

# The Head Coverings of 1 Corinthians 11

*Paul K. Williams*



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**By**

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## **Paul K. Williams**

Paul Keaster Williams was born August 12, 1930 in Pomona, California and reared in San Bernardino, 60 miles east of Los Angeles. His mother was a faithful Christian. His father had his faith destroyed while studying at Pomona College, Claremont, but he was a good moral man and a good father. He was a school teacher.

Paul was baptized into Christ when he was eleven years old. Before he finished high school in 1947 he decided to become a preacher of the gospel. He attended San Bernardino Valley College for one year, then spent one year in the army at Ft. Lewis, near Tacoma, Washington.

When he was discharged in August 1949, his high school sweetheart, Helen Orendorff, journeyed to Tacoma where they were married. They then drove to Abilene, Texas where Paul spent three years studying Bible with a Greek minor at Abilene Christian College, graduating in 1952. While there he became very interested in preaching the gospel in South Africa.

From 1952 to 1968 he preached for churches of Christ in Oregon, Ohio and Indiana. In January 1968, Paul, Helen and their five sons went to South Africa. He has been preaching there until the present (2013).

Mr. Williams enjoys writing and has regularly written articles for religious journals. He “rewrote in simple English” Brian Vinson’s commentary on Romans, which is available at religious book stores. He has written a number of tracts, including one on the head covering in 1953. He has conducted debates with a Mormon, Seventh Day Adventists, institutional preachers of the church of Christ, and a Muslim.

For the past 29 years he and his wife have lived in Eshowe, South Africa, where he preaches mostly among the Zulu people. They have five sons, five daughters-in-law, fifteen grandchildren, four granddaughters-in-law, and twelve great grandchildren. All live in America, except one grandson that now lives with him in Eshowe.

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# Introduction

The passage of scripture we are examining in this book has seen various interpretations. The interpretations have changed as society has changed, and now it seems that whatever the interpretation, the conclusion is always the same—women in our society do not have to cover their heads in worship.

I came to the conviction in my early preaching years that the commands of this passage apply to women in worship in all places in all cultures. I have studied much of what has been written on the matter and have had friendly discussions with many brethren. As I have gathered material and examined the different arguments, I have longed for a forum in which these things can be taught and examined. At one time I sought to have a series of articles published in a leading brotherhood paper, but I was not successful.

I reluctantly came to the conclusion that the best way to give brethren access to this material was for me to write the book. So after much labor and prayer, here it is.

I have worked hard to make this book a thorough and careful study of the verses and the various arguments which have been made on the verses. I have tried to keep impersonal; that is, I have not named names. I have also tried to keep from any unfair or prejudicial language. I want this to provoke thought and study, not raise temperatures.

I call your special attention to the transcript of a cassette sermon by David W. Bercot (chapter: *What the Early Christians Believed About the Head Covering*) which is printed here by permission. I draw upon his material in several chapters.

May God bless us all as we study and try our best to follow His will.

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# Chapter 1

## The Text

### 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, King James Version

*<sup>1</sup>Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

*<sup>2</sup>Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. <sup>3</sup>But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. <sup>4</sup>Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. <sup>5</sup>But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. <sup>6</sup>For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. <sup>7</sup>For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. <sup>8</sup>For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. <sup>9</sup>Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. <sup>10</sup>For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. <sup>11</sup>Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup>For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. <sup>13</sup>Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? <sup>15</sup>But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. <sup>16</sup>But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.*

## 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, New American Standard Bible

*<sup>1</sup>Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*

*<sup>2</sup>Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. <sup>3</sup>But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. <sup>4</sup>Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. <sup>5</sup>But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. <sup>6</sup>For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. <sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup>for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. <sup>10</sup>Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup>However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup>For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. <sup>13</sup>Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, <sup>15</sup>but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup>But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.*



## Comments

I hope you have read our text in both the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible. Now I want to give a short commentary on these verses. This will give us a survey of the subject. Many of the topics found in these verses are the subject of further study in chapters of this book. I will reprint each verse here and then comment on it. I am reprinting the verses because it is important that the TEXT govern our study. Let's begin.

***<sup>1</sup>Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. (KJV)***

***<sup>1</sup>Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. (NASB)***

This verse is a fitting close to the discussion of eating meat sacrificed to idols and it is a fitting introduction to Paul's teaching concerning the wearing of the head covering. Both in the matter of eating meat sacrificed to ancestors or idols, and in covering or not covering the head when praying or prophesying, we should follow Paul because he was following Christ. Remember that Paul taught the same in every church. *"For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church."* (1 Corinthians 4:17)

***<sup>2</sup>Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. (KJV)***

***<sup>2</sup>Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. (NASB)***

These "ordinances" or "traditions" are the inspired commandments which came from the apostles. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote,

***"So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." (2 Thessalonians 2:15).***

These are not human traditions, but the practices commanded by the apostles which all the churches must keep. (1 Cor. 4:17).

Thayer's Greek Lexicon states on this word: "objectively, *what is delivered, the substance of the teaching*: so of Paul's teaching, 2 Th. iii.6; in plur. of the particular injunctions of Paul's instruction, 1 Cor. xi. 2; 2 Th. ii. 15."

Albert Barnes writes: "The word does not refer to any thing that had been delivered down from a former generation, or from former times, as the word 'tradition' now usually signifies; but it means that which had been delivered to them; i.e. by the apostles," (Notes on 1 Cor. 11:2, p. 201)

***<sup>3</sup>But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (KJV)***

***<sup>3</sup>But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. (NASB)***

The main subject of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is the head covering. There are several reasons which Paul gives to prove that women are to cover their heads when praying or prophesying and men are not to cover their heads. The first is the order of headship given by God. The Divine order of headship is: God, Christ, man, woman.

It is well to observe that Paul talks about man in general and woman in general. It is not just that the husband is head of the wife, it is that man in general is head of woman in general. This teaching applies to married men and women, and to single men and women—to man and woman.

This makes the subject of the head covering of first importance. The head must be covered or not covered in order to show the proper relationship of Christ, man and woman.

McGarvey and Pendleton write: “Paul settles the humblest difficulties by appealing to the loftiest principles: thus he makes the headship of Christ over man the basis, or principle, on which he decides that the man has headship over the woman, and as we shall see further on, he makes the headship of the man over the woman the principle by which he determines the question as to whether men should worship with uncovered, and women with covered heads.” (*The Standard Bible Commentary*, Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans, p. 109)

John T. Lewis wrote: “I never preach on these verses, but what I try to impress upon the listeners, that if they fail to consider, or comprehend the relationship set forth in verse 3, they will never grasp Paul’s teaching on the following verses.” (*Covered and Uncovered Heads*, p. 27).

From the beginning man was made head of the woman. “*For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.*” (1 Timothy 2:12) Adam named the animals and Adam named the one God created for him “woman”. Naming the animals and naming the woman showed that Adam was head over them. Woman was made to be a “*helper suitable for him.*” (Genesis 2:18)

From the beginning, man has been the head of woman. Adam failed in his headship when he allowed Satan to tempt Eve and when he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil because she gave it to him. He should have been the leader, not the follower.

Therefore Adam sinned because he did not lead, and Eve sinned because she did lead. “*It was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.*” (1 Timothy 2:13). If Adam was not deceived, then he ate the fruit simply because he was following Eve and was not willing to be separated from her. Physical death, woman’s pain in childbirth, man’s labour in order to eat—all these things have come because Adam failed to be the head that God wanted Him to be. Though Eve was the first to sin, the New Testament always refers to “Adam’s” sin. (Romans 5:12-14) He was responsible.

“The relationship set forth in 1 Cor. 11:3, is as unchangeable as the word of God, and will last until the end of time. The covering that symbolized woman’s subjection to man is to be worn when she prays in the assembly as long as this relationship exists!” (*What Did Paul Teach in 1 Cor. 11:2-16?*, William H. Lewis.)

***<sup>4</sup>Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. (KJV)***

***<sup>4</sup>Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. (NASB)***

Commentators are divided as to what the phrase, “*disgraces his head*” means. Is *his head* his physical head, or is it his spiritual head, Christ? Since in the verse before this Paul sets forth the spiritual headship of God, Christ, man and woman, I am of the opinion that when a man prays with something on his head it is a disgrace, or dishonour, to Christ.

It is hard for me to understand how the physical head of a person can be disgraced or dishonoured. (Note: Oster argues that it is the physical head. See his comments on verse 5 in the appendix. He does not explain how one can dishonour one’s physical head). The head Paul is talking about is Christ.

Why is it that when a man prays with nothing on his head he shows that Christ is his head? It is because God has ordered that the headship of Christ over man is to be shown by the man praying or prophesying with his head uncovered. That is all I have to know, and it is all I do know.

In their *Commentary on 1st Corinthians* David Lipscomb and J. W. Shepherd write: “Every man, therefore, who in praying or prophesying covers his head, thereby acknowledges himself dependent on some earthly head other than his heavenly head, and thereby takes from the latter the honor which is due to him as the head of man.” (p. 163)

This was not so under the Old Testament Law. There was nothing which said a man had to pray or prophesy with his head uncovered. In fact, the high priests wore turbans and the priests wore caps (Exodus 28:4,37,40). Christ was not known at that time, and that was probably the reason why there was no command to honour Him by praying or prophesying with heads uncovered. This is a New Testament command to men. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head dishonours his head (Christ).

Note, Paul does not say that this command is restricted to the church at Corinth. He bases the command on the fact of headship and says “every man”.

The phrase “praying or prophesying” occurs here and in verse five, while the word “pray” alone is in verse 13. Notice that Paul joins the two actions with the word “or”. This means that the requirement concerning the head covering applies to those doing both OR either one—either praying or prophesying. It is not necessary for a person to do both of those things before the head covering rules must be followed.

The phrase “praying or prophesying” will be examined in detail in another chapter.

***<sup>5</sup>But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven (KJV)***

***<sup>5</sup>But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. (NASB)***

God’s order for the woman is the opposite from His order for the man. When she prays or prophesies she must cover her head. If she does not, she disgraces her head (man). This means that she must show her subjection to God’s arrangement of headship by covering her head while praying or prophesying. Her action in refusing to cover her head is a statement that she is equal in authority to man. In that case, she is

the same as a woman who shaves her head like a man might do.

Paul does not say that the woman disgraces her *husband*. The teaching applies to all women, whether married or not, for it is God's law that woman in general be subject to man in general. She shows this by covering her head when praying or prophesying.

E. P. Gould comments: "The long hair and the veil were both intended as a covering of the head, and as a sign of true womanliness, and of the right relation of woman to man; and hence the absence of one had the same significance as that of the other" (*Commentary on 1st Corinthians*. pg. 94).

***For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. (KJV)***

***For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. (NASB)***

The word "also" shows that Paul is talking about two coverings—the veil and the hair. If she does not cover her head (with a veil), then she might just as well cut off her hair or shave her head. Let her head be in all respects like a man's.

Lipscomb and Shepherd comment: "It is a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven because it fashions her, to that extent, as a man, and it is God's will, distinctly revealed in the Scriptures, to keep the sexes distinguishable. For a woman to remove her hair is in part to obliterate this outward distinction, and is therefore a trampling under foot God's will. And as further defense of woman modesty and morality, God forbids the sexes wearing each other's clothes: '*A woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for whosever doeth these things is an abomination unto Jehovah thy God.*' (Deut. 22:5)" (*Commentary on 1st Corinthians by Lipscomb and Shepherd*, pg. 164-165).

Albert Barnes writes: “Long hair is, by the custom of the times, and of nearly all countries, a mark of the sex, an ornament of the female, and judged to be beautiful and comely. To remove that is to appear, in this respect, like the other sex, and to lay aside the badge of her own. This, says Paul, all would judge to be improper. You yourselves would not allow it. And yet to lay aside the veil—the appropriate badge of the sex, and of her sense of subordination—would be an act of the same kind. It would indicate the same feeling, the same forgetfulness of the proper sense of subordination; and if that is laid aside, ALL the usual indications of modesty and subordination might be removed also. Not even under religious pretences, therefore, are the usual marks of sex, and of propriety of place and rank, to be laid aside. Due respect is to be shown, in dress, and speech, and deportment, to those whom God has placed above us; and neither in language, in attire, nor in habit are we to depart from what all judge to be proprieties of life, or from what God has judged and ordained to be the proper indications of the regular gradations in society” (*Commentary on 1st Corinthians by Albert Barnes*, pg. 203-204).

Barnes makes a proper distinction between “what all judge to be proprieties of life” and “what God has judged and ordained to be the proper indications of the regular gradations in society.” Paul was able to appeal to “what all judge to be proprieties of life” to reinforce God’s teaching that a woman is to be covered when praying or prophesying.

There are societies where women shave their heads without shame. In fact, modern American society promotes the shortest hair, including shaved heads, for women. This is part of the “unisex” trend, the deliberate attempt to blot out distinctions in dress and behaviour between the sexes. Paul would have a hard time making this argument today in American society. But it was a strong argument in the society of Paul’s time, and has been in most societies since then. It is a shame to women that they want to look like men today. That it is not shameful for a woman to have her hair shorn (“cut short”—Thayer) or to have her head shaved is an indictment on our society. It shows how godless we are becoming. (Read David W. Bercot’s sermon in which he connects the teachings against the head covering with the rise of the

feminist movement.)

*<sup>7</sup>For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. (KJV)*

*<sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. (NASB)*

Man is the image and glory of God, not because he is holy and pure, but because God gave him authority and dominion over all the animals and made him head over woman. Charles Hodge writes: “The only sense in which the man, in distinction from the woman, is the image of God, is that he represents the authority of God. He is invested with dominion.” (*Commentary on 1st Corinthians* pg. 209-210). Man must not cover his head (when praying or prophesying) **because** he is the image and glory of God.

Why? Because God says so. There was no Old Testament command for a man to put off his covering when praying or prophesying. There certainly was no custom among the unbelieving idolaters for a man to pray to God uncovered—they didn’t believe in God! David Oster (see appendix) gives many evidences to prove that Roman men worshiped their gods with heads covered. The reason man’s uncovered head shows that he is the image and glory of God is because God said so.

This point is important when considering whether the head covering command was simply the enforcement of local or universal custom of the time. Heathen custom was the opposite of what Paul here states, and nothing in the law of Moses said a man must have his head bare when praying or prophesying. It is God’s New Testament command.

*<sup>8</sup>For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. (KJV)*

*<sup>8</sup>For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; (NASB)*



The fact that man is the image and glory of God and woman is the glory of man is shown by the way in which God made the two. God made man from the dust of the ground, then He made woman from Adam's rib. (Genesis 2:7, 21-22) When Adam named her "woman" he said, "*because she was taken out of Man.*" (Genesis 2:23) Paul uses this same reason to explain why he commanded "*Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submission. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.*" (1 Timothy 2:11-13) The woman is not to teach or exercise authority over a man, and she is to cover her head when praying or prophesying, for the same reason—that man was first created, and then Eve.

***<sup>9</sup>Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. (KJV)***

***<sup>9</sup>for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. (NASB)***

Paul is still with the creation account. Not only was Adam formed first, but the woman was created to be a helper for Adam (Genesis 2:18), or as Paul puts it here, "*for the man's sake.*" These two facts explain why woman is the glory of man. (v. 7)

***<sup>10</sup>For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. (KJV)***

***<sup>10</sup>Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (NASB)***

This verse is the conclusion of what Paul has argued in verses 8 and 9. Because woman is the glory of man and was created for him, she is to have a (symbol of) authority on her head. This symbol of authority is the covering. It is the symbol that man is her head. (Other interpretations of this phrase have been made, but the majority of commentators agree that the "authority" on her head is the veil, which shows the authority of the man over the woman.)

Thus far the verse is easy to understand. However, the phrase, “because of the angels”, is not so easy. Interpreters have come up with different ideas. McGarvey writes: “To abandon this justifiable and well-established symbol of subordination would be a shock to the submissive and obedient spirit of the ministering angels (Isa. 6:2) who, though unseen, are always present with you in your places of worship (Matt. 18:10-31; Ps. 138:1; 1 Tim. 5:21; ch. 4:9; Eccles. 5:6)”. (*Commentary on 1st Corinthians* pp. 111-112). This seems to be the majority opinion. As Albert Barnes says, “‘A woman in the public assemblies, and in speaking in the presence of men, should wear a veil — the usual symbol of modesty and subordination — because the angels of God are witnesses of your public worship (Heb. 1:13), and because they know and appreciate the propriety in public assemblies.’ According to this, it would mean that the simple reason would be that the angels were witnesses of their worship and that they were the friends of propriety, due subordination, and order; and that they ought to observe these in all assemblies convened for the worship of God.” (pp. 205-206)

MacKnight gives a little different view: “...that remembering their first mother’s seduction by evil angels, they might be sensible of their own frailty, and behave with humility.” (*Apostolical Apostles*, p. 180)

Another reason this verse can be referring to evil angels is that they are being punished because they “*did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode.*” (Jude 6) Women are to keep their proper “domain” in order not to be punished as were the evil angels. This is the view of T. Doy Moyer in his article reproduced in the appendix.

One of the reasons given in I Corinthians 11 for women to wear the covering was “because of the angels” (v. 10). Since the covering was a sign of “authority” (i.e., it symbolizes the authority to which she submits), her not wearing one when praying or prophesying, indicated that she was stepping out of her required role. She needed to think of angels. This is not because they were looking down on her to see what she was doing. It seems more likely that this is referring to the “angels

who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” (Jude 6). As a result, they were “kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (cf. also 2 Pet. 2:4). In other words, he was telling the women to think about what happened to the angels who stepped out of their assigned positions before you think of removing the sign of authority which shows your submission. Keeping our proper places is essential according to the word of God.

The view that angels in the assembly might be tempted to lust by women who were unveiled is, to my mind, far-fetched and impossible.

But whichever interpretation might be right, Paul says that women are to have a symbol of authority on their heads “because of the angels,” NOT because of a custom of idol-worshipping people!

***<sup>11</sup>Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. (KJV)***

***<sup>11</sup>However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. (NASB)***

***<sup>12</sup>For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. (KJV)***

***<sup>12</sup>For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. (NASB)***

These two verses guard against the possible interpretation that woman is inferior to man. Man is born of woman, and all things come from God. Man needs woman and woman needs man. Each has his or her own role, but both are equally precious and valuable in God’s sight. Thus a husband must “*grant her (the wife) honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*” (1 Peter 3:7)

“Paul, in order to add balance to what was previously said, expresses the interdependence of man and woman ‘*in the Lord*’. Outside of the Lord, social convention will rarely realize the scriptural understanding

of God's design and the headship order, because His truths are spiritually discerned and thus foolishness to the natural man (1 Cor. 2:10-16). But '*in the Lord*', where '*Christ is all in all*', His lordship over each sets in order the interpersonal relationships of the members of the Body, causing them to function in their specific place harmoniously, bonding them together in love (Col. 3:15)." (Tom Shanks, p. 17)

It is not true that because one person is in command and another is under him, that the one under the commander is inferior to him. When I was in the army it was made clear to us that when we saluted an officer it was his office we were saluting, not the man. The enlisted man is not one bit inferior to the officer, but he has a different position. He must be in subjection to the officer.

The feminist movement has made a big mistake. They say that whenever a woman is not allowed to have the leading, commanding position, she is being treated as if she were inferior. That is not at all true.

This is best seen in the fact that Jesus is subject to His Heavenly Father. This does not make him inferior to the Father. He had, and has, all the attributes of God (Colossians 2:9). But there is a division of duties in the Godhead. The Father is the planner, the Son is the One who carries out the plan. There is complete harmony, and there is complete EQUALITY. They are ONE. Husband and wife are one when the man exercises his headship by leading the family as God would have it to go, and the wife works together with him to carry out God's will. There is no inferiority at all.

A friend of mine wrote:

The fact that women serve God in a different role in the church is really to serve as a reminder to all mankind as to the seriousness of sin. 1 Tim 2:14. Sin was such a serious breach of man's relationship with God that the first decree that woman would be in submission to man was a direct

result of the first sin of woman. Submission of woman to man was to serve a purpose to remind history of the seriousness of sin, not an indication of the inferiority of woman to man in any moral or intellectual sense. It would therefore seem natural in any discussion of headship that an inspired writer would describe what, if any, outward manifestations (men and women doing something with the covering of their heads when worshipping or praying) of that relationship would be required. Headship and its various injunctions to women all are to serve as reminders to mankind of how significant it was to God of woman's first breach of His holy nature by breaking His law for the first time.

***<sup>13</sup>Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? (KJV)***

***<sup>13</sup>Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? (NASB)***

This is not the first time Paul has used this expression. In 10:15 he writes, "I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say". He follows this with some questions which answer themselves but require "judgment". The spiritual man will agree with what Paul teaches. He will "judge rightly."

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul uses the same approach. After he asks them to judge for themselves whether it is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered, he asks the rhetorical question, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him; but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?" When we answer that question, we can judge correctly whether it is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered.

"Paul challenges the believers to reflect deeply upon the truths and their application which he had conveyed to them. Based upon the important principles he had established, could it possibly be fitting for a woman to pray to God with an unveiled head? He knew what answer

they could only but give, according to his teaching, which had full apostolic authority and was inspired by the Holy Spirit.” (Tom Shanks, p. 18)

When we judge, we must judge by God’s principles, not by the custom of our society or according to our desires. Paul is not telling us that we can judge any way we want to. He is impressing on us the importance of applying the principles he has given in these verses.

There is clear evidence that the culture in Rome and Corinth allowed women to worship heathen gods, even to lead the worship, with their heads uncovered.

“It used to be asserted by theologians that Paul was simply endorsing the unwritten law of Hellenic (Greek PKW) 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...., and the worship of chthonic deities.... But it is quite wrong that Greek women were under some kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public.... The mysteries inscription of Andania, which gives an exact description of women taking part in the procession, makes no mention of the veil. Indeed, the cultic order of Lycosura seems to forbid it.” (G. Kittle, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, comments on the word “katakalupto”—“to cover”.)

Thus Paul was telling them, and us, to judge according to spiritual principles revealed by the Holy Spirit, not by the customs of the society we live in. When these principles are applied, we judge that it is not proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered.

E. P. Gould writes: “*Judge in yourselves*. As we should say, *for yourselves*, instead of depending on the judgment of others. The preposition denotes the inwardness of the act. *Is it comely*, better, proper, befitting—*that a woman pray unto God uncovered?* The one to whom the prayer is addressed is named, in order to indicate the solemnity of the act. They were thus made to feel the incongruity of the

custom. Paul had already made them see the unfitness of the *unveiled head* for woman, its immodesty and unwomanliness, and now, with that impression on their minds, asks if it is proper to pray to God in such unseemly fashion.” (American Commentary of the New Testament.)

***<sup>14</sup>Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? (KJV)***

***<sup>14</sup>Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, (NASB)***

Nature means the “natural” sense of what is right or wrong. This sense comes from what is learned from custom and the long experience of mankind.

Albert Barnes writes: “The word nature (*phusis*) denotes evidently that sense of propriety which all men have, and which is expressed in any prevailing or universal custom. That which is universal we say is according to nature. It is such as is demanded by the natural sense of fitness among men. Thus we may say that nature demands that the sexes should wear different kinds of dress.... Such are in general the customs the world over; and if any reason is asked for numerous habits that exist in society, no better answer can be given than that nature, as arranged by God, has demanded it. The word in this place... refers to a deep internal sense of what is proper and right; a sense which is expressed extensively in all nations, showing what that sense is. No reason can be given, in the nature of things, why the woman should wear long hair and the man not; but the custom prevails extensively everywhere, and nature, in all nations has prompted to the same course.” (pg. 207-208)

So the natural sense of what is proper tells us that a man should not have long hair. This is not just custom—it is “nature”, something deeper than custom.

***<sup>15</sup>But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. (KJV)***

***<sup>15</sup>but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (NASB)***

Long hair is a shame for a man, but a glory for a woman. This “natural” covering was given by God as an indication that it is proper for the woman to wear an artificial covering. Her long hair is a natural veil as well as her beautiful ornament. And since God has given her this covering, it is reasonable and proper for her to wear an artificial covering when praying or prophesying.

Paul mentions the length of hair in order to teach about the artificial covering, but what he says tells us that the length of hair is important. Men are to have “short” hair, and women are to have “long” hair. “Long” is not defined, so we have to apply it in our own culture. Certainly it means that men are to keep their hair shorter than women keep theirs, and that women should not cut their hair short like men do.

***<sup>16</sup>But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God. (KJV)***

***<sup>16</sup>But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. (NASB)***

The King James Version is the literal translation, while the New American Standard is an attempt by the translators to give the sense without following the literal Greek words. What the NASB says is the exact truth, and we shall see that this is what the literal words mean when they say, “*we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.*”

Do not make the mistake which some have made. Do not conclude that Paul is here saying that it makes no difference whether women pray or prophesy with heads uncovered. Paul has given reason after reason for a woman to cover her head. He does not then say that it makes no difference!



The Williams translation says: “But if anyone is inclined to be contentious about it, I for my part prescribe no other practice than this, and neither do the churches of God.”

The Moffat translation says: “If anyone presumes to raise objections on this point, well, I acknowledge no other mode of worship, and neither do the churches of God.”

The Revised Standard Version translates: “If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.”

There are two possibilities as to what the custom was. It can be either, “we have no such custom as requiring our women to pray with heads covered,” or “we have no such custom as allowing our women to pray with heads uncovered.” Paul has made it clear that women DO have to cover their heads when they pray or prophesy. He is here reinforcing that rule by telling the Corinthians that all the churches of God have the same practice. “*The churches of God*” do not have the custom of allowing women to pray with heads uncovered.

Thus, Paul is showing that his commands to the Corinthians were the same as he taught in all the churches (1 Corinthians 4:17) and were followed by all the churches.

When you read the sermon by David Bercot (Chapter ) you will see that from New Testament times onward Christians in ALL the churches followed the practice of requiring women to be covered in worship. The practice of the early church (before A.D. 200) shows clearly that this WAS a practice of all the churches. Therefore Paul is saying in this verse that “we have no such custom as allowing women to pray with heads uncovered,” or as the NASB translates, “we have no other practice” than to require women to pray with heads covered.

Here are the comments of J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton: “Knowing the argumentative spirit of the Greeks, and being conscious that it was likely that some would even yet want to dispute the matter,

despite his three reasons to the contrary, Paul takes it entirely out of the realm of discussion into that of precedent. The settled and established practice of the church had from the beginning followed the course outlined by Paul, which showed that other apostles beside himself had either established it by rule, or endorsed it in practice. In this appeal for uniformity Paul makes it clear that all churches should strive to make their practices uniform, not variant.” —*The Standard Bible Commentary*, Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans, p. 113.

Some have said that the custom which Paul says the churches do not have is the practice of being contentious, or disputing. Godet writes, “I cannot understand how eminent critics, such as the old Greek expositors, then Calvin, deWette, Meyer, Kling, Reuss, Edwards, would imagine that the custom of which the apostle speaks is that of disputing! The love of disputation is a fault, a bad habit, but not a custom.... The only custom of which there can be any question here is that on which the whole passage has turned: women speaking without being veiled. Paul means that neither he, nor the Christians formed by him, nor in general any of the churches of God, either those which he has not founded or those properly his own, allow such procedure in their ecclesiastical usage; compare ch. 14:36-47, where the idea simply indicated here is developed”. (II:121-132)

Adam Clarke paraphrases the verse this way: “If any person **sets himself up** as a wrangler—puts himself forward as a defender of such points, that a **woman may pray or teach with her head uncovered**, and that a man may, without reproach, have long hair; let him know that we have no such custom as either, nor are they sanctioned by any of the Churches of God, whether among the **Jews** or the **Gentiles**.” (VI: 253-254)

G. G. Findlay writes: “Verse 16 closes the discussion sharply, with its appeal to established Christian rule. If, after all the apostle has advanced in maintenance of the modest distinction between the sexes, any one is still minded to debate, he must be put down by authority—that of Paul himself and his colleagues, supported by universal Christendom: cv. 14:33, 37 ff”. (*The Expositors Greek Testament*, Vol. 2, pg. 876).

“Not the custom of contentiousness, but that of women speaking unveiled. The testimonies of Tertullian and Chrysostom show that these injunctions of Paul prevailed in the churches. In the sculptures of the catacombs the women have a close-fitting head-dress, while the men have the hair short.” (*Vincent’s Word Studies*, III:248)

James MacKnight’s paraphrase is this: “Now if the false teacher resolves to be contentious, and maintain that it is allowable for women to pray and teach publicly in the church unveiled, We in Judea have no such custom, neither any of the churches of God.” (*Apostolic Epistles*, pg. 180)

## Chapter 2

### Headship : vs. 3-10

The subject of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is the head coverings of men and women when praying or prophesying. One of the main reasons Paul gives for these instructions is that the head covering or lack of covering shows headship or subjection. Verse 3 says: *But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.* He then explains that when a man prays or prophesies with *something on his head, he disgraces his head.* (v. 4) On the other hand, the woman *disgraces her head* when she *has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying.* v. 5. The head coverings are designed to show the proper relationship between man, woman, and Christ.

The following article by Brother T. Doy Moyer does not directly answer the question about whether a man today may please God by praying or preaching while wearing something on his head, or whether a woman can please God by worshiping bare-headed. But it deals very carefully with the subject of headship in our text. For this reason I reproduce it here. Please read.

## What Does 1 Corinthians 11:3 Teach About The Role Of Women?

**T. Doy Moyer**

1 Corinthians 11 has been surrounded by controversy due to the teaching about the covering. It is not the purpose or scope of this article to try to expound a pro or con position on the covering today. Women do need to carefully study the passage for themselves and make thought-out decisions as to what they will practice. It is certainly not a passage that can be overlooked without serious consideration. This

article will focus more on the role of women as taught in verse 3. The wearing of the covering for the women when praying or prophesying was to demonstrate their submissive position. It is the submissive role itself that we want to briefly consider.

“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

In the midst of the problems that the Corinthians were having, it appears that they also had a problem with order among men and women. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 indicates problems even within the assembly with women inappropriately addressing the assembly or interrupting with questions. This violated their given role to “quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness” (1 Tim. 2:11). Even women with prophetic abilities were not to violate their submissive position to take the lead over men. The apostle is very explicit in the order given. We no more have a right to change this order around than we do to change around the order of what is required for salvation.

### **Stepping Out of the Role**

Terrible consequences come when we step out of our given roles. A woman who did not wear a covering within this context disgraced her head (v. 5). She was “one and the same with her whose head is shaved,” something they would have understood to be a great disgrace to women. Women who think that they are demonstrating their “independence” and acting in their own self-interests when they reject God-given submissive roles are, in reality, disgracing themselves. It is no great dignity for a woman to try to take the headship away from the man. She does not “fulfill her potential” when she usurps authority over men. She was not created to lead man. Thus, when she attempts to do so, she greatly harms her divine station in life. Contrary to popular opinion, the role of the woman as shown in Scripture is not a shameful position to be in. In fact, it is a position of honor and esteem. For example, to hear people degrade women who stay home to raise their children is distasteful to a mind thinking on godly values. Rather, we

need to realize what a great honor it is for a woman to be in the position in which God has put her (cf. Tit. 2:4-5).

Verse 9 teaches that woman was created “for the man,” as Genesis teaches. She was made to be a complement to the man, not a hindrance. Feminism, which in essence seeks to break all ties with “man,” has hurt, perhaps more than any movement, the honor and glory that rightly belongs to a woman who gracefully submits to the will of God (cf. Prov. 31:10-31). She was created to be a companion and helper, not a threat and challenge to the man.

One of the reasons given in I Corinthians 11 for women to wear the covering was “because of the angels” (v. 10). Since the covering was a sign of “authority” (i.e., it symbolizes the authority to which she submits), her not wearing one when praying or prophesying, indicated that she was stepping out of her required role. She needed to think of angels. This is not because they were looking down on her to see what she was doing. It seems more likely that this is referring to the “angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode” (Jude 6). As a result, they were “kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (cf. also 2 Pet. 2:4). In other words, he was telling the women to think about what happened to the angels who stepped out of their assigned positions before you think of removing the sign of authority which shows your submission. Keeping our proper places is essential according to the word of God.

Men and women are dependent upon each other (v. 11). Therefore, it is vital for us to recognize our proper places and stay there. The battle existing between men and women is only further aggravated when we try to reverse or ignore the roles. Even “nature” teaches a difference between men and women (vv. 14-15). It is a tremendous curse on our society that these differences are not respected as they should be. When men look and act like women, and women look and act like men, we are shamed and reproached.

## Meaning of Head

The word head (*kephale*) refers to “that which is uppermost in relation to something”(Zodhiates 860). When used of persons, it is “the head, chief, one to whom others are subordinate” (Ibid.). “In the case of living beings, to denote superior rank” (Bauer 430). “A figurative extension...one who is of supreme or pre-eminent status, in view of authority to order or command - one who is the head of, one who is superior to, one who is supreme over”(Louw & Nida 739). When it says that “man is the head of woman,” it is saying that, in terms of authority, man has the higher position. This clearly puts man in the leadership position. For a woman to resent this and attempt to step out of her role is to disrespect God. This is not the result of some male-dominated society and chauvinistic apostle. This is the inspired teaching of God, and it must be respected.

One question that arises is whether or not this is speaking only of the husband and wife relationship. Some women will say that the only man they have to submit to is the husband. However, there is nothing in this context limiting the relationship to only husbands and wives. It says, “man is the head of woman.” If “man” here is “husbands only,” then does it also mean “husbands only” when it says “Christ is the head of every man”? If “every man” extends beyond husbands, then on what grounds does it become “husbands only” within the very same sentence? The general relationship is that man has authority over the woman. This is exactly what 1 Timothy 2:11-14 teaches. This does not mean that a man has a right to enter another man’s home and boss that man’s wife around. It does not mean that men generally can “command” women to be at their “beck and call.” It simply means that God has placed man in the leadership role, and women are to follow this lead, not attempting to usurp authority over men.

A second question over this verse comes with the word “head” itself. Some are teaching that the word “head” means “source,” and does not refer to authority. What is the point of defining the word this way? If it is to say that man does not have the position of authority, there are many other passages to be reckoned with. Furthermore, if “head”

means “source,” and refers to the creation, then what does it mean when it says, “God is head of Christ”? Does it mean that somehow Jesus was created? The same word is used in referring to the husband and wife relationship in Ephesians 5:23. Is the husband the “source” of the wife? Defining the word this way creates more problems than it solves. The idea of “head” is clearly authority.

### **The Nature of the Authority**

Men need to understand the nature of their authority. Is 1 Corinthians 11:3 describing a relationship where man has tyrannical rule over the woman? Not at all. Man does not have a right to force a woman into submission or dangle it over her head to get his own way. This is contrary to the teachings of Christ and the example that he himself left for us (cf. Phil. 2:3-8). A man is overstepping his bounds if he acts this way; and, to be sure, plenty of men have done this. Nor is this passage saying that man is better than woman. A man is no more human or godly than a woman is. This is simply an order of authority that God has put into effect.

The nature of this authority is loving, considerate and decisive, just as God has demonstrated toward us. It does not give man a right to “lord it over” women (cf. Matt. 20:25-28).

Consider the relationship between Jesus and the Father. The Bible teaches that Jesus himself is God, equal in nature to the Father (Jn. 1:1; 5:17-24; 10:30; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1; etc.). Even so, Jesus took on a role of submission under the Father. This did not change his equality in nature; he simply acted in a different capacity than the Father. Likewise, men and women are equal in terms of human nature. But God has given them different roles. This does not mean one is more or less important than the other. Both roles are vital for the proper functioning of society, the home and the church. We must respect God’s order. Man is to be the leader. He should respect the woman and try to make it pleasant for her to follow his example. The woman is respectfully to submit to the lead of the man.



In the church, men are to be leaders. Modern thinking has opened the door for women to take major leading roles in churches (i.e., preachers and “elders”). We will find real trouble very soon if the truth is not taught and upheld in this age. Though the biblical teaching about the roles of men and women is despised by the modern worldview, our efforts as Christians must be to please God (cf. Gal. 1:10). To place women in positions of equal authority to men in the church is to violate the Scriptures. Feminism has no place in the church of God. Our thinking on this matter needs to be dictated by God, not by political correctness.

Men need to be leaders in the home. Some men relinquish their responsibilities to the wives – some let their wives take over. Either way, God’s order has been violated. Men need to wake up to their obligations and lovingly lead their families in the ways of God. Unless the home reflects the godly order of leadership, the church and society both will suffer.

## **Conclusion**

The bottom line is that 1 Corinthians 11:3 teaches that men are in the position of leadership, and women have the role of submission. A man’s attitude should be, as Christ, to be a loving leader, providing a good example and godly spirit. A woman’s attitude should be that she willingly submits and follows the lead. Man is not to put her in submission, and woman is not to despise submission. When God’s way is respected, the home, the church and the nation will prosper. Let us therefore seek to fulfill the will of God even against the prevailing backdrop of feminism today. It matters not what “they” say. Only what God says matters.

–Guardian of Truth, Feb. 2, 1995

## Chapter 3

### Custom

In the years before e-mail a leading gospel preacher wrote a bulletin article in which he asserted that the custom in New Testament times was for a woman to veil herself in public, and that if she appeared in public with her head uncovered she would be considered a harlot. I wrote the preacher asking for evidence of his assertion and told him that I had researched the matter and found no such custom. I did not receive a reply to my letter.

A brother recently wrote, “There is a difference in teaching a custom and teaching how to deal with an existing custom. The principles Paul set forth in the first part of 1 Corinthians 11 concerning headship would make it imperative that Christians at Corinth do nothing that would deny those principles. To ignore the custom would bring shame on man. That is not the case in our society. ‘We have no such custom.’”

This oft-repeated and almost universally-believed story is simply a fable! Though I have read this assertion in commentaries, when I look for the evidence to prove that women were required to cover their heads in public I cannot find it! In fact, there is wide-spread and easily-available evidence to prove the opposite! Let us examine the arguments from custom both from what Paul says and from the evidence we have of what customs concerning veiling were at that time.

#### **Two different positions of those who believe Paul was only regulating custom.**

There are two arguments based on custom which attempt to set aside the necessity for women in all cultures and times to cover their heads in worship, and for men to have bare heads. These arguments are the exact opposite of one another, yet they both arrive at the same conclusion. The conclusion is that where there is a strong custom that women must veil themselves in public, Christian women must conform

to this custom and veil themselves. However, where there is no custom requiring women to be veiled in public, it is not necessary for Christian women to be covered in the worship.

### **Position 1: A general custom**

The first and more generally accepted assertion is that Paul was enforcing a custom which was general throughout the first century world. Since it was customary for women to veil themselves in public as a matter of modesty, it was necessary for Christians to conform to the custom. It is not right to scandalize the world by behaving or dressing in a way that the world finds immodest or offensive. This interpretation understands verse 16 to mean that all churches required their women to veil themselves in worship.

R. Fox uses that reasoning concerning the man's covering. He writes: "A general principle to govern all styles in all ages is established here. Its application may be demonstrated in our attitude toward a man wearing a woman's dress. The shame is in the fact that a 'dress' is an article of clothing characteristic of woman. That is the only reason we object to a man wearing one. A man with his head covered was objectionable then for the same reason." (A Discussion of First Corinthians 11:2-16).

(However, that idea is refuted by Oster [see quote later in the chapter] who proves that Roman men worshipped with heads covered, and by much evidence which shows that men quite often covered their heads in public. There was nothing effeminate in a man's covering his head, whether in worship or in other situations.)

Probably a majority of our brethren take the position that Paul was telling the Corinthian brethren to conform to the custom of the ancient world. Mike Willis, in his *Truth Commentary* on 1 Corinthians writes:

***"We have no such custom. The term sunetheia only occurs here and in John 18:39 in the New Testament; it***

*means ‘an established custom, usage, or habit.’ In John 18:39, it is used to refer to the general practice of the Roman ruler to release one of the Jewish prisoners on the Passover. The law did not require him to do so, but the gesture of good will had become customary. In this passage, *netheia* refers grammatically, not to the fondness of strife mentioned earlier in this verse, but to the practice of women wearing veils. Hence, the wearing of the veils was not a divine law but a custom! Paul plainly calls it a custom in this verse.*

*“Neither the churches of God. The universal custom in Paul’s day was for the woman to wear the veils. The different local congregations all observed the custom. The lesson from this is that the Christian should not ignore the customs of his day but should observe them as much as possible.” (Pg. 308)*

## **Position 2: A local custom only**

The second position is based solely on a peculiar interpretation of verse 16 which says in the King James Version, “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” These brethren understand this verse to say that Corinth was the only church where the women were required to cover their heads in worship, while the other churches of God did not require it. According to this interpretation, there was a local custom at Corinth which required women to cover their heads while praying or prophesying, but this custom was not found anywhere else. This position requires Paul to be saying that no woman in any place except in the Corinthian area needed to be covered, in spite of all the reasons from headship, the angels, etc. which Paul so carefully gave.

The ones who believe that the custom was merely local to Corinth usually do not attempt to give any evidence from history, paintings, sculpture, or archaeology for their assertion. Some make general

arguments from what they consider Biblical principles. But mostly they simply assert that verse 16 means that the practice of requiring women to cover themselves in worship was not followed by any other church.

I did run across this assertion in an online discussion on Markslist, 6 March 95. This statement is ascribed to Basil L. “Skip” Copeland:

“In Roman society, the MEN wore the veil when they prayed! Here, though, in a society influenced by Greek culture, it was the women wearing the veil.”

Skip does not give any documentation for this statement.

Skip’s argument is that the women at Corinth believed that in Christ there should be no difference between men and women, “like the angels”, and therefore they had the right to pray or prophesy with heads uncovered. But since we shall be like the angels only when we get to heaven, Paul is saying that the women at Corinth must conform to the custom which shows that man is the head of woman. Skip’s conclusion, like that of most who make the custom argument, is that where women understand their proper position in regard to men, and where there is no custom of veiling, the women do not have to cover their heads when praying or prophesying.

J. W. McGarvey makes a similar assertion in his commentary: “The Jew and the Roman worshiped with covered, and the Greek with uncovered, head.” He does not give any documentation, either.

If it is true, the position that Paul was telling the Corinthians to conform to local custom has some support. But I have not been able to find evidence for a difference in customs, and IF IT WERE TRUE, IT WOULD NOT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE! Paul does not base his teaching on custom. Consider especially the section in this chapter subtitled, *The Achilles heel of the custom argument*.

However, the vast majority of older commentators take the position that the custom which Paul did not have, neither the churches of God,

was the custom of allowing women to pray or prophesy with heads uncovered. The word “custom” therefore means “practice”, and does not refer to what was culturally acceptable or unacceptable.

The New American Standard Bible translation reflects this position: “But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” (Note: the NASV does not give the literal translation of the Greek when it says, “we have no other practice”, but it is correct in using the word practice for the word translated “custom” in the KJV.)

### Evidence of the customs

It is not necessary to understand the customs of the time in order to understand the teaching of our passage. It should be clear to the unbiased reader that Paul is giving clear commandments based on headship. He appeals to the judgment of the Corinthians only after he has taught forcefully on the question. The argument about custom does not come from the text.

However, when we look at the evidence of the customary practices of the people in Paul’s time, we cannot find evidence either that there was a universal custom which would require women to cover their heads when praying or prophesying, or that there was a local custom at Corinth contrary to the universal custom followed elsewhere. However, since the custom argument seems to be the most generally believed, and there are strong assertions that custom required the women of Corinth to be covered, it is in order for us to look at the evidence.

What David W. Bercot experienced in the denominations is what we often hear from gospel preachers. He says:

For example, when I was in a liberal church, I remember the pastor saying, “Back there in the first century, to come to church without a veil on your head would be the equivalent of today a sister coming to church without a

blouse—coming topless—or something like that. It was just a shocking scandal, and the women were doing this in Corinth so Paul writes to address that. In other words, it was shocking because of their culture, and so they needed to follow their culture. But since our culture doesn't expect women to wear a veil in public, we don't have to follow that either." But the pastor said the principle still applies. It would be wrong for a woman to come to church in a bathing suit, or something like that. That would be shocking to people.

OK. When I was in a so-called Bible-believing evangelical church I was told that, "Back in Corinth, the only women who didn't go around with a veil on were prostitutes. And so Paul was giving his counsel so that the women there would not be mistaken for prostitutes, or cause disturbance in the community because they were there without being veiled." (Sermon found in the Appendix)

A less extreme statement is found in the Pulpit Commentary: "For a woman to do this in a public assembly was against the national custom of all ancient communities, and might lead to the gravest misconceptions. As a rule, modest women covered their heads with the *peplum* with a veil when they worshipped or were in public". (Vol. 19, p. 362)

Adam Clarke writes: "...it was a *custom*, both among the Greeks and Romans, and among the Jews an express *law*, that no woman should be seen abroad without a *veil*. This was, and is, a common custom through all the east, and none but public prostitutes go without veils." (comments on 1 Cor. 11:5)

James Macknight writes: "Women being put in subjection to men, ver. 2, ought in the public assemblies to acknowledge their inferiority, by those marks of respect which the customs of the countries where they live have established as expressions of respect."

Bro. J. W. McGarvey seems to recognize that the customs differed from place to place. He writes: “The Jew and the Roman worshiped with covered, and the Greek with uncovered, head.”

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says: “In NT times, however, among both Greeks and Romans, reputable women wore a veil in public...and to appear without it was an act of bravado (or worse); Tarsus, St. Paul’s home city, was especially noted for strictness in this regard.” (Article on “*Veil*”, p. 3047).

As can be seen, these men do not completely agree as to what the customs were. And when they tell about the practice of veiling in New Testament times, what they say is virtually without proof. They have almost no contemporary evidence of what they say.

We can say that in many places there was the custom of women generally veiling themselves in public as a sign of modesty. In some places this custom was very strict, in other places not so. At the time of Paul, it was certainly not universal. In Rome or Corinth it was common for a woman to appear unveiled in public. It is nonsense to say that a woman in Corinth who appeared without a veil was considered to be a prostitute!

Jimmy Short writes: “We have searched through as many museums, art books and encyclopedias as we have had opportunity to do, and have yet to find one single instance of a ‘veiled’ woman in Greek paintings and sculptures. If ‘veiling’ were such an important part of Hellenic culture, why is it not reflected in the art of the Greeks?” (From letter from Mrs. Margaret Short)

Bercot also examined the evidence. He said in his sermon printed in the Appendix:

“We have a lot of paintings. The paintings are mainly frescoes, which are paintings on wall made on wet plaster. And we have lots of sculptures of Greek and Roman women. There are numerous ones around the world, and



even if you can't visit all the places where they are, the pictures of these frescoes and of these statues are in all kinds of books. I've seen many of them with my own eyes in the British Museum where there are many articles there. And it is clear when you look at them that it wasn't scandalous for a Greek or Roman woman to appear without a veil because in so many of these pictures they are not wearing a veil."

Tertullian of North Africa made this observation (Vol. 3 page 95 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers): "Among the Jews, so usual is it for their women to have the head veiled, that they may be thereby recognized." This shows that in A.D. 200 there was a difference in the way Jewish women appeared in public and the way other women did. The Jewish women veiled themselves, whereas other women did not always do so. There was, therefore, no universal custom that women had to be veiled.

In about 195 A.D. Clement of Alexandria wrote: "It has also been commanded that the head should be veiled and the face covered, for it is a wicked thing for beauty to be a snare to men. Nor is it appropriate for a woman to desire to make herself conspicuous by using a purple veil." (Vol. 2 page 266 of the Ante Nicene Fathers.) The reason Clement gives for veiling was modesty. Whether this practice was predominant in Alexandria cannot be gleaned from this passage, but from what Tertullian wrote, who lived at the same time and place, it appears that it was not. Note that Clement makes a difference between veiling the head and covering the face.

G. Kittle writes in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*:

"It used to be asserted by theologians that Paul was simply endorsing the unwritten law of Hellenic (Greek) and Roman 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..., and the worship of chthonic deities.... But it is quite wrong that

Greek women were under some kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public.... The mysteries inscription of Andania, which gives an exact description of women taking part in the procession, makes no mention of the veil. Indeed, the cultic order of Lycosura seems to forbid it... Hence veiling was not a general custom; it was Jewish.”

“Paul is thus attempting to introduce into congregations on Greek soil a custom which corresponds to oriental and especially Jewish sensibility rather than Greek.”

*(Comments on the word “katakalypto”—“to cover”.)*

But Paul does not say, “Veil yourselves when praying or prophesying in order to be modest.” He gives a specific reason, “In order to show that man is your head.” He did not tell women to veil themselves in public in order to be modest.

An essay by Richard Oster entitled “When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4”, *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 34, 1988, pp. 481-505, says that a wealth of ancient literary and archeological data show that it was a Roman custom for both men and women to pray with their heads covered. This was a part of all Roman worship, including “sacrifice and augury.” He says that since Corinth was a Roman colony and that there was a strong Roman influence there, that men were praying with heads covered in the Corinthian church.

“1 Cor. 11.4-5 states the occasion for Paul’s advice and what these undesired practices were. Specifically, while praying and prophesying some men were wearing head coverings and some women were not. According to Paul these practices should be reversed, since in his judgment the semantic [“relating to significance or meaning”] significance of men covering their heads during worship was antithetical [“directly opposite”] to the male ‘headship’ affirmed in 11.3.” (p. 504)

If this was true, Paul was NOT telling the Corinthians to follow custom. He was telling them to do the OPPOSITE of prevailing custom.

### **The custom argument and women preachers**

Ken Craig in a private letter to me made some astute observations. He wrote:

“I would like to share one thought with you on the covering for your comment or consideration that I think reflects a lack of consistency in how brethren treat 1 Cor. 11, particularly the “cultural” argument. I notice that when we discuss with evangelicals or others the New Testament injunctions about women’s roles and participation in the New Testament, the substance of our argument is that Paul went all the way back to Genesis to explain that the basis for these injunctions was not cultural but had a scriptural basis from the beginning. In other words, there may have been a cultural or custom component to women’s roles in New Testament times, but the cultural component was driven by and reflected a scriptural injunction and basis going all the way back to God’s original plan.

“But here is the inconsistency, I think. Isn’t this exactly what happens in 1 Cor. 11? Paul first explains that the basis for the whole discussion goes back to the foundational principle of headship and authority. In this manner the covering (as well as men having long hair, etc.) is just an application of a fundamental, long-standing biblical principle. Sure there is an appeal to culture as well, but where did culture obtain the practice to begin with? In this manner I believe brethren attack women’s roles as leaders in the church using an argument and principle that they then fail to apply in 1 Cor. 11.

“I have begun to notice among the evangelicals more and more reference to 1 Cor. 11 and the use of the veil. It is used in defense of the movement to have women teachers and preachers in the church. Their argument goes like this: ‘Look, we all see in 1 Cor. 11 that women in New Testament times were to have their heads veiled [they either recognize that this IS what the passage teaches or they are using it accommodatively] and we don’t practice that any more because it was just a custom. Why is that any different from other things the New Testament teaches about women’s roles, e.g. public preaching and teaching? We now know so much more and have matured and outgrown antiquated practices.’ I saw an article the other day where a couple of Baptist missionaries were getting thrown out after over 20 years of mission work because the wife had started ‘pastoring.’ The abandonment of women wearing the veil based on enlightenment and the “custom” of 1 Cor. 11 was the cornerstone of their defense for women abandoning the other teachings about women’s roles in the church.

“The other defense of women’s roles rests on the analogy from slavery. ‘See how the New Testament used to approve of slavery, but we know better now.’ I have yet to see this argument addressed by brethren.”

If we attack these arguments consistently we can deal with slavery (not divinely ordained or defended) with the ‘customs’ of women’s roles (divinely ordained basis and defended as such) and the veil (divinely ordained basis and defended as such). In other words I believe the teachings about women’s role in the church and the covering question rise or fall together. If brethren can dismiss the teachings on the covering due to custom or culture, then I think others can just as easily dismiss the teachings on women’s role on exactly the same basis. Our evangelical friends are doing exactly this, and I have yet to read one article that deals

with these two issues consistently.

Bro. Craig's words should be taken seriously, especially when combined with the observation of Bercot (appendix) that women's head coverings began disappearing as the women's emancipation (liberation) movement arose.

To summarize: The oft-repeated statement that it was universal custom in Paul's time for women to appear in public only when their heads were veiled is without foundation, and is contrary to the evidence of writings, pictures and statues which date back to Paul's time. The evidence that men in Roman heathen worship veiled their heads argues that Paul was commanding the Corinthians to act in a different way from custom.

Paul's legislation in 1 Corinthians 11 stands alone as God's commands, not man's. Regardless of what customs society has or had, the commands of 1 Corinthians 11 are to be obeyed in all times and places.

### **The Achilles' heel of the custom argument**

There is a story in Greek mythology about a man named Achilles. When he was born his mother took him to the river which was supposed to give magic protection and dipped him in the water. She was careful to dip him completely under the water so that he would be completely protected from the attacks of enemies. However, she gripped him by the heel and his heel did not get wet. He grew to be a fantastic warrior. Nothing seemed to hurt him. Until one day a stray arrow hit him in the heel, it became infected, and he died. Since then the phrase, "Achilles' heel", has meant "the weak spot where there is no protection against attack."

When people say that all Paul is teaching in 1 Cor. 11 is that we should conform to custom, they always talk about the custom for *women* to veil themselves in public. But Paul just as clearly tells *men* that they must not have anything on their head when praying or prophesying.

And this is the Achilles' heel of their position. If Paul was merely saying, "Conform to the custom of your area," then there must have been a custom for *men* to be bareheaded when praying or prophesying!

No one has appealed to such a custom, because there is no evidence that there was such a custom! In fact, the Law of Moses prescribed headgear for the high priest and the ordinary priests (Exodus 28:4, 40). These were the men who were to lead the worship under the Law. They HAD to cover their heads! And Oster's evidence is that heathen Roman (and he thinks Corinthian) men were required to have their heads veiled. Yet Paul teaches that "Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head." (1 Cor. 11:4) And Paul says, "Christ is the head of every man." (v. 3) There is no way that any custom of either the unbelieving Jews or the heathens would require a man to pray or prophesy with head uncovered in order to show that Christ is his head! The Jews who rejected Jesus Christ certainly would not command *anything* to show that Christ is the head of man! And the heathens did not believe in Christ. They certainly had no custom to show that Christ is head of man. *Yet this is what would be required if Paul was simply enforcing custom in 1 Cor. 11!*

### **Who or what is the head who is disgraced?**

Some have said that the "head" which is "disgraced" when a man wears something on his head while praying or prophesying is the physical head of a man. Even if this is so, it does not change the argument. Mike Willis writes:

***"Does head (kephale) refer to one's own physical head or to one's spiritual head, in this case to Christ?"***

***Commentators are divided over the matter. If it refers to Christ, then Paul is saying that anyone who covers his head acknowledges himself to be dependent on some earthly head other than Jesus and thereby takes the honor which is his due respect as head of creation from him. Hence, he dishonors the Christ. On the other hand,***

*if it refers to one's own head, Paul is saying that one disgraces himself (the "head" being used by synecdoche [a part used to mean the whole'—pkw] for the whole person) by wearing a token of subjection. The shame is upon the man himself for recognizing some head in addition to Christ. Which of these that Paul intended is uncertain." — Truth Commentary on First Corinthians*

Therefore it does not matter whether the word "head" in verse 4 which is "disgraced" is the spiritual head of man (Christ) or his physical head (standing for the man himself). A man disgraces his head when he prays or prophesies with head covered—BECAUSE CHRIST IS HIS HEAD! By praying with uncovered head he shows that no one on earth is his spiritual head. Jesus is His head. I repeat, neither Jews nor Gentiles had such a practice because they did not believe Jesus was their head! This is solely a New Testament command!

I have not been able to establish when the modern Jewish custom began of men covering their heads when praying. It probably was after New Testament times. But those who claim that Paul was telling the Corinthians to conform to the custom of the times must not only find that men were **forbidden** to cover their heads when praying or prophesying (and they cannot!), they must ALSO establish that the men were required to have uncovered heads TO SHOW THAT CHRIST WAS THEIR HEAD! Nonsense.

"What is sauce for the goose, is sauce for the gander." If the women were required to cover their heads because of custom, then the men were required to have uncovered heads because of custom—IN ORDER TO SHOW THAT CHRIST WAS THEIR HEAD! Who can believe it?

## Internal Evidences of Custom?

In Bro. Mike Willis's commentary on First Corinthians (Truth Commentaries), he writes:

“The position which teaches that the covering is binding today must confront the internal evidences from the text which lead me to the conclusion that the custom approach is the only legitimate approach.”

Then he gives a list of four evidences from the text. Let us examine each.

- 1) “Paul called the wearing of the veil a custom (sunetheia), v. 16.”

Comment: The word translated “custom” in the King James Version is translated “practice” in the New American Standard Bible. It does not necessarily refer to a “human” custom. And Paul in verse 16 says that the churches had no other practice. Bro. Willis writes, “The different local congregations all observed the custom.” Furthermore, we cannot restrict the practice to what women were wearing when praying or prophesying. Paul was just as clear in saying that men are NOT to wear anything on their heads. This practice, which all the churches observed, was certainly not a custom of Jews or pagans. We must conclude, therefore, that the practice of verse 16 was the practice of all the churches because it was commanded by the apostles. 1 Corinthians 4:17 says concerning Paul's practices: “...*my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*”

- 2) “The meaning of prepo (v. 13) alludes to what is ‘comely’ or what is agreeable with contemporary propriety.”

Comment: There are two ways in which to evaluate Paul's use



of this word. The first is that Paul is appealing to their judgment of what is “proper” AFTER he has carefully instructed them. They now have the clear word of God as to what is proper and therefore can be appealed to to apply it.

The second way to understand Paul’s use of “proper” is given in the quote from Bro. Ken Craig earlier in this chapter. Since I believe what he wrote is very important, I will quote it again here:

I would like to share one thought with you on the covering for your comment or consideration that I think reflects a lack of consistency in how brethren treat 1 Cor. 11, particularly the “cultural” argument. I notice that when we discuss with evangelicals or others the New Testament injunctions about women’s roles and participation in the New Testament, the substance of our argument is that Paul went all the way back to Genesis to explain that the basis for these injunctions was not cultural but had a scriptural basis from the beginning. In other words, there may have been a cultural or custom component to women’s roles in New Testament times, but the cultural component was driven by and reflected a scriptural injunction and basis going all the way back to God’s original plan.

But here is the inconsistency, I think. Isn’t this exactly what happens in 1 Cor. 11? Paul first explains that the basis for the whole discussion goes back to the foundational principle of headship and authority. In this manner the covering (as well as men having long hair, etc.) is just an application of a fundamental, long-standing biblical principle. Sure there is an appeal to culture as well, but where did culture obtain the practice to begin with? In this manner I believe brethren attack women’s roles as leaders in the church using an argument and principle that they then fail to apply in 1 Cor. 11. (Emphasis mine, pkw).

To put this in my words: The principle that man is head of woman is from the beginning. The cultural practice of women covering their heads probably came from this scriptural principle. Thus Paul could appeal to the practice, since it came from observing the principle of headship.

- 3) That going about unveiled signified the same thing as going about shaven. We can only learn the significance of each from a study of local customs.

Comment: But where did the significance of the custom come from? It is logical that it came from the understanding given by God from the beginning that woman is in subjection to man and therefore should not wear the same kind of clothing and her hair should not be short like his.

Note: The man who took the Nazirite vow (like Samson) was not allowed to cut his hair during the time of the vow (Numbers 6:1-5). This was obviously an exception to the rule that men should cut their hair. The fact that he was specifically not to cut his hair set him apart from other men. Some cite the fact that Absalom cut his hair only once a year (2 Samuel 14:26) as evidence that there was no practice that men should not have long hair. But even at the end of a year, his hair would have been shorter than the hair of women who did not cut their hair.

Paul does not appeal to any custom concerning man's head covering. There was no Old Testament legislation concerning it, except to command the priests to wear turbans. Since the reason man must not wear anything on his head when praying or prophesying is that Christ is his head, there was no command concerning this before Christ came.

- 4) The veil symbolized woman's subjection to man.

Comment: The answers given above cover this point.

Note: The custom argument NEVER appeals to any custom to show that *man* must NOT cover his head when praying or prophesying, because such custom cannot be found! This shows conclusively that Paul was not merely saying, “Conform to custom.” There was no custom for the man to uncover his head when praying or prophesying *to show that Christ is his head!* It is God’s legislation, not human customary practice, which makes it wrong for the man to cover his head when praying or prophesying. The same thing must be said concerning the woman. Paul’s words are commands, regardless of local or universal practice.

### Summary

The reasons Paul gives for a woman to cover her head when praying or prophesying are facts which cannot be changed. He does not say, “Cover your head because it is the custom.”

Here are the things Paul says:

1. “Hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.” (v. 2) Not human traditions, but the practices which Paul taught them.
2. “Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” (v. 3)
3. “Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head.” (v. 4)
4. “But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head.” (v. 5)
5. “If it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.” (v. 6) This and verses 14-15 appeal to what is considered proper in order to reinforce what Paul is teaching.
6. “A man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.” (v. 7)

7. “Man does not originate from woman, but woman from man.” (v. 8)
8. “The woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” (v. 10)
9. “Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered?” v. 13) We can judge what is proper from what Paul already taught.
10. “Does not even nature itself teach you that ... if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.” (vs. 14,15) He now appeals to what is the natural practice to argue that it is right to wear a covering.
11. “We have no such custom.” (v. 16). All the churches had the same practice.

Note: Nowhere does Paul say, “Conform to whatever custom is prevalent in society.” He does not say, “People will think you are a harlot if you appear in public without a covering.” And the fact that Paul teaches that it is a shame for a man to pray or prophesy with head covered shows that Paul was not talking about human customs. These words are the commands of the Lord without regard to human practices.

## Chapter 4

# What the Early Christians Believed About The Head Covering

Transcript of cassette sermon by  
David W. Bercot  
1997

The first time I visited a Mennonite church one of the first things I noticed was that all of the women wore these certain caps on their heads. Now I had no idea why. I thought it was just some sort of costume they were wearing, and I never gave much more thought to it until 1985 when I spent a whole year reading the 10-volume set of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. And one night during that year I was reading a work of Tertullian entitled “*The Veiling of Virgins.*” And it was that work that suddenly opened my eyes to what the scriptures teach about the “prayer veil” or the “head covering”.

The scripture passage that Tertullian was discussing was 1 Cor. 11:1-16, and I want to read that whole passage to you. If you have your Bible handy I would encourage you to get it out and read along with me. I am going to be reading from the NKJV.

The interesting thing I noticed in reading Tertullian’s essay or tract on the subject of “veiling” was that there was no issue in the churches of his day on what 1 Cor. 11 meant. The only issue that was there was whether Paul’s words applied to all mature females, or whether it applied only to married women. So that was what he was discussing in his work.

Let’s read that passage together. 1 Cor. 11 starting with verse 1.

***“Imitate me just as I also imitate Christ. Now I praise you brethren that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you***

*to know, that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered dishonors his head. 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. 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. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God. But woman is the glory of man. For man is not from man, 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 because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman nor woman independent of man in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman. But all things are from God. Judge among yourselves, is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.”*

That was the passage I went and read again after reading the work that Tertullian had written on this subject. And one of the things that came to me, back there in 1985 when I had just read Tertullian and I had gone back and read this passage, was—You know, its strange; this passage is hardly ever discussed today in our churches. I am talking about conventional Evangelical churches or Protestant churches, liberal, Catholic or whatever. I can't think of ever hearing a sermon on that subject. I can think of a couple of times, either in group discussions or Sunday school class where the topic came up. And in each instance, this whole passage of 1 Cor. 11 was simply brushed aside as though it were merely a cultural issue that applied in the first

century but has no real application today.

For example, when I was in a liberal church, I remember the pastor saying, “Well back there in the first century, to come to church without a veil on your head would be the equivalent of today a sister coming to church without a blouse—coming topless—or something like that. It was just a shocking scandal, and the women were doing this in Corinth so Paul writes to address that. In other words, it was shocking because of their culture, and so they needed to follow their culture. But since our culture doesn’t expect women to wear a veil in public, we don’t have to follow that either.” But the pastor said the principle still applies. It would be wrong for a woman to come to church in a bathing suit, or something like that. That would be shocking to people.

OK. When I was in a so-called Bible-believing Evangelical church I was told that, “Well back in Corinth, the only women who didn’t go around with a veil on were prostitutes. And so Paul was giving his counsel so that the women there would not be mistaken for prostitutes, or cause disturbance in the community because they were there without being veiled.”

Now, at the time I heard those explanations I had not questioned them. I had accepted them as being valid. But then years later, like I say in 1985 when I was going back and looking at this, having just read this writing of Tertullian, and having read much of the early Christian writings, several things struck me about those explanations.

Number 1. Paul didn’t say anything about those situations. He didn’t say, “This is shocking to the community that you are coming to church without a veil on your head.” In fact we will talk about this later, he doesn’t say anything about coming to church or not coming to church. He never mentions it there in that passage that we read. He doesn’t say anything about prostitutes not wearing a veil, and the Christian sisters causing a scandal in the community. He doesn’t mention that at all. And of course I knew way back that the scriptures didn’t say this, but I thought there must be some writings of the early Christians that explain all this. Well, I had just read the primary early Christian writing

that discusses this in detail, and it doesn't say anything about that. And there's no mention among any of the other writings about any such thing.

Furthermore Paul didn't give culture as the reason. When he gave those instructions he didn't say, "A woman should not pray or prophesy with her head uncovered because of the culture." He didn't say anything about culture. The reason he gives is God's order among men and women.

Well after further digging and trying to get to the bottom of this whole thing, to find why I was told that, I finally realized that there was no historical basis whatsoever for those statements! They were something someone just made up. And because they tickled the ears of today's hearers, because they were what people wanted to hear today, then they were passed around without objection, even though there was absolutely no historical basis whatsoever for those statements having been made.

In fact, they are not even accurate. That's because we have a lot of paintings. The paintings are mainly frescoes, which are paintings on wall made on wet plaster. And we have lots of sculptures of Greek and Roman women. There are numerous ones around the world, and even if you can't visit all the places where they are, the pictures of these frescoes and of these statues are in all kinds of books. I've seen many of them with my own eyes in the British Museum where there are many articles there. And it is clear when you look at them that it wasn't scandalous for a Greek or Roman woman to appear without a veil because in so many of these pictures they are not wearing a veil.

Now it wasn't strange for them to go out in public in a veil. That wouldn't have caused any uproar either. That was a fairly normal thing to do as well. But in other words, there was no scandal either way. There was no law, or commandment, or religious teaching that a woman had to have a veil on her head when she was either worshiping or when she was in public.



So it simply isn't true that for the Corinthian women to have appeared in public or come to church without a veil on their heads was causing a scandal, because it wasn't scandalous to the pagans. The only issue was to the Christians.

OK. So with that explanation and mention of what the passage doesn't mean, and correcting some misinformation, I think it would be appropriate to go through this and explain exactly what this passage DID mean to the early Christians.

Now I am going to read back through it verse by verse, but the second time through, instead of reading from the NKJV which we have just gone through, I am going to read from the New American Bible. Its translation certainly fits a lot more clearly how the early Christians were understanding this passage.

Paul starts off:

***“Imitate me as I imitate Christ. I praise you because you always remember me and are holding fast to the traditions just as I handed them on to you.”***

OK so this is the beginning. And in these first two verses Paul sets forth the basic premise of what he is going to be talking about. He is telling them to imitate him, that previous to writing this letter he had already handed down orally certain teachings to them, and he commends them that they are still holding fast to those traditions. Now he is about to rebuke them, because they are not following him in everything that he said. But like Jesus in His letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation, he starts off commending the Corinthians.

In verse 2 is his basic topical sentence. ***“I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is the Father.”*** So what is about to follow concerns headship. He points out that there is headship in the entire structure of the universe. It goes all the way back into the Trinity, that

there is a headship there of the Father over the Son. And then he mentions that Christ is the head of man, and either, depending on how you want to translate it, man is the head of woman or a husband is the head of his wife. The reason I said that is that it depends on how you translate it. Although there are Greek words which specifically mean “husband” and mean “wife”, it was normal to refer to a husband by the word “man” and to a wife by the word, “woman”. This has just vaguely been preserved in English. I think about the only expression in which we still have some remembrance of this is in a wedding where the minister says, “I now pronounce you man and wife.” I have heard people say, “Why does he say ‘man’ and wife and not ‘husband’ and wife?” I am sure the minister doesn’t know, but originally “man” and “husband” were used interchangeably. And so saying “man and wife” is the same as saying “husband and wife”. Or you could say, “I pronounce you husband and woman,” which would be the same as husband and wife.

As I mentioned, this was the only issue that was around when Tertullian wrote around the year 200. Tertullian was answering the question as to whether Paul was talking about all women, or whether he was talking only about married women. Tertullian makes a case that Paul is talking about all females, and we’ll get to that in a little bit.

Then, with verse 4 Paul gets into the specific application. He has given the principles of headship, so he says, “*Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered brings shame upon his head.*” In other words, for a Christian man to pray with his head covered, that is with a veil on his head, or a hat, or something, is an affront to God, because it is ignoring His pattern of headship. The veil on a man’s head would symbolize that he has an earthly head over him, and that would be contrary to God’s whole arrangement. No, Christ is your head. You don’t have a head here on the earth, at least not in the family and in spiritual matters. So this is a command not only on women but on men as well. And men are commanded not to wear anything on their head when they pray.

Now let's address for a minute this whole argument that is made today to rationalize this whole passage that, "Oh, this was all a matter of culture." I would like for somebody to show me evidence of any culture that existed in Paul's day in the world where he was, in the Mediterranean world, where it was considered wrong for a man to pray or to worship with his head covered. It certainly wasn't a Greek or Roman custom. In fact we have paintings, we have sculptures, friezes that is, of pagan priests offering sacrifices, pagan priests praying to their pagan god, and they always show the priest with a covering on his head. Now this perhaps would not have been true down in Egypt where the priests shaved themselves totally bald, but there in the Corinthian area and in that Mediterranean world that Paul is writing to, it was not the custom of any of the pagans to forbid a man to cover his head when praying.

Well, what about the Jews? There is nothing in the Old Testament that says a Jewish man was not to pray with his head covered. In fact, part of the vestments which God prescribed for Aaron and for all of the high priests after him was that they would wear on their head a turban, or a head-dress. Turn with me to Exodus 39:27-31.

***“They made tunics artistically woven of fine linen for Aaron and his sons, a turban of fine linen, exquisite hats of fine linen, short trousers of fine woven linen, and a sash of fine woven linen with blue, purple and scarlet thread made by the way as the Lord had commanded Moses. Then they made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold and wrote on it an inscription like the engraving of a signet, ‘Holiness to the Lord.’ And they tied to it a blue cord to fasten it above the turban, as the Lord had commanded Moses.”***

Alright, so the high priest of Israel, when he was offering sacrifices, when he was praying before God, had a head-dress, a turban, on his head. So there was nothing cultural about this at all. This was a new teaching made by God just to Christians! To my knowledge there is no other place before this time where God had made such a teaching. And

perhaps it would have been inappropriate before Christ, because Paul says, *“The head of very man is Christ.”* So perhaps, before Christ had come, in anticipation of that head, men were supposed to have their heads covered when they prayed. But now that Christ was here, now that they had been set free, and their head is in heaven now, God gave this new commandment.

The early Christian writings are very clear that men were conscious that they were not to pray with their head covered. And interestingly, this commandment is still followed by Christian men today. It is even followed by men in our culture even if they don't claim to be Christians. It has become that ingrained. If you are at a ball game or some place where prayer is offered in public, what happens? Well, all the men immediately remove their hats, don't they? You know, whether it is at a funeral, at a cemetery, just any place where there is a public gathering. Now they probably don't know why. They would say, “This is just what is appropriate for a man to do.” They couldn't give you the biblical reason. But this is why they do it. The reason has been lost, but the practice continues today anyway. Now let's look at verses 5 and 6 that concern women.

***“Similarly, any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered brings shame upon her head. It is as if she had had her head shaved. Indeed, if a woman will not wear a veil, she ought to cut off her hair. If it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, it is clear that she ought to wear a veil.”***

So in God's arrangement it is likewise an affront to God for a Christian woman to approach Him in prayer with her head uncovered, because the uncovered head is a public statement before God, before man, before angels, that “I do not recognize myself as having a head here on the earth. I want to stand before God the same way as my husband or other men do.” And Paul is saying that is an affront to God; that is contrary to God's arrangement.

Now again on the issue of culture, I am not aware of any commandment in the Old Testament that said that women had to cover their heads when they prayed. I think as we are going to see, Jewish women would have normally had their heads covered because they normally wore a veil, but I am not aware of anything I've come across in the writings of the ancients, Greek or Roman writers, certainly nothing in the early Christian writings, that would indicate that in pagan religions it was considered improper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered. Now again, I am talking about in the area of Corinth, the Graeco-Roman world, the northern Mediterranean world there. People who say this was culture can't point to something in culture that dictates either one of these two commandments.

Now some say, "Well, how do we know he is really talking about a veil, etc?" Well let me just read to you a couple of portions from that work of Tertullian's I referred to. If you have the Ante-Nicene Fathers, you can find this in volume 4, and I'll be reading from page 37.

He says, "For some, with their turbans and woollen bands, do not veil their heads but bind them up." Now he is very critical of women who didn't wear a full veil. And apparently in many places, and he was in North Africa, in Carthage, and apparently there it was not particularly common for women to wear a veil, and so Tertullian is arguing that the veil should be a real veil, not just a symbolic thing. But ignoring his views for right now, notice what he says about what Christian women were doing. He says some of them put on turbans or bands so they were kind of binding their hair up. He says, "They were protected indeed in front, however they are bare where their head properly lies. Others are to a certain extent covered over the region of the brain with linen doilies of small dimensions which do not quite reach the ears. Let them know that the whole head constitutes the woman. Its limits and boundaries reach as far as the place where the robe begins. The region of the veil is coextensive with the space covered by the hair when unbound." So the issue again was not wearing a veil or not wearing it but what kind of veil she was wearing. He was saying that a veil should cover your whole head and go down to your shoulders to where your robe would begin. It should cover the length of your hair when it

is unbound. Now again, I am not saying Paul commanded that. I am saying this is what Tertullian is arguing. But it is interesting, whether you agree with his argument or not, that nobody was arguing that women weren't to wear a veil when they were praying.

He says, “Arabia’s pagan females will be your judges. For they cover not only the head but the face also.” Now if you are like me, I always thought that Muslim women were veiled because of the teaching of Mohammed; that he is the one who introduced these teachings about veiling. But no, in Tertullian’s day, a couple of centuries before Mohammed, Arabian women were already wearing veils. So that wasn't something Mohammed brought. This would be something maybe as a descendant of Ishmael, as a descendant of Abraham, that those women wore the veils that they still do today.

Tertullian considers: “How severe a chastisement will they likewise deserve who during the psalms and at any mention of God remain uncovered. Even when about to spend time in prayer itself, with the utmost readiness, they place a fringe, tuft, or any thread whatever on the crowns of their heads, and suppose themselves to be covered.”

OK. For now we are going to ignore Tertullian’s viewpoint. It may well be a defensible viewpoint. We will talk maybe more about that later. But the important thing about this regardless of whether you like his viewpoint or not, is that in arguing that the veil should be a larger piece of cloth that covers the whole head, he reveals that everywhere Christian women were covering their heads when they were about to pray. Even if it wasn't covered before then, they would put something on their heads, even if it would be a little handkerchief or a tiny piece of cloth, something like that. Even if it wasn't a part of their culture to be veiled, they recognized the commandment there in the Bible and covered their head. So from that testimony it is clear what the early Christians believed about the woman's prayer veil. Or in other words how they understood Paul's letter to the Corinthians, that women are to wear a covering when they pray or prophesy.

Now some Christians today, who are conscientious and do want to follow the scriptures, argue that, “Well, he is not talking about a veil, he is talking about long hair. That if a man has long hair, that’s wrong for him, and if a woman has short hair, then that’s wrong.”

Well, first thing off the bat, from Tertullian’s writings that’s not how the primitive church understood it. And they were the ones closely linked to Paul’s culture and they were the ones who spoke Paul’s language.

But let’s just see from the context itself if that makes any sense. I am going to substitute “long hair” here or “short hair” as the case may be instead of “covering” or “veil.” Verse 4:

***“Any man who prays or prophesies with long hair brings shame upon his head.”***

Now please explain to me how a man can pray or prophesy with his hair being long if it is not already long at other times? In other words, how can Paul say “He shouldn’t pray or prophesy with long hair,” indicating that it is OK that at other times to have long hair. How does he do that? How can his hair be long at other times and then he would have to cut when he is about to pray. It doesn’t make much sense, does it?

Or what about verse 5:

***“Similarly, any woman who prays or prophesies with short hair brings shame upon her head. It is as if she had had her head shaved. Indeed, if a woman will not wear long hair, she ought to cut off her hair. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off, or her head shaved, it is clear that she ought to have long hair.”***

Again, why would he give these specific instructions about prayer if he is talking about hair, because a woman can’t have long hair when she is praying and short hair the rest of the time. It is a little redundant for

him to say “When she is praying”, because her long or short hair would be something she would have all of the time.

How much sense is it to say, “If she is going to wear her hair short, she might as well have her hair cut off.” In other words, if she wants to wear it short, she might as well have it short. This does not make sense. He is contradicting himself there if he says that. And again he gets through saying, “If it is shameful for a woman to have short hair, then she ought to have it covered.” Well if it was shameful for women to wear short hair, then the Corinthian sisters would not have been wearing short hair, would they? Because it would have been shameful for them.

No, his argument only makes sense if you put “veil” in there and understand “the covering” to be a garment worn on the head. That if you are not going to wear a veil, then you ought to go ahead and cut your hair off as well.

Let me read you some other passages from the early Christians to make it clear that this was not long hair. Tertullian, once again this is from Vol. 4 pages 27-29, and page 33, says, “It behoves our virgins to be veiled from the time they have passed the turning point of their age. This observance is required by truth. Therefore no one can impose any condition on it. No space of time, no influence of persons, and no privilege of regions.” Interestingly now he is saying, “No, this isn’t cultural. It doesn’t have to do with this part of the world, this century. It is true for all times.” “Throughout Greece and certain of its barbaric provinces the majority of churches keep their virgins covered.” Again, the only issue that he is arguing, or the only two issues, are how long the veil should be and whether it applies to virgins or only to married women.

“There are places too beneath this North African sky where this practice is also followed, lest anyone ascribe the custom to Greek or Barbarian Gentile-hood. But I have proposed as models those churches which were founded by apostles or apostolic men. Still until very recently among us” that is, the North African Christians, “females



following either custom were admitted to communion with comparative indifference. The matter had been left up to choice for each virgin, either to veil herself or expose herself.” So he is saying there in Carthage the practice was for a virgin, an unmarried woman, to either veil herself or not veil herself and the choice was left up to her because of the question whether Paul meant this to apply to all women or only to married women.

Tertullian goes on to say, “We ought to look at the churches where the apostles taught and see what those churches do.” They could follow the example of the apostles, they could hear Paul further explain what he meant and to institute a practice there. In fact he says, “Let’s go and look at the church in Corinth, whom Paul wrote to.” If you want to know what Paul meant, why not go and see what the church in Corinth does? So he says this, “Likewise the Corinthians themselves understood him in this manner,” meaning that they understood him to be talking about all females, virgins and married. He says, “In fact, at this very day the Corinthians do veil their virgins. What the apostles taught, their disciples approved.” That last quote can be found on page 33 of volume 4.

Now that is an extremely important piece of historic evidence, that in Corinth, the people to whom Paul wrote this letter, that number one, they understood him to be talking about a veil, not long hair, and number two, they understood him to be talking about all women, not just married women.

Clement of Alexandria comments briefly on this passage, you can find it in Vol. 2 p. 290, of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. He says “This is the wish of the word. For it is becoming for her to pray veiled.” Hypolitus, this is not in the Ante-Nicene Fathers, it is in The Apostolic Tradition of Hypolitus, a separate work because it wasn’t discovered until after that set had been put together, he says, “Let all the women have their head covered with an opaque cloth, not with a veil of thin linen, for this is not a true covering.” He is saying not just any piece of cloth but something that is really a covering for the head, if it is going to meet the symbolic expression that Paul says it is meant to be.

So for Christians today to say, “This is long hair, it is not a veil,” I would have to say this: If that is the case, how come nobody, nobody whatsoever in the Christian world, ever understood it that way until the last century? That is when that teaching became popular. How come the very people Paul wrote to didn’t understand it that way?

As most of you know, I grew up as a Jehovah’s Witness and one of the reasons I read the early Christian writings, which was about ten years after I had left them, was that I wanted to know what the truth was. I had been indoctrinated by the Witnesses, and then by the liberals, and then the Evangelicals, and they all would make all these kind of claims, “Well this is what this passage means” and all of that. And I thought “I want to know what the truth is. I want to go back and see historically how did Christians understand these things.” I recognized that the Witnesses were in error to think they knew more than everybody who had come before them, that they had the hidden light on the scriptures that had lain hidden for 1800 or 1900 years. That didn’t fit what Jesus said about being with His people all the days until the end. Nor the fact that Jesus would build His church on a strong foundation, not on something that as soon as soon as the apostles died the basic teachings would be lost and hidden for 1900 years.

So I am shocked when I find that Evangelicals who will ridicule the Witnesses and chide then on this, saying “you come up with your own peculiar interpretation of scripture in so many instances,” that they do the same thing when it is convenient for them. And they will ignore whatever historical evidence that anyone can present if it doesn’t fit what they want to hear.

So again, coming up with teaching like it is long hair, as if everybody who came before the 1900’s, whether it was the reformers, whether it was the first generation after the apostles, the Christians in whatever age, the people like the Waldensians—all of those people misunderstood the scriptures and it wasn’t understood until the mid 1800’s—I have a problem with that because it is the whole Witness scenario all over again.

OK, then—Why are all these rules made about the head covering? We read what it said there concerning headship. Let's go over it again. Again I am reading from the New American Bible this time. I will go back to verse 6.

***“Indeed, if a woman will not wear a veil, she ought to cut off her hair. If it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, it is clear that she ought to wear a veil. A man, on the other hand, ought not to cover his head because he is the image of God and the reflection of His glory. Woman in turn is the reflection of man’s glory. Man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason a woman ought to have a sign of submission on her head, because of the angels. Yet in the Lord, woman is not independent of man, nor man independent of woman. In the same way that woman was made for man, so man is born of woman, and all is from God.”***

Now, I realize that what I've just read is terribly politically incorrect—to say that woman was created for man, and man not for woman—but it isn't something I've made up, it is what God's word teaches. Of course as you probably say, “It is terribly religiously incorrect.” Because really what has happened in the visible church today is that whatever is politically incorrect, within a decade or so it becomes religiously incorrect as well. And because the teaching on headship is not popular today, this passage has been virtually ignored in most churches, or it has been explained away.

The liberals scoff at this passage. One commentary that I have says, “Paul believed that women are inferior to men,” so Paul gives all of these commands. Well, excuse me, Paul didn't say that whatsoever! He talked about God's order of things. He wasn't putting anybody down, or talking about anyone being superior or inferior to anyone else. He talked about headship, which the Bible talks about in many places. And headship isn't based on the superiority of one person over another, but

rather on arrangement or order. There is headship within the Trinity. Even though there is an equality of nature, there is still order in the Trinity, as Paul says, “The Father is the head of Christ.” Likewise on earth there is to be order, there is to be governments, and we are to obey our government leaders, not because we are inferior to them, but because that is God’s order. Children are to obey their parents and be subject to them, not because children are inferior to adults, depraved more than adults are—not at all. But because this is God’s order and arrangement which will work for the best for everybody. It is for our good as well as anybody else’s. It is for our good to obey the government. It is for the good of children for them to obey their parents. It is for the good of the home, and for the good of a woman, for a woman to be subject to her husband. This is God’s arrangement, this is what He will bless if we will follow His arrangement.

Now as I said, the liberals have no trouble since they are not bound to believe the Bible is the word of God. They say, “Oh this is Paul; this is Paul writing this. And see, Paul, says this, and Paul was wrong. He had a wrong attitude towards women.” Now for Evangelicals, and other Bible-believing Christians, it is not so easy for them. Because they can’t write it off unless they are going to erode the whole foundation of why they exist, separate from the liberals that is. So what they are forced to do is to come up with excuses as to why this passage made perfect sense in Paul’s day—it was true in Paul’s day—but we don’t have to follow it today.

For example, I was talking to a well-educated Evangelical woman a few months ago, and she noticed that my wife was wearing a prayer veil. She does missionary work in Russia, but through a teaching position in a university, and she noticed that most Christians over there wear prayer veils as well. And she said she would even in a church where that was the custom. And she said, trying to defend what the scriptures say, “You know, if it is going to cause disorder or disruption for a woman not to have her head covered, then she should cover it.”

Well, the setting wasn’t such that I chose to get into an argument with her about it, but it was a nice way to explain away what Paul had just

said. Paul doesn't say anything about custom, he doesn't say anything about disruption of services. He says this has something to do with order, it has something to do with your husband, it has something to do with the relation of men and women. He doesn't say anything about disruptions in a service or scandals or any of those sorts of things.

And when it comes to men, and most seminary professors and pastors are men, I clearly see in them what I call "The Adam Syndrome." What I mean by the Adam Syndrome is that when it comes to choosing between having to please God or having to please women, most men, like our forefather Adam, will choose to please the women in our life and will directly disobey God in order to do that. And we somehow rationalize it as we do it. I don't know what Adam's rationalization was. The scriptures say he wasn't deceived. He knew that he would die if he ate of it. But he would rather die, would rather be disobedient to God, than to face the displeasure or rejection of his wife.

And likewise, most pastors would rather disobey God, would rather teach disobedience to God, than to teach something that would put them at odds with the women in their congregation—that is their wives, their daughters, and the sisters who make up their fellowship. Because if they teach this, that is if the pastor in a conventional church got up one Sunday and taught this and said, "From now on, no woman is going to be served communion in this church if she doesn't cover her head. No woman will be recognized as an obedient sister in the congregation, as having standing in a Sunday school class or any other meeting if she doesn't have her head covered, at least during prayer." Well that would cause such a commotion that he would most likely be fired from his position.

And so what pastors do, following in the footsteps of Adam, is that they make a ridiculous double standard when it comes to 1 Corinthians 11. Somehow, this chapter is still binding on men, not to cover their heads. I've been in places, conventional settings, where the pastor called down men who didn't take their hats off when it was time to pray. I've been in plenty of places where the pastor instructed the men to remove their hats during prayer. You see, they are not afraid to

offend men, because men will today generally be submissive on things like that. OK, if you know that men are do to this or that, the men of the congregation will do whatever the pastor says. But then out of fear for what the women will say, and the rebellion that he might have in his congregation, most pastors will say “It is not binding on women to cover their heads.” In other words, men have to uncover theirs, women are free either to cover or not to cover theirs.

The result is that women are then put on a pedestal above men. It is just the opposite of what the scripture is teaching here. Women are put on a pedestal above men. In other words, men have to uncover their heads. It is wrong for a man to pray with something on his head. But a woman can do whatever she wants. If she has a hat on, she doesn’t have to take it off. If she is not wearing one, she does not have to put it on. In other words, she’s the one who is on the pedestal; she’s the one who is being treated as if she were the head.

Yet, no one objects to this, because it is completely politically correct, it is completely religiously correct. So pastors go about their duties and no waves are caused by it, at least not in this life. Of course those pastors are going to have to answer to Christ as to why they clearly disobeyed a black and white commandment in scripture, and particularly in applying a double standard to it.

Actually this is all part of a larger pattern that emerged in the 19th century. Today we often think of women’s lib or the feminist movement as something that started in the 60’s. No it didn’t start in the 1960’s, it started back in the early 1800’s. And the result of that movement that has swept both through politics and through the church is that churches have basically gone through the scriptures and nullified every single commandment that applies to women alone or particularly to women. At the same time, these same churches not only still insist that the commandments that are directed to men still be followed, they actually enlarge them. For example in several magazine articles and booklets that I have picked up in the last three or four years they have talked about the passage in 1 Peter 3:7 where it says, “*Husbands, likewise dwell with them* (talking about your wives) *with*

*understanding, giving honour to the wife as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*” Now in this verse there is some scriptural instruction that applies only to men. Now do we find that sort of thrown out because Peter does not say that about men and women equally so we will just throw that out, since that would be unfair? No. It is not unfair if it is men who are being singled out. In fact what happens, at least in these articles that I have read and sermons that I have heard in various churches, Peter’s simple counsel here is expanded into a great big thing so that when the minister or teacher gets through it sounds rather suspiciously like, “Husbands, submit to your wives in everything.” Honouring them somehow means this, it means that. I mean they come up with a big long list. I remember getting one article in the mail, and that is what it was, “What it means to honour your wife.” And it went down a long list of things that Peter wouldn’t even have been remotely thinking of because many of the things on the list were not even in existence in the days of Peter. For example, putting down the lid on the commode when you are finished. I rather doubt Peter had that in mind.

But this is what these Bible teachers and pastors do because it is religiously correct to do that. It takes no courage to do that. You can heap up commandments on men today and they will either silently take it or quit coming to church. But those same preachers will totally ignore the first six verses of Peter. They wouldn’t dream of telling the women in their church not to wear make-up, not to wear jewellery, as Peter tells them not to do. They would never dream of telling a woman to refer to her husband as “lord”, as Peter holds out as an example, and things like that.

So there is a real double standard that doesn’t apply just to 1 Corinthians 11. It is all the way through the scriptures. And like I say, it is Bible-believing churches as well as liberal churches that have fallen into this and have played such games with God’s word.

Let’s move on. There is a whole larger issue in 1 Corinthians 11, or at least in the application of it, than just prayer. Paul only commands when you are praying or prophesying, but it was the general practice of

Christian women to wear a veil at all times, at least in public. Today when we think of women who dress very modestly and who are veiled, who do we think of? Well, I would think that with most people the first thing that comes to their mind would be Muslim women. Or maybe Hindu women in many regions. If they think of Americans at all they would probably think of Mennonite or Amish. I don't think anyone would think of American women in general or western European women. No, not at all.

The simple truth is that today that in countries made up predominately of non-believers that women dress the most modestly, and still wear a veil. And yet originally, in God's order, it was just the other way around. It was God's women who dressed more modestly than nonbelievers. And the veil goes back probably all the way back to the time of Noah. Genesis 24:64, this is the passage concerning when Rebekah travels with Abraham's servant to become Isaac's wife, says:

***“Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel for she had said to the servant, ‘Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?’ The servant said, ‘It is my master.’ So she took a veil and covered herself.”***

So we see that this was a practice of God's women long before Moses, long before Paul wrote that passage, that they would veil themselves in the presence of unfamiliar men. Now, often women did not do this at home with family members and with servants. But in public they would.

Tertullian made this observation. We find this in Vol. 3 page 95 of the Ante-Nicene Fathers: “Among the Jews, so usual is it for their women to have the head veiled, that they may be thereby recognized.” Now that is interesting. This was written about the year 200. He says that Jewish women could be recognized for their modest dress and that they wore a veil on their head. If you look at any Bible story picture book, how do they draw the Jewish women? Isn't it nearly always with veils on their heads? And Tertullian, even after the Jews rejected Jesus, even



after the creation of the church and all of that, the Jews still continued on in the practices that their forefathers had when it came to this.

It also shows that it wasn't the custom of all women to veil themselves in public because if it were, Jewish women couldn't be recognized because of their veils, could they?

Likewise Christian women dressed more modestly than the pagans around them, and they veiled themselves in public in all parts of the world. Clement of Alexandria writes: "It has also been commanded that the head should be veiled and the face covered, for it is a wicked thing for beauty to be a snare to men. Nor is it appropriate for a woman to desire to make herself conspicuous by using a purple veil." This was written about the year 195 in Alexandria, Egypt. You can find that passage in volume 2 page 266 to the Ante Nicene Fathers.

So there in Egypt it was customary for the Christian women to wear a full veil, even one that covered much of the face.

He writes in another place, on p. 290 of that same volume, Clement says, "And a Christian woman will never fall if she puts before her eyes modesty and her veil. Nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face."

So Christian women were concerned. They knew the heavy teaching that Jesus had laid on men everywhere—the serious sin to lust after women. It also puts a responsibility on women to dress in such a way that it would not invite the lust of men or cause them to stumble. So Christian women normally veiled themselves, at least in that part of the world.

Tertullian writes, this is on p. 689 of vol. 3—"Why do you uncover before God what you cover before men? Will you be more modest in public than in the church? Be veiled, virgin, if you really are a virgin. For you should blush if you are virgin, shrink from the gaze of many eyes. Let no one admire your face."

So Tertullian is saying that the practice there of the women in his community in Carthage, North Africa—now this was long before the Muslim invasion, so don't think of Muslims when you think of North Africa in his day, think of women who were more Roman. And he says that what the virgins would do, because their church allowed them the liberty to be veiled or not veiled when praying, was to veil themselves in public—they didn't want unbelieving men looking upon them, so they would cover themselves with a veil when they were out in public—but they would take it off in the church among their brothers.

The Apostolic Constitutions, which was compiled about 390, most of its teachings were preNicene teachings which were written down at this later date and probably compiled in Syria, says: “When you are in the streets, cover your head, for by such a covering you will avoid being viewed by idle persons. Look downward when you walk in public, veiling yourself as becomes women.”

So throughout the various parts of the ancient world, we see this same teaching or reference to the fact that Christian women normally veiled themselves in public. They were more modest than pagan women.

So you might be wondering then, “So why are not Christian women veiled today?” Well as I have mentioned, in the 19th century one-by-one virtually every single commandment in scripture that applies only to women, or especially to women, have been nullified by the majority of the Christian churches, or churches that profess to be Christian. Until then Christian women did not usually appear in public without some sort of veiling. For example, take a look at drawings of European women through the centuries, paintings made in the time of the Middle Ages and the Reformation and all of that. Now if they are paintings of highborn women, yes often their head is not covered. But their paintings of ordinary women, particularly women who would be viewed as Christians, religious women, spiritually-minded women—most of the time you will notice that they have a veil on their heads in the paintings. Often the painting was made in a home or something like that where a woman might not have necessarily worn a veil, and that is why sometimes the painting shows a woman unveiled if it is showing a

house scene, but most of the ones I have seen the women have a veil on their heads.

I think of the cap the Puritan women wore. It wasn't a costume. That was the prayer veil they were wearing, or the veils that were worn by Spanish women that you can look at pictures of.

The scarves that have traditionally been worn by eastern European and Russian women. Again, these are the Christian prayer covering, it is why they were wearing those.

However, eventually the veil or large scarf gave way to bonnets, around the beginning of the 19th century. At first those bonnets were very, very large and they were not decorative. For example the bonnet that Susanna Wesley would have worn—I have seen pictures of her—was a big bonnet that totally covered her head. It was black, not frilly, not fashionable at all.

However, as the 19th century progressed, the bonnets that women wore which were originally a type of prayer covering, became smaller and smaller and became more frilly with each decade. Eventually they were simply, by the end of the 19th century, a decorative fashion. Women were not wearing them with any thought of piety, but as a fashionable thing. No one even consciously associated these bonnets with 1 Corinthians 11 or with modesty.

Then the bonnets gave way to hats. And hats were almost always fashionable and they were designed either to enhance or to dignify a woman's appearance. They were not a symbol of God's pattern of headship.

Still, until around 1950 it was the usual custom in most churches here in America and in Europe for women to wear a hat in church. Few of them knew why that was the custom. They didn't realize that it was 1 Corinthians 11, yet they followed the custom because it had been handed down.

When you have time, go back and look at some pictures of Christian church gatherings in the first half of the 20th century, and no matter what denomination it is, you will find that nearly all of the women will be wearing a hat in the service.

Now today I hear Evangelical Christians say that “Well, all that really matters is that we keep this teaching on God’s headship. Yes, we hold to that teaching. It is not important wearing a veil.”

Well, I have to say the simple truth. The practice of wearing veils has been discontinued because women have rebelled against God’s teaching on headship. It is not just some accident that this has suddenly fallen to the wayside just as the feminist movement has gained more and more strength. No, it has gone hand in hand with it. Christian women today don’t want to wear a veil because of what 1 Corinthians 11 says, because it would mean they would be wearing something that would be an outward sign that I respect my husband as my head, or that I respect man as the head of woman. That’s the very thing that Christian women object to today. So it’s not true that we can just follow the thought behind the teaching but you don’t have to follow it in all of its details.

You see, when we throw out the details of God’s word, it is usually very soon after that the entire basis for the commandment is totally done away with.

So let me just leave you with this exhortation. If this is new teaching to you as a Christian sister, I would really encourage you to do what Paul says. When you are praying, cover your head with some kind of cloth. Whether it is a scarf or something else, bring one to church with you and put it on during church. If anyone is going to ask you, say it is because this is what God’s word says. People may think you are a bit strange, but God will bless you for it.

## Chapter 5

### The Hair

(vs. 4-6, 14-15)

#### 1 Corinthians 11:4-6

*Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.*

#### 1 Corinthians 11:14-15

*Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.*

#### Is long hair the only covering?

Some brethren affirm that the ONLY COVERING Paul requires is long hair. They say that Paul is not referring to a covering which can be put on and taken off. He is referring ONLY to the covering of verse 15, which is long hair.

#### Two Greek words

Note first that Paul uses TWO Greek words to refer to the coverings. In every case, except for verse 15, he uses the verb *katakalupto*. However, when referring to the hair as a covering, he changes to an entirely

different word, *peribolaion*. Knowing this fact may help us.

*“The word translated ‘covering’ in verse 15 is peribolaion, which means ‘something cast around’, as opposed to the word translated covered, uncovered, etc. in the previous verses — katakalupto, which means ‘something which covers completely and hangs own’. Paul obviously used an entirely different word in verse 15 so as to not confuse the natural hair covering with the veiling.” — Tom Shank, “...let her be veiled.” pp 78, 79.*

*Verse 6—“let her also have her hair cut off.”*

The word “also” in verse 6 shows that there are two coverings:

*“For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.”*

I have checked a good number of commentaries on this point. Without exception they show that this verse makes it impossible for the hair to be the only covering.

Here are some samples of the remarks of these commentators:

*For if the woman be not covered - If her head be not covered with a veil.*

*Let her also be shorn - Let her long hair be cut off. Let her lay aside all the usual and proper indications of her sex and rank in life. If it is done in one respect, it may with the same propriety be done in all.*

*But if it be a shame... - If custom, nature, and habit; if the common and usual feelings and views among people would pronounce this to be a shame, the other would be*

*pronounced to be a shame also by the same custom and common sense of people.*

*Let her be covered - With a veil. Let her wear the customary attire indicative of modesty and a sense of subordination. Let her not lay this aside even on any pretence of religion.*

– Albert Barnes

## 1 Corinthians 11:6

For if the woman be not covered – If she will not wear a veil in the public assemblies, let her be shorn – let her carry a public badge of infamy: but if it be a shame – if to be shorn or shaven would appear, as it must, a badge of infamy, then let her be covered – let her by all means wear a veil.

– Adam Clarke

All one as if she were shaven. For a woman's head to be shaven was usually a sign of shamelessness (See Meyer). The uncovered head in an assembly was also unbecoming.

For if the woman be not covered. If she defies decorum by an uncovered head, let her go further, and be shaven.

– People's New Testament

“Let's take a closer look at v. 5:

*but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head — it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved.*

“If the head being unveiled (uncovered) IS being shorn, then the analogy (“the same AS having her head shaved”) evaporates.

“The text as a whole has many difficulties, but in my mind this is not one of them: the text at vv. 4 and 5 is talking about veils or prayer coverings. These were common in antiquity, though the exact custom varied from place to place. In Roman society, the MEN wore the veil when they prayed! Here, though, in a society influenced by Greek culture, it was the women wearing the veil. To see anything other than a controversy about the veil is to miss what may be the only really clear thing about this passage!”

— Basil L. “Skip” Copeland, from MarksList,  
6 March 95 — 22 March 95

### **The covering commanded is “while praying or prophesying.”**

The covering commanded is “while praying or prophesying”, not all the time. Long hair is not something which can be put on “while praying or prophesying” and then put off afterward. If Paul were saying that long hair is the only covering, he would not say “while praying or prophesying”.

If I say, “Be sure to wear clips on your trousers while riding your bicycle,” it is clear that I mean something which can be put on and taken off. Just so when Paul said, “Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head” (v. 4), Paul is talking about something which can be put on and taken off. And when he writes, “Every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved” (v. 5), the phrase “while praying or prophesying” indicates a covering which can be put on or taken off.



### One and the same as:

Verse 5 says, “Every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, *for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.*” Paul is making a parallel. If you are shameless enough to pray or prophesy with head uncovered, then you are acting the same as the woman whose head is shaved.

But if the ONLY covering is the hair, the woman whose head is uncovered IS the same as the woman whose head is shaved. She IS THAT WOMAN.

### Conclusion

The reason why Paul writes about long hair is to reinforce what he is affirming about the head covering. In these verses he uses several arguments. One of these arguments is from a sense of what is proper from “nature”. The word “nature” means “by long practice, etc.” Paul uses what can be seen as proper (long hair) in distinguishing women from men to argue that women must cover their heads in worship to show the headship of men.

Paul is incidentally showing that long hair is for women and short hair is for men. That is not his main purpose, but we can get that lesson from what he writes.

## Chapter 6

## The Lesson from “Nature”

“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.” 1 Corinthians 11:14-15.

Albert Barnes comments:

*“The word nature (phusis) denotes evidently that sense of propriety which all men have, and which is expressed in any prevailing or universal custom. That which is universal we say is according to nature. It is such as is demanded by the natural sense of fitness among men. Thus we may say that nature demands that the sexes should wear different kinds of dress; that nature demands that the female should be modest and retiring; that nature demands that the toils of the chase, of the field, of war—the duties of office, of government, and of professional life, should be discharged by men. Such are in general the customs the world over; and if any reason is asked for numerous habits that exist in society, no better answer can be given than that nature as arranged by God, has demanded it. The word in this place...refers to a deep internal sense of what is proper and right; a sense which is expressed extensively in all nations, showing what that sense is. No reason can be given, in the nature of things, why the woman should wear long hair and the man not; but the custom prevails extensively everywhere, and nature, in all nations, has prompted to the same course. ‘Use is second nature;’ but the usage in this case is not arbitrary, but is founded in an anterior universal sense of what is proper and right.”*

The word “nature” (*phusis*) is used in Ephesians 2:3: “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were **by nature** children of wrath, even as the rest.” “Children of wrath” means people who deserve the wrath of God. When we indulged the desires of the flesh and of the mind we were children of wrath **by nature**. This cannot mean that we were born that way, for Paul in Romans 7:9 clearly teaches that we are alive apart from the Law when we are children. Thus **by nature** means that which is natural in our world, that which is so common as to be universal.

It is used this way by Paul in 1 Cor 11:14. The way that “nature” teaches is by, as Barnes expresses it, “a deep internal sense of what is proper and right.”

Paul is strengthening his case that women should wear a covering when praying or prophesying by appealing to nature. This is an argument in addition to the other arguments he has given. Since nature teaches a woman to have long hair and that it is against nature for a man to have long hair, it is consistent with nature (one’s deep sense of what is appropriate) to insist that the woman wear a covering when praying or prophesying and that the man does not.

Paul does not introduce this to teach that a woman should have long hair and a man should have short hair. He did not need to teach this. Nature taught that and all accepted the teaching. There is no indication that the women in the Corinthian church were shaving their heads! They were not going against “nature”. (Those who today teach that it is proper for a woman to cut her hair short or shave her head, and that a man can have long hair, are going against that which nature teaches. Obviously, it is also against what God teaches, for the natural custom is based on that which we understand deep down is right or wrong.)

## Long hair is a glory to her

Paul does not explain why long hair is a glory to a woman except in his words, “For her hair is given to her for a covering.” Some have taken this to mean that long hair was given to woman as a beautiful decoration. But I do not think the context implies that. It appears to me that long hair is given to indicate the same thing that the artificial covering is to show. When she wears long hair she shows her proper place—that she is in subjection to man. (Which shows, incidentally, why short hair and shaven heads among women are being pushed. Many women do not want to be subject to man.)

It is a glory to a woman to fulfill her position in God’s scheme of things. Thus when she shows her subjection to man by letting her hair grow long, her hair is a glory to her. When a man shows himself to be womanly by wearing long hair, it is a shame to him. He is failing to show his proper place in God’s scheme.

Commentators note the exception of those who took the Nazirite vow. They were required by God not to cut their hair during the time of the vow. This marked them out as “special” during this period. This exception does not set aside the teaching of nature.

## Chapter 7

## While Praying or Prophesying

In verses 4 and 5 Paul uses the phrase, “while praying or prophesying.” In verse 13 he uses just the word “pray”. The instructions concerning the head covering are given to men and women “while praying or prophesying.”

Until very recent times those who called themselves Christians understood 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 to mean that women are to cover their heads when they assemble to worship. If you check the commentaries written before 1900, you will find that almost without exception they agree that 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 means that a woman must cover her head with a veil or other covering when she worships God. This is the natural conclusion which people come to when reading this passage. Some years ago a fellow-preacher told me, “I have been impressed that when a woman who has had no teaching about the head covering reads this passage, she always comes to the conclusion that she should cover her head in worship.”

Frank Rester wrote in *God’s Truth On The Covering*:

*“At the very beginning it is imperative that we understand that these instructions are dealing with proper decorum not in just any public or social gathering or in the concourse of everyday activities but in the assembly of the church, while one is engaged in ‘praying or prophesying’ (verse 4, 5, 13). To say that Paul was instructing Christian men and women as to their head-dress in social concourse of everyday life is simply speaking from ignorance. I readily concede that any Christian woman or man is to dress decently, modestly and in harmony with good taste in all social activities. This is clearly emphasized in such places as Deut. 22:5; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1*

*Pet. 3:1-6; Mt. 5:27-28; etc. Yet Paul was not writing on this subject in 1 Cor. 11. He was speaking of proper head-dress while one is engaged in ‘praying or prophesying.’ How an individual appears elsewhere or otherwise does not concern him here. He was speaking of worship. Nothing more. This cannot be overemphasized. For it is at this point that many stumble in endeavoring to understand and teach this passage.” (p. 13)*

We can trace this understanding right back to apostolic times. Tertullian, who wrote about A.D. 200, said, “How severe a chastisement will they likewise deserve who during the psalms and at any mention of God remain uncovered. Even when about to spend time in prayer itself, with the utmost readiness, they place a fringe, tuft, or any thread whatever on the crowns of their heads, and suppose themselves to be covered.” Tertullian lived in North Africa. In arguing that virgins and not only married women must be covered in worship, he tells his readers to go to Greece and Rome, even to Corinth, where the churches all required young unmarried women to wear a veil in worship. (For these quotes and references to where they can be found, read the chapter, “What the Early Christians Believed About the Head Covering”.) This was in the year 200, just 100 years after the death of the last apostle. The unvarying practice was for churches to require women to cover their heads in worship because of the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11, with some churches allowing young unmarried women to worship without a covering. According to Tertullian, all the churches had the same requirement (which helps us understand Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:16).

### **Instructions apply only to inspired people?**

In the last 50 years or so a new teaching has been promoted. The teaching asserts that, because the head covering command is addressed to men and women “while praying or prophesying”, only inspired Christians are addressed. The consequence of the argument is that since there are no inspired people today, 1 Corinthians 11 does not apply to

women and men today, and never applied to worshipers who were not prophesying or leading inspired prayer. The teaching denies that people who pray silently while a man leads the prayer were ever required to observe the head covering requirements of 1 Corinthians 11.

A brother wrote: “Certain men and certain women in the early churches were ‘praying or prophesying’, and the instructions pertained to them. The instructions did not apply to all men and women in the churches then, and apply to none now, for we have no such men or women in the churches.”

We have seen that this was not the understanding of Tertullian in A.D. 200. The universal practice of churches of that time is strong testimony that women were covering their heads in worship from the time of Paul and the other apostles. All women were expected to cover their heads, not just women who were inspired. Of course, by the time of Tertullian there were no inspired people in the church. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 teaches that when the New Testament was completed (when “the perfect” was come), all the spiritual gifts ceased. Yet long after the gifts had ceased the practice of all the churches was to require women to cover their heads in worship.

But though the testimony of Tertullian and Clement and other early Christians is important, we do not need their testimony to establish the fact that women must cover their heads when praying and men must not—even when the person is not leading the prayer.

### All of worship

First of all, the words of Paul are “while praying or prophesying”. The word “or” separates the two actions. It means whether the woman is praying or prophesying—either one—she must be covered. Nor does Paul say, “While an inspired woman is praying.” Nothing in Paul’s words requires the woman to be inspired. She is a woman who is praying. Verse 13 uses the word “pray” only—“Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered?”

The word “prophesy” ordinarily means “to speak by inspiration of the Holy Spirit”, whether to foretell future events or to exhort or rebuke. In some places in the Bible it is used to mean uninspired singing or speaking (1 Chron. 15:1-2), and “the priests of Baal, who prayed and sang hymns to that idol, in the contest with Elijah, are said, 1 Kings xviii. 29 to have ‘prophesied till the time of the evening sacrifice’” (James MacKnight). Thus some believe Paul’s use of the word in 1 Corinthians 11 includes uninspired teaching and singing.

But in Paul’s day, when many of the Corinthians were guided by the Holy Spirit in their teaching, the word “prophesy” would describe the kind of teaching which was done, whether in the public service or in more private situations. “Pray or prophesy” covers what Christians do in worship. It is a way of saying, “When you worship God.”

### **Prayer can mean “worship”**

In defining the Greek word translated “prayer” (*proseuchomenos*), Strong says: “To pray to God, i.e. supplicate, worship: pray (earnestly, for) make prayer.” Thus the word “pray” can mean “worship”. A worship service is a prayer meeting. Sometimes a mid-week service is referred to as “prayer meeting”, even though all know that we also sing and teach. The word “prayer” simply stands for “worship.” Thus when Paul writes: “Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Cor. 11:13), he is using the word “pray” to stand for “worship.”

In Matthew 21:12 Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 when He said, “It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer.” The temple was a place of worship, which included prayer. To call it a house of prayer was to call it a place of worship.



The place where Lydia and the women worshiped God is called, “a place of prayer,” (Acts 16:13), as is also the place Paul was walking toward when he cast out the demon from the slave girl (Acts 16:16).

It is common, therefore, for the word “pray” or “prayer” to stand for all worship. This is clearly the way it is used in 1 Corinthians 11, and is how it was understood by Tertullian and the early Christians.

### **If only women speaking publicly are addressed:**

Some of the commentators I have checked take the position that in 1 Cor. 11 Paul is rebuking the women for “throwing aside the veil” while getting up publicly to teach or pray. Paul later (1 Cor. 14:34) shows that women are not to speak at all in the public assembly. Thus he rebukes the practice of laying aside the covering before he rebukes the practice of speaking publicly.

Expositor’s Greek New Testament says: “The regulation is not limited to those of either sex who ‘pray or prophesy’, but such activity called attention to the apparel, and doubtless it was among the more demonstrative women that the impropriety occurred, in the excitement of public speaking the shawl might unconsciously be thrown back.” (on 1 Cor. 11:4-5)

Or as Mike Willis puts it, “From what I can gather, the women must have been conducting a small women’s liberation movement in Corinth.” (p. 289)

Henry Alford says, (The Greek Testament, p. 564): “It appears, that the Christian women at Corinth claimed for their sex an equality with the other, taking occasion by the doctrine of Christian freedom and abolition of sexual distinctions in Christ (Gal. iii. 28). The gospel unquestionably did much for the emancipation of women, who in the East and among the Ionian Greeks (not among the Dorians and the Romans) were kept in unworthy dependence. Still this was effected in a quiet and gradual manner; whereas in Corinth they seem to have taken

up the cause of female independence somewhat too eagerly. The women overstepped the bounds of the sex, in coming forward to pray and to prophesy in the assembled church with uncovered heads. Both of these the Apostle disapproved,—as well their coming forward to pray and to prophesy, as their removing the veil; here however he blames the latter practice only, and reserves the former till ch. xiv. 34.” (Emphasis mine, pkw)

James Macknight in commenting on the same passage says: “As it is reasonable to think, that this praying and prophesying of the women, was of the same kind with the praying and prophesying of the men who acted as teachers, mentioned ver. 4, we may suppose the Corinthian women affected to perform these offices in the public assemblies, on pretence of being inspired, and though the apostle in this place hath not condemned that practice, it does not follow that he allowed it, or that it was allowed in any church. His design here was not to consider whether that practice was allowable, but to condemn the indecent manner in which it had been performed.”

If these commentators are correct, the only reason Paul rebuked these women was that they appeared in the assembly with uncovered heads. He is teaching incidentally, but nevertheless very clearly, that ALL women are to have their heads covered. If the covering applied ONLY to the ones praying or prophesying, there would be no reason for Paul to go to great length to tell them what to wear while they do it—then tell them in 1 Cor. 14:34 that they cannot do it at all! But they were violating TWO things—the head covering of a woman when worshiping AND the silence a woman is to keep in the assembly.

Therefore I believe this teaching was meant for ALL women, then and now. The women who prayed or prophesied were rebuked because they were the ones violating the “tradition” delivered to them by Paul (1 Cor. 11:2). It is just as wrong for the other women to be uncovered in the assembly as it was for the women praying or prophesying. Read again the commentators quoted and you will see that this is what they are saying.

### **Includes the public assembly**

The text does not specifically say that Paul is talking about women and men in the public assembly, but the words “pray or prophesy” must include the public assembly. It has been suggested that perhaps the women were not speaking in the public assembly, but were teaching in small groups. But Paul’s words apply wherever Christians are praying or prophesying, that is, when they are worshiping. The action was public enough to be regulated by “all the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:16).

### **A parallel to 1 Corinthians 14**

Can regulations which were given to regulate the behaviour of inspired people be used for us today when there are no spiritual gifts? If we answer, “Those commands are not for us,” then we are in a problem with the instructions of Paul concerning decent and orderly worship in 1 Corinthians 14. The instructions in verses 26-33 concerning the prophets in the assembly are just as applicable today as then.

Notice verses 29-33: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”

Because preachers are not inspired by the Holy Spirit today, can two or three speak at the same time? We recognize that there must be order, and we quote these verses to prove it. It matters not whether men are inspired or not, the principles apply in exactly the same way.

Note also verse 34, “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says.” Paul gave these instructions in the context of assemblies where spiritual gifts were exercised (which, as I have said

previously, would probably be typical of all worship assemblies of God's people at that time). If we cannot apply these instructions to worship assemblies without spiritual gifts, then women can preach! I think that is the inescapable conclusion.

I live and preach among the Zulus in South Africa. We use 1 Cor. 14:13-17 to show that we must have prayers interpreted so that all can understand. We also use these verses to show that it is wrong for everyone to pray different prayers out loud at the same time, since we can't know what the other is praying and therefore cannot say "Amen" at the end. But these verses deal with the exercise of spiritual gifts. Note what they say: "Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified."

Are we wrong to apply the instructions of these verses to our assemblies today? Will God be pleased if a man leads prayer in a language no one else can understand? Is it permitted for all to pray different prayers at the same time?

The assertion that Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 applied ONLY to inspired men and women and therefore do not say anything to us today will also eliminate his instructions in 1 Corinthians 14. It will mean that women CAN speak in the assembly. It will mean that a man can pray in a language no one else can understand. It will mean that all can pray different prayers out loud at the same time. But if we can see, and we should, that Paul's instructions, though spoken in the context of assemblies where spiritual gifts were used, are for all of us for all time even in the time of no spiritual gifts, we will be able to apply Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 AND 14 to us today.

The one who denies that women should cover their heads in worship today, either because of custom or because the instructions are addressed to inspired people, will have to allow women to speak in church for the same reasons. (Note, however, that Paul in 1 Cor. 11 addresses men and women “while praying OR prophesying”, so the assumption that Paul is speaking ONLY to inspired men and women is without foundation. But even if that assumption WERE true, Paul’s instructions are still binding today.)

### **A parallel to Matthew 5:23-24.**

Can we apply the teaching of Jesus in these verses today? He said, “If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

Jesus spoke these words when the Jews worshiped God by bringing gifts to the altar. We have no physical altar today. Does that mean we can dismiss Jesus’ words and say that they do not apply today?

Of course not. The principle is still true, and we apply it by saying that if you are on your way to worship God and then remember that someone has something against you, it is more important to go to the brother and show your repentance than it is to go to church.

The principles of 1 Cor. 11 and 14 must be applied in the same way, regardless of whether any of the people involved then were inspired or not.

### **Bible prophets not always inspired**

However, it is interesting that the Bible uses the word “prophet” and “prophesy” to apply to people who were not inspired by the Holy Spirit. The one who affirms that “a person had to be inspired to be a prophet” is affirming too much. Note the following lengthy quote from

Alfred Edersheim (*Prophecy and History*, pp. 121-123)

“Thus viewed, the prophet is the medium of supposed or real Divine communication—from whatever Deity it be—and the ‘weller-forth’ is also ‘the spokesman.’ It is in this sense that, when Moses was sent to bear the Divine communication to Pharaoh, Aaron was promised to him as his Nabhi— his well-forth, spokesman, or medium of communication. This may also help us to understand the meaning of an institution and of a designation in the Old Testament which is of the deepest interest: that of ‘schools of the prophets’ and ‘the sons of the prophets.’ I would suggest that ‘the sons of the prophets’ stood related to the prophets as the prophets themselves to the divine. They were the medium of prophetic communication, as the prophets were the medium of divine communication. And the analogy holds true in every particular. As the prophet must absolutely submit himself to God, and be always ready to act only as the medium of Divine communication, so must the ‘son of the prophet’ be ready to carry out the behests of the prophet and be the medium of his communication, whether by word or deed. As a prophet might be divinely employed temporarily, occasionally, or permanently, so the sons of the prophets by the prophets. God might in a moment raise up and qualify suitable men to be His prophets or means of communication, since only inspiration was required for this. But the prophets could not exercise such influence in regard to the ‘sons’. Accordingly, special institutions, ‘the schools of the prophets,’ were required for their training and preparation. Besides this primary object, these establishments would serve important spiritual and religious purposes in the land, alike as regarded their testimony to Prophetism, their cultivation of the Divine, their moral discipline, readiness of absolute God-consecration and implicit submission to Him, and general religious influence on the people. But the analogy between prophets and sons of the prophets went

even farther than we have indicated. For the moral qualifications for the two offices, however fundamentally differing, were in one respect the same. For both offices the one condition needful was absolute obedience; that is, viewed subjectively, passiveness; viewed objectively, faithfulness. Alike the prophet and the son of the prophet must, in the discharge of his commission, have absolutely no will or mind of his own, that so he may be faithful to Him Whose medium of communication he is.”

This explains why there were so many prophets in Elijah’s day. Obadiah told Elijah, “Has it not been told to my master what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, that I hid a hundred prophets of the Lord by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water?” (1 Kings 18:13.) These were probably the young men who were in the “schools of the prophets”.

### **Adam Clarke in his commentary on 1 Cor. 11 wrote:**

**Praying or prophesying.** Any person who engages in public acts in the worship of God, whether prayer, singing, or exhortation: for we learn, from the apostle himself, that propheteuein (to prophesy) signifies to speak unto men to edification, exhortation, and comfort, chap. 14:3. And this comprehends all that we understand by exhortation, or even preaching.

**Having his head covered** — with his cap or turban on, dishonoureth his head; because the head being covered was a sign of subjection; and while he was employed in the public ministration of the word, he was to be considered as a representative of Christ, and on this account his being veiled or covered would be improper.

Therefore, since the Bible uses the word “prophet” and “prophecy” to apply to uninspired people and their teaching from God’s word, the one who affirms that 1 Cor. 11 is speaking only to inspired people is on shaky ground. He cannot prove what he says.

### **Prayer not inspired**

Note that Paul gives his instructions to men and women while praying OR prophecyng. There is no way a man can prove that all prayers at Corinth were inspired prayers. In fact, a man will have a hard time to prove that the words of any prayer were directly inspired by God. But the person who argues that the instructions of 1 Cor. 11 do not apply to us because they were for inspired persons only, must prove that all the prayers were inspired. Of course he cannot do that.

### **Must these instructions be followed during private prayer?**

Verse 16 tells us that “the assemblies (churches) of God” observed the head covering practices. This is what Tertullian wrote in A.D. 200. It is clear that in public worship, whether in small groups or large, women are to cover their heads.

But what about when the woman is at home by herself, or when thanks is being said to God at the table? May a man who is wearing a hat pray when he is driving his car? Here we have one of the matters on which people may not see alike. Since the head covering is a sign which is designed to say something to other people, it is my judgment that it does not apply in private prayer. But let each person study and follow what he or she believes is right.



## **Must a woman wear a covering whenever she is in public?**

In some places in Bible times a woman wore a veil over her hair when in public. It was a matter of modesty. The Christian woman should always be careful to dress and behave in a way which shows that she is modest. If the practice of the community is to wear a veil in public, then the Christian will do that. Some of the writings of the early Christians talk about this.

However, Paul's instructions are for another purpose. He does not say, "Follow the custom of the people in order to be modest." He tells us that a woman is to cover her head *when praying or prophesying* in order to show that man is her head. The man must not cover his head *when praying or prophesying* in order to show that Christ is his head. These instructions are for worship, not for walking on the street.

Note: The problem with the idea that the woman must cover her head at all times in public runs into the same problem as the custom argument—What about the man? If the woman must wear a covering in public, the man must not wear a hat!

## Chapter 8

## “No such practice”—v. 16

Verse 16 reads:

*“But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” (KJV)*

*“But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” (NASB)*

This comes as Paul’s final statement on the subject, intended to settle the matter conclusively. Nearly all commentators agree that Paul is appealing to the practice of all the churches of God, saying that they all practice the same thing; that is, they require women to pray or prophesy with heads covered and men to pray or prophesy with heads uncovered. This means that the phrase “we have no such custom” (KJV) means “we have no custom of allowing women to pray with heads uncovered, etc.” Or we could say that the phrase means, “we have no custom such as that of the contentious man (who wanted women to pray or prophesy with heads uncovered and men to pray or prophesy with heads covered.)”

The NASB, while not rendering the Greek words literally, is trying to give the same sense. “We have no other practice” meaning “we have no other practice than requiring women to pray with heads covered, etc.”

This makes good sense. In 1 Corinthians 7:17 Paul appealed in the same way when he wrote concerning marriage and other relationships: “And so I direct in all the churches.” He also told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:17; “For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.” Here in the same letter he appeals to the same argument—neither “we” nor the churches of God have such a custom (practice). All the churches practiced the same thing.

This is the understanding of Mike Willis in *Truth Commentary* p. 308: “The universal custom in Paul’s day was for the woman to wear the veils. The different local congregations all observed the custom.” Bro. Willis argues that the matter is governed by the custom of the people (see the chapter on “Custom” for an examination of that position), and that all the churches required women to be veiled in worship because that was the custom of (worldly) people everywhere.

However there are some brethren who understand this verse to mean just the opposite. They maintain that Paul is saying, “We have no such custom (as requiring women to pray with heads covered and men to pray with heads uncovered), neither the churches of God.” That would mean that what Paul was requiring the Corinthians to do was the opposite of what was practiced by all other churches of Christ.

These brethren reason that there was a custom concerning head coverings at Corinth which was different from the custom anywhere else. Because of this custom, sisters and brothers had to cover or uncover their heads when praying or prophesying, but because this custom was not observed in other places, sisters could pray with heads uncovered and brothers could pray with heads covered in those places. Only in Corinth was the peculiar custom found which required what Paul taught in 1 Cor. 11:2-15. Those who teach this idea cannot cite biblical evidence for this peculiar custom at Corinth, nor can they find any mention of it in history or archaeology. They base it simply on what they believe verse 16 means.

Their application of this is the same as those who teach the usual custom argument (See the chapter on “Custom”). The assertion is that Paul is teaching that where there is a general custom in the community for women to cover their heads and men not to cover their heads when praying or prophesying, Christians must conform to that custom. But where custom does not require this, Christians do not have to cover or uncover heads in accordance with what Paul teaches.

## The historical evidence

But we have found that the heathen practices in worship among the Romans were quite different from what Paul commands. We have noted that Corinth was a Roman colony where Roman practices were common. It is quite likely that there were men in the church in Corinth who were covering their heads just as they had been accustomed to doing when worshiping their heathen gods before they became believers. Further, Kittle cites contemporary evidence to show that heathen priestesses did not wear head coverings. Thus every reliable evidence points to the conclusion that customary practices in heathen worship were the opposite of what Paul legislated in 1 Corinthians 11. No contemporary historical evidence suggests that head covering practices in Corinth were different from other areas, nor that the customary head covering practices were what Paul commanded the Corinthians to observe. Thus, those who argue that verse 16 means that Paul’s commands did not apply anywhere else than Corinth are asserting something which flies in the face of all the evidence.

It is noteworthy that these brethren do not usually try to cite any historical evidence to support their contention of the peculiar worship practices at Corinth. The fact that they do not is strong evidence that there is none. All of the evidence is that the practices in Corinth were no different than in Rome or other places.

### **Requires Christians to follow heathen worship customs**

This argument requires the church to follow the customs of heathens. These brethren assert that the practice of all other churches was different from what Paul required the Corinthians to follow. If this assertion is true, the custom did not come from Christians. If it were a Christian custom, all churches would follow it. Further, if these brethren are right the custom did not come from the Jews. There were Jews in the church at Corinth—AND in most of the other churches. If it is true that the custom here commanded was ONLY observed at Corinth, then it could not have been Jewish custom, since Jews were everywhere.

According to this argument, there was a peculiar practice in Corinth different from the practice in all other churches of Christ. Since the custom could not be from Christians or from Jews, it had to come from heathens. There is no other possible source for the custom.

But to make the matter even more difficult, Paul does not talk about what Christians are to wear on the street. He is legislating what Christians must do “when praying or prophesying.” These are worship practices, not practices of modesty in society. So the heathen custom at Corinth which the church had to follow must have been what was required by idolworshippers, that when worshipping idols the women were required to cover their heads and the men were required to uncover theirs. This is the only source from which the “custom” could have come—that men must pray or prophesy with heads uncovered and that women must pray or prophesy with heads covered. It had to come from heathen worship!

What a strange position these brethren are in! They have Paul saying that at Corinth women must cover their heads and men must uncover theirs when praying or prophesying because that was the practice of Greek heathens in their worship! That is hard to believe. Perhaps these brethren have not realized the consequences of their assertions.

Remember, Paul writes about head coverings when worshiping. Therefore the customs which Corinth alone had and which the Corinthian Christians had to obey, were worship customs—which came from heathens!

## Traditions

In 2 Thess. 2:15 Paul wrote: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the **traditions** which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” Again he wrote in 2 Thess. 3:6: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the **tradition** which you received from us.” This is the same Greek word

(*paradosis*) which Paul used in 1 Cor. 11:2: “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the **traditions**, just as I delivered them to you.”

Therefore we cannot infer from the word in verse 2 that Paul is talking about human traditions. They were traditions which Paul delivered to them and in this whole section Paul is talking about those traditions. They were the practices which Christians are to observe when praying or prophesying. They were delivered by Paul, therefore they came from Jesus Christ.

This is why all the churches observed the same practices.

### **The evidence of Tertullian and Clement**

David W. Bercot observes: “The interesting thing I noticed in reading Tertullian’s essay or tract on the subject of ‘veiling’ was that there was no issue in the churches of his day on what 1 Cor. 11 meant. The only issue that was there was whether Paul’s words applied to all mature females, or whether it applied only to married women.” (See chapter, *What the Early Christians Believed About the Head Covering*.) Tertullian wrote before 200 A.D., less than 100 years after the death of John, the last apostle to die. He cited the practice of all the churches, and particularly the church at Corinth, when arguing that virgins, and not just married women, must cover their heads in worship. This was evidently the universal practice from the time of the apostles. Mr. Bercot cites Clement and Hypolitus who testified to the same thing.

### **What Paul based his instructions on**

Perhaps the strongest argument that Paul was not instructing brethren to follow worldly customs, whether universal or local, is the fact that Paul based his teaching **upon divine principles, not custom**. He appealed to the divine principles of headship, creation, nature’s teaching, and “because of the angels”. He did not say, “Follow the customs of the people.” He taught us to cover or uncover heads when

praying or prophesying because of eternal principles. To trivialize those instructions into advice to follow local or universal customs is to fly in the face of what Paul teaches.

It is simply amazing to me that brethren who are so careful to handle the word of God correctly in other matters are willing to “suppose” something in this matter, something which cannot be proved from the Bible, and which is opposite to all known historical evidence! The position that the brethren at Corinth were required to cover or uncover heads when praying or prophesying because of local custom, while all other Christians in every other place were free from those restrictions, must be rejected. It cannot be true.

The truth is that all the churches of God required women to cover their heads when praying or prophesying, and all the churches of God required men to uncover their heads when praying or prophesying. The instructions of Paul were exactly what all the other apostles taught in every place. In every church the same behaviour was required. Paul cites this fact as the concluding argument, the argument which should stop every mouth. We today should listen carefully to this argument.

## Chapter 9

## Translations of Verse 16

**J. B. Phillips, *Letters to Young Churches*:** “But if anyone wants to be argumentative about it, I can only say that we and the Churches of God generally hold this ruling on the matter.”

**The Living Bible Paraphrased:** “But if anyone wants to argue about this, all I can say is that we never teach anything else than this—that a woman should wear a covering when prophesying or praying publicly in the church, and all the churches feel the same way about it.”

**Today’s English Version:** “But if anyone wants to argue about it, all I have to say is that neither we nor the churches of God have any other habit in worship.”

**James Moffatt Translation:** “If anyone presumes to raise objections on this point—well, I acknowledge no other mode of worship, and neither do the churches of God.”

**George P. Estes Translation:** “But if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no other practice, neither have God’s congregations.” (Bro. Estes published this translation of the New Testament in 1994.)

**The Living Oracles, Alexander Campbell:** “However, if any one resolve to be contentious, we have no such custom; neither the congregations of God.”

**Douay Version (Roman Catholic):** “But, if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor the church of God.”



## **Chapter 10**

# **The Holy Kiss and Washing of Feet**

There are some social customs which are recognized and commanded in the Bible. Two of these are the kiss of greeting and washing the feet of guests.

There are two essential differences between the way these customs are commanded and the way the head coverings are commanded.

First of all, it can be clearly demonstrated from scripture that these were social customs, and the way they were regulated in the New Testament is in exact accord with practice. The kiss was made “holy”, showing that our greetings are to be from the heart and not hypocritical. Washing of feet was a specific hospitable act, and this act is used to indicate hospitality in general.

Second, in regulating these acts there are no special reasons given for commanding them. They remain acts of greeting or hospitality. They have no special significance. They are simply to be “holy”.

Here are biblical references to these practices:

The kiss of greeting:

- Genesis 27:26,27—Jacob kisses his father.
- 2 Samuel 20:9—Joab makes as if to kiss Amasa.
- Psalm 2:12—“Kiss the son”, translated “Do homage” in the NASB.
- Proverbs 24:26—A right answer is like a kiss on the lips.
- Matthew 26:48—Judas kissed Jesus.
- Luke 7:45—Jesus rebuked the Pharisee for giving him no kiss.

- Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14—Christians told to greet with a “holy” kiss.

### Washing of feet:

- Genesis 18:4—Abraham entertained angels.
- Genesis 19:2—Lot entertained angels.
- Genesis 24:32—Laban gave hospitality to the servant of Abraham
- Genesis 43:24—Joseph’s steward washed feet of Joseph’s brothers
- 1 Samuel 25:41—Abigail described herself as “a maid to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.”
- 2 Samuel 11:8—David invited Uriah to go down to his house and wash his feet.
- Luke 7:44—Jesus rebuked the Pharisee for giving him no water for his feet.
- John 13:4-15—Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, told them to do the same.

Notice: When these practices were enjoined in the New Testament, no new significance was given to them. The washing of feet was commanded to show that we are to serve one another, even when that means doing things ordinarily done by a servant. The kiss of greeting was made into a “holy” kiss, a kiss which was a sincere sign of the love Christians are to have for one another.

It is for this reason that we know these practices are not in themselves important. When customs change, we can follow the customs for greeting or for hospitality. But the principles taught by the commands concerning those customs are always to be followed.

Paul dealt with the head coverings in a different way. First, he legislated very specifically in a way which was contrary to practice, especially the practice of men. (See chapter *Custom*.) These differences

are important. They show that Paul was not telling the Corinthians to follow accepted practice because of what that practice meant. He did not talk about head coverings in general, but head coverings “while praying or prophesying.” He told men not to cover their heads when praying or prophesying because Christ is their head. This was contrary to the Roman practice of worship, and contrary to what Jewish priests were to wear. And the reason for the command had nothing to do with custom.

In the case of women, though it was common for women to cover their heads in public, custom did not make it necessary. Further, we found that priestesses in heathen religions did not cover their heads. Therefore Paul was giving something different from social or religious customs.

Second, Paul gave very important reasons for carrying out his commands: to show headship, to keep from disgracing one’s head, to have “authority” on her head, because of the angels. He appealed to the accepted practice (“nature”) of hair length only to reinforce his command concerning the coverings.

Our conclusion is, therefore, that the words of 1 Corinthians 11 were not given to regulate custom. They were given as instructions to Christians different from what was customary, for reasons not found in custom. We have no right to change the way in which we follow these instructions.

# **Chapter 11**

## **Some Objections**

In this chapter we want to examine three objections which are sometimes voiced. The first two are given in order to question the conclusion that the instructions of Paul are for all Christians for all time, and the third objection is an attempt to weaken the position that the head covering is for women today by showing problems of application between brethren.

### **1. Found only once in scripture**

This instruction is not found anywhere else in the Bible. However, that alone does not lessen its power to be authority for all. There are many instructions which are found only once. Two examples: Matt 5:32 tells us two things not repeated elsewhere—that the man who puts away his wife for a cause other than fornication causes her to commit fornication, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (The latter clause is found in late manuscripts and included as Matt 19:9b, but it is not included in the NASB.) Matt 18:15-17 gives instructions concerning church discipline.

The Lord does not have to tell us twice. Whatever His Holy Spirit gives to us is true, whether it is repeated or not.

### **2. Written only to Corinth**

There are many instructions found in books written to individual churches, instructions which we understand are for all Christians. Paul wrote: “Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.” 1 Cor 4:16-17. The particular

teachings which are given in any one letter will be governed by the need of that church, but the teachings are universal in application. Paul taught the same everywhere in every church.

**3. Those who contend that women cover their heads in worship are divided on what kind of covering and when it must be worn.**

This is sadly true, but the same can be said of other subjects. Brethren who believe the church must eat the Lord's supper each first day of the week are divided as to how many drinking vessels may be used and whether the church which serves the Lord's supper in the morning may serve it to others on Sunday night. But this does not take away from the clear teaching that brethren must assemble to eat the Lord's supper each first day of the week.

When there is disagreement, we need to keep studying and attempting to carry out God's instructions in the spirit they have been given. Whether a hat will suffice as a covering, or whether the covering must hang down needs to be discussed. But disagreement on that topic does not mean that women do not need to be covered when praying or prophesying.

## Chapter 12

# What Constitutes a Covering?

This subject comes logically *after* one decides that the woman must wear a covering in worship. Unfortunately, many have tried to prejudice people by saying that 1 Cor. 11 required women to wear a covering which covered the face, or which was big enough to hold a large amount of grain. I am afraid that these assertions have been made in order to make people recoil in amused disgust from the whole idea that a woman must wear a covering in worship. Such assertions do not help us to consider the issue with clear minds.

There is another consideration, too. It is possible that some women may consider something to be a covering which does not “cover”. This was so in the day of Tertullian. He wrote: “How severe a chastisement will they likewise deserve who during the psalms and at any mention of God remain uncovered. Even when about to spend time in prayer itself, with the utmost readiness, they place a fringe, tuft, or any thread whatever on the crowns of their heads, and suppose themselves to be covered.” However, this does not affect the truth taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. The inconsistency of some people should not cause us to reject what Paul says.

### The Greek Words

First of all, let us find out what the two Greek words translated “cover” or “veil” in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 mean. There are two related words, *kalupto* and *katakalupto*. The first is not used in our passage, but is the root of the second. *Katakalupto* is used to refer to the covering which a woman must put on when praying or prophesying. A third word, *peribolaion*, is used in verse 15 to refer to a woman’s hair.

These are the definitions found in the Greek-English Lexicon by G. Abbott-Smith. Vine's and Thayer agree with Abbott-Smith.

The first word is *kalupto*. "in cl(assical Greek), rare in prose, *to cover*. Luke 23:30 ("to the hills, 'cover us."); Luke 8:16 ("No one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container"); Matthew 8:24 ("the boat was covered with the waves"); metaphorically, *to veil,conceal*: Matthew 10:26 ("there is nothing covered that will not be revealed"); 2 Corinthians 4:3 ("and even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing"); of the forgiveness of sins: 1 Peter 4:8 ("love covers a multitude of sins"); James 5:20 ("and will cover a multitude of sins");

I have given the definition of this word because *katakalupto* comes from it. Note: In AbbotSmith's definition of *kalupto* he gives all the instances of its use in the New Testament.

The word *katakalupto* is used only here in the New Testament. It is found in 1 Corinthians 11:6 and 7, and it is found with the Greek "a" (which means "not") attached to it in verses 5 and 13. Abbot-Smith defines it: "*to cover up; to cover or veil oneself*: 1 Corinthians 11:6, 7." He defines *akatakaluptos* as "*uncovered, unveiled*: 1 Corinthians 11:5, 13."

About 200 years before Jesus was born a number of learned Jews translated the Old Testament into Greek. This version of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint, and it was widely used in New Testament times. The words "*kalupto*" and "*katakalupto*" are found in the Septuagint, and their use may help us understand the meaning of *katakalupto* in 1 Corinthians 11. Here are two instances of its use. Numbers 22:5: "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land." Ezekiel 26:10: "Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you."

The word *kalupto* is also used in the Septuagint. One place is Ezekiel 38:16: "You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land."

It appears, therefore, that the words are used interchangeably with no essential difference in their meanings. *katakalupto* means “to cover” or “to veil”.

The word translated “covering” in 1 Corinthians 11:15: (“her hair is given to her for a covering”) is *peribolaion*. Abbott-Smith defines this word as: “*that which is thrown around, a covering*; in NT, (a) *a mantle*: Ps 102:26 (“like clothing”), Isaiah 59:17 (“And wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle”): (b) *a veil*: 1 Corinthians 11:15.”

I quote here from Margaret Short’s tract:

***Paul uses “katakalupto” for “cover” all the way down to verse 15. Then when speaking of the long hair of women as a covering he uses a different word “peribolaion”. But if he is referring to the hair as a “covering” in the same sense as he spoke earlier, why does he not use the same word?***

We conclude then that it is an artificial covering spoken of here. But what kind? Does the word “katakalupto” refer to a specific kind of covering? Some have argued from the etymology of the word that it refers specifically and exclusively to a full veil that will completely and opaquely cover the face and head. Consideration of the use of the word in other Greek writings, particularly the Septuagint, shows quite clearly that by the time of the New Testament the word had come to mean simply “cover” as we use the English word “cover”. It is, though, an intense form, indicating that the covering referred to would be a fairly full cover, thus ruling out a narrow head band (or similar item) as being a covering referred to here.



## Head, not Face

Some contend that in order to comply with Paul's command to cover the head, that the covering required would have to cover the face as well as the head. They often use the illustration of John the Baptist's head which was brought on a platter to the daughter of Herodias (Matthew 14:6-12). What was on the platter included his face, therefore the covering for the head must include covering the face.

First of all, it appears that this argument is made to create prejudice. If it were true, it would not affect the teaching of the passage. The only thing the assertion does is make it appear that those who teach that a woman must cover her head are inconsistent. But even if that were true, it would not change the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11.

Jesus recognized a difference between the face and the head when He said in Matthew 6:17— “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.” The word “head” is used the same way in 1 Corinthians 11. This is implied when the hair is said to be a covering. The hair does not cover the face. Tertullian (about A.D. 200) made this distinction when he wrote, “Arabia's pagan females will be your judges. For they cover not only the head but the face also.” (See chapter *What the Early Christians Believed About the Head Covering*.) Note the distinction he made between head and face.

It might also be noted that if the face had to be covered in order for it to be a “head” covering, then a man might pray or prophesy with a veil on his head as long as it did not cover his face. Suppose a man were to appear like that in worship today! Would we let him preach? Adam Clarke commented on 1 Cor 11:7—“He should not wear his cap or turban in the public congregation.”

## Cover, not Decorate

It seems that we Christians, in our less than perfect spirituality, try to stretch the limits of God's word. When one teaches about modesty, the question of "how short may a skirt be?" will certainly be brought up, with the implication that if we cannot give the exact length, then any length the "Christian" may be comfortable with is OK. The same thing has happened with the head covering worn by women in worship.

In about the year 200 Tertullian wrote: "For some, with their turbans and woolen bands, do not veil their heads but bind them up." "They were protected indeed in front, however they are bare where their head properly lies. Others are to a certain extent covered over the region of the brain with linen doilies of small dimensions which do not quite reach the ears. Let them know that the whole head constitutes the woman. Its limits and boundaries reach as far as the place where the robe begins. The region of the veil is co-extensive with the space covered by the hair when unbound." He also wrote, "Even when about to spend time in prayer itself, with the utmost readiness, they place a fringe, tuft, or any thread whatever on the crowns of their heads, and suppose themselves to be covered." (For these quotes see the chapter *What the Early Christians Believed About the Head Covering.*)

What Paul commands is a "covering", not a "decoration". Paul has not given the dimensions, nor the color, nor how opaque the covering must be. However I am persuaded that the spiritually minded person will not be trying to press the limits. She will be trying to truly cover her head.

## **Chapter 13**

# **Fellowship**

It has been the usual practice in churches of Christ for brethren who disagree on the meaning of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 to worship and work together without distinction. Preachers who believe that women should cover their heads in worship work together with preachers who do not, and women who cover their heads sit next to women with bare heads in the assembly. And I believe this is the correct thing to do.

Many brethren justify our fellowship on the basis of the teaching of Romans 14. However, I do not believe the principles of that chapter cover the problem of fellowship between us on this question.

In Romans 14 Paul deals with those who are weak in (the) faith and the ones who are strong in (the) faith. The strong one understands correctly that he may eat all things, while the weak believes he must eat vegetables only.

In this case, the strong one can eat meat and the weak one can eat vegetables and both be pleasing to God. There is no law to say that one must eat meat, therefore no law is violated by either. Therefore each should be convinced in his own mind. No one should judge his brother in the matter, and no one should put a stumbling block in front of his brother.

However, the truth on the matter was taught clearly by Paul, so that the one who was weak in (the) faith could become strong. In verse 22 Paul writes, “The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God.” This indicates that on this question your faith is a private matter. You do not have to convert others to your belief.

The matter of the meaning of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is a different matter. The ones who believe a woman can worship God with

uncovered head think of themselves as the “strong” ones. It makes no difference to them whether a woman covers her head or not. So they can tolerate those who cover their heads.

However, to those of us who have studied carefully and come to the conclusion that it is God’s will for women to cover their heads in worship, this is not a matter of liberty or free choice. It is a matter of God’s will. When we offer fellowship to those who disagree with us on this matter, it is not on the basis of what Romans 14 says.

A preacher who does not believe that women have to cover their heads in worship moved to work with a church where the members were strong in believing that women should cover their heads. I asked him, “How did you manage to get along?” He said, “That was their problem. We got along fine.” When he said, “That was their problem,” he was stating the truth. The problem of fellowship is with us who believe that women should cover their heads. How can we consistently fellowship those whom we believe are failing to obey God’s command?

We know that the head covering question is not the only problem in this realm. Those who believe it is a sin for a man to go to war for his country under any circumstances are in the same position. How can they justify fellowshiping those whom they believe are sinning against God? David Lipscomb believed it was a sin to have any part in the government, yet he willingly offered cooperation to those who believed the opposite. There are many positions concerning the Lord’s Supper—whether to offer it in the evening, for instance. We can think of a number of things on which good brethren differ.

Windell Wiser points out some things worth considering. He writes: “We both (those who are for and against the head covering) teach numbers of things, which are a part of the faith, which we do not make a test of fellowship... (Paul) withdrew from one living in adultery. I never find where he withdrew from any of the rest of the Corinthians for not living up to his teaching... Paul withdrew from Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20), taught the church at Rome to mark certain ones (Rom. 16:17) but did not withdraw from others who were doing

things wrong as we have already mentioned at Corinth.... There are a number of things (we) teach, which are a part of the faith, and (we) do not withdraw from people who fail to comply.” (*Booklet Don Quixote Rides Again!*, An Answer pp. 21-23.)

I do not know the entire answer concerning fellowship, and I doubt that anyone else does. I know that the consequences of refusing fellowship whenever we conscientiously disagree over the application of Bible teaching will soon be a fragmenting too horrendous to think about.

I also think that those things where we have tacitly agreed to disagree and remain in fellowship are things which require a good many inferences, sometimes not necessary inferences. These things do not seem as clear as other matters. Thus we continue to try to teach one another and leave the judging to God. I think this is right. It seems the only practical course.

However, this has resulted in brethren thinking that the questions on which we differ without breaking fellowship are not important. Instead of there being careful Bible study on those questions, they are dismissed because brethren differ and still get along. I have tried to get thoughtful articles on the head covering published by a leading brotherhood journal, but it has not been possible. Apparently brethren do not want to upset things. And I think this is a very bad attitude.

Brethren, we need to study, and we need to study questions wherein we differ. We must study in a brotherly way, with love for the truth and love for one another. But we must remember that God will hold us responsible for how we handle the truth. We must not stifle controversy when it is for the purpose of finding the truth.

Therefore, let us tolerate and work together with brethren who differ on these questions, while at the same time being willing to study and teach that the truth may always prevail.

## Chapter 14

### Why So Many Positions?

The reader may have observed that it has been necessary to deal with many different positions which brethren hold concerning the head coverings. These positions are very different from one another. Some say that there was a universal custom making it necessary for women to cover their heads when in public. Others say that is absolutely wrong—the custom was only at Corinth. Some maintain that there is only one covering in the passage, and the covering is long hair. Others make it clear that this is an untenable position. Some contend that the only covering in the passage is hair. And a recent position is that the verses apply only to women who had spiritual gifts, and since God does not give gifts today women and men do not have to follow the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11.

Yet though these people have different understandings of 1 Corinthians 11, they all agree that the instructions given by Paul in this chapter do not apply today. These brethren, while having completely different understandings of the passage, are happy with one another. It seems that as long as there is agreement that women do not have to cover their heads in worship, whatever reasoning takes a person there is all right!

One brother wrote to me:

The one thought that occurred to me for the first time as I watched you “systematically” deal with argument after argument against the woman’s injunction to wear a covering is this: The liberals must be right – we do need a new hermeneutic! (I say this with tongue firmly implanted in cheek!). Look at this situation. Here are a series of arguments Paul puts clearly forward to support his argument of Lordship and headship. Our brethren take issue with different individual arguments to convince themselves, and others, that a woman need not wear a

covering. One argues that it was just a local custom, another says “no it was more than a local custom” but argues that it only applies during the exercise of spiritual gifts, another doesn’t accept the custom or gifts argument but argues that the only covering under consideration was hair, and so on and so forth. The disturbing thing is that our brethren don’t even agree on which of their negative arguments apply and when. And so the “custom” arguer may not accept the validity of the “spiritual gifts” arguer. The “hair” arguer may not accept the validity of the “custom” arguer, and so on and so on.

The fact that the brethren who are taking the negative position can not even agree on the validity of a uniform negative argument(s) indicates to me that the negative is in complete disarray. Why? This suggests to me very strongly that the negative is NOT being motivated so much by Biblical truth, injunction, and careful hermeneutic application but are being driven by doctrinal predisposition or a cultural prejudice. If this is not the case then what is the explanation that a group of brethren, all holding to the essential same Biblical basis of hermeneutics can not even come up with anywhere near a consistent negative case? It seems to me in stepping back and looking at the big picture of negative argumentation that it represents a “casting about” to try to find some avenue to make the passage mean what we want it to mean rather than what it clearly states. I’m not really trying to impugn any particular position or any one’s motives in particular. But the fact that those who are teaching against the covering cannot even come close to a consistent negative set of arguments must give one pause to think in considering the motivation and overall validity of the negative position.

If the reader has read the chapter *What the Early Christians Believed About the Head Covering*, which is the transcript of a cassette sermon by David Bercot, you will have noticed that he addresses this question.

One thing that Mr. Bercot said is:

Actually this is all part of a larger pattern that emerged in the 19th century. Today we often think of women's lib or the feminist movement as something that started in the 60's. No it didn't start in the 1960's, it started back in the early 1800's. And the result of that movement that has swept both through politics and through the church is that churches have basically gone through the scriptures and nullified every single commandment that applies to women alone or particularly to women.

We in the church of the Lord are certainly not immune to peer pressure. The world is against anything which will show that woman is to be in subjection to man. Though we teach that the woman is to be in subjection, it very well may be that the pressure of the world is influencing how we deal with the instructions of the head coverings.

May God help us all to be striving to determine God's will, regardless of the pressure of the world.



## Appendix

### Comments by Richard E. Oster, Jr.

#### On 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

##### College Press NIV Commentary 1995

I was given a photocopy of the section of the above commentary. It is published by the publishing house of “conservative” Christian Church people. I am reproducing it here, minus the many footnotes, because I want the reader to see what a modern commentator does with this passage. Though he does not specifically apply the passage to modern times, and therefore does not say that a woman must cover her head in worship, his comments point to that conclusion. His material on men covering their heads in worship in his comments on verse 4 are very important. He points out in his comments on verse 5 that Paul is not talking about what a woman wears outside the home. He shows in his comments on verse 16 that all the churches of God observed the head covering practices Paul teaches in these verses. I think you will profit from considering what Mr. Oster has written.

—PKW

## VI. LITURGICAL ABERRATIONS (11:2-34)

A few comments about the literary structure and themes of this new section of 1 Corinthians are in order. First, there is no occurrence of the “now about” (*peri de*) introductory phrase which many interpreters believe signal topics raised by the Corinthians that the apostle is answering (see Introduction; cf. 1 Cor. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Regardless of whether Paul is responding to inquiries in chapter 11, he clearly has two major issues before his readership, each of which begins with a

form of verbal parallelism. The first section, 11:2-16, begins with the phrase “I praise you” while the second unit, 11:17-34, states “I have no praise for you.” Another feature of both topics in this chapter is that they deal with matters related to the liturgical and devotional practices of the Corinthian believers. With the primary focus of 11:2-16 being on prayer and prophecy (see notes on 11:4-5), and the focus of 11:17-34 being on the Lord’s Supper (11:20), one is constrained to see worship as the common denominator between these two blocks of Pauline instruction.

## A. PROPRIETY IN WORSHIP (11:2-16)

### 1. Head Coverings in Worship (11:2-10)

*11:2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.*

Consistent with Paul’s words of praise in this first section, the reader notices the mild tone, relative to 11:17-34, in Paul’s teaching. The apostle mentions two matters which serve as the basis (*hoti*) of his praise. They are the facts that the Corinthians remember him and that they embrace the religious traditions (*paradoxeis*) with which he had instructed them in the past. All of this is to prepare them for additional religious tradition with which he hopes to correct the impropriety of their worship practices. This strategy of praising his readers prior to correction is not an uncommon rhetorical feature in Paul’s letters or ancient Greco-Roman moral philosophers. The pagan author Plutarch encouraged this pattern of behavior in his philosophy. He wrote,

We ought to keep close watch upon our friends not only when they go wrong but also when they are right, and indeed the first step should be commendation cheerfully bestowed. Then later...we should give them an application of frankness.” (Plutarch “How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend” 73C-74E, cited in Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation*, no. 21, p. 53.)

***11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.***

Current literature on the issue of the Christian faith and its view(s) regarding the role, status, and function of men and women can easily be overwhelming and befuddling, particularly to the non-specialist. With the inundation of publications, all with differing agendas, scholars have found it helpful to categorize major schools of thought on the topic of the Bible and its view(s) about women. From the perspectives of a nonfeminist (i.e. “believes hierarchical relationships based upon gender are still normative within the church,”) Jack Cottrell has categorized feminist interpretations into four groups. (These summaries are taken from Jack Cottrell, ***Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption***, Joplin: College Press, 1994).

1. **Secular Feminism.** These “have abandoned all religious belief as having any positive relation to feminist philosophy” and base their views “on human philosophy and humanistic theories of social justice”(p. 13).
2. **Goddess Feminism.** This approach believes “that Goddess worship was the original nearly-universal religion and that it fostered a matriarchal culture [and that] feminist goals can best be achieved through a ‘return to the Goddess,’[a return that means becoming] an active part of the current revival of neo-pagan religions and witchcraft” (p. 14).
3. **Liberal Feminism.** This approach “shares the same general goals of secular and Goddess feminism, but it pursues these goals from within the Christian framework....While granting that the Bible is mostly androcentric and patriarchal, they decline to abandon it altogether and to give up their connection with Jesus Christ....Liberal Christian feminism does not accept the Bible as the revealed and inspired Word of God nor as any kind of canonical authority [but rather believes that] women’s experience is the ultimate criterion of all truth” (pp. 16:17).

4. **Biblical Feminism.** This perspective accepts “the final authority of the Bible and...believes that feminism is the Bible’s authentic teaching...[and] interprets the Bible as consistently teaching an egalitarian view of women” (pp. 18-19).

In light of the assumptions of a historical-exegetical method and the numerous exegetical abuses set forth both by feminist and anti-feminists, a few general observations are in order. First, when interpreters go beyond asking solely historical questions and attempt to isolate the differences between the temporary and the eternal in the teachings and affirmations of Paul, they must keep in mind that the apostle himself left no explicit guidelines for this task. That is, Paul did not employ some system of annotation, such as asterisks, to inform his original readers which instructions he thought were “only temporary.” A historically honest interpretation ought at least acknowledge what the apostle thought his own doctrines, and their foundations, were.

Second, one needs to be cautious about the dangers of feminist alchemy, whereby the feminist interpreter attempts to transmute, based upon ill-informed historical reconstructions and tendentious philology, Pauline words and theology into something deemed to be more desirable and precious than the original. There are far too many examples in current publications where ideology is paraded about masquerading as exegesis.

Finally, in its more egregious forms, current feminist theories disregard any part of the Scripture that does not conform to their own cultural, philosophical psychological, and social agendas. It is no coincidence that feminist interpretations are often mere echoes of whatever the currently popular social or political views happen to be.

Irrespective of what one chooses to do with the issue of feminism in the current setting, the intention of Paul can be more judiciously encountered and interpreted when his ideas are not jerked from the soil of his response to a first generation urban church in the Roman colony

of Corinth.

The word “head” dominates in 1 Corinthians 11:3. The frequency of the term “head” (*kephale*) in this chapter (nine times) is a significant indicator of the issue under discussion in 11:2-16. Specifically, Paul explains his position in this section on the basis of the alternation between the literal and the metaphorical use of the term. He does this in order to deal with two head-related ideas, namely, the liturgical head covering and the significance of hair (or lack of it) on one’s head.

The occasional and contextual nature of Paul’s choice of wording in this verse is important to notice. It is evident that the meaning of the term “head” in the paired formulations of 11:3 seems to be created for this particular section since it is found in this connection nowhere else in Paul’s writings. Specifically, Paul nowhere else uses this term “head” (*kephale*) to denote the relationship between Christ and every male. Nor is there corroborating evidence elsewhere in Paul for his use of this word to depict the relationship between men and women. (Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5:21-33 is not about men and women, but rather about husbands and wives.) Most significantly, in all the Christological formulas and texts in Paul there are none which use the terminology of head to talk about the relationship between God and Christ. What stands before the interpreter, then, is another instance in which the apostle responds to a problematic situation with terminology and rhetoric which both arises from the *ad hoc* problem and corresponds to the occasional nature of the situation.

An important and detailed philological debate has arisen in the past few decades over the connotations of the Greek term *kephale* as it is used metaphorically in this section of 1 Corinthians. The two basic interpretations are that the term should be understood as meaning either (1) source or (2) leader (=in authority over). The fact that the forceful impetus for promoting interpretation no. 1 typically comes from New Testament scholars (e.g., Gordon Fee) with strong feminist perspectives explains why this theory is still somewhat novel. Those interpreters who endorse the second view represent both scholars who support the ordination of women as well as those with no interest in

supporting the ordination of women. English translations, as one would expect, merely translate the word *kephale* as “head” and leave it to the reader to interpret its metaphorical connotations. The evaluation of Witherington seems correct on this point when he reasons that, “since the context has to do with authority, authorization, and order in worship, it would seem more probable that *kephale* has the metaphorical sense” of leader. (*Conflict and Community in Corinth*, pp. 237-238)

While the term “hierarchy” or “chain of command” will hardly do as a metaphor for the linking together of the three paired relationships (i.e., God-Christ; Christ-man; man-woman) in 11:3, one is not within earshot of this text if he cannot see that Paul, particularly in light of the following arguments of 11:2-16, is primarily focused on (re)affirming a certain liturgical propriety (see 11:13, “is it proper?” *prepon estin*) that employs a gender criterion.

In light of the fact that some of the Corinthian saints are not disposed to acquiesce to Paul’s judgments in this matter, as he himself acknowledges (11:16), Paul attempts in 11:3 to prove the validity of his position by making an appeal to “the arrangements which God has appointed” (Calvin) or, in more modern terms, “Paul’s view is that the creation order should be properly manifested, not obliterated, in Christian worship....” (Witherington)

Due to the fact that Paul makes a correlation between “divine order” (i.e., God is the *kephale* of Christ) and male “headship” (i.e., man is the *kephale* of woman) at Corinth, some interpreters with feminist-egalitarian commitments end up promoting an egalitarian view of the Trinity in its depiction of the relationship between God and Christ. This view is obviously non-Pauline! (See 1 Cor 15:28.)

In order to keep the implications of Paul's argument clear, it is crucial to translate the pairing man/woman (*aner/gyne*) consistently in this particular rhetorical section. Accordingly, not only is it poor translation technique, but it also confuses the historical issues at Corinth to vacillate between man-woman and husband-wife in this section, or to interpret this section through the situation addressed in Eph 5:21ff where marriage is clearly meant.

***11:4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.***

The history of the interpretation of 1 Cor 11:4 manifests a wide diversity of methodologies and corresponding conclusions. Two major methodological problems explain most of the incorrect interpretations of this section. Either the interpreter is:

1. remiss in understanding and using the appropriate sources from ancient cultures or
  2. preoccupied with demonstrating that Paul's principal complaint is with Christian women at Corinth.
1. John C. Hurd, for example, questions the necessity of knowing the historical information about the background to this situation when he writes, "It is not necessary to decide the difficult historical problem of the actual social *mores* which were current at that time." Others, such as Gordon Fee, have misjudged the availability of the pertinent evidence. Contrary to the evidence of a plethora of literary and archaeological evidence Fee concluded, "There is almost no evidence (paintings, reliefs, statuary, etc.) that men in any of the cultures (Greek, Roman, Jew) covered their heads." After abandoning the hope of finding a historical and cultural matrix that would provide insight into the Corinthian situation, he is drawn inevitably to conclude, "In the final analysis, however, we simply have to admit that we do not know. In any case, it is hypothetical, whatever it was."

These conclusions by Fee and others simply do not acknowledge the relevant archaeological and literary evidence from antiquity. Notwithstanding this neglect, the ancient evidence is incontestable and widespread. Plutarch, a Greek writing author who lived during the early Roman Empire, wrote that the Romans, as opposed to Greeks, “thus worshipped the gods either humbling themselves by concealing the head, or rather by pulling the toga over their ears.” The later author Dionysius of Halicarnassus likewise observed that this use of the devotional head covering was an important Roman religious practice used when participating in prayer, prophecy or sacrifice. The Latin author Valerius Flaccus, writing in the late first century A.D., mentions the pagan prophet Mopsus who “veiling his head” worships by offering a libation. Virgil, the famous Latin author who wrote shortly after the time of the refounding of Corinth as a Roman colony, also sheds light on this significant Roman liturgical practice. In the epic story of Rome’s beginning recorded in the *Aeneid*, one learns that it was sacred law for the Romans to veil their heads when worshipping and sacrificing to their gods and goddesses. Regarding this custom and tradition the prophet Helenus proclaims that “this mode of sacrifice do thou keep, thou and thy company; by this observance let thy children’s children in purity stand fast.” Both the frequency and the significance of this pietistic head covering gesture is attested by the Latin author Lucretius who ridicules Roman piety with these words,

It is no piety to show oneself often with head covered, turning towards a stone and approaching every altar, none to fall prostrate upon the ground and to spread open the palms before shrines of the gods, none to sprinkle altars with blood of beasts in shows and to link vow to vow.

In addition to an enormous amount of literary data that depicts the Roman devotional head-covering, it is also attested by visual evidence on ancient Roman coins, Roman statues, and



Roman altar reliefs from around the Mediterranean world. Even though some interpreters of this Corinthian text are yet unconvinced that this widespread Roman practice should be seen as the backdrop for this verse, other scholars are now convinced that this provides the most plausible explanation for the situation assumed by this opening section of 1 Cor 11:2ff. All things considered, it is not a radical conclusion to affirm that a congregation in a large Roman colony would have some Roman members who would have been converted from Roman paganism and would have brought some of their devotional and liturgical traditions with them into the worship assemblies of the church of God.

2. Probably because of the gender of most interpreters of 1 Corinthians, many have thought that the only aberrant believers whom the apostle was addressing in this section were women. As Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has shown, it is a masculine bias that has focused on Paul's injunctions in 11:2-16 and concluded that no men were at fault. Typical of the history of this sexist exegesis were comments by:
  - a. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer: "There is no reason for supposing that men at Corinth had been making this mistake in the congregation. The conduct which would be improper for men is mentioned in order to give point to the censure on women, who in this matter had been acting as men."
  - b. Charles Hodge: "The thing to be corrected was women appearing in public assemblies unveiled.... Men are mentioned only for the sake of illustrating the principle."
  - c. Hans Conzelmann: "The parallelism between vv 4 and 5 expresses the fundamental equality of rights although it is only the woman's conduct that is at issue."

- d. F. F. Bruce: “It is improbable that Christian men were actually veiling their heads in Corinth; the reference to their (hypothetically) doing so is necessary to complete the argument.”

An overview of 11:2-16 makes it clear that Paul is quite even-handed in his directives and arguments about both men (*aner*) and women (*gyne*) in this chapter: (There follows a chart which shows that *aner* is used 14 times in these verses and *gyne* 16 times.)

Another clear implication of this statistical evidence is that in Paul’s mind gender is the controlling issue of the paradigm with which he is operating. This means that social status issues were not what the apostle was striving to counter.

There are three exegetical points in the text that need to be mentioned. First, in light of the Greek words used by Paul for the phrase “with his head covered,” (*kata kephales echon*) there is no need to question whether he had the idea of a head covering in mind. In light of the ancient philological evidence, the words and idioms used by Paul most naturally refer to the Roman toga which would have covered the head of someone worshipping. Second, given the Roman cultural setting of this custom, it is extremely doubtful whether the acts of praying and prophesying mentioned here ought to be identified with the “charismatic” praying and prophesying recounted in 1 Cor 14. Finally, the second reference to the head (i.e., the dishonored head) in this verse is the literal head of the man who prays and prophesies and not Christ as the head.

***11:5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved.***

Since the apostle specifies the exact circumstance he has in mind and this is participation in liturgy (i.e., praying and prophesying), one has clearly left Paul’s agenda to take this text to refer to what a believing woman should wear when she goes outside her home. Admittedly there

were ancient dress codes of modesty that were concerned about the modesty of a woman's attire in public. A pagan philosophical document coming from a time generally contemporary with early Christianity asserts that,

***The temperate, freeborn woman must live with her legal husband adorned with modesty, clad in neat, simple, white dress without extravagance or excess. She must avoid clothing that is either entirely purple or is streaked with purple and gold.***

Paul has no interest in the issue mentioned in the above quotation. Moreover, he is not even addressing a situation concerning what women should wear "to the assembly."

Several preposterous suggestions have been offered about the background of Paul's concern here. One such idea states that Paul is combating a situation where the women believers were appearing like prostitutes since they were unveiled. Another perspective states that there were women running around unclothed in the assembly in some orgiastic-like demeanor. These types of suggestions and reconstructions stem from a fertile imagination rather than any exegetical or historical evidence.

The apostle's observations in this verse are solely about women's devotional attire in the presence of men during periods of worship in which some woman participated. Since women prophets are also attested in the Acts of the Apostles, a reference here to women prophesying should come as little surprise. Since prophecy was a gift for corporate worship (1 Cor 14), he can hardly have in mind at 11:5 some worship that is performed alone or without the presence of men. In fact, had there been no men present (1 Cor 11:4) when these sisters were praying and prophesying, this issue would not have even arisen for Paul to correct.

Interpreters differ over the various possible connotations of the threefold use of the word "head" in this verse. While all take the first

and third occurrences to be literal, many view the second occurrence (dishonors the head) to be a metaphorical reference. The use of head does not likely refer metaphorically to the woman's husband as Kistemaker and Gill believe since in this section *aner* refers to man and not to a husband. Another metaphorical view interprets the reference back to head in 11:3 and takes 11:5 as a reference to the woman's man "in terms of male/female relationships." This view is likewise not without problems. In my judgment Paul uses this term *kephale* in the literal sense all three times in 11:5. As Robertson and Plummer noted, "The unveiled woman dishonours her head because that is the part in which the indecency is manifested." The connecting Greek word *gar* (for; omitted in the NIV translation) between the second and third occurrences of the word "head" reveals the connection in Paul's mind between dishonoring one's literal head and the similar meaning manifested when the literal head is shaved. Barrett sees the same connection and notes about the meaning of the phrase "dishonors her head" that "the subsequent reference to shaving suggests that her physical head is meant."

***11:6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.***

The interpreter finds himself, somewhat unexpectedly, in the midst of references to hair, or its absence, on women's heads. In light of the dual references in this section to bald women and men with long hair, scholars have wondered exactly what Paul is referring to. There are two main schools of thought regarding Paul's intent in introducing issues of hair and hair length.

One school of thought believes that some of the Corinthians are manifesting concrete problems with the length of their hair. Interpreters mention the ancient phenomenon of men, either homosexuals or disheveled cynic philosophers, having long, stringy, and unkempt locks, and the phenomenon of women, usually prostitutes, adulteresses, or priestesses in pagan cults, with shorn heads. In light of this

perspective, Paul is admonishing the men and women believers to abandon these unacceptable hair styles because of their dishonorable reputation.

A second understanding views the arguments about the respective hair lengths as not directed to any concrete problems that the Corinthian saints have, but as arguments used to buttress Paul's contention that head coverings, hair or otherwise, do make a difference. This second interpretive approach seems more cogent to me. It does not have the liability of having Paul introduce an issue which has nothing essential to do with the topic of worship, a topic which is the focus of the entirety of the rest of chapter 11.

Moreover, at the rhetorical level this second understanding makes the best sense of Paul's strategy of connecting the issue of artificial head coverings with the issue of the natural covering provided by human hair, especially in 11:13-15. Paul anticipates the problems that some of his readers will have with his admonitions on the head veils (11:16) and he intends to persuade them on the basis of an appeal to commonly held values. That is, Paul's thesis that liturgical head coverings should differ according to gender will not appear cogent to Roman believers for whom the devotional head covering was never a gender-related practice. In this situation Paul wants to argue, based upon the authority of the everyday perceptions and values of his readers, that everyone knows that shame and dishonor can be attributed to a person's literal head based upon the presence or lack of a natural covering.

In light of the premise at the end of the preceding verse (a woman's uncovered head is like a shaved head), Paul argues that the logic of the situation demands that the sisters at Corinth who are uncovered during the participation in praying and prophesying in worship should be consistent and have their "hair cut off." Conversely, if it is a correct premise (and Paul's audience would have certainly consented to this premise) that a woman with a shaven head is a disgrace, then Paul concludes the argument, the women at Corinth who wish to avoid a disgraceful demeanor must cover their heads during the liturgical circumstances set forth in 11:5.

***11:7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.***

In this verse Paul cannot employ an argument against men's improprieties that is identical with the one that he used against women in the preceding verse. Given the realities of human genetics (men have a greater propensity for balding) and the fact that the cultural image of a man with a shaven head did not engender concepts of disgrace, the apostle's reasoning turns at this point to other arguments and resources.

As mentioned above, the Greek author Plutarch reports important information about this Roman practice of head covering. In his discussion he makes it clear that there were several distinct and at times conflicting interpretations about the meaning and significance of the wearing of the liturgical veil. One of the stronger interpretations was that the wearing of the devotional head covering was a sign of giving honors to the gods (*time*). The apostle himself will reveal more than one reason for the divine necessity (*opheilo*) involved in his instruction.

The justification, indeed demand, that male participants in worship keep heads uncovered is first argued on the basis of the terms "image" (*eikon*) and "glory" (*doxa*). In light of the explicit reference to the creation account of Genesis in 1 Cor 11:8-9, there is no justification for denying the implicit reference to it in 11:7. In fact, if one were looking for Scripture attestation to issues related to men and women one would hard pressed to find a more natural place to begin than Genesis.

The internal "logic" of Paul's argumentation has not always been readily apparent. This is understandable since the attribute of glory in the case of the man requires unveiling while praying and prophesying though in the case of the woman it requires veiling. The upshot of the apostle's reasoning seems to be that man can worship God without a head covering since he is the glory (*doxa*) of God's creation. Woman on the other hand is the glory (*doxa*) of man and not of God. Therefore, she must pray and prophesy in the presence of men with head covered.

Most interpreters rightly observe that the apostle did not say that woman was the image (*eikon*) of man, but only his glory. It is surely, however, a trivialization of Paul's thought to suggest no more than that. "Perhaps he means that women's uncovered heads are drawing men's attention to humanity instead of to God; as one would say today, they were turning men's heads."

***11:8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man;***

By his use of the term "for" (*gar*) he offers 11:8 as an explanation of how woman is the glory of man. Specifically, Paul has in mind limiting this perspective of glory to the priority of man's creation to woman's. This is an obvious allusion to Gen 2:22-23 which states, "Then the Lord God made woman from the rib he had taken out of man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman" for she was taken out of man.'"

***11:9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.***

Having given an argument in 11:8 based upon the relative origin of the female species (from man), Paul now turns to an argument based upon the cause (*dia* plus the accusative case) for the creation of the woman. Paul again draws his theological perspectives from the Genesis narrative, this time from Gen 2:18-20. God observed the loneliness of the man and decided to create an appropriate helper for him to remedy this problem, a helper whose role in this regard, according to the narrative of Gen 2:18-24, is completed in marital union.

Since Adam and Eve are presented in Genesis as both the first married couple and the first man and woman, it is crucial to keep in mind which perspective Paul is focused on in 1 Cor 11. As Witherington correctly concluded, Paul's "argument [in this section] is not about family relations but about praying and prophesying in Christian worship." It is especially difficult to follow Paul's argument if we read husband and

wife rather than man and woman into 11:8.

***11:10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.***

This one brief sentence is replete with grammatical, philological, and exegetical difficulties. One of the less significant of these problems is how to understand the opening words “for this reason” (*dia touto*). Does this prepositional phrase point back to the preceding sentence or to the following thoughts or to both? Fee is of the opinion that the meaning of this phrase functions “in both directions at once” which means that “the woman ought to have authority over her head because she is man’s glory” and also “because of the angels.”

A more difficult and significant issue is the proper understanding of the Greek wording behind the NIV’s translation “have a sign of authority” (*exousian echein*). At the most rudimentary level the Greek merely says “have authority” on her head. The difficulty is that Paul’s general contextual view seems to point in the direction of women wearing head coverings. Since Paul has established (11:3) that man is the head of woman, how does the woman’s wearing of the head covering signify *her* authority? If it is man’s authority that he wishes to advocate (as the context clearly indicates), then why use the word “authority” (*exousia*), which has implied to certain interpreters that Paul is acknowledging that the woman does “wear authority”? A host of explanations for this irregularity have been offered. In a famous article by Morna Hooker she advocates that the woman does have new authority in the Christian faith to pray and prophesy in public worship when wearing the head covering. Many interpreters and most translations take “authority” to mean “sign of authority” or “sign of submission” and correlate that with the veil as such a sign. Robertson and Plummer take Paul to be saying that the woman does in fact have authority over what is on her head. Since she is in charge of what she wears on her head, she should not expose it so as to put herself to shame. Fee surveys the several possibilities that have been advocated over the years, and opts for the meaning “The woman ought to have the freedom over her head to do as she wishes,” and then confesses “what that means in this context



remains a mystery.”

The third troublesome part of this verse is the final prepositional phrase “because of the angels.” The older concept that Paul’s reference is an adaptation of the Gen 6:21 text (“the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful”), understood in ancient Judaism as a saga where heavenly beings were sexually attracted to women, is highly problematic since the head covering provided by the Roman toga did not particularly cover up erogenous areas. A very interesting theory is one found in, among others, Robertson and Plummer, who comment that the apostle is reminding women that “she must remember that she will also be shocking the angels, who of course are present at public worship.” The investigation of the archaeological materials from the Dead Sea Scrolls has yielded a similar motif of angelic presence at worship.

While certitude hardly seems possible at this juncture in research, the function of this text seems discoverable. The purpose of this verse is to keep the heads of the women participants covered and to base that appeal upon certain divine realities.

## **2. Hair in the Nature of Things (11:11-16)**

***11:11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.***

In spite of all the differences between man and woman and notwithstanding the “headship” relationship that exists between them, Paul will not allow this to promote a gender-based sense of autonomy and gender self-sufficiency. Since there is no historical evidence that Paul is attempting in this section of Corinthians to suppress “uppity women” or first century “women libbers” there is no need to see Paul’s plea for interdependence as a constraint on some woman’s radical misunderstanding of her new freedom in Christ. Though it is assumed with some regularity in current interpretation there is no historical evidence that some of the Corinthian sisters were taking the affirmation of Gal 3:28 — In Christ there is neither male nor female — to some

aberrant extreme.

Calvin was of the opinion that Paul wrote this verse “partly to restrain men from treating women badly, partly to give encouragement to women, so that their subjection may not be a source of annoyance to them.” Some interpreters see these thoughts as representing “an about-face” from the preceding Pauline ideas since “if taken at face value, [they] controvert his remarks immediately preceding.” Accordingly, Holladay concludes that if they are taken as the words of “an imaginary opponent, expressing the views of the ‘enlightened’ within the church, they are more comprehensible.” Fee, on the other hand, suggests that this verse is designed to qualify the woman’s understanding of her own authority (*exousia*) mentioned in 11:10 as well as “to keep the earlier argument from being read in a subordinationist way.”

One’s understanding of the prepositional phrase “in the Lord” should impact one’s interpretation of the apostle’s statement here. While it is almost universally believed that Paul is talking about gender relationships between fellow believers (because of the phrase “in the Lord”), this view is not without problems. First, is Paul setting up a double standard whereby the benefits of the suggestion of the male hierarchy in 1 Cor 11:11-12 is only for believing women? Must a woman or a man be “in the new age” in order to receive such treatment from a follower of Christ? Second, if this prepositional phrase refers to Christian relationships, why is Paul’s explanation (*gar*, 11:12) and illustration taken from the creation account of Genesis and the natural world of reproduction?

***11:12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.***

Paul now demonstrates by an argument from Scripture and an argument from nature that there does exist a divinely directed mutuality between men and women. The fact that a woman is not independent of man (11:11) is shown by the fact that in the creation of mankind woman was taken from man (identical to the observation made in 11:8). Moreover, man’s dependence on woman is manifested, Paul

argues, in the fact that men are conceived in and born of women.

Paul's concluding phrase in this verse is typically theocentric. It certainly removes any misplaced emphasis upon the man or woman isolated and removed from his or her theocentric origin. This may be his way of restating in summary form the headship paradigm of 1 Cor 11:3 in which God clearly stood at the zenith of headship over Christ as well as men and women.

***11:13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?***

Paul had earlier challenged the readers to judge for themselves what he was saying (see 1 Cor 10:15). The fact that he mentions only the woman at this juncture does not negate the entirety of the preceding eleven verses in which he also focused attention on men. In fact, this verse is parallel to 11:5 except that here Paul's argument shifts to an argument based upon propriety (*prepon*, cf. Eph 5:3; 1 Tim 2:10). With this reference to a woman praying Paul obviously has in mind the liturgical setting assumed in 1 Cor 11:4-5 and not just any setting of personal devotion and piety.

***11:14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him,***

Here the apostle shifts to yet another form of argumentation, namely an argument from nature (*he physis*; cf. Rom 1:26). This type of argumentation was relatively well known and popular at Paul's time. In fact, the important Stoic author Epictetus appeals to the fact that God has given men and women different amounts of hair to distinguish the two sexes from each other. But what did Paul mean with this mention of the didactic character of "the very nature of things"? According to Calvin, with this reference to nature, Paul is pointing to "what was accepted by common consent and usage at that time." Thus, one learns from both the literary and archaeological evidence of that period that acceptable men, indeed, men of propriety, used barbers and typically had short hair. In the routine experience of an urbane Corinthian

believer, it would be disgraceful (*atimia*) men such as the male homosexual or the unkempt Cynic philosophers who “typically” might have long hair.

***11:15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?  
For long hair is given to her as a covering.***

Paul’s explicit point here is not to get the Corinthian sisters to let their hair grow longer, but to reinforce his argument upon the basis of a pre-existing conviction and experience of the Corinthians about “natural” head-coverings on women. It is a glory to a woman to have long hair because it serves as a covering (*anti peribolaïou*) for her. Paul is not saying, as is sometimes suggested, that the woman can have long hair in place of the liturgical headcovering. Rather, since natural hair is a glory and serves as a covering, they ought to embrace Paul’s emphasis upon a liturgical head-covering.

***11:16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we  
have no other practice — nor do the churches of God.***

Paul’s concern about contentiousness (*philoneikos*) is focused upon the original issues raised in 11:4-5. If some of the Corinthian readers are still at loggerheads with Paul’s position and instruction about devotional head-coverings they should know how out-of-step they are with both Paul and the rest of the churches. The designation “churches of God” fits well with this widespread designation used by Paul in the Corinthian letters (e.g., 1 Cor 1:1; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9). By the nature of this appeal, Sampley states, “Paul recognizes a nascent sense of collectivity of his congregations. Insofar as individual churches are supposed to be swayed by practices that prevail ‘in all the churches.’”

The translation “no other practice” is infamously imprecise since the word translated “other” (*toiauten*) never means that except in the translation of this verse. Paul stated that we have no such practice (*synetheian*), referring to the head-covering practices corrected in 11:2-15, though some interpreters believe that Paul refers to the practice of being contentious.