cover.

The “Righteous Judgement” Problem

- It is incredible how often this excuse is used as a reason not to cover. Why would anyone judge not to cover after reading the many good reasons to cover given by Paul? In fact, that alone is a good enough reason for women to cover; the majority judges not to obey for selfish reasons, despite the spiritual logic given by Christ, and the majority is hellbound! (Matt 7:13-14; Luke 13:24-28) But the final judgement aside, there is a very logical Biblical precedent that proves this passage isn't giving women any option but the one Paul already argued in favor of.

When speaking to the Children of Israel, Joshua also gives the followers of God an “option”:

And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

(Josh 24:15)

What if our hypothetical Mary was an ancient Hebrew given this option, and she followed the same logic as those who

believe Paul gives two equally valid choices in 1 Corinthians 11:13? If she chose to follow the gods of the Amorites, how do you believe God would regard her? If you believe God will save unrepentant idolaters, you are in serious trouble.

After Christ established the church, he sent His disciples out to make more disciples. Upon hearing the gospel being taught at the temple, the Jewish leaders became disturbed and demanded that Peter and John preach no longer in the name of Jesus. The apostles had a response for that command:

Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge."

(Acts 4:19)

So in keeping the same mindset of our uncovered sisters, may we now judge that it is right to listen to men rather than to God? Isn't Peter giving mankind that choice by telling us to judge?

Now here is the best one, saved for last. In 1 Corinthians 10, just a few sentences back from the passage on headcovering, Paul was writing on the topic of idolatry. In giving the reasons to not eat things sacrificed to idol, he writes:

I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

(1 Corinthians 10:15-16)

Well ladies, shall we judge that the cup of blessing is not the communion? That is the consequence of claiming verse thirteen allows a freedom of choice. The rhetorical questions given by these men of God do indeed allow choice, but only one *righteous* choice. So too does verse thirteen allow only

one *righteous* choice: cover your head in prayer and the proclamation of God's inspired word. That is the very essence of Christianity; *making the righteous choices.*

8. "I heard that the churches had 'no such custom' as head covering."

Summary: Since Paul says neither he nor the church have such a custom, some assume this refers to the custom of covering.

The "Parenthetical" Problem

- It should be said, lest anyone confuse the word "tradition" used in verse two with the traditions of mere men, that these traditions include the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20), a tradition from Christ. The Greek word for tradition is "*paradosis*," and it literally means "an ordinance."^a Paul is about to explain one of the basic practices of the church fully, so that the Corinthians might understand and observe it more willingly. Paul is not interested in traditional customs, but is teaching the church. As an example, Paul warns the Colossians against those who would have them follow the philosophical traditions of men rather than Christ (Col 2:8), showing that Christ's traditions are superior ordinances, and are to be observed properly.

Paul proceeds in giving several sound reasons why women should be covered, not the least of which is the order of creation. At this point, Paul tells us in verse sixteen, "*But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.*" Did Paul really make all those sound spiritual and physical arguments for headcovering, only to negate them in just one verse?

Using this verse to claim that the custom of headcovering was not practiced by the churches of Christ is a textbook case of proof-texting, the sinful art of picking verses that seemingly support whatever doctrine

one wishes to uphold.

For example, our imaginary friend Mary has decided that no one needs to repent or be baptized for the remission of sins. She looks for a verse to prove this, and finds one which reads: *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God”* (1 John 5:13). By proof-texting, she has chosen a verse which she claims teaches belief alone is sufficient for salvation. But in so doing, she ignores Luke 13:3-5 and 1 Peter 3:21, which contradict her ideas, thus creating an unsatisfactory doctrine. How does quoting verse sixteen to claim headcovering wasn't a custom of the churches qualify as an act of proof-texting? Because it ignores the verses that come before it, especially verse thirteen.

In verse thirteen, Paul asks, *“Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?”* Paul has started a new thought, going from a lecture on the various reasons why women should be covered to a rhetorical exercise to remind the reader of the physical differences God created between men and women. Verses fourteen and fifteen form a parenthetical statement between the question asked in verse thirteen and an answer given in verse sixteen. We can observe another example of Paul's parenthetical expression from Scripture:

For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also

bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

(Romans 2:12-16)

Paul interrupts that statement with parenthetical facts midway, then finishes the sentence. He does the same thing here. He has a question and he answers it: ***Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ...we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.***

Verse sixteen isn't a conclusion to the entire subject of headcovering, but it is answering the rhetorical question with an argument-destroying fact. “Is it proper for her to pray with her head uncovered?” Paul asks. Are uncovered, praying women proper, yes or no? Paul says that, regardless of however we may judge, allowing uncovered, praying women is a custom the faithful churches of God do not observe.

a. Strong's [G3862]

The “Contentious Ones” Problem

- The word *“philoneikos”* translated as “contentious” means “a lover of strife,”^a that is, someone who makes excuses even though he is wrong because he wishes he were correct. The disciples were given to such a childish “dispute” over which of them was the “best” in Luke 22:24. A good comparison of this behavior would be a spoiled child who noisily and persistently demands a toy, even though her parents have given several logical and reasonable reasons why she cannot have her own way. It is a waste of time to attempt to reason with such an obstinate person (Proverbs 14:16). Just as is the only way to end a futile argument with a spoiled child, the only thing left to do after the logical arguments have been exhausted is rely on the basis of final authority: *“Because I said ‘No!’”* After

giving all the good reasons to cover, and giving the wise men one more appeal to nature, Paul gives his ammunition for those who must deal with the contentious: “Is it a proper custom for a woman to pray uncovered? None of the churches or inspired teachers observe it.” Those who would continue to argue for uncovered women, for whatever reasons, would now know that only one practice was recognized among the churches— faithful brothers uncover their heads and faithful sisters cover their heads in prayer and prophesy. In addition, the practice of uncovered women was rejected by the other apostles and disciples inspired by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 4:9-13,9:5), the only real basis for authority in church practices.

a. Strong's [G5380]

Concluding Thoughts

- The offering of excuses and justifications is not new to sinners. In fact, this was the response to the very first sins of mankind; both Adam and Eve attempted to excuse their own sins before God by blaming another for the transgressions. The Pharisees transgressed nearly every commandment of God, justifying these sins with the artificial doctrines of their Talmud:

[Jesus] answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”; then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with

their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

(Matthew 15:3-9)

The true sin of the Pharisee, no matter what century he lives in, is the failure to abide by the truth. The Pharisees and scribes believed themselves to be experts in the Law. They relied upon tradition and the obedient masses as evidence that they were indeed righteous. They looked to the commentaries of famous rabbis for their guidance. Their excuses and allowances filled volumes.

“Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?”

This paper made no attempt to challenge every excuse people can generate to avoid obedience; there are literally dozens more. At the end of the day, this debate comes down to just one contest: The Bible says women need to be covered, women don't want to cover. Because women don't want to hear it, preachers created these justifications, and more. What could any man possibly say to convince you that it is better to find ways to discard a Scripture than to accept it at face value? What could I possibly say to convince you to stop looking for reasons to avoid doing what the Lord commands, and to start looking for reasons to keep His word?

This paper will no doubt have little influence on the modern Pharisee, if only because evidence has little influence on those who aren't willing to put their own beliefs and behavior on trial. My only hope, albeit slim, is that there are still men and women who will do what the Father commands, without making any excuses.