

Covered Glory



A STUDY OF 1ST CORINTHIANS 11 AND
THE CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF HEADCOVERING

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Δ Preface

The Apostle Paul: “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. 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 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... Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”

1st Corinthians 11

I remember how odd it used to feel whenever I read the Lord's instructions about headcoverings. The topic was so foreign to me that it was easy to be very disconnected from it. However, since I considered this topic to be a “non-essential” of the Christian faith,¹ I was content to leave the passage for *later* study. Until I could take a more in-depth look, I figured that headcoverings were probably just an ancient cultural practice, and that if wearing a headcovering was still required by the Lord today, then a woman's long hair probably qualified as a “covering.”

Eventually I devoted some time to do a more careful study of this topic in the Scripture and in Christian history. I was very intrigued with what I found. Also, I happened to know several ladies who wore headcoverings in response to 1st Corinthians 11, and seeing the discrepancy between their choice and my familiar “Christian norm” prompted my further interest. My curiosity was also piqued when I realized that Christian men today still practice (perhaps only because of tradition) Paul's instruction to uncover their heads when they pray.

Paul's directions in 1 Corinthians 11 are fairly straightforward. So, since the Lord calls the husband to lead his wife (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 3:18), I began to feel that a small part of fulfilling my role was to eventually gain some well-founded conclusions regarding a proper response to God's teaching about headcoverings. Further motivation to pursue that goal was simply that I enjoy detailed studies of Scripture. This subject gave me an opportunity to ponder a unique passage, learn more about history, read from a *wide* variety of Bible commentators and theologians, consider the relevant passages in their original languages, and have some interesting conversations with my wife and other Christian sisters and brothers.

Of course, the main reason anyone should devote time to studying Scripture is simply to do a better job of following God's lead. This first requires a well-grounded and accurate understanding of the direction He gives, and so I hope that this paper will help you reach these goals in relation to the passage of 1st Corinthians 11. As you read this study, I would be interested in hearing from you ~

*Note: This document is not in its final draft.
So, I don't yet consider its conclusions to be “final.”
Please send your input by [clicking here](#).*

David Phillips

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¹ Meaning that my salvation does not depend on my understanding of this topic, and this topic is not foundational to my pursuit of godliness.

Δ Introduction to This Study

This is a study of the Bible's direction regarding the wearing of headcoverings. For the most part, Western Christians rarely consider the Apostle Paul's teaching on this practice, and many believers are not even aware that God has included this topic in the New Testament. Modern Bible interpreters vary widely in their conclusions about 1st Corinthians 11, and some go so far as to state that the passage could not have been inspired by God or was not actually written by the Apostle Paul.

Today, headcoverings are often associated with women from conservative Islamic, Catholic, or Amish/Mennonite backgrounds. However, Christian headcoverings have become generally unconventional only recently in history. Before continuing on to the first section of this study, you may find it helpful to get a big-picture overview of the Church's perspectives on headcoverings through various cultures, locations, and time periods (this topic begins on page 34).

This study consists of four main sections: **(1)** a review of the Scriptural passages that mention of headcoverings, **(2)** a look at the use of headcoverings in the three different First Century cultures in the area of Corinth, **(3)** a study on Paul's teaching in 1st Corinthians 11:1-16, and **(4)** an overview of the use of headcoverings in the history of Christianity. Since Paul specifically connects male and female *hair length* to his teaching on *headcoverings*, one section of this study will consider the topic of hair from the perspective of Scripture and from the perspective of First Century culture.

While Paul's discussion reads fairly quickly and its meaning was probably quite plain to the Corinthian Christians who originally received his letter, among believers today there is a very wide range of views about Paul's teaching – which result in a diversity of practices. This study will discuss the more-prominent viewpoints. No conclusions in this document are new to the Church. As the Jews in Berea were “noble” because they eagerly searched the Scriptures to verify the truthfulness of what they were taught (Acts 17:11), one of the goals of this study is to carefully evaluate various perspectives on the practice of Christian headcovering in the light of God's Word.

Since this is a detailed study, it unfortunately forfeits the benefits of a more simple and relational writing style, as presented by other authors on this topic. Also, writing as a male who does not need to wonder whether or not I ought to put on a headcovering whenever I pray, I realize that I am unable to provide the dynamic of woman-to-women communication on this topic. Some of the quality resources offering these other styles/formats will be listed in a section titled “Practical Issues.”

Notes About This Document

- For those reading this study on a computer, additional information on a variety of subtopics is available by clicking on text that appears in **blue**. Specifically, the phrase “**Available online**” indicates source references that are also available in electronic form.
- All verse references that do not include a book or chapter are referring to 1st Corinthians 11.
- A variety of resources were consulted for the definitions of Greek and Hebrew words given in this study. These are listed on page 42. Definitions given reflect the common voice of the lexicons unless noted.
- Please see the following page for explanation of terms and abbreviations frequently used.

Δ Common Terms and Abbreviations

Corinth: A major seaport city in southern Greece, which was a Roman colony¹ during the time of Paul. The book of “1st Corinthians” was probably written about 57 AD while Paul was staying in Ephesus (16:8), which is located in modern Turkey (about 180 miles away from Corinth).

Gentile: A non-Jewish person.

Early Church: Christianity as it existed in the first few centuries after the death of Christ.

Bible Lexicon: A Hebrew-to-English or Greek-to-English dictionary.²

Koiné Greek: A dialect of the Greek language which was spoken from about 330BC (after “Ancient Greek”) to about 330AD (before “Medieval Greek”). Because of the conquests of Alexander the Great, it became the universal language of the Greek and Roman Empires. It is the language the New Testament was originally written in. *Koiné* means “common.”

Hebrew: Language of Israel and of the Jewish people. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew.

Septuagint: A Greek translation of the Old Testament, written 200-300 years before Christ. It is often abbreviated “LXX” (the number “70” using Roman numerals; tradition states that it was written by 70 or 72 Jewish translators). Starting in the 2nd century BC, most Jews in Israel spoke Greek as their primary language, thus the need for a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. The New Testament authors quoted the LXX and it was the main version of the Old Testament used by early Greek-speaking Christians.

Exegesis: A term that comes from a Greek word meaning, “to lead out.” The practice of exegesis is where a person draws the meaning out of a text. It is contrasted with *eisegesis*, which is when an outside meaning is “read into” a text.

LXX The Septuagint (see above).

ff “And following.” Example: *John 3:16ff*

BDAG A well-respected lexicon (see page ___)

v. “Verse” Example: *v.16*

cf. “Confer.” Example: *cf. John 3:16*

English Bible Translations

KJV: King James Version.

ASV: American Standard Version.

NASB: New American Standard Bible.

RSV: Revised Standard Version.

NIV: New International Version.

NRSV: New Revised Standard Version.

NET: New English Translation.

NKJV: New King James Version

ESV: English Standard Version.

HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible.

NLT: New Living Translation.

¹ Similarly, the Philippian church was located in a Roman colony (Acts 16:12).

² In this document, Greek and Hebrew words are often expressed in this format:
Transliterated English / Greek, Strong's Number.

For example: *gar* / γάρ, Strong's #1063

Δ Headcoverings in Scripture

The use of headcoverings appears in both the Old and New Testaments. Headcoverings were worn by a variety of people in a variety of situations. Below is an overview.¹

Headcoverings In The Old Testament

- THE FEMALE'S HEADCOVERINGS

- Genesis² 24:65 → Rebekah covers herself with her veil/shawl³ when she sees her future husband for the first time.
- Genesis 38:14,19 → Tamar covered herself with a veil³ as part of her attire as a prostitute⁴
- Numbers 5:18 → The priest uncovers⁵ the head of a woman accused of adultery⁶
- Song of Solomon 5:7 → The wife's veil/shawl⁷ was taken by the city watchmen
- Song of Solomon 4:1,3 & 6:7 → The wife's temples and eyes are behind her veil⁸
- Isaiah 3:20 and 3:23 → God removes the veil⁹ of prideful women
- Isaiah 47:2 → God shames the “daughter of Babylon” by removing her veil⁸ and skirt

¹ Headpieces such as crowns (as in Esther 2:17 and 2nd Samuel 12:30) and helmets (1st Samuel 17:5, 38) are not included in this section.

² Genesis 20:16 (KJV) also mentions a “covering of the eyes.” However, this is an archaic English phrase (not shared by modern translations) and is not referring to a literal “cover” over the eyes.

³ **tsa`iyph** / צעיף (Strong's #6809), which means “wrapper, shawl, or veil.”

⁴ Verse 15 states that Tamar's veil was the cause for Judah's belief that she was a prostitute. This obviously was not same signal that Rebekah's veil gave, in Genesis 24:65 (above).

⁵ **para`** / פרע (Strong's #6544), which means “to loosen restraints.”

⁶ There are various viewpoints on this verse. Generally, newer translations render this verse as “unbind her hair” while older translations have “uncover her head.” The Hebrew phrase includes the word “head” but not the word “hair.”

⁷ **radiyd** / רדיד (Strong's #7289), meaning “something spread, wide wrapper or large veil.”

⁸ **tsammah** / צממה (Strong's #6777), meaning “veil.”

⁹ The word used in 3:20 is **pē'er** / פער (Strong's #6287), meaning “head-dress, turban, or bonnet.”

The word used in 3:23 is **tsaniyph** / צניף (Strong's #6797), meaning “turban or headdress.” This comes from another word meaning “to wrap” or “to wind around.”

A second word used in 3:23 is **radiyd** / רדיד (defined above).

- THE MALE'S HEADCOVERINGS

- Exodus 28:4, 37, 39; 29:6; 39:28¹ & 31; Leviticus 8:9, 16:4 → The priest wears a turban²
- Exodus 28:40,³ 29:9, 39:28 and Leviticus 8:13 → The priest wears a cap⁴
- Exodus 34:33-35 → Moses veiled⁵ his face after standing in God's presence
- Leviticus 10:6 → Moses tells Aaron not to uncover⁶ his heads, to honor God's holiness
- Leviticus 13:45 → A leper must uncover⁶ his hair
- Leviticus 21:10 → The high priest must not uncover⁶ his head
- 2nd Samuel 15:30 → David covered⁷ his head when mourning
- 1st Kings 19:13 → Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle⁸ when he heard the quiet voice
- Esther 6:12 → Haman goes home in sorrow and shame with his head covered⁷
- Isaiah 61:10 → A bridegroom wears a turban⁹ like a priest
- Jeremiah 14:3-4 → The nobles' servants and the plowmen cover⁷ their heads in shame
- Ezekiel 24:17, 23 → God tells Ezekiel he must not remove his turban⁹ when his wife dies
- Ezekiel 44:18 → The priests must wear turbans⁹
- Daniel 3:21 → While wearing their caps/turbans,¹⁰ Daniel's friends were thrown into the fire
- Zechariah 3:5 → In a vision, a clean turban¹¹ is put on Zechariah's head

Conclusion: Dr. Alan Ingalls of Baptist Bible Seminary summarizes the Old Testament passages:¹²

- Men put on headcoverings as signs of humility or mourning.
- Women put on headcoverings as signs of dignity and modesty.

¹ This verse is listed again (on the next line), since two different words for headcoverings are used.

² ***mitsnepheth* / מצנפת** (Strong's #4701), meaning "turban" or "mitre" of the high priest.

³ According to this verse, this headpiece was made "for glory and beauty."

⁴ ***migba'ah* / מגבעה** (Strong's #4021), "turban" or "bonnet" or "headgear."

⁵ ***macveh* / מסוה** (Strong's #4533), meaning "veil."

⁶ ***para`* / פרע** (Strong's #6544), which means "to loosen restraints."

⁷ ***chaphah* / חפה** (Strong's #2645), meaning "cover, overlay."

⁸ ***addereth* / אדרת** (Strong's #0155), meaning "mantle/cloak made of fur or fine material."

⁹ ***pě'er* / פאר** (Strong's #6287), meaning "head-dress, turban, or bonnet."

¹⁰ ***karbla* / כרבלע** (Strong's #3737), meaning "mantle, robe, cap, turban, helmet."

¹¹ ***tsaniyph* / צניף** (Strong's #6797), meaning "turban or headdress." Comes from another word which means "to wrap" or "to wind around."

¹² "Headcoverings in the Old Testament," Dr. Alan D. Ingalls, *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*, Vol. 4 No. 2 Fall 2000, p. 5. [[Available online](#)]

Headcoverings In The New Testament

1st Corinthians 11:2-16 (NASB)¹

(2) Now I praise you² because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.³ (3) 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.⁴ (4) Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying⁵ disgraces his head. (5) 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. (6) For⁶ if a woman does not cover her head,⁷ 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.⁸ (7) 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.⁹ (8) For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;¹⁰ (9) for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.¹¹ (10) Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol¹² of authority on her head, because of the angels. (11) However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. (12) For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. (13) Judge for yourselves:¹³ is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? (14) Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, (15) but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (16) But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

¹ 1st Corinthians 11 is the only passage in the New Testament that refers to headcoverings. Other common English translations (KJV, NIV, NET, ESV, NLT) all provide very similar renderings.

² Paul's praise would be especially meaningful to those who may be facing opposition over these matters (v.16). The praise is contrast with his later disapproval of their other practices (v. 17 & 22).

³ Probably a reference to Paul's 1½ year stay with the Church of Corinth as described in Acts 18.

⁴ "But" can also be translated "now" or "and." See page 43 for a discussion on the meaning of "head."

⁵ *Prayer* is communication from man to God, and *prophesy* is communication from God to man. In Scripture, the word "prophesy" is not just fore-telling of the future, but also forth-telling of God's already-revealed truth. The Greek word (προφητεύω / *propheteuo*, Strong's 4395) means "to speak forth." As 1st Corinthians 14:3 states: "One who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation."

⁶ Verse 6, 7, 8, and 9 each begin with the word "for" (*gar* / γάρ, Strong's #1063) to show that each verse is adding another point to Paul's line of reasoning. Note that this continues with the word "therefore" in verse 10. Note also that some Bibles do not translate the word "for" in verse 9.

⁷ Note that in verse 6 and 13, the phrase "her head" is not in the Greek (cf. KJV & Young's Literal Translation).

⁸ Verses 5-6 can be classified as a debate technique called *reductio ad absurdum* (Latin for "reduction to the absurd"). This type of argument serves to discard a proposition (often to validate an opposing one) by showing that continuing the proposition forward leads to an absurd conclusion.

⁹ Cf. Proverbs 11:16 LXX & 1st Esdras 4:17. However, both are equally created in His image (Genesis 1:26-27).

¹⁰ Genesis 2:22: "The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man." Cf. 1 Tim 2:13.

¹¹ Genesis 2:18: "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper.'"

¹² The phrase "a symbol" or "a sign" is not in the Greek. KJV is one of the few translations that renders this absence. However, since "authority" is not something tangible that can be worn on a physical head, we know that this is a figure of speech or symbolism.

¹³ Cf. 1st Corinthians 10:15.

Δ What Is A “Covering”?

When Paul commanded the Corinthian women to cover their heads, he did not specify what they were to cover their heads *with*. While the object was probably obvious to them, it is much-debated today. Is it a cloth covering, a full veil over the face, a bun, the woman's husband, or hair itself?

Specifically, this section discusses the identity of the item that is literally described as both “down the head” (verse 4) and “down-covering”¹ (in verse 5-7 and 13).

...Is Paul Referring To A Full Veil Over The Face?²

- **Part of the Body Specified.** Outside of 1st Corinthians 11, Paul does mention a covering that he specifically identifies as covering the “face.”³ However, within 1st Corinthians 11, he states that the covering is over the “head.”
- **Different Terms for “Cover.”** Paul refers to the *headcovering* using a Greek compound word that is literally translated “cover-down” or “cover-over.” The New Testament uses this word only when referring to a headcovering.⁴ In contrast, when Paul elsewhere describes a veil that can go around the *face*, he uses words that mean “cover” or “veil” in a more general sense.⁵
- **Definition of Terms.** In verse 4, the Greek word that refers to the covering is defined by BDAG as “veiled down to the forehead” (and so, the face remains uncovered).
- **Response by Christians Through History.** Believers within the first centuries of Christianity (those with the nearest understanding of Greek terminology and original Christian practice), did not understand Paul to be requiring women to cover their faces: pictures of the Early Church show women with garments that cover the head but not the face.⁶ Similarly, when non-Christian women in general society wore a covering during that time period, their faces were visible: “the veils that were worn in Paul's day by Greco-Roman women did not cover the face.”⁷ “There is no extant evidence that full veiling, familiar in Islam, was current in Paul's time.”⁸

¹ While both Greek usage and Greek lexicons indicate this word can refer to a cloth covering, a “cloth” is not inherent in its definition. For example, in Isaiah 6:2 (LXX) the word is used without referring to a garment.

² ASV/RSV/NRSV are in the minority of translations, having the word “veiled” instead of “covered” in this passage.

³ See 2nd Corinthians 3:13-18 (cf. Exodus 34:33-35)

⁴ See page 45 for more information regarding its definition.

⁵ The same word is also used to describe this face-veil in the LXX (Exodus 34:33-35). In Greek, this word is used both in contexts that refer to the head/face, and in those that don't. For example, in 2nd Corinthians 3:15 the word is used to describe “covering” or “veiling” the heart.

⁶ Page 34 provides quotations from the Early Church, and some links to a variety of Early Church drawings are available on page 41. Similarly, Christian practice through history did not employ a face-veil (page 34ff).

⁷ Nancy A. Carter, *Paul and Corinthian Women's Head Coverings*. Contains examples of a variety of ancient artwork. [[Available online](#)]

⁸ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, p. 118. [[Available online](#)]

...Is Paul Referring to A Woman's Husband?

- Some define a “covered” person as one who is in submission to his/her head. According to this view, the husband provides “spiritual cover” for his wife. An uncovered woman would then be one who is not submissive to her husband. Also, a male church leader would be the “covering” for a woman's ministry. Instead of a physical covering symbolizing submission, the view here is that the woman wears nothing on her head and the husband himself is the “covering.”
- Comparably, this view is not common¹ and is difficult to support from the passage. Replacing references to a “covered head” with the concept of “submission,” the passage looks like this:

1st Corinthians 11

(4) Every man who is submissive while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. (5) But every woman who is unsubmitive while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. (6) For if a woman is unsubmitive, 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 be submissive. (7) For a man ought not to be submissive, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

- Substituting “submission” for “covering” renders the passage illogical. This is seen especially in verse 4: an “uncovered man” would mean “unsubmitive man.” However, the passage is *promoting* uncovered men submitting to their Head.
- This reading also blurs the differences between “head” and “covering.”
- The definition for the Greek word for “cover” means “hide” or “veil.”² It is difficult to conceive that Paul has the idea of the husband being a “veil” to “hide” behind. Specifically, the husband doesn't cover the glory (hair) as Paul emphasizes.
- For those who say the “covering” is the woman's father or husband, there is a problem when the phrase “every woman” is contrasted with the fact that many women have no husband, and some also do not have a living father.
- Nothing in this text requires, or even implies, that a man is the woman's “covering.” This is an arbitrary interpretation that depends on a non-literal, “spiritualized” understanding. For many reasons, evangelical Christians consider this an unbiblical and invalid method of interpretation.³

¹ It is uncommon both in contemporary times and through Church history.

² This is further discussed on page 45.

³ While a full list of reasons is beyond the scope of this document, in the field of Bible interpretation (hermeneutics), this method of understanding the Bible is considered “allegorical interpretation.”

...Is Paul Referring to Long Hair?

In 1st Corinthians 11:15, Paul states that hair was “given to” the woman “for a covering.” Based on this verse, some believe that “long hair” is the only covering that is referred to in this passage, and thus the only covering a woman is required to have.¹ An “uncovered” woman would then be defined as one with short hair or no hair.² Since the text does not specifically state that the “covering” of verse 15 is (or is not) the same “wrapper” in verses 4-13, it is important to gain contextual clues.

This view is completely dependent on the phrase “her hair is given to her for a covering.” Surprisingly, the Greek words translated *hair*, *covering*, and *for* in this phrase are actually somewhat unique. Below is a summary of the definitions of these words (Appendix A contains further details). Below we will also take a look at the reference in verse 6 to “cutting off” the woman’s hair.

→ The Two Words For “Hair”

1st Corinthians 11

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

- The phrase translated “long hair” (in each verse) is just one word in the Greek. It means “to let one’s hair grow long.” It can also be translated “tresses.”
- The word “hair” (second ½ of verse 15) refers to “ornamental locks.” The emphasis of this word is on *style*, not *length*.

→ The Two Greek Words Translated “Covering”

- In verse 5-7 & 13: the verb “covered” means “to cover over” or “to hide.”
- In verse 15: the noun “covering” (describing the woman’s hair) means “a wrapper thrown around, a mantle, a veil.”

→ The preposition “for” (in the phrase “her hair is given to her for a covering”)

- Originally meaning “opposite,” the three main definitions of the Greek word translated “for” are:
 - *in place of* (that is, a substitute)
 - *for the purpose of* (that is, a reason)
 - *in return for* (that is, an exchange)

→ **Conclusion:** In effect, the phrase can be rendered: “her ornamental locks are given to her for a wrapper.” However, because of the differing definitions of “for,” the verse (by itself) remains ambiguous regarding whether or not the hair *is* the covering of verses 4-13. This question is thus to be determined by context.

→ In verse 6, Paul says that a woman who does not wear a covering should “have her hair cut off.”

- The NASB’s literal rendering of this phrase is: “let her also shear herself.”
- Often translated “shorn,” the Greek word³ means to “cut short, clip, shear, or crop.”
- The word indicates hair cut with scissors/shears⁴, while “shaven”⁵ (used later in the verse) indicates hair cut with a razor. Both words are used in Acts to describe men who are under a vow.⁶

¹ This concept was discussed by Church leaders as early as the 4th century AD (see, for example, the quotation of John Chrysostom on page 34).

² This view is also expressed in an NIV footnote for verse 7, which provides an alternative rendering of this passage. Some concerns with this rendering are noted on page 12.

³ *keirō* / κείρω (Strong’s #2751).

⁴ In Acts 8:32, the word “shorn” is used in reference to shearing sheep.

⁵ *xurao* / ξυράω (Strong’s #3587).

⁶ Acts 18:18 (crop) & Acts 21:24 (shave). Similarly, the words are used almost interchangeably in 1 Corinthians 11:6.

“Given For A Covering” - A Summary of Appendix B

Interpretive Issues: A non-cloth covering (in verses 3-14) is not necessary for a consistent and normal interpretation. On the contrary, the view of a hair-only covering creates the following problems:

- The two “coverings” are from different Greek words.
- Verse 6 becomes illogical if the covering is long hair.
- The symbolism no longer is uniquely-Christian, and v.10's symbolism doesn't make sense.
- The structure of Paul's argument indicates that hair supports the cloth, not equates to it.
- 1st Corinthians 11 states that the “glory” of the woman is covered by two layers: her hair (v.15) and “also” a cloth (verses 5-6).

Understanding Of The Church: The Corinthian Christians were familiar with cloth headcoverings, and so this would have been a natural understanding.¹ Historically, the Church through the centuries has understood a distinction (starting with the Early Church). The majority of Bible commentators & teachers agree that the covering in verses 4-13 is not hair. It is only recently that the hair-only view has become more common.

Scripture gives each of the following differences between hair and cloth coverings:

- Long hair is a continual covering. It is put on the woman's head by God Himself. (v.15)
- A cloth is a situational covering (v.5). It is put on the woman's head by the woman herself. (v.6)
- Long hair is nature-taught (v.14-15). This covering is worn regardless of religion.
- A cloth covering is Paul-taught (v.2-10). This covering is worn by Christians.
- Long hair is an adornment;² it is the woman's “glory” (v.15).
- A cloth covering over the head *conceals*³ the woman's glory.

A Note Regarding the NIV Bible's Alternative Translation

The NIV Bible includes a footnote for verse 7, which provides a different rendering of verses 4-7 than is found in the regular NIV text:

Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair dishonors her head—she is just like one of the “shorn women.” If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair; but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. A man ought not to have long hair...

This footnote removes the word “covered” and replaces it with “long hair.” This alternative wording (not found in other translations) creates a few issues regarding consistency:

- This wording is not found in the original Greek language (nor is it based on alternative definition of the Greek words involved).
- In verse 5, the word “shaved” is replaced by the word “shorn.”⁴ This modification of Scriptural text is necessary in order to avoid a problem with the alternative rendering: the phrase “she is just like” would become a statement of *equality*, rather than the statement of *similarity* (as it is in the original rendering of the NIV and Greek).
- In verse 6, the action of the woman (“have her hair cut off”) is changed into a passive pre-existing condition (“let her be for now with short hair”).

¹ See the section “Headcoverings in 1st Century Culture” on page 14.

² The Greek word “hair” refers to an ornamental *style*. See page 44.

³ The Greek word “cover” means to “hide or conceal.” See page 45.

⁴ These are two separate Greek words. Interestingly, the NIV is faithful to differentiate them in verse 6.

Δ Appropriate Hair Lengths: Cultural or Universal?¹

1st Corinthians 11

(14) Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor² to him, (15) but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory³ to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

The Issue: Gender-Specific Hair Lengths

A common question is whether these verses relate only to the local norms of *Corinthian* society, or do they describe gender-specific hairstyles that God states are proper *universally*? That is, ought men of every society avoid the “dishonor” of long hair? Is long hair meant to be a “glory” for women *universally*?

The Teaching of “Nature”

Definition: The meaning of the word “nature” is important here because Paul bases his statement on what “nature teaches.” The Greek word translated “nature” (*physis*) is defined as: *order, laws, innateness, or instinct*. English words such as *physics* and *physiology* come from this Greek word.⁴

Usage: The word “nature” (*physis*) is used 13 other times in the New Testament. Each time, the word refers to Creation-oriented facts and rather than the norms of a particular culture.⁵ Outside the Bible, this word is used by writers in reference to various aspects of Creation (animals, water, birth, etc.).

Examples: This “innate” and “natural law” of hair length is seen played out within God's Creation...

- *Biologically natural:* As part of God's Creation, female hormones promote faster-growing and longer hair, while hair loss is associated with male hormones.
- *Innately natural:* Around the world & throughout history, women generally have longer hair than men. Though a man may go bald or shave his head, it is regarded as unnatural for a woman to do so.

God's Gift: Paul states, in verse 15, that the woman's long hair is “given” to her for a covering. Presumably, this “giving” is *from* the Lord *to* womankind.⁶

Conclusion: Nature (Not Just Nurture)

This passage contains no references to Corinthian society, nor any indication that Paul's instructions are culture-limited.⁷ A normal, universal meaning of the English word “nature” is verified by a deeper look at etymology, biology, history, and other biblical passages. In this light, all women ought to adorn themselves with long hair, while all men should not.⁸ Immediately after this teaching, Paul seems to anticipate controversy. He gives a direct, God-inspired response to potential dispute: “If anyone intends to quarrel about this, we have no other practice, nor do the churches of God.”⁹

¹ This page is a summary of the section beginning on page Error: Reference source not found, which provides additional discussion and details.

² This word is also translated as *disgrace, shame, and degrading*.

³ The Greek word “glory” is also used in passages such as Matthew 6:29 (“not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these [lilies]”), Matthew 19:28 (“His glorious throne”), Acts 22:11 (“I could not see because of the glory of that light”), and 1st Corinthians 11:7 (“the woman is the glory of man”).

⁴ This word comes from another Greek word (φύω/phua, Strong's #5453) that means “to produce or to grow.”

⁵ For example, Romans 1:26-27 (homosexuality) and Romans 2:14 (conscience).

⁶ Likewise, God prohibited the Old Testament priests from growing their hair long (Ezekiel 44:20).

⁷ Rather, v.16 states these hair-length norms were also practiced by churches *outside* of the local Corinthian society.

⁸ Page 44 looks at the meaning of the two Greek words translated “hair” and “long hair” in this passage.

Δ Headcoverings in 1st Century Culture

Observations From Scripture About Ethnicity

The Corinthian church was located in a Gentile city, outside of the country of Israel. Paul states that the believers in this church were previously “pagans” (which is [literally translated](#) as “[Gentiles](#)”) who were involved in “idolatry” (1st Corinthians 12:2). This matches up with the fact that the church was birthed when Paul evangelized the Gentiles in this city rather than the Gospel-resistant Jews (Acts 18:1-6, 12). Thus, the church at Corinth was made up of primarily non-Jewish Christians.

Observations By Historians About Headcovering Practices

Regarding the wearing of headcoverings, there is disagreement among scholars about what culture dictated in the first century: whether they were worn by men or by women, by Jews or by Greeks or by Romans, in everyday public life or only in worship. “To try to understand exactly what the situation was in the city of Corinth secularly...is not easy.”¹

This uncertainty does not help in understanding whether or not Paul connects his teaching on headcoverings with the norms of first century culture. “Some scholars claim that Paul deferred to the customs of his culture, and others claim that he rejected precisely those customs.”² Additionally, some Bible teachers and commentators unintentionally confuse this issue by attempting to make conclusions based on information that is actually unrelated.³

With the changing culture of the time (especially the [Jewish adoption of Greek culture](#)⁴) and the fact that the Greek city of Corinth was a *Roman* colony, there may have been multiple cultural norms in regard to clothing, within Paul’s location and lifetime.⁵

If general conclusions must be made, the best understanding of first century culture seems to be...⁶

The Jews

- Men worshiped with uncovered heads.
- Women covered their heads in worship and in public.

The Greeks

- Men worshiped with their heads uncovered.
- Women had their heads uncovered while in public.

The Romans

⁹ Verse 16. The universality of this statement matches up well with (1) Paul’s reference (v.2) to God-inspired ordinances (see page 21), and (2) the decisions of Early Church councils (see section on page Error: Reference source not found).

¹ John MacArthur, *The Subordination and Equality of Women*, April 25, 1976. [[Available online](#)]

² Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God*, (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1979), p. 106.

³ Such as using Old Testament Scripture or modern Jewish practices to “explain” first century Corinthian perspectives on headcoverings and hair length.

⁴ In the Bible, “Hellenistic Jews” are mentioned in Acts 6:1 & 9:29.

⁵ However, there was not a complete societal uniformity: cultural differences still existed (cf. Acts 16:20-21), and there was still a distinction between Jewish rule and Roman authority (cf. John 11:48).

⁶ See page 56 for specific sources of these generalizations. Further uncertainty comes from the question of whether the Early Church considered their local assemblies, which met in homes, to be “public” settings.

- Men worshiped with their heads covered.
- Women covered themselves in worship, but otherwise did not do so in public.

→ Was A Shaved or Uncovered Head The Local Sign of Corinthian Prostitutes?

Regarding hair length, “ancient authors are not unanimous about Greek custom.”¹ One current school of thought says that the *reason* Paul specified that women should have long hair and wear a headcovering was in order to *promote a visual distinction* between a God-following woman and a Corinthian prostitute. Specifically, the Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth was said to have housed 1000 prostitutes with shaven heads. Thus, Paul's goal was to maintain an appearance of propriety among Christian women. However, regarding this view, scholars have pointed out a few important issues regarding historical accuracy.

- **Gill:** “Some have taken the urge for women to wear veils as Paul ensuring that they were not mistaken for prostitutes or *hetairai* [or *hetaera*, educated/artistic mistresses or prostitutes]. Part of the reason for this view lies in the interpretation of Corinth as a ‘sex-obsessed’ city with prostitutes freely roaming the streets. The 1000 *hetairai* linked to the cult of Aphrodite, and the corresponding notoriety of Corinth, belong to the hellenistic city *swept away* by *Mummius* in 146 BC. In contrast the Roman shrine was far more modest.”²
- **Bercot:** “The Greek Corinth with its temple to Aphrodite and a thousand prostitutes was completely destroyed, and the site remained desolate for a long time. In 44 B.C., *Julius Caesar rebuilt a new Corinth*. This new Corinth had no temple of Aphrodite, and it was a Roman colony... which had no special reputation for prostitutes or immorality.”³
- **Lenski:** “As far as prostitutes are concerned, all the evidence that has been discovered proves that only a few of the very lowest types had shorn or shaven heads. As a class these women endeavored to make themselves as attractive as possible and did their utmost to beautify also their hair.⁴ We cannot, therefore, accept the idea that is advanced by not a few of the best commentators that in our passage Paul refers to [having short hair as] the practice of the prostitutes.”⁵
- **Fee:** The sexual vice “of Corinthian life, however, has tended to be overplayed by most NT scholars... It was commonly suggested that short hair or a shaved head was the mark of the Corinthians prostitutes... But there is no contemporary evidence to support this view (it seems to be the case of one scholar's guess becoming a second scholar's footnote and a third scholar's assumption)... There is no sure first-century evidence that long [loosed] hair in public would have been a disgrace of some kind.”⁶
- **Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society:** After reviewing the claims for an active Temple of Aphrodite, the author concludes: “I do not believe that cult prostitution was practiced in Greek (and Roman) regions of the NT era. The evidence thought to support *this institution in the cities of Corinth* and Ephesus was found wanting.”⁷

Conclusion: The key questions for this issue are: (1) Was there actually an active Temple of Aphrodite with 1000 prostitutes during the time of Paul? (2) If so, did the prostitutes actually have shaved heads and/or go without a headcovering? (3) If so, was *that* the reason for Paul's instructions in this passage?

Regarding question (3): In consideration of (a) the historical information above, (b) the fact that 1st Corinthians 11 does not mention prostitution at all, and (c) the fact that the practice of headcovering was standard among the churches *outside* of Corinth,⁸ a “yes” answer to question (3) is left firmly within the realm of speculation, and in fact there is much more evidence to the contrary.⁹

¹ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition (BDAG), p. 557.

² David Gill, *The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, Tyndale Bulletin 41.2 (1990), p. 245-260. [Available online]

³ David Bercot, *Will the Theologians Please Sit Down* (Amberson, PA: Scroll Publishing Co., 2009), p. 157.

⁴ Pictures of the *hetairai* show them with long hair, often with a headband holding it in place. Examples can be seen on the following sites: #1, #2, #3, and #4.

⁵ R. Lenski, *Interpretations of I and II Corinthians*, (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 439. [Available online]

⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1987), 2-3, 511, 496.

⁷ S. M. Baugh, *Cult Prostitution In New Testament Ephesus: A Reappraisal*, JETS, 42.3 (1999): 459-460. [Available online]

⁸ According to verse 16, and according to testimony of the Early Church in various locales (see page 34).

⁹ The “prostitute” perspective is further invalidated by the fact that Greek & Roman women *normally* went uncovered in public (see page 14). It also does not explain why Paul commanded men *against* wearing a covering.

→ **Modesty:** Was covering the head done to prevent the sensuality of revealed hair?

- In the Old Testament, Hebrew women used headcoverings for modesty/propriety (see page 6). Later, the Jewish Talmud¹ (which is not inspired Scripture) required married Jewish women to cover their heads. The Gemara (in [Ketubot 72a](#)) states that hair covering is a Scriptural requirement.² The Mishna states (in [Berakhot 24a](#)) that hair is erotic, and also says (in [Ketubot 7:6](#)) that a married woman who appears in public with uncovered hair can be divorced without the benefit of a marriage settlement.^{3, 4}
- For Greek women, being in public without a headcovering was not an indication of immodesty, rather it was the norm (see page 14). The practice of not wearing a covering may have been shared by Corinthian prostitutes (see previous page), but for any that went without a headcovering, hair was not a modesty issue, since these prostitutes usually shaved their heads.^{5, 6, 7, 8}

Considerations...

- Modesty was probably not the concern in Scripture in regard to the need for a headcovering:
 - If uncovered hair went beyond a *symbol* of immodesty and was itself indeed “an object of male lust” then it would have been inappropriate to have two women wipe oil onto Jesus with their uncovered hair. Instead, Jesus praises them (and the concern of His disciples is for the cost of the oil rather than the women's physical act).⁹
 - Paul's reason *why* an uncovered head is shameful is not because it shows lust-inducing hair, but rather the opposite: it is equivalent to having no hair (verse 5).¹⁰
 - Paul gave specific reasons for wearing a headcovering,¹¹ and none of them were to prevent the man from stumbling into lust; none of them reference modesty.
 - Regarding the Jewish concern about uncovered hair: the Corinthian church was not a Jewish church (see page 14). Also, these Jewish obligations were not divinely-inspired.
- Thus, the view that Paul prescribed a headcovering for the sake of modesty has no Scriptural basis. Additionally, it has no cultural basis for a primarily-Gentile church.

¹ The [Jewish Talmud](#) is a record of the discussions of [Jewish rabbis](#). It consists of the “Mishna” and “Gemara.” The [Mishna](#) was written down about 200AD, and reflects rabbinic debates between 70-200 AD. The [Gemara](#) (also called “the Talmud”) is a commentary on the Mishnah, published around 500 AD.

² It based this view on Number 5:18 which, as described in a footnote on page 6, is a debated passage.

³ Alieza Salzberg, *Hair Coverings for Married Women* [[Available online](#)] See also: “Headcoverings in the Old Testament,” Dr. Alan D. Ingalls, *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*, Vol. 4 No. 2 Fall 2000, pp. 2, 4. [[Available online](#)]

⁴ During Old Testament times, the female headcovering apparently was not always a symbol of modesty: (1) In Genesis 24:65, Rebekah had not yet put on her veil but was in the presence of a male servant, and (2) Tamar's veil indicated that she was a prostitute (Genesis 38:15).

⁵ R. Lenski, *Interpretations of I and II Corinthians*, (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1946), p. 439. [[Available online](#)]

⁶ *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Vol. II), p. 872–875. Quoted in: “Head Coverings” by Robert Morey. [The Encyclopedia of Practical Christianity](#) (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁷ Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 254. Quoted in: “Head Coverings” by Robert Morey. [The Encyclopedia of Practical Christianity](#) (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2004), p. 6.

⁸ Similarly, for the few commentators that say Greek women had shaved heads if they were slaves, or under great distress.

⁹ Mary in John 12:3, cf. also Mark 14, Matthew 26, and Luke 7:37.

¹⁰ In 1st Corinthians 11, Paul's main emphasis is covering the “head,” not covering the “hair.” Paul, in this chapter, did use the term “hair” specifically, but never in relation to covering it.

¹¹ Paul's reasons (page 19) were directed strictly God-ward (prayer, prophesy, glory, angels), not toward society.

Δ Biblical Headcoverings Requirements

Most conservative evangelical Christians agree that regardless of whether or not Paul's commands about headcovering are limited to the Corinthian culture, the principles behind the headcovering are universal and meant to be followed by all Christians.

Since we are not the original recipients of Paul's letters, every time we look at Scripture we are, to a certain extent, "reading someone else's mail." Such is the case when we study the document that we now call "1st Corinthians." Below we will wrestle with whether 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 is a section of Scripture that had one specific command for one specific group of people¹ or whether it was meant to be followed by the Church at large.^{2, 3}

This study on headcoverings was initiated by the fact that the practice of headcovering is a command for Christians in the New Testament (1st Corinthians 11). And so to ignore this command today, or to practice the principle of the command in a different way, we must have clear exegetical reasons for doing so.

Two well-known evangelical scholars provide some advice on considering such reasons:

"We share with all interpreters the challenge of discerning how Biblical teaching should be applied today in a very different culture. In demonstrating the permanent validity of a command, we would try to show from its context that it has roots in the nature of God, the gospel, or creation as God ordered it... In contrast, to show that the specific forms of some commands are limited to one kind of situation or culture, (1) we seek for clues in the context that this is so; (2) we compare other Scriptures relating to the same subject to see if we are dealing with limited application or with an abiding requirement; and (3) we try to show that the cultural specificity of the command is not rooted in the nature of God, the gospel, or the created order."

*John Piper and Wayne Grudem, with "The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood."*⁴

These principles of Bible interpretation (as well as others) will be used in the following pages to determine whether or not the headcovering commands should be followed, in a literal way, by Christians today.

¹ Such as Luke 10:24: "Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way."

² Such as Romans 12:9: "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good."

³ Strictly speaking, though, these two passages create an unfair comparison, since we should take into account that Luke 10 is narrative literature and Romans 12 is not. This distinction can be helpful in discerning the line between situational and universal commands. It is appropriate to also note this distinction in 1st Corinthians 11.

⁴ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, p. 67-68.

[\[Available online \]](#)

Δ Headcovering Requirements: A Universal Command?

- **Paul's Universal Reason for The Headcovering → God's Order of Authority.** 1st Corinthians 11:3-9 shows that the meaning of the headcovering is based on the relationships within God's universal order (Father → Christ → Man → Woman). This “headship order” is transcultural.
- **Paul's Universal Reason for The Headcovering → Worship.** Verse 7 states that the headcovering has to do with “covering” (Greek: *hiding*) human “glory.” Here, Paul says the reason man does not cover his head is that he is “the glory of God.” The reason that a woman covers is that she is “the glory of man.”¹ Additionally, she has the glory of woman (verse 15). And so in worship, God's people desire to humble the glory of humanity while magnifying the glory of God.
- **Christianity's Universal Practice.** Paul's instruction about headcoverings relates to “every man” and “every woman” (1st Corinthians 11:4-5).² The instructions about headcoverings weren't just for churches of one culture, but were for “the churches of God” as a whole (v.16).^{3, 4, 5}
- **Not A Culture-Based Message.** There is no specific indication in this passage that the command to wear a headcovering is related to a 1st Century cultural norm or rule. Nor does Paul give any indication that the headcovering intended to “speak” a message to the unbelieving culture.
 - Indeed, with relationship of the headcovering to God's authority structure, God's glory, and the angels (1st Corinthians 11:3-5, 10), those outside of the Church would not even have picked up on the theological basis and reasons for the headcovering.
 - Similarly, Christians today (and throughout history) practice other commands in the Bible, regardless of whether their obedience is understandable by our culture.⁶

¹ Paul then explains *how* woman is man's glory: she originated *from* man and was created *for* his sake.

² Or “any man” and “any woman,” depending on the translation.

³ And so, as described in the section beginning on page 34), Christian women from all lands and time periods have worn headcoverings. Contemporary Western Christian culture does retain obedience to Paul's command for men to pray uncovered – most men will automatically take off their hats when someone begins leading a gathering in prayer. As one person has asked, “Why, then, is there so much contention with verse 5 [the woman wearing a headcovering] which is a counterpart to verse 4 [the man not wearing one]? Why is there so much maneuvering around to try to neutralize verse 5? Should we not consider verse 5 to simply mean what it says, just like verse 4?”

⁴ This point is invalid if it can be argued that “churches of God” only had one culture at this point, and that in Paul's message about headcoverings he was taking a cultural cue. But by this time the church may have spread as far as Africa (ie., the Ethiopian eunuch), and the Apostle Thomas may have already planted churches in India by the time Paul wrote 1st Corinthians. Additionally, there were different cultural norms among the Jews, Greeks, and Romans.

⁵ Additionally, the entire book may be specifically *addressed* to a wider audience than just the Church in Corinth, depending on how 1st Corinthians 1:2 is understood: “To the church of God which is at Corinth...together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The “universal” aspect of chapter 11 can be contrasted to other sections of 1st Corinthians where Paul speaks about issues specifically related to the Corinthians (such as in 1:14, 3:5, 4:17, 5:1, 6:7, 7:1, 11:18, etc.).

⁶ Such as the ordinances of Communion (in which the Jewish significance of the Passover dinner has mostly been lost) and baptism (which the Jews of Jesus' time understood, but the average American, European, African, or Asian today often does not understand). Western Christianity may need to re-teach the practice of headcovering, just as it re-teaches the often-lost meaning of baptism (which is often associated with child dedication, baptismal salvation, or “sprinkling” rather than immersion).

- Paul Says a Woman's Natural Hair Length Argues For A Cloth Covering

Nature's *universal* teaching about hair length (see page 13) is Paul's support for the woman's use of a headcovering:

1st Corinthians 11

- (13) Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?
 (14) Does not even nature itself teach you that ...
 (15) ...if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.¹

- Paul Leaves Only One Option for A Woman's Naturally Glorious Hair

1st Corinthians 11

- (6) 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.
 (14) Does not even nature itself teach you that ...
 (15) ... if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? ...

An answer to the implied question in verse 6 (“Is it disgraceful for a woman to have her hair shaved?”) is found in 1st Corinthians 11:14-15: yes, it is universally² disgraceful for a woman's hair to be cut off. Thus, the command in verse 6 is not dependent on culture.

- **Angels → Beyond Human Culture.** Paul states that women should cover their heads “because of the angels” (v.10). While he does not elaborate on what this means exactly, apparently Paul isn't commanding the Corinthians to follow a societal custom for the angels' sake.³
 - “The angel detail is so cryptic, so off the wall, so without explanation, that it becomes the strongest argument of all. Where is the 'cultural relativity' case now, where angels transcend all historical agitations?”⁴

¹ In reference to the use of the word “(un)covered” in verses 13 and 15: page 11 begins a discussion about the indications that verse 13 is referring to a cloth covering while verse 15 is not.

² See the previous discussion on God-created “nature,” on page 13.

³ Paul does not further explain how angels are related to headcoverings. This reference to angels may relate to our other Scriptural revelation about angel-human relationships (Ephesians 3:10, 1st Corinthians 4:9, 1st Timothy 5:21, and 1st Peter 1:12). This is not the only New Testament command that has “angels” as the reason for obedience (Hebrews 13:2).

Christians have come up with a wide variety of conjecture to try to provide explanation for this verse:

- (1) Perhaps the “sign of authority” signifies *something useful* to the angels as they perform their roles.
- (2) Perhaps the lack of this sign would *offend* the angels who themselves are constantly submitted to God.
- (3) Perhaps the Greek word for “angels” (which simply means “messenger”) refers here to *human beings*, as it does elsewhere in Scripture (Matthew 11:10, Luke 7:24, Luke 9:52, James 2:25, various places in the LXX, and possibly in Revelation 1-3) and as the ESV footnote suggests (though Paul probably did not use the word this way elsewhere in 1st Corinthians: 4:9, 6:3, 13:1).
- (4) Perhaps Paul even has in mind an effect on *fallen* angels (that is, demons) who, unlike godly covered women, chose not to submit to God.

To avoid delving into the realm of speculation, the safest understanding of this verse (even if it is not a complete explanation) comes from the observation that verse 10 begins with the Greek word translated “therefore.” This references the previous discussion about God's order of authority. In the Greek (and in most English translations except the NIV, which changes the word order), verse 10 then concludes using the same Greek word (often translated “because”), this time referencing to the angels. So, the sequence of the idea is: *God created an order of authority → therefore wear the headcovering symbol → because of the angels.* Thus, at the minimum, the headcovering is a sign to the angels that the woman is submissively positioned in God's order of authority.

⁴ “A Symbol of Glory,” Andrée Seu, *World Magazine*, June 02, 2007, Vol. 22, No. 20. [Available online]

The “Ordinances” of 1st Corinthians 11

- Paul uses the word “traditions”¹ or “teachings”² in the opening section of 1st Corinthians 11. The King James Version has the word “ordinance.”

1st Corinthians 11

(2) Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions/teachings/ordinances, just as I delivered them to you.

- **A God-Inspired Traditions:** Evangelical Christians are often cautious about “tradition” taking a directive role in religious practice. God likewise has a negative view of man-made religious traditions. In Scripture, the word “tradition” may refer to either man-originated or God-originated practices.
 - God-originated “traditions” are mentioned in 1st Corinthians & 2nd Thessalonians.³
 - Man-originated “traditions” are mentioned (and condemned) in Matthew, Mark, Galatians, Colossians, and 1st Peter.⁴

The “tradition” in this passage (headcoverings) is a teaching given from God Himself through an apostle.⁵ This matches up with the universal practice described in verses 4-5 & 16.

- **The Headcovering As A New Teaching:** The word translated “tradition” means “passing on a teaching.”⁶ Paul says the “delivered” these “traditions” to the Corinthians.^{7, 8} Paul was not the originator of the practice, but simply a link in the chain of revelation. This indicates that the “traditions” were not simply already-existing local customs. Paul, as a foreigner and Jew, certainly did not deliver already-existing headcovering customs of Corinth to the Christians of Corinth. Thus, the command for Corinthian women to wear a headcovering was not just Paul approving of a local practice.

¹ As translated by NASB, ESV, NET, NKJV, and HCSB.

² As translated by NIV and NLT.

³ 1st Corinthians 11:2, 2nd Thessalonians 2:15, 2nd Thessalonians 3:6.

⁴ Matthew 15:2-3, 6; Mark 7:3,5,8,9,12; Galatians 1:14; Colossians 2:8; and 1st Peter 1:18.

⁵ This is true of all the New Testament, and is specifically noted in 1st Corinthians 14:36-37.

⁶ *paradosis* / παράδοσις (Strong's #3862) meaning “a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, that which is delivered, the substance of a teaching of the body of precepts, transmission.”

⁷ In verse 2, there is a Greek wordplay between “traditions” (*paradosis*) and “delivered” (*paradidōmi*), as the former is derived from the latter.

⁸ The act of “delivering” this teaching connects well with the definition of “tradition” (given above). The word “deliver” is used again later in this chapter (verse 23) in reference to the Lord's Supper.

Δ Headcovering Requirements: A Cultural Practice?

“Oh, headcoverings were just cultural, for back then.” Many people believe that the command to wear a headcovering was only directed toward a specific culture,¹ and so is not applicable to Christian women of today. Behind the “culture-only” statement is a variety of different perspectives on *why* headcoverings are a command for a unique culture, and are not for universal practice. The following are some of the most-common perspectives, with some notes after each.

- **“Paul was concerned about head coverings *only because of the message* they sent to people in that culture. A headcovering has no meaning in our culture, so wearing one would be pointless.”**
 - The headcovering is not primarily a message *to* (or *from*) the culture.²
 - Similarly, the question could be asked, “How do baptism and the Lord’s Supper speak to our culture?” If our 21st Century setting sees these practices as culturally irrelevant, are Christians to give them up also?
 - However, “as a mental exercise try imagining a world in which you wake up tomorrow and most Christian woman begin to wear head coverings (at least during worship). This would draw scorn from the world. We would be mocked on late night TV. Oprah would interview psychologists about the negative effects head coverings have on self esteem. Many women would perhaps refuse to wear them because of the shame it brings, not from those within the church but from the culture. In fact I am sure many would refuse to step foot into any church which even adhered to such a practice... It marks the wearer publicly as one of God’s children. The cultural argument *for* head coverings is as strong today as it was in the days of Paul.”³
- **“The headcovering was a matter of modesty. Paul required a headcovering because, in his first century culture, hair was an object of male lust. The reason why a woman without a covering disgraces herself (v.5) is because she gives herself the characteristic mark of a prostitute. Since such symbolism is not in use today, the need for the covering is no longer present.”**
 - While avoiding the appearance of a prostitute is a wise goal, there is simply no indication in the passage that this is Paul’s goal when he gives his direction about headcovering. Rather, first century culture itself calls this proposal into question.
 - Instead, Paul explicitly gives *different* reasons for requiring a headcovering -- especially since these reasons (related to Creation-initiated gender order) provide little support if Paul is arguing for culture-appropriate modesty, and because “modesty” does not account for the prohibition against male headcoverings.⁴

¹ Sometimes referred to as “the Corinthian culture,” or “the Greek culture,” or “1st Century culture.”

² As discussed in the previous section.

³ This hypothetical scenario is from [this site](#). Emphasis mine, to distinguish this from the “cultural” arguments *against* headcoverings.

⁴ This topic is discussed in more detail on pages 16 and 17.

- **“The use of headcoverings *matches up* with Corinthian culture, so we know that Paul’s commands obviously must be *based on* the culture, and *limited* to that culture.”**
 - We do not discount biblical teachings just because they match up with culture. At times, culture may indeed practice what God intends, and God-inspired teachings are not negated just because they have cultural connections. For example, the Lord’s Supper was established in a Jewish culture with only Jews present. The principle male leadership in the family is not just from 1st Century culture, but is from God. Baptism was a religious practice in use by some cultures before the Church started, but we do not discount it because of its cultural connection - but we still regard it as Scripturally commanded for the Church today.¹
 - Similarly with headcoverings. We need more than “because they did it in their day means it’s not for our day”² in order to prove the perspective that headcoverings are only cultural.
 - Additionally, God’s direction on headcoverings did not actually match up with culture...
 - Men in the Roman colony of Corinth worshiped with their head covered (see page 14), but Paul tells them to uncover their heads.
 - Jewish priests worshiped with their heads covered, but Paul tells them to uncover.³
- **“The line of argument which Paul is using is the same theological basis for 21st century Christians observing such cultural practices as Father’s Day and Mother’s Day. While there is no Scripture we can quote to prove that Christians should observe such cultural customs, it is obvious that Christians can adopt such customs in order to show reverence to their parents.”⁴**
 - Yes, celebrating Father’s Day and Mother’s Day can be one way of obeying God’s commands to honor our parents (Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-3, and Colossians 3:20).
 - But would God *command* that we celebrate Mother’s Day?
 - The analogy/similarity starts to break down when we compare Mother’s Day to the *imperative-style language* (commands) that Paul uses.⁵
 - It also breaks down with the apparent intentionality of “head” and the universality described in the previous section.
 - The headcovering is apparently on a different level than Father’s and Mother’s Day.

¹ Chapter 12 (following the chapter that discusses headcoverings) references spiritual baptism. Physical baptism is referenced in the same book.

Similarly, the Jewish Passover is the setting for the inauguration of the Lord’s Supper (Communion), another practice still in use today. Paul’s discussion about the Lord’s Supper is found in the same chapter as his direction on headcoverings.

² It should be noted that with our confusion about what the culture actually was in relationship to headcoverings (see page 14), it’s a possibility that the headcoverings prescribed by Paul weren’t practiced by the culture at all. They may *not* have been a cultural custom, and so all arguments *for* a “culture-only” perspective fall by the wayside.

³ Also, as far as Christians are God’s present-day priests (1st Peter 2:9), believing men do not cover their heads.

⁴ Robert Morey, “Head Coverings,” *The Encyclopedia of Practical Christianity* (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2004), p. 7.

⁵ And this breakdown is alluded to in the phrase in the question above, “there is no Scripture we can quote to prove that Christians should observe such cultural customs.”

- **“Keep the Principle” (#1): Christian women can practice the universal principle of submission without wearing a headcovering.**

A culturally-relevant symbol can be used, if needed. Otherwise, the cloth is only required in cultures that consider the wearing of veils to be a sign of submission. “We don't 'greet each other with a holy kiss’ -- we shake hands or give hugs. The point (principle) here is the universal principle of fellowship, the 'spirit of the law' not the 'letter of the law'.” Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians worship services to be different than the pagan worship services.

- Yes, upholding the principle inwardly is definitely more important and more foundational than the resulting outward practice.
- In Western culture today, however, there is not an alternative, outward “symbol” to show submission.² In fact, feminine submission is anti-cultural to many “modern” cultures.
- Apparently, the head is a very *intentional* symbol. Paul says that it is *because* of a woman's *head* (man) that she covers her *head*.³ So, the headcovering creates the appropriate symbolism.
- The distinctions between a “holy kiss” and the practice of headcovering is discussed in a separate study.⁴
- The Corinthians could have also argued, “I’m being submissive, I don’t need the cloth to show it” -- but Paul still required it for them.
- Even when they are not understood by our culture, Christians still obediently practice other symbolic actions that are commanded of us by the Lord, such as water baptism and the Lord's Supper. We don't have the authority to change even the symbolic actions that the Lord instructs us in.⁵ Both of these are founded in ancient cultures, but are meaningful to Christians today because Christians are taught the message behind the symbolism. Similarly, the only reason that headcovering has no meaning to many contemporary Christians is that they haven't been taught about it.

¹ Romans 16:16, 1st Thessalonians 5:26, 1st Corinthians 16:20, and 2nd Corinthians 13:12.

² Even the wedding ring can't be used well as a cultural symbol, because (1) it doesn't have the express meaning of “submission” in Western cultures, (2) the husband wears one as well (Paul states that the man should not wear the symbol of the woman), and (3) this symbolism could not be used by unmarried women (who are included in the “every women” phrase that Paul uses; notice also that he does not specify “wife” but instead discusses womenkind as a whole).

³ This is not a word play created by the English translators. The Greek word for “head” in verse 3 is [the same](#) Greek word for “head” as used in the rest of the chapter.

⁴ Dr. Robert Spinney, *Should Christian Women Wear Head Coverings Today?*, p. 11. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁵ As a contrast, we could easily propose alternatives to these two standard Christian ordinances... “Let's wear pins that say 'I'm a Christian' instead of performing baptisms. If baptism identifies someone with Christ, I think people would understand the pins better than the water ceremony.” The author has also read of a Methodist minister approving the use of hamburgers and Coca-Cola instead of bread and wine.

- **“Keep the Principle” (#2):** The reason for the headcovering was to express gender-identity. This expression is the universal principle that “nature” teaches. Christian women can express their femininity using modern culturally-relevant signs, without a headcovering.
 - Those who promote this view often state that 1st Corinthians 11:15 points to the unique beauty of a woman with long hair and that this shows Paul's emphasis on gender distinction. However, Paul nowhere indicates that the covering is used for gender-identification, but rather for universal gender-roles (related to glory and headship).
 - The passage gives the *reasons* for the command, none of which are cultural.¹ We must be careful to keep in mind *why* the long hair is considered a “glory” to the woman. The reason is given in verse 15: it is *because* it covers her.
- The topic of Christian headcoverings is mentioned in only one chapter of Scripture, so it probably wasn't a really important doctrine. In this world, we have more important things (such as those related to eternal destiny and sanctification) to devote our time to.
 - While the topic of headcoverings is not foundational and is a minor matter in comparison to such things as the Gospel and Christian love, Jesus' principle of obedience still stands: “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). Similarly, Jesus warns against downplaying the importance of any of the “minor” commands of God: “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19, ESV).
 - If Scripture mentions any command only once, the command still has incredible importance because it came from the mouth of the Lord of the universe. Evaluating the importance of a section of Scripture can't be done by only counting up the number of times God says something (or the number of verses that speak to a particular topic). For example:
 - The amount of space that Paul devotes to the Lord's Supper (Communion) is almost the same as the amount of space he devotes to headcoverings.
 - This study on headcoverings covers 15 verses in 1st Corinthians 11. The number of direct references in the Bible to the virgin birth of Christ is found in only 12 verses.²
 - The revelation that Christians will judge both the world and angels is contained in only two verses (1st Corinthians 6:2-3).
 - Additionally, while we do know that this practice is not widely discussed in Scripture, we also know from 1st Corinthians 11:16 that it was widely practiced by the Church.

¹ The tension between the common “it's cultural” interpretation and the biblical “universal” interpretation can be directly seen in John MacArthur's two sermons on this topic (available on [this site](#) and [this site](#)). He begins by saying that gaining a confident understanding of the cultural background is difficult. He then chooses one view of the cultural background and uses it as a basis for his “culture-only” exegesis for the rest of the chapter. However, when he interacts with Scriptural text in this chapter that is universalistic, MacArthur temporarily becomes universalistic as well. Specifically, he states this passages teaches that Jewish men should not wear headcoverings, and also that the reference to “angels” causes this teaching to go beyond Corinthian culture.

² Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-25, and Luke 1:27, 34-35.

Δ Modern-Day Headcoverings?

Exegetical Summary

As the Jews in Berea were noble because they eagerly searched the Scriptures to see if what the apostles were teaching was true (Acts 17:11), we should be careful to evaluate various teachings about headcoverings in the full light of Scripture. Especially since the Scripture makes no direct reference to culture nor the Old Testament, and because the “norms” of Christianity have varied according to time and location, the danger in studying the topic of biblical headcovering is *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*.

- **The Old Testament Is Non-Prescriptive on This Topic:** While seeing the pattern of headcovering in the Old Testament is helpful, the Old Testament does not have any command for Christians regarding the wearing of headcoverings. Most of the Old Testament passages on this topic are *descriptive* of what people did, rather than *prescriptive* in nature.¹ Those passages that *are* prescriptive speak only to (male) Jewish priests. The variety of differences between Old Testament Jewish practice and New Testament Christian practice limits the voice of the Old Testament on this topic, except to conclude generally that God can have standards and direction for us regarding hair length and head covering.
- **The First Century Culture Does Not Affect The Interpretation:** It is always important to interpret Scripture with the historical context in view. This can give insight to word meaning and usage, and understanding how the original hearers would understand the biblical message. However, because there is so much disagreement about what the culture actually was in regards to headcoverings (see page 14), it is difficult to prove a “culture-only” perspective for Paul’s commands about headcoverings. To the contrary, Paul’s direction was probably counter-cultural to the Roman worship practices of that time, and his direction is based on Creation, not culture.
- **Hypothetical Contexts Provides No Basis For Conclusions:** Most “culture-only” perspectives on this topic depend on reading into the passage to find additional reasons (not given in the passage) for Paul’s direction about headcovering. We ought not give reasons for headcoverings that Paul himself does not give. The reasons put forth “for culture” are generally not based on specific parts of Scripture (that is, they are not *exegesis*). This guesswork shows itself with the fact that there is a variety of *different* (often conflicting) culture-based perspectives.²
- **The History of the Church Is Non-Prescriptive:** The practice of Christians throughout history can be informative and helpful, but it does not determine doctrine.
- **Paul Was Prescriptive:** Paul gave commands without condition, and additionally gave specific non-cultural *reasons* for his God-inspired commands:

Universal Headship Order	The Angels	Universal Church Practice
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¹ That is, the Old Testament passages that mention headcoverings are usually narratives; they are not giving commands.

² Additionally, many teachers assume the Corinthians were displeasing Paul in this matter (even though he praises them in verse 2 and doesn’t turn to correction until verse 17) and then attempt to read into the passage to find cultural reasons for why the women were practicing what was not right.

Each of the “culture-only” arguments miss the “universal principle” and “universal practice” aspects of the passage. Paul's message is that it is “not proper” (verse 13) for a woman to go without a headcovering while praying or prophesying.

Proper Motivation vs. Legalism

What does wearing a headcovering mean? What statement is made by wearing one?¹

→ Headcoverings According to Scripture...

- **Position:** A Christian woman wearing a headcovering symbolizes she believes in, agrees with, practices, and wants to represent God's order of authority. It is an outward expression of an inward commitment. Wearing a headcovering is a statement that "I'm in the divine order."²
 - While not wearing a headcovering wouldn't send an "unsubmissive" message to many modern cultures, it does not send the *biblically*-prescribed statement of submission.
 - Scripture says that a woman without the symbol of authority disgraces her head (v.5).³
 - Why signify that the woman is under authority? Paul gives two reasons⁴ for this sign...
 - The angels (v.10), *and*
 - Her relationship to man (v.7-9).
- **God's Glory:** The woman *has* a "glory"⁵ and she *is* a "glory."⁶ As appropriate in worshiping the Lord, Christians want to make much of the glory of God while humbling themselves. This is the message of verse 7: God's glory ought *not* to be covered/hidden,⁷ while the glory of humans *should* be covered/hidden.⁸
 - **Divine Glory:** The "glory of God" (which is *man*)⁹ is not covered during worship.
 - **Human Glory:** The "glory of man" (which is *woman*)¹¹ is covered during worship. The "glory of woman" (her hair)¹⁰ is also covered during worship.
- **Obedience:** Paul introduced the topic of headcoverings by praising the Corinthians for holding to his God-inspired teachings (verse 2).¹¹ Wearing a headcovering is an obedient expression of love to our Head, who said: "If you love Me, you will obey Me."¹²

¹ Remember that the symbol in 1st Corinthians 11:1-16 is the *covered head*, not the covering *itself*.

² Verses 7-9 each start with "for" (or "since" or "because") and describe the woman's relationship to man: she is the glory of man (v.7), she originated from man (v.8), and she was created for man's sake (v.9). Wearing a headcovering reflects God's *order* of created submission, *glory* of creation, and *reason* for creation. It is interesting to note that verse 10 doesn't say that the woman should wear a "symbol of submission" but rather a "symbol of authority." As she is positionally under the authority of man, she is physically under the headcovering.

³ Whether that head is "man" or her physical head.

⁴ The word "because" (or "therefore" or "since", from *dia* / δια, Strong's #1223) occurs twice in v.10, once in relation to the angels and once in relation to man.

⁵ Her hair, according to verse 15.

⁶ She is the glory of the man, according to verse 7. The Greek word for "glory" is the same in both verse 7 and verse 15. Similarly, a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband (Proverbs 12:4). God's Old Testament "bride" (Israel) will be a "crown of glory" in the hand of the Lord (Isaiah 62:3).

⁷ By definition of the word translated "covered." See page 45.

⁸ This may be in accordance with 1st Corinthians 1:29: "no flesh should glory in His presence" (KJV).

⁹ See verse 7.

¹⁰ See verse 15.

¹¹ Paul says his writing *is* the "command of Christ" (1st Corinthians 14:36-37).

¹² John 14:15, John 14:21, and 1st John 5:3.

→ Unbiblical Reasons That Headcoverings Are Worn¹

- **Tradition.** Sometimes the practice of headcovering is promoted only because of the heritage of a religious group. However, when the tradition of man is *the* reason for wearing one, the ordinance of God is diminished.²
- **Man-made “holiness” (legalism).** Sometimes the practice of headcovering is divorced from the reasons/meaning of the headcovering, and in effect becomes a rule for “rule’s sake.” This is further discussed on the following page.
- **Modesty.** Dressing modestly is the Lord’s standard (1st Timothy 2:9-10 & 1st Peter 3:3-5). However, modesty is not one of the God-inspired reasons that Paul gave for wearing a headcovering.³ Thus, it is legalistic to set headcoverings as a standard for modesty. The context for Paul’s direction about headcoverings is not within his discussions about lust and morality, but rather in the context of headship. Standards for modesty are applicable beyond times of prayer and prophesy.
- **Style.** The purpose of the headcovering is not to draw attention to the wearer.⁴ The biblical headcovering is not a fashion accessory.
- **To Diminish the Honor and Dignity Of Women**
 - **Equality.** Genesis 1 indicates that both genders are equally made in the image of God. In Galatians 3:28, Paul proclaims gender equality in the realm of salvation. And in the middle of Paul’s promotion of headcoverings, he was careful to show (v.11) the inter-dependence between man and woman (see also [1st Timothy 2:15](#) and Psalm 127:3-5).
 - **Submission.** God’s *standard of submission* (which the woman’s headcovering symbolizes) does not begin with the woman. As Paul teaches here, Jesus looks to an authority over Him (the Father)⁵, men submit to the authorities over them (Jesus and human authorities), and women do likewise. In all three instances, Scripture does not describe submission as demeaning. As the Son submits to the Father and is yet equal in value, so the woman submits to the man and is equal in value. The various New Testament teachings on the woman’s submission have their foundation in God’s “good” creation (Genesis 1-2). Thus, while headcoverings may serve a demeaning or repressive role in other cultures or religions, that is not the biblical meaning.⁶

¹ While these are not necessarily wrong (“unbiblical”) reasons to wear a headcovering, they are not the reasons for wearing one as found in Scripture. Rather, these reasons are sometimes promoted by legalistic groups.

² Similarly, choosing to wear a headcovering does not mean you are adopting a new culture or affiliation.

³ The definition of modesty as “discreet, humble, not having a high opinion of one’s self” (similar to Romans 12:3) can be reflected by a headcovering. However, the appearance-related definition of modesty (“not dressing sensually”) is not related to Paul’s view of headcoverings. This contrasts with the modesty-oriented reasons that Muslim women wear a covering. See page 17 for a discussion related to this topic.

⁴ The Scriptural references above, on the topic of modesty, speak to the topic of a prideful outward appearance.

⁵ Similarly taught in 1st Corinthians 15:28, 1st Corinthians 3:23, John 14:28, and Philippians 2:6-11.

⁶ Rather, Christianity has been [a great liberator](#) from oppression of women. In 1st Peter 3:7, the Apostle Peter gives this command to husbands regarding their wives: “show them honor.”

- **Summary.** The world, in its confusion, teaches that *submission* means *inferiority*.¹ As Jesus and the Father are of *equal divinity* and yet have unique roles, man and women are *equally human* and have unique roles. We ought to avoid confusing “equality” and “sameness.”²

¹ Many women who begin to wear a headcovering report feeling an increased sense of dignity. They also report that they are often treated more properly and respectfully, including men being less likely to cross relational boundaries.

² That is, “equality of importance and dignity, in both essence and role” does not imply “sameness of role.”

→ The Snare of Legalism

It is important for Christians to be careful to avoid unbiblical requirements for behavior. So, is it *legalistic* to wear a headcovering? Though it was appropriate for the Corinthian believers to follow Paul's God-inspired instructions regarding the use of headcoverings, would contemporary obedience to those instructions be a form of legalism? The three different types of legalism are discussed below.

The Context of Salvation: While the term “legalism” is not found in the Bible, in relation to *salvation* the word is commonly used to mean a type of *obedience-based forgiveness*, a keeping of rules in order to earn God's mercy. This is the “classic” definition of legalism and is the type of legalism Paul referred to when warning the Galatians about a false Gospel infused with requirements of the Mosaic Law.¹ Legalism is completely contrary to the Scripture-taught concept of grace-based salvation. Nothing in the Bible indicates that wearing a headcovering earns God's forgiveness or love for the wearer.

Unbiblical Rules: “Legalism” is also used at times to refer to *non-Scriptural requirements for behavior* (even while acknowledging the behavior are *not* necessary for *salvation*). Examples can include church or family “rules” such as permitting the use of only one specific Bible translation, prohibition against the use of alcohol or the eating of pork, or non-Scriptural prerequisites for baptism, communion, or fellowship. This type of legalism often originates either from a godly goal or valid biblical principle (with one particular practice being set as obligatory)² or from pride.³

If headcoverings are, Scripturally, only obligatory in certain cultural contexts, then similar to other practices, the use of headcoverings can be a form of legalism if they are set forth as a requirement for those outside that culture. However, if headcoverings are taught in the Bible as a universal practice for Christian women, then they do not qualify as this type of legalism.

Biblical Rules Without Biblical Reasons: “Legalism” is also defined as a *wrong kind* of emphasis on God-given requirements for behavior. The improper emphasis here is on *the letter of the [Scriptural] law* to the exclusion of *the spirit of the [Scriptural] law*. Godly behaviors can become “legalistic” if the *behavior itself* is emphasized over the *reasons* for the behavior. *Obedience* to God becomes divorced from *relationship* with God. This may occur with a variety of Christian behaviors such as financial giving, reading the Bible, or church attendance.

Thus, while headcovering is a Scriptural practice, it *can become* legalism if it is divorced from its purpose.⁴ Note that the teaching on headcovering comes from an apostle known for preaching against legalism and man-made traditions (such as in Romans 14:1-10 and Colossians 2:20-23).

Summary: Understanding legalism helps prevent the practice of headcovering from (1) becoming a spiritual hindrance, or (2) losing its God-ordained meaning.

¹ Even though the Mosaic Law was itself given by God.

² Example: “Because of the biblical standard of modesty, our congregation states that ladies must wear only dresses to church services.”

³ Often this is an attempt to create “homemade” works-based holiness (rather than submit to God-enabled faith-based sanctification) or to place one's self in a spiritually-superior position above others through “higher standards.”. This pride-induced legalism can produce separation, hurt, and confusion in relationships. Therefore, caution ought to be exercised in relation to groups that *legalistically* practice headcovering. Often these group also insist on other practices that are not biblically required.

⁴ In several ways, baptism and communion are very similar to headcovering, since each are *outward, physical symbols* of a *spiritual reality*. Each are God's direction for the believer, each can be divorced from its purpose. For example, baptism is sometimes viewed as a requirement for salvation, or as just an optional practice. In both extremes, the purpose of baptism has been ignored, and baptism under either perspective is spiritually meaningless. Similarly, just because a person drinks a bottle of wine and eats a piece of bread doesn't mean that Communion has happened. These same concerns apply to those who practice headcovering without regard for the *meaning* of its symbolism.

Next Steps

• Faithfully Teaching Scripture...

- Christians often form their conclusions about the use of headcoverings based on one of the following: (1) the practice of their own church and their own experience in Christianity, (2) what they have heard from other people on this topic, and (3) their opinions about (and potential consequences of) the outward appearance created by wearing a covering.
- Though the second half of 1st Corinthians 11 is frequently read for Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper, the first half of the chapter (on the topic of headcoverings) is rarely touched in most Evangelical circles. Much of Christianity needs to become re-acquainted with this passage.
- If wearing a headcovering is to be a universal practice for Christian women, and since it was important enough for Paul to include this teaching in his letter to the Corinthians, it is thus important enough for our churches today to hear and obey his God-inspired teaching. Most Christians consider a biblical "ordinance" to be a divinely-prescribed symbolic action¹, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion). Along the same lines, headcoverings are essentially a third ordinance.² It is worth challenging believers to seriously consider the reintroduction of a practice that is soundly Scriptural.

• Faithfully Obeying Scripture...

- Some Christian women are hesitant or even resistant to following God's direction about wearing a headcovering. Knowing this would be the case,³ the Lord included the message of 1st Corinthians 11:16, "if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God." As the tradition of most Evangelical churches today is for women to uncover their heads, we ought to be careful to avoid falling under the same judgment as the Jewish religious leaders in Mark 7:8-9, which ____.
- Anyone who is not "fully convinced in your own mind" (Romans 14:5) about whether or not the Lord wants Christian women to wear headcoverings today, then this can be a helpful question to ask to get some guidance in the meantime:

"Would it be better to treat a (possibly) local custom as a universal command (and thus follow it) and *be guilt of being over-scrupulous*, or would it be better to treat a (possibly) universal command as a local custom (and thus not follow it) and *be guilty of sin* - demoting the requirement of God to the level of human convention?"^{4, 5, 6}

¹ That is, a physical act that represents a spiritual reality.

² Paul uses the word "ordinance" (KJV) to introduce the topic of headcoverings in 1st Corinthians 11:2 (see page 21). Paul's next topic, after headcoverings, is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

³ The Corinthians seem to have problems in the area of unity and conformity (1st Corinthians 1:10-11).

⁴ This rhetorical question was proposed by R.C. Sproul on [his website](#) and on his recording titled "To Cover or Not To Cover?" (referenced below in the "Headcoverings in Christian History" section).

⁵ Or, put another way: you are driving your moped on the road and see a police car stationed just past speed limit sign that says "45 MPH / 20 Minimum." You look at your speedometer and notice that you're going 10 MPH, so you wonder to yourself, "Would that cop really pull me over for going 10 MPH under the limit? Is that sign just for cars and trucks, or is it for all motorists?" So, to be safe, you give it the gas and bump up your speed to 20 MPH. Now you're in compliance with authority's guidelines ("the letter of the law"), and also in compliance with the *goal* of the guidelines ("the spirit of the law").

⁶ This approach for use only until you reach a well-founded conclusion. Using this approach to be dogmatic would be a form of legalism (under the 2nd definition of legalism given on page 31). Romans 14 instructs us *how to relate* to each other in matters of disagreement, and points us back to focusing on the purpose for our behaviors.

- **Practical Issues:** There are many practical issues that this document has not discussed. These will be dealt with in a supplement titled “Practical Issues.”

Δ The Practice of Headcoverings Throughout Christian History

From the Early Church to the Reformation, and up until the early 1900's, the use of headcovering by Christian women was the norm. Some well-known modern-day evangelical theologians, such as R. C. Sproul and Charles Ryrie, also endorse the practice.

Early Christianity to the Reformation

- **Clement** (c.150 - c. 215 A.D.): “Woman and man are to go to church decently attired... Let the woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be at home... For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.”¹
- **Tertullian** (c. 160 - c. 220 A.D.): “Throughout Greece, and certain of its barbaric provinces, the majority of Churches keep their virgins covered. There are places, too, beneath this (African) sky, where this practice obtains; lest any ascribe the custom to Greek or barbarian Gentilehood... It is not strange, since it is not among strangers that we find it, but among those, to wit, with whom we share the law of peace and the name of brotherhood.”²
- **Hippolytus** (170 - 236 A.D.): “Let all the women have their heads covered.”³
- The **Apostolic Constitutions** (200 - 315 A.D.): “When thou art in the streets, cover thy head... veiling thyself as becomes women.”⁴
- **John Chrysostom** (c. 349 - 407 A.D.): “If it [that is, hair] be given [to] her for a covering... wherefore need she add another covering [cloth]? [In order so] That not nature only, but also her own will may have part in her acknowledgment of subjection.”⁵
- **Augustine** (354 - 430 A.D.): “It is not becoming, even in married women, to uncover their hair, since the apostle commands women to keep their heads covered.”⁶
- “Early church history bears witness that in Rome, Antioch, and Africa the custom became the norm.”⁷ “The apostle Thomas took the gospel to India and also taught the converts to Christ the importance of the head covering practice.”⁸
- Early Christian art shows women wearing headcoverings. “In the sculptures of the catacombs the women have a close-fitting head-dress.”⁹ “Pictures on the walls of the Roman catacombs show the early Christian women wearing one.”^{10, 11}

¹ *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume Two, Book Five, The Instructor, Book 3, Chapter 11. [Available online]

² *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume Four, Book One, Part Three, “On the Veiling of Virgins.” [Available online] reason Tertullian wrote specifically about virgins to support the view (accepted by Greek scholars now, but disputed during Tertullian's time) that Paul's wording included *unmarried* women in 1st Corinthians 11.

³ *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome*. Available on [this site](#) and [this site](#).

⁴ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume VII, “Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries.” [Available online]

⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homily XXVI: On the Veiling of Women*. [Available online]

⁶ St. Augustine, *Epistula CCXLV*. Available on [this site](#) and [this site](#). [This site](#) also references Augustine's support of headcoverings in his work *On the Trinity*, Book 12, Chapter 7.

⁷ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. “1 Corinthians,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. Edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1247-48.

⁸ Warren A. Henderson, *Glories Seen and Unseen* (Scroll Publishing: 2007), 33.

⁹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume IV* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 162.

¹⁰ Renée Ellison, *The Biblical Headcovering* (2009), 27. [Available online]

¹¹ Resources which provide additional examples of Early Christian artwork are given on page 41.

...Christian History [continued]

- In Britain: “By the eighth century it seems that headcoverings were worn by all¹ women.”²
- “Many of the ninth and tenth century women's burials...reveal no headcoverings at all...although finds of headwear are more common in Christianized areas like Dublin.”³

From the Reformation To The Last 100 Years

- **John Calvin** (1509 - 1564): “When he says 'her hair is for a covering' he does not mean that as long as a woman has hair, that should be enough for her. He rather teaches that our Lord is giving a directive that He desires to have observed and maintained. If a woman has long hair, this is equivalent to saying to her, 'Use your head covering, use your hat, use your hood; do not expose yourself in that way!’”⁴
- **The Augsburg Confession** (1530): Placing the command to wear headcoverings on the same level of authority as the church's observance of the Lord's Day (Sunday), they state: “Paul ordains, 1 Cor. 11:5, that women should cover their heads in the congregation... It is proper that the churches should keep such ordinances for the sake of love and tranquillity, so far that one do not offend another, that all things be done in the churches in order, and without confusion.”⁵
- **David Dickerson** (c.1583 - 1663): “It is dishonourable to the Female Sex to lay aside her veil, and against the dignity.”⁶
- **John Bunyan** (1628 - 1688)⁷: “For this cause ought the woman to have power', that is a covering, 'on her head, because of the angels' ... Methinks, holy and beloved sisters, you should be content to wear this power or badge.”^{8, 9}
- **Frédéric Louis Godet** (1812 - 1900), commenting on 1st Corinthians 11:16: “Was this conviction solely a matter of time and place, so that it is possible to suppose, that if (Paul) lived now, and in the West, the apostle would express himself differently? This supposition is not admissible; for the reasons which he alleges are taken, not from contemporary usages, but from permanent facts, which will last as long as the present economy.”¹⁰

¹ Note that contextually (see title of the resource), this is in reference specifically to *Christian* women.

² Ben Levick, *Clothing and Appearance of the Early Christian Anglo-Saxons*. [Available online]

³ Carolyn Priest-Dorman, *Viking Women's Garb in Art and Archaeology*. [Available online]

⁴ Seth Skolnitsky, trans., *Men, Women and Order in the Church: Three Sermons by John Calvin*, (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1992), p. 53. Quoted on [this site](#).
See also [this site](#), which quotes three of his sermons. [This site](#) and [this site](#) contain his commentary on the passage.

⁵ *The Augsburg Confession*, Article 28:54-55. [Available online]

⁶ *Commentaries on the Epistles*. Printed 1659. [Available online]

⁷ Known especially for writing the book *Pilgrim's Progress*.

⁸ John Bunyan, Henry Stebbing, “A Case of Conscience Resolved (Women's Prayer Meetings)” in *The Entire Works of John Bunyan*, Vol 4 (London: [City Road and Ivy Lane](#), 1860), p. 418. [Available online]

⁹ A variety of quotations from other Puritans are available on [this site](#) and [this site](#).

¹⁰ Frédéric Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Volume 2, p. 132. [Available online]

...Christian History [continued]

- “**John** and **Charles Wesley** and their many siblings knew that when their mother [Susanna] pulled her apron up over her head, they were not to disturb her - she was at the throne of God, even though she was sitting in the room in the midst of them.”¹
- **John Wesley** (1703 - 1791) exhorted women to dress “exemplarily plain in your apparel; as plain as Quakers or Moravians.”² Women of the **Moravian Church** wore headcoverings.³
- “In more recent history, there appears the Salvation Army bonnet in the 1700s and coverings amongst the early Methodists.”⁴
- **Charles Spurgeon** (1834 - 1892): “The reason why our sisters appear in the House of God with their heads covered is ‘because of the angels’.”⁵
- **Robert Dabney** (1820 - 1898), protesting a trend towards accepting female preachers in the mid-to-late 1800’s: “For a woman to appear or to perform any public religious function in the Christian assembly, with her head uncovered, is a glaring impropriety, because it is contrary to the subordination of the position assigned her by her Creator.”⁶
- **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (1815 - 1902), a non-Christian feminist, wrote the following in the late 19th century as part of her book titled *The Woman’s Bible*: “A veil on the head was a token of respect for superiors; hence for a woman to lay aside her veil was to affect authority over the man... The same customs prevail in our day and are enforced by the Church, as of vital consequence; their non-observance so irreligious that it would exclude a woman from the church. It is not mere social fashion that allows men to sit in church with their heads uncovered and women with theirs covered, but a requirement of canon law of vital significance.”⁷

¹ *The Biblical Headcovering*, Renée Ellison (2009), p. 20, 28. [[Available online](#)]

² John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, (New York, 1836), Volume II, p. 328. [[Available online](#)]

³ As noted on the Moravian Church Archives ([this site](#), and [this site](#)), as well as on [this site](#) (page 30-31, 70).

⁴ Renée Ellison, *The Biblical Headcovering* (2009), p. 28. [[Available online](#)]

⁵ *Sermon on Eph. 3:10*, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 8, p. 263. Quoted on [this page](#) and [this page](#).

⁶ Sermon titled *The Public Preaching of Women*, preached in October of 1879. [[Available online](#)]

⁷ *The Woman’s Bible*, 1898. [[Available online](#)]

A Transition in the Last Century

Even into the 20th century, wearing a headcovering was the norm for Christian women in Western churches. However, in the last 100 years, many churches slowly ended the practice of wearing headcoverings.

- **R. C. Sproul:** “The wearing of fabric head coverings in worship was universally the practice of Christian women until the twentieth century. What happened? Did we suddenly find some biblical truth to which the saints for thousands of years were blind?”¹
- **Mary Kassian:** “It is only in the past three or four decades that its observance [headcovering] has slipped away – particularly in Western society.”²
- **Susan Foh:** “The discontinuance of coverings for women, by most denominations only in this century, was not done for theological reasons but for cultural reasons.”³
- **Robert D. Culver:** “There has been a change in practice, if not in Bible interpretation, within the living memory of millions of people; women attend church ... and almost never wear a hat or other head covering.”⁴
- “In North America, women in the late 1800's replaced the simple cloth head covering (or bonnet) with a hat. In time, the woman's hat became a fashion accessory rather than a religious statement. Even as the religious rationale for head covering was lost, however, women's hats were normative in North American until the 1950's.”⁵
- “In the late 19th century, American women opted for hats in lieu of [the] bonnets and veils worn by European women... After a frenzy of fashion changes, the hat was no longer the norm in public attire.... It took only another 20 years [the 1950's] before women generally grew tiresome of wearing hats during Protestant religious services.”⁶
- Most Roman Catholic women stopped wearing headcoverings in the 1960's.⁷
- The Reformed Presbytery of North America reversed their position on headcoverings in 2001.⁸
- A congregation of the Christian Brethren church states: “This practice [of headcovering] was common in all Evangelical groups until just a few decades ago. It only became a distinctive of the Christian Brethren when other groups abandoned this symbol.”⁹

¹ Quoted on [this site](#).

² Mary Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Crossway Books: 1990), p. 179. [[Available online](#), courtesy of the evangelical [Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#)]

³ Susan Foh, *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. B. Clouse and R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 86.

⁴ Robert D. Culver, “A Traditional View,” *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. B. Clouse and R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 29. [[Available online](#)]

⁵ Dr. Robert Spinney, *Should Christian Women Wear Head Coverings Today?* [[Available online](#)]

⁶ Warren A. Henderson, *Glories Seen and Unseen* (Scroll Publishing: 2007), p. 33.

⁷ In the [1917 Code of Canon Law](#), the Catholic Church stated the following in *Canon 1262*: “Men, in a church or outside a church, while they are assisting at sacred rites, shall be bare-headed... women, however, shall have a covered head and be modestly dressed, especially when they approach the table of the Lord.” This Canon was not re-instated in the [1983 Code of Canon Law](#). There is some debate whether Canon 6 of the 1983 Code indicates a removal of the 1917 guideline on headcoverings, or if Canons 20-21 and 27-28 of the 1983 Code indicate that the 1917 guideline is still in effect. However, “the [second Vatican Council](#) (1962-1965) was the pivotal point in history when many Roman Catholic women discontinued covering themselves during church meetings” (Warren Henderson, *Glories Seen & Unseen*, Scroll Publishing: 2007, p.31).

⁸ See [this site](#), which links to an article by the denomination regarding their current position.

⁹ The Christian Brethren of Pawtucket, *Our Brethren Legacy*. [[Available online](#)]

*...Christian History [continued]***The Last 100 Years to the Present**

As mentioned in the last section, in the last 100 years (just 5% of Church history) the common use of headcoverings has greatly decreased. Some of those who promote the use of headcoverings today are listed below.

Locations Where Christians Practice Headcovering

- “The practice [of headcovering] continues to appear with many of the Chinese, Asian, African, and Eastern European Christians. Women there wear one today just by learning about it from the Scriptures, without having been taught about it.”¹
- Christian women in India wear headcoverings, not because of local custom, but because of biblical instruction. A local pastor explains, “When the Apostle Thomas brought the gospel to India in the First Century, he taught that the woman's head should be covered...and they have been doing it ever since. Pastors in India never need to tell the women to cover their heads. The women know the Bible tells them to do it, so they do it.”²
- Egyptian Christian women cover their head during the Communion service.³
- “Even today, born again Christians from the former Soviet Block countries still cover their heads with a veil.”⁴ For example, Christian women in Kazakhstan wear the headcovering today (not as a cultural tradition, but specifically in response to 1st Corinthians 11).⁵ Russian Orthodox churches, even outside of Russia, practice the same.⁶
- Warren Henderson writes that he “can personally attest to meeting Chinese Christians in the underground church who are following the head covering teaching.”⁷
- Some denominations and theologians in Western countries continue to practice and promote the use of headcoverings (see next section).

¹ *The Biblical Headcovering*, Renée Ellison (2009), p. 28. [\[Available online \]](#)

² Daniel Botkin, *The Validity and Value of the Woman's Headcovering* (East Peoria, IL: Gates of Eden, 1995), p. 8. [\[Available online \]](#) Also included in the book *Women of Worth*, Reneé Lovelace (Xulon Press, 2009), p. 109. [\[Available online \]](#)

³ Lara Iskander & Jimmy Dunn, *An Overview of the Coptic Christians of Egypt*. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁴ R.J. Vogel, *Is the Headcovering Really An Issue?*, 1999. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁵ According to the author's personal correspondence with a missionary to Kazakhstan.

⁶ *On The Covering of Heads*, Parish Life (Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Washington, DC: August 1994). [\[Available online \]](#)

⁷ Warren A. Henderson, *Glories Seen and Unseen* (Scroll Publishing: 2007), p. 33.

*...Christian History [continued]*Churches & Denominations That Practice Headcovering

- Some Christian groups with an Anabaptist heritage practice headcovering. Women from Amish, [Mennonite](#)¹, Old German Baptist Brethren, and Hutterite heritage wear headcoverings.
- The [Plymouth Brethren](#),² the Free Presbyterians,³ the [Church of the Brethren](#)⁴, and the Dutch Reformed churches⁵ practice headcovering.
- Various denominational and non-denominational churches practice headcovering.⁶

Individuals Who Advocate Headcovering

- [Harry A. Ironside](#) (1876 - 1951), when preaching on 1st Corinthians 11, stated that he himself ought not wear a hat while in the pulpit, and that a woman ought to have a hat on while in church. According to him, the act of “uncovering her head” in effect says, “I am not going to take any subject place” [that is, any submissive position]. Ironside states that by our response to this passage “we test our state, whether there is self-will working or whether one is ready to be subject to the Word of God...whether our wills are subject to God or whether we are going to be subject to the fashions and order of the day in which we live.”⁷
- [John Murray](#) (1898 - 1975, a founder of [Westminster Theological Seminary](#)): “Since Paul appeals to the order of creation, it is totally indefensible to suppose that what is in view and enjoined had only local or temporary relevance. The ordinance of creation is universally and perpetually applicable, as also are the implications for conduct arising therefrom.”⁸
- [Watchman Nee](#) (1903 - 1972): “God has sovereignly willed that the head of Christ is God Himself, so Christ must obey; the head of man is Christ, so man must obey; and the head of woman is man, and so woman should have the sign of obedience on her head... There are many who like to argue that it is not necessary for woman to have her head covered. They withstand Paul’s word and oppose what he has received from the Lord and delivered to them. What does Paul reply? ‘We have no such custom.’ The ‘we’ points to Paul and the apostles. There is no such custom among the apostles that the sisters are not covered. This is a matter which is non-negotiable.”⁹

¹ Mennonites vary widely in the areas of theology and practice. Some conservative evangelical Mennonites wear headcoverings, such as the [Alliance of Mennonite Evangelical Congregations](#) (as stated on [their site](#)).

² A conservative, evangelical movement also called “Christian Brethren” (not to be confused with the “Church of the Brethren”). Their headcovering beliefs are described on [this site](#) and [this site](#).

³ Their [website](#) has a [specific section](#) with a statement on headcoverings.

⁴ Note that this is not the same group as the “Plymouth Brethren.” One subgroup of the Church of the Brethren has written an article about headcoverings titled “The Sister’s Prayer Covering.” [\[Available online \]](#)

⁵ Such as these denominations: “[Netherlands Reformed](#),” “[Heritage Reformed](#),” and “[Free Reformed](#).”

⁶ Such as a [Baptist church](#), a [Presbyterian church](#), a [house church](#), a [Bible Chapel](#), a [Gospel Chapel](#), etc.

⁷ *Epistle to the Corinthians*, H. A. Ironside (Louizeaux Brothers, Neptune, New Jersey, 1973), pp. 331-332, 339.

⁸ John Murray, A Letter To The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Australia), *Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*, (Winter 1992). Quoted on [this site](#) and [this site](#).

⁹ *Love One Another*, Watchman Nee. [\[Available online \]](#)

...Christian History [continued]

- **William MacDonald** (1917 - 2007): “Paul teaches the subordination of the woman to man by going back to creation. This should forever lay to rest any idea that his teaching about women's covering was what was culturally suitable to his day but not applicable to us today.”¹
- **Charles C. Ryrie**² (1925 - present): “Women should be veiled or covered in the meeting of the church, and men should not. Paul’s reasons were based on theology (headship, v.3), the order of creation (vv. 7-9), and the presence of angels in the meeting (v.10). None of these reasons was based on contemporary social customs.”³ Paul’s command “was not connected with some local Corinthian peculiarity.”⁴
- **R.C. Sproul**⁵ (1939 - present): “It’s totally inappropriate to assign to Paul a reason for his saying something that is different from the one he himself gives. Paul does not leave us without a rational or defense for covering the head... he appeals to Creation, not to Corinth.”⁶ “If there’s ever an indicate of a perpetual ordinance in the church, it is that which is based on an appeal to Creation. I’m persuaded that the principle of covering the head is still in effect... I don’t think it matters one bit whether it’s a babushka, a veil, or a hat, but I think that the symbol should remain intact as a sign of our obedience to God.”^{7, 8}
- **Mary Kassian**: “Both the principle [headship] and its commanded behavioral expression [headcovering] are seen as applicable today... women should veil themselves today (as I would encourage).”⁹
- **Bruce Waltke** (1930-present): “This writer concludes, then, that a woman who prays or prophesies in an assembly of believers should cover her head as a symbol of her submission to the absolute will of God who has ordered His universe according to His own good pleasure... it would be well for Christian women to wear head coverings at church meetings as a symbol of an abiding theological truth.”¹⁰

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN; 1995), p. 1786.

Quoted from: Warren A. Henderson, *Glories Seen and Unseen* (Scroll Publishing: 2007), p. 110.

² Popular author of numerous theology books, former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, and former professor and president of Philadelphia Biblical University.

³ *The Ryrie Study Bible Expanded Edition* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995) p. 1832.

⁴ *The Role of Women in the Church (First Ed.)*, Charles Ryrie, p. 74.

⁵ President of Ligonier Ministries (known for the radio broadcast “Renewing Your Mind” and the monthly “Tabletalk” magazine, as well as numerous Bible studies, commentaries, and the “Reformation Study Bible”).

⁶ *To Cover or Not To Cover?* Available on tape (Tape #675, Side B), or MP3 [on this site](#).

⁷ *Now, That's a Good Question!*, R. C. Sproul, p. 348. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁸ In the following resources, R.C. Sproul also expresses his belief that headcovering is a universal command: “Table Talk Magazine” (*Coram Deo*), June 1996. The text is available on these sites: [#1](#), [#2](#), and [#3](#). *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1977), p. 110. [\[Available online \]](#).

⁹ *Women, Creation and the Fall*, Mary Kassian (Crossway Books: 1990), p. 104. [\[Available online](#), courtesy of the evangelical [Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood \]](#)

¹⁰ Bruce Waltke, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978): p. 55-56.

...Christian History [continued]

- **S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.** (1915-2004):¹ Paul's objections to the uncovered woman "have nothing to do with social custom... each of the reasons given for the wearing of a veil is taken from permanent facts, lasting as long as the present earthly economy... The presence of both [the headcovering and positional subordination] is the ideal."²
- **Gary Inrig** (19__ - present): "There are very strong reasons for believing that Paul is not arguing on merely cultural grounds, and that the wearing of the veil is relevant to modern Christians... A woman is to be veiled in the [church] assembly meeting."³
- **Susan Foh**: "Do Paul's instructions still apply today? Frequently, the command for a covering is assumed to be a cultural requirement. This assumption is doubtful for several reasons... If the woman prays or prophesies, she must be covered."⁴
- **Robert D. Culver**: Chapter 11 of 1st Corinthians "has taught believers of every clime and time...[that] she is to wear an additional headcovering."⁵

Additional Notes

- A pictorial overview of the attire of Christians women (from the Early Church to the 1900's) is available through several resources.⁶
- Other contemporary usage includes:
 - Individual women in a variety of different churches practice headcovering today.
 - Most professors at [Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary](#) are in favor of the practice of headcovering.⁷

¹ Additional biographical information is provided in his obituary, available on [this site](#).

² S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. "1 Corinthians," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. Edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1247-48.

³ Gary Inrig, *Life in His Body* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1975), p. 165, 172.

⁴ S. T. Foh, "A Male Leadership View: The Head of the Woman Is the Man," *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. B. Clouse and R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 86-89.

⁵ Robert D. Culver, "A Traditional View," *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. B. Clouse and R. G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 28. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁶ A variety of images through the centuries of Christian history are available in "Appendix I" of *Covered or Uncovered*. Scroll Publishing offers over four dozen pictures. [\[Available online \]](#) La Vista Church of Christ offers a half-dozen pictures, mostly from the Roman catacombs. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁷ Per personal correspondence with seminary faculty.

Δ Appendix A: Defining Key Words

When studying a passage in the Bible, often it's helpful to look at a word's definition(s) in the original language of the passage. This is especially true for the passage of 1st Corinthians 11, in which a person's conclusions about Paul's teaching will at times depend on the specific meaning of the words that Paul used. And so, for the Greek and Hebrew definitions given in this study, the following resources were consulted:

- [Smith's Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon](#) (Joseph Thayer)
- [Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon](#)
- [A Manual Greek Lexicon](#) (Abbott-Smith)
- [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (BDAG)
- [Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon](#)
- [Vine's Greek Dictionary](#) (William Vine)
- [Strong's Bible Dictionary](#) (James Strong)
- [Theological Lexicon of the New Testament](#) (Ceslas Spicq)
- [Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament](#) (Spiros Zodhiates)
- [Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament](#) (Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider)
- [The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament](#) (Danker & Krug)

Δ The Word “Head” in 1st Corinthians 11

As in English, the Greek word for “head”¹ can refer to either a physical head (ie., “the hair on your head”) or an authority head (ie., “head of a company”). The beginning of 1st Corinthians 11 uses “head” as *authority* and the end of the passage refers to the *physical head*. In the middle of this passage, Paul connects both concepts together.

→ Beginning of the Passage: What does “head” mean in v.3?

1st Corinthians 11

(3) I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

- Here, “head” is obviously not physical, but rather refers to authority.²
- Christ-as-Head is different here than the concept in Colossians and Ephesians: here Christ is the head of *man*, and in Colossians & Ephesians Christ is the head of the *Church*.

→ End of the Passage: The Women Covers Her Physical Head

1st Corinthians 11

(13) Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?
 (14) Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace for him,³
 (15) but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

→ Middle of the Passage: Is the disgraced “head” in v.4-5 referring to a *physical* head or an *authority* head?⁴

1st Corinthians 11

(4-5) Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered disgraces his head. But any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head, for it is one and the same thing as having a shaved head.

- The reference to authority (verse 3) is in close context here, so perhaps the “disgraced” head is referring to the man, or perhaps it is referring to the woman's physical head. Perhaps both are in view. Either meaning creates a true statement, which makes it difficult to narrow down Paul's meaning.⁵

¹ *kephalē* / κεφαλή (Strong's #2776).

² There has been some debate between whether “head” means “authority” or “source.” While there are many good Greek studies that conclude “authority,” two simple observations from the passage are that (1) *authority*, not *source*, is in view by Paul when he says, “God is the head of Christ” (that is, Jesus was not “sourced” from the Father, but each have eternally co-existed). Also, (2) verse 10 specifically uses the word “authority” in context (its connection to context is emphasized by the opening word “therefore”).

³ Note that Old Testament priests were specifically prohibited from growing their hair long (Ezekiel 44:20).

⁴ The “covered head,” the “uncovered head,” and the “shaved head” are obviously physical.

⁵ See also the above-mentioned *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 68-69, 224-276.

Δ The Word “Hair” in 1st Corinthians 11

In v. 14-15, the word translated “hair” is not the common word for “hair” in the New Testament.¹

1st Corinthians 11

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

“...if a man has long hair...if a woman has long hair...”

- The phrase “long hair” comes from only one Greek word.² It means simply “to let one’s hair grow long.”³ This is the only chapter in the New Testament where this word is used.⁴

“...her hair is given to her for a covering.”

- Here, the word translated “hair” is from a different Greek word than “long hair” in the previous phrase.⁵ In the New Testament, this word appears only in this chapter.⁶
- This word “hair” here specifically refers to “ornamental locks.” *Length* is not the emphasis of this word, but rather *style*.⁷

¹ Note that the original Greek, the term “hair” is not used elsewhere in this chapter. When it is present in verse 6, it is only because the English translation added it in, instead of going with the original literal phrase of “let her shear herself.”

² *komaō* / κομάω (Strong’s #2863). [Strong’s Greek Dictionary](#) provides a one-word English translation: “tresses.”

³ The meaning can be either “to have long hair” or “to let one’s hair grow long.”

⁴ The word is also used when [Plutarch](#) says, “In Greece... men cut their hair short; women let it grow [κομάειν].” (Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, p. 201). This statement is from Question #14 of Plutarch’s “[Roman Questions](#)” found in Book IV of *Moralia* (available online in [Greek](#) and in [English](#)).

⁵ *kome* / κόμη (Strong’s #2864), used only once in the Bible. The Greek word for “long hair” in the first phrase is derived from this Greek word translated “hair” in the second phrase. The English word “comet” [comes from](#) this Greek word because of the resemblance of the comet’s tail to long, streaming hair.

⁶ The word’s extra-biblical usage is noted in Liddell-Scott’s Greek Lexicon. [\[Available online\]](#) This word is also found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Numbers 6:5 and Ezekiel 44:20 (in both passages, the NASB translates the word “locks”).

⁷ This is specifically noted in Strong’s Bible Dictionary, Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, BDAG, and Zodhiates’s Word Study Dictionary. “From classical to hellenistic times κόμη often denotes hair perceived as an ornament... [in contrast to] hair in a more anatomical sense.” (Thiselton, 825).

Δ The Word “Cover” in 1st Corinthians 11

- The Greek word “covering” in verse 15 is different than the word “covering” in verses 5-7.

1st Corinthians 11

(5) Every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head.

(6) For if a woman does not cover her head ... let her cover her head.

(7) A man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God.

(13) Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

(15) ...if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her... For her hair is given to her for a covering.

- In verses 5-7 & 13, the verb *katakalupto*¹ (literally “to cover down”) is defined as “to cover over” or “to conceal.”
 - This word is also used in a variety of passages [in the Septuagint](#) (such as Genesis 38:15 and Isaiah 6:2). In each case the translation “cover” or “hide” is appropriate.²
 - Outside the Bible, the word is used by [Philo](#) and [Plutarch](#) (both of whom lived during the time of Paul) to refer to a cloth covering over the head.³
- In verse 15, the noun *peribolaion*⁴ means “an article of clothing thrown around, a wrapper, a mantle or cloak.”
 - When the word *peribolaion* is [used in the Septuagint](#), it refers to articles of clothing and to the covering of a ship.
 - It is [used outside the Bible](#) to refer to such things as chariot covers, bed covers, and gowns.
 - BDAG defines the word as “an article of apparel that covers much of the body.”⁵

¹ *katakalupto* / κατακαλυπτο (Strong's #2619). Used 8 times in this passage (twice exactly, plus 6 variations). It is a compound word formed by the word *kata* (Strong's #2596, meaning “down from, over, throughout, according to, toward, or along”) and the word *kalupto* (Strong's #2572, meaning “to hide, to veil”)

kalupto is the basis for the word *kaluma* (Strong's #2571, meaning “covering, hood, or veil”) and is also the basis for other compound words like the verb *anakalupto* (Strong's #343, meaning “to unveil or reveil or uncover by drawing back a veil”), the verb *epikalupto* (Strong's #1943, meaning “to hide from view by covering”), and the noun *epikaluma* (Strong's #1942, meaning “a cover-up used to conceal something”). *Kalupto* is found in passages such as Matthew 8:24 (“the boat was being covered with the waves”), Luke 8:16, (“no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a container”), Luke 23:30 (“they will begin to say...to the hills, ‘Cover us.’”), and 1st Peter 4:8 (“love covers a multitude of sins.”).

² *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 130. [[Available online](#)]

³ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 118-119. [[Available online](#)]

⁴ *peribolaion* / περιβολαιον (Strong's #4018). Used only twice in the NT, once in 1st Corinthians 11:15 and once in Hebrews 1:12, which reads: “Like a mantle You will roll them [the foundation of the earth and the heavens] up.” Comes from the Greek word *periballo* / περιβαλλο (Strong's #4016), meaning “to throw around” or “to clothe” (as used in Matthew 6:29 and Acts 12:8).

⁵ Perhaps referring to the “[peplos](#)” (more popular *before* 500BC), which wrapped around the body (shoulders to toes).

Δ The Word “For” in 1st Corinthians 11:15

1st Corinthians 11

(15) ...her hair is given to her for a covering.

The English word “for” has a wide variety of meanings.¹ So, to understand the specific meaning of “for” in this passage, we will look at the Greek word, ἀντί.² It can have four main definitions...

- “Hair is given to her in place of a covering” (that is, a substitute/replacement)^{3, 4}
- “Hair is given to her with the purpose of a covering” (that is, a reason or cause)⁵
- “Hair is given to her corresponding to a covering” (that is, an opposite/counterpart)⁶
- “Hair is given to her in return for a covering” (that is, an exchange)⁷

Through ἀντί, the noun “covering”⁸ (wrapper) is used as an *adjective* to describe the noun “hair.”⁹ Since “hair” is the main subject; the emphasis, grammatically, is that “hair” (not the “wrapper”) is what is given. The word order of the literal Greek phrase makes these word-relationships more obvious¹⁰:

- “*this hair (for a wrapper) is given to her.*”

¹ For example, the online edition of Webster's Dictionary provides 10 definitions at [their site](#).

² *anti* / ἀντί (Strong's #473). Originally meaning “opposite” or “over against.” There is some debate over its exact meaning in biblical (*koine*) Greek. This word is only used 22 times in the New Testament. In contrast, the Greek word “for” in the phrase “for God so loved the world” (John 3:16) is used over 1000 times. Similarly, the word “for” in the phrase “for her hair is given to her” (earlier in verse 15) is used over 1300 times.

³ Examples of ἀντί used this way: Matthew 2:22 (“Archelaus was reigning over Judea *in place of* his father Herod”), Luke 11:11 (“give him a snake *instead of* a fish”), and in the term “antichrist” (Greek *antichristos*). The Septuagint uses it in Genesis 22:13 (“Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering *in the place of* his son”). Also, “instead” in James 4:15 & Genesis 4:25 (LXX).

⁴ Thus, the Darby Bible renders verse 15 as: “hair is given to her *in lieu of* a veil.” Young's Literal Translation similarly has: “hair *instead of* a covering hath been given to her.”

⁵ Examples of ἀντί used this way: Luke 1:20 (“you shall be silent and unable to speak...*because* you did not believe my words”), Acts 12:23 (“immediately an angel of the Lord struck him *because* he did not give God the glory”), 2nd Thessalonians 2:10 (“...those who perish, *because* they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved”), and Ephesians 5:31 (“*For this reason* man leave his father and mother and joined to his wife.”).

⁶ The word is not used this way in the New Testament, except when in compound words like *antitype* (Hebrews 9:24, 1 Peter 3:21) and *antechó* (Luke 16:13), and *antidikos* (Matthew 5:25). [anything in the LXX?]

⁷ Examples of ἀντί used this way: Matthew 5:38 (“An eye *for* an eye, and a tooth *for* a tooth,” cf. Genesis 9:6 LXX), Romans 12:17 (“Never pay back evil *for* evil”), Matthew 17:27 (“...you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them *for* you and Me”), Hebrews 12:2 (“Jesus...who, *for* the joy set before Him, endured the cross”), and Hebrews 12:16 (“Esau, who sold his own birthright *for* a single meal”). Frequently, when *anti* is used to indicate an exchange, the context states that something is “given” or “sold.” Such is the case with 1st Corinthians 11:15 (“hair is given to her *for* a covering”), and so this definition may be appropriate: God gives the woman “glorious” hair, and in return she wears a “wrapper” for Him.

⁸ It must be remembered that in this verse, “covering” is a noun, even though it has a verb-like “ing” ending in English.

⁹ The grammar of the Greek indicates that “covering” is a descriptive noun (called a “genitive case”), meaning that it modifies another noun. For example, in phrase “the hoof of the horse”, the “hoof” is further defined by the descriptive noun “horse” (for example, it is not a cow's hoof). Similarly, “business” is a “genitive case” in the phrase “business attire.” So, what noun is modified by “covering”? There are only two other nouns in this phrase: “her” and “hair.” The word “her” is in the “dative case” (indicating a noun to whom something is given). But the word “hair” is in the “nominative case” (which marks a subject of the predicate noun). In this phrase the predicate noun is the word “covering,” and so the word “covering” modifies (describes) the “hair.”

¹⁰ Punctuation and the words *a*, *is*, and *to* are provided; they are not found as separate words in the Greek. Note also that none of these definitions directly states that hair “is” a covering.

Δ The Word “Nature” in 1st Corinthians 11:14

1st Corinthians 11

(14) Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, (15) but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

The definition of “nature” is important because Paul bases his argument on what “nature teaches.” Does “nature” refer to the *culture & customs* of a particular group of people, or does it refer to a God-created universal standard or norm? Or perhaps a combination?

There are three options here:

1. “*Nature* is just another way of saying ‘culture.’ Verses 14-15 refer to societal hairstyles.”
2. “*Nature* refers to an innate, universal desire to appear differently than the opposite gender, but the gender-specific appearance (including hair) is dictated by each individual culture.”
3. “*Nature* means universal, innate human instinct. There is no cultural reference to hair.”

1. Does “Nature” Mean Cultural Customs?

In other words, this view is that societal norms had become “natural.” This is expressed a few ways:

- “Certain cultures have had men who wore long hair without disgrace, which indicates that hair length is not a universal instinct.”
- “Verse 13 is asking for a personal judgment call regarding propriety¹ and that culture dictates the guidelines for ‘propriety.’ So, the culture-based judgment call extends into verses 14-15, in relation to hair length for men and women.”
- “Short hair was a cultural sign of prostitution and was therefore prohibited by Paul.”

Further considerations about this view...

- Cultures that have men with long hair do not disprove the proposal that “nature” is universal, since if nature were universal, some cultures could still choose contrary to nature (note the use of the word “nature” to describe heterosexuality in Romans 1, as mentioned again below). Humans can choose contrary to what is universally natural.
- Verse 13 (a call for personal judgment regarding a woman praying uncovered) cannot be directly applied to verses 14-15 (the length of men's and women's hair. The topics are related, but are not the same.
- See page for 14 more information about the question about whether short hair was a sign of prostitution.
- This view does not take into account the definition of the word “nature” (see below).
- This view does not take into account that the universality of verse 16 (see below).

¹ On the issue of a woman praying with her head uncovered.

2. Is “Nature” *Universally Related To Culture*?

This position states that “nature” refers to every person’s innate desire to not have the appearance (including hair length) of the opposite gender. Appearing as the opposite gender is shameful, but to appear as your real gender is proper. Culture dictates what an “honorable” and “shameful” hair length is, and “nature” teaches *through culture*.¹

Further considerations about this view...

- This viewpoint depends on an assumption that there’s a relationship between instinct and cultural gender appearances and that this relationship is the reason that hair length is called “shameful” or “glorious” by Scripture. However, this assumption is not proved from the passage. In fact, there are other reasons given in this passage for the shame and honor.
- In context of this chapter, Paul is not trying to promote appearance that is consistent with cultural *gender distinctions*, but rather with universal *gender submission*.²

Paul’s use of hair length to support his reasons for the headcovering (the headcovering points to God’s guidance for universal gender submission) would be meaningless if the hair length were not also universal.

- This view does not take into account the definition of the word “nature” (see below).
- This view does not take into account that the universality of verse 16 (see below).

¹ This argument makes an assumption about the reason for the “dishonor” and “glory” mentioned in verses 14-15. The assumption is that there is dishonor and glory the man or woman is in compliance or rebellion in relation to culture (rather than in relation to God-created innate understanding). This argument must necessarily also conclude that the “giving” of long hair (v.15) is done by the culture, not by God.

² In regards to hair length, nowhere in the passage can we point to conclusive proof for the former, while we have several Scriptural reasons for the latter.

3. Is “Nature” Universal And Not Dependent On Culture?

The Definition of “Nature”

- The definition of the Greek word “nature” is: *order, laws, innateness, or instinct*.¹
- It comes from another Greek word meaning “to produce or grow.”
- The Greek word for “nature” is used in Scripture only non-culturally. For example...²
 - Romans 1:26-27 → The (non-cultural) evaluation that homosexuality is “unnatural.”³
 - Romans 2:14 → The conscience (which is identified here as *cross-cultural*) is “instinctive.”
 - Ephesians 2:3 → Uncircumcision is the “natural” condition of mankind.⁴
 - Galatians 4:8 → The statement in this verse regarding slavery is wrong if “nature” means *culture* (because the Galatians *were* slaves to that which *by culture* are gods).
- The same Greek word is used similarly even by non-Christians in Paul's time. For example, [Epictetus](#) wrote: “Woman is born smooth and dainty by nature; if she is very hairy she is a prodigy. But for a man *not* to be hairy... if by nature he has no hair he is a prodigy. If he removes his hair...you complain against your nature.”^{5, 6}

God's Universal Creation

- In God-created nature, female hormones promote hair growth, while male hormones influence hair loss.⁷ John MacArthur presents an interesting lesson in biology, stating that women physiologically have the ability to grow *longer* hair than men.⁸ He also states female hair grows *faster*.⁹ “The male hormone testosterone speeds the loss of hair in men. Estrogen causes women's hair to grow longer, and for a longer time.”¹⁰
- A woman's long hair “is given” to her (verse 15). Presumably, this “giving” is from the Lord to womankind. In this passage, the concepts of *nature* and *God's gift* are closely associated.

¹ [The Role of the Godly Woman](#), John MacArthur. See also the NASB rendering of “instinctive” in Romans 2:14.

² In the following sub-points, quotation marks indicate the English word translated by the Greek word “nature.”

³ Paul's description (“vile” / *atimia*) of what is “unnatural” is the same in both Romans 1 and 1st Corinthians 11.

⁴ See also Romans 2:27.

⁵ Note the references to nature by “birth” and also the human choice to change what is “natural.”

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 845. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁷ This is presented in [John MacArthur's commentary](#) and also is described on [this site](#), [this site](#), and [this site](#).

⁸ In relation to the role of male and female hormones, MacArthur references scientific research in *The Role of the Godly Woman*. In relation to the role that male hormones play in the loss of hair, he also provides a quote from Aristotle: “I have never seen a bald child, eunuch, or a woman.” [\[Available online \]](#)

⁹ *Women, Prophecy, and Headcoverings*, John MacArthur. [\[Available online \]](#)

¹⁰ “MacArthur Bible Commentary” Pub by: Thomas Nelson, 2005, page 1589.

Mankind's Universal Practice

- We see that “natural” hair length (short for men, long for women) is the same even 2000 years after Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and is generally the same all around the world.¹ As verse 15 states, it is “natural” for women today to view their hair as their “glory.”²
- The universality plays out in individual local cultures. For example, it was unnatural for men in Corinth to have long hair, as it was considered effeminate/homosexual.³
- God specifically prohibited the Old Testament priests from growing their hair long (Ezekiel 44:20).⁴
- 1st Corinthians 11:16 says that wearing long hair as a covering is practiced by all the churches.⁵
 - In addition to being the practice of the other churches,⁶ it was the practice promoted authoritatively by the apostles (note the word “we” in verse 16).
 - This universal practice correlates well with the previous reference (in verse 2) to God-inspired “ordinances” (page 21 contains a longer discussion on the “ordinances”).
 - The universal practice also correlates well with the decisions of Early Church councils, which upheld Paul's inspired disapproval of men with long hair.⁷
 - Verses 14-15 gives an answer (and the reason for the answer) to the implied question of v.6: “Is it disgraceful for a woman to have her hair shaved?” That is, the fact that nature dictates what is disgraceful (v.14) may be helpful in explaining the reason for shame in verses 4-6.

¹ Even if there have been any societies where men had long hair or women had short hair, this does not contradict the definition of “nature.” As Romans 1:26-27 state that homosexuality is unnatural, this does not prohibit people from choosing against nature.

² And so most people think it odd to see a bald woman, or one with a crew cut. Rather, women undergoing chemotherapy (for example) often buy wigs in order to get their long hair back. This correlates with Paul's implication that it is “disgraceful” (verse 6) for a woman to have short hair. Similarly, for the Jews, the Nazarite vow (and Paul's vows in Acts) indicate that short hair was the norm for men.

³ Payne, 142-143.

⁴ In contrast, King David's ungodly son Absalom grew his hair out very long (2nd Samuel 14:25-26). The [Babylonian Talmud](#) prescribes punishment for priests who grew their hair long (Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, pg. 202).

⁵ From this fact we know that women in first century churches from various cultures were wearing long hair: Gentile woman in Rome (cf. Romans 1:7), Jewish women in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:17, Romans 15:25), Jewish women outside of Israel (cf. James 1:1), and “barbarian” (that is, non-Greek and non-Jewish) women (cf. Romans 1:14, Colossians 3:11).

⁶ A practice which could potentially be questioned, since *practice* doesn't determine *doctrine*. However, since Paul uses their practice as support for why the Corinthian church should do the same, we can assume their practice matched up with correct doctrine. Similarly, elsewhere Paul states that his teachings to the Corinthians are the same as what he teaches in the other churches: 4:17, 7:17, and 14:33-34 (note that 33b connects to 34 in ESV but not in NASB).

⁷ John MacArthur, *The Role of the Godly Woman*. [\[Available online \]](#)

Δ Appendix B: The Phrase “Given For A Covering”

Is “Long Hair” the Only Covering in 1st Corinthians 11? One way of answering this is by asking: Can “long hair” be inserted into the meaning of “covering” in 1st Corinthians 11:4-13?¹ Here is the passage with the phrase “long hair” substituted for the original word “covered”...

1st Corinthians 11

(4) Every man who has long hair on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. (5) But every woman who has her head lacking long hair while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. (6) For if a woman does not cover her head with long hair, 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 with long hair. (7) For a man ought not to have his head covered with long hair, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man... (10) Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head [long hair], because of the angels... (13) Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered by long hair?

- If “headcovering” is another way of referring to her hair, then verse 6 would read:

“If a woman does not cover her head with long hair, let her also crop her hair.”

However, this re-wording creates an illogical scenario: if the woman does not have a long-hair “covering,” then she *already* has cropped her hair.²

- This distinction is further emphasized with the word “also” in the verse³, which indicates that *the cropping* is a separate act from *wearing short hair*. There would be no distinction between the two actions if “long hair” is considered the covering. In verse 6, there are two different actions (underlined below) of the woman:
 - (1) If the woman does not cover herself [then she is told that she must...]
 - (2) “also shear herself.”⁴
- Conclusion: Because of the above “illogical scenario” and because shearing is done separately (“also”) from the uncovering, it is apparent that there are actually two layers on the woman’s head: hair and cloth.

¹ The word “covering” in 11:4-13 means “cover down” and so could refer to either hair or a cloth covering.

² Unless it can be shown that Paul here was concerned about a specific hair length between “long hair” and “cropped hair.” At a minimum, this is an awkwardly-worded difference between the *actual* hair length and the *commanded* hair length, which suggests that the two coverings are not the same.

³ Some translations skip the word “also” though it is in the Greek and in the more-literal English translations.

⁴ Some of those who believe that Paul speaks of two different coverings (hair and cloth) try to gain a better position by using “hair” instead of “long hair” in the substitution (which makes the reading even more illogical, thus strengthening their point). However, this substitution loses integrity, because...

- It was not “hair” in general that was given as a covering. After all, men also have hair and they, according to this passage, are not “covered” by nature).
- This passage specifically references “long hair” rather than “hair” in general.
- Further, after mentioning long hair, Paul refers to “*this* hair.” The context is obviously referring to her long hair. The Greek word for “this” (Strong’s #3588) is nominative, singular, feminine, and defined as: “this, that, these.”

...Is Paul Referring To Long Hair? (continued)

In addition, we have a variety of specific indications that Paul is describing a *cloth* “covering” that is distinct from the *hair* “covering.”

- **Loss of Symbolism:** If long hair were the headcovering of verse 4-13 and if long hair is natural for all women¹, then how would the “long-hair headcovering” create the uniquely-Christian symbolism described verse 4-10 & 13? The cloth covering is unique and intentional. Similarly, how does long hair represent man’s authority (verse 10)?
- **A Practice Taught By Nature Or By Paul?** The proper hair length of men and women is taught *by nature* (according to verses 14-15), while the practice of headcovering is *taught by Paul* (in verses 4-13). Each practice has a different source.
- **Wearing The Hair Covering → As-Needed or Continuously?** Verses 4-13 (especially verses 4 & 6a) imply that the woman’s headcovering can be put on and taken off *at will* (that is, during times of prayer and prophesy). Performing these actions is unrealistic expectation if “hair” is the covering described here.
 - In other words, Paul says that when the covering (of verses 4-13) is misused, it is a disgrace only during times of prayer and prophesy (verse 4-5), while non-conformance to the natural standard of the hair covering is continually a dishonor (verses 14-15).
 - This difference is further shown in the fact that verse 6 is in the “middle voice,” which means that the covering is something the woman actively puts on herself (just like she puts on her footwear and clothes).² God, not her, is the one that covers her head with hair. This is the message of verse 15, which states that long hair is “given to her.” This verse is not in the “middle voice,” but is in the “passive voice” -- she just receives the hair the Lord “gives” to her, without playing any causal role.³
- **The Role of the Headcovering:** If hair is the “covering” referred to in verses 4-13, then hair would have two roles, and they would be contradictory...
 - Verse 7 states that “glory of God” is *man*, and the “glory of man” is *woman*. With the word “cover” having the idea of *hiding or concealing*,⁴ Paul teaches in this verse that the man does not cover (*conceal*) the “glory of God” (that is, he doesn’t cover himself), but the woman does cover (*conceal*) “the glory of man” (that is, she covers herself).
 - Verse 15 states that the woman’s hair is her glory.
 - Thus, a “hair covering” would simultaneously: (1) Conceal the woman (verse 7) while giving her glory (verse 15), and (2) hide the glory of man (verse 7) while giving glory to women (verse 15). In addition to being self-contradictory, the *role* of the covering⁵ is compromised if the covering of verses 4-13 is viewed as the covering of verses 14-15.

¹ See separate discussion on the definition of the Greek word “nature” on page 13.

² “In our study of grammar we have what is called active voice, passive voice, and middle voice. In the sentence, ‘John killed the rabbit’, John is the subject, and he is the doer of the action. So this makes it active voice. If we turn the sentence around and say, ‘the rabbit was killed by John’, that makes rabbit the subject. And since the rabbit is the receiver of the action, that makes this sentence passive voice. But if we say that ‘John shot himself’, that makes John the doer and also the receiver of the action. That makes this sentence the middle voice.” [Quoted from [this site](#)]

³ This “passive voice” is further supported by the definition of the Greek word for “long hair,” which means “to let one’s hair grow long” (see page 44).

⁴ This is further discussed on page 45.

⁵ That is, to conceal the glory of humans who are in communication with the glorious God.

...Is Paul Referring To Long Hair? (continued)

Some further observations show additional differences between a hair covering and a cloth covering.

- **A New Interpretation:**
 - “It is only in the past century that some commentators have attempted to make this ‘hair equals head covering’ argument.”¹
 - The Early Church, and the Church throughout history, did not believe that Paul meant that hair is the only covering a woman needs.²
 - “Whether we look at Hebrew women in the Old Testament or Christian women through the ages (and in a variety of different cultures), God’s people have always understood that the head covering is a piece of cloth or clothing worn upon the head and not merely a woman’s long hair.”³
- **Awkward Construction of the Passage:** If the “covering” of verses 3-14 is actually hair, then this meaning of “hair” is not revealed until the end of the passage -- at which point it re-defines the entire practice. In contrast, the plain reading of verses 4-8, (especially the references to man not covering his head) would naturally be thought to mean a cloth covering.
- **Abnormal Terminology:** The meaning of the entire passage is unconventional if “covering” (in verse 3-14) were to refer to “hair.” The word “covering” does not mean “hair” elsewhere in Scripture⁴ and also not the typical meaning as used in the Corinthian’s culture.
- **Hair Supports Headcoverings:** Paul’s statement about the woman’s hair length is not the central point of Paul’s teaching. Contextually, Paul uses the topic of hair length (verse 14-15) to confirm his previous argument, an argument for the propriety of wearing headcoverings (verse 4-13). His statement that “hair is given as a covering” is used only in *explaining the reason why* a woman’s hair is “a glory to her.”⁵ Paul, in essence, says: “the woman’s hair is a natural, God-given glory *because* it is a covering, and this universal reality supports the practice of women intentionally putting on a cloth covering.”
- **The Two Different Greek Words for “Covering”:** As noted on page 45, Paul did not use the same word for the hair covering (verses 14-15) as he did in his preceding references to a covering (verses 4-13). The two different words are etymologically unrelated (that is, they do not share the same word history). Paul says (verses 4-13) that a woman is to “cover” (that is, *hide* or *conceal*) her head with a cloth (when this word is used in the LXX, it most-often refers to a cloth covering). He later says (verses 14-15) that her hair is given as a “covering” (that is, a *wrapping*).⁶

¹ Dr. Robert Spinney, *Should Women Wear Headcoverings Today?*, p. 4. [[Available online](#)]

² See page 34 for an overview of perspectives from a variety of Church leaders throughout history. Also, the Early Church father [Irenaeus](#) (120-202AD) considered verse 10 to refer to a cloth (see [this site](#) and [this site](#)).

³ Dr. Robert Spinney, *Should Women Wear Headcoverings Today?*, p. 4. [[Available online](#)]

⁴ Those who believe that hair is the headcovering sometime refer to Number 5:18, but there is no proof of a connection between it and 1st Corinthians 11. See page 6 for further information on this verse.

⁵ The first occurrence of the word “for” in the phrase “for her hair is given to her for a covering” is the Greek word *hoti* / ὅτι (Strong’s #3754), which means “because” or “since.” That is, the woman’s hair is glorious *because* it is given as a covering.

⁶ As an analogy, I may buy a protective car cover and while it does cover (*wrap*) my car, I did not get it to cover (*hide* or *conceal*) my car.

...Is Paul Referring to the Woman Wearing Her Hair in A Bun?

This is a modification of the view that the covering is long hair. Greco-Roman women in the first century often wore their long hair up in a bun, and they let it down only for times of mourning, weddings, and immoral cultic activities. This view states that “covered” means “hair in a bun” and “uncovered” means “long hair let down loose.” It takes a cue from the previous two chapters in 1st Corinthians (especially 9:22b & 10:32) in that rather than describing a God-originated practice for Christians, this view sees Paul as giving divine approval for a pre-existing societal practice.

Strengths

- In the Old Testament, the word “uncover” may refer to unbinding the hair on someone’s head, not a separate cloth covering (see Leviticus 13:45 and Numbers 5:18, LXX).
- Equating unbound hair (“uncovered head”) to “shorn head” (the woman is “one and the same as”) makes sense from a Jewish perspective, where an adulterous woman (which may be indicated by loose hair) has her head shaved. This works well with verses 4-6. Similarly, in the cultures of Germany and Cyprus of that time, the punishment for adultery is a shaved head. This matches up with Paul’s statement that an uncovered woman “is one and the same as a shaved woman.”¹
- In the immoral Dionysiac cult, with a temple in Corinth, the women let their hair down. This was also a sign of loose morals in Jewish culture.² So, Paul’s instruction about covering was important to the Corinthians, who had trouble with sexual boundaries (ch. 5-7, 10).

Weaknesses

- The view that Paul is speaking *against* unbound hair and is *promoting* a “bun” hairstyle is not very common. It is well-evaluated (and then dismissed) in Chapter 5 of “Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.”³
- This view is not upheld by our knowledge of the headcovering practice of the Early Church (see page 34)
- Regarding the association of an adulteress with unbound hair being the same as one who is shaved: not only is this not a Corinthian custom but area in which it was a custom was even near Corinth. There was likely, thus, no close association between the two in the minds of Paul’s audience. Additionally, since Paul simply does not make this association, it is difficult to prove it exists.
- Regarding the definition of “cover”...
 - It does not fit well with the meaning of Greek word for “covered,” which is defined as “to cover over or conceal.”⁴
 - The meaning of “uncovering” in Number 5:18 is debatable (see footnote on page 6).
 - The word is used in the Old Testament (LXX) for a cloth cover more than it is for unbinding hair.
 - Philo, a contemporary of Paul, also uses the word to refer to a cloth covering.⁵
- It is difficult to bind Mosaic Law on the Gentile Corinthians. The Corinthians were neither Jewish nor German and its difficult to imagine Paul forcing non-Scriptural non-cultural commands on them.

¹ Payne, 162-165, 172.

² See section on 1st Century Culture, starting on page 34.

³ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, pp. 119-120.
[Available online]

⁴ Even more for Zodhaite’s definition for *katakalypto*: “something that hangs down.”

⁵ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 118 [Available online]

- With Paul's command to men not to cover their heads, it's easy to question whether Paul was really concerned about men “covering” their heads with buns.
- It is difficult or impossible to prove that Paul is writing about hair length be specifically because of cultic influences.
- The idea of a “bun” equating to “authority”¹ (v.10) does not have cultural or Christian historical basis.
- There is documented use of *katakalypto* being used for a cloth covering, but no documented use as a bun.
- Buns don't fit the meaning of the word very well: they don't conceal the head, nor do they “cover-down” the head.
- Early translations and Christians sometimes used the Greek word for “veil” in regards to v.10.
- If the term “covered” = “bun” then we are stuck with two questionable options. (1) A man with a bun on top his head doesn't match well with the description of the “covered” men as having “down the head.” (2) The term “covered” would have a different meaning for each gender (women = bun on top of head, men = long hair hanging down) and that a covered man and an uncovered woman would be doing the same thing (that is, having long hair hanging down). Paul does not imply this, rather he seems to contrast the same thing between each gender.
- This view sees the issue as modesty and a visual gender distinction, while Paul's reasons are related to gender roles (see page 17).
- The discussion (above) regarding long hair is also applicable to the “bun” view.

¹ Or “exercising control over their heads by not letting their hair down” – as if a lack of control would bring their hair down during prayer.

Δ Appendix C: Further Details on 1st Century Culture¹

Preliminary Notes

- Under the (difficult-to-prove) assumption that Paul is writing to correct the Corinthians, there are a variety of culture-based reasons that are proposed as to why Christian women in Corinth may have not been covering their heads (they were rejecting Paul's Jewish customs, they were seeking sexual equality, they were maintaining pagan practices, they considered the worship to be “private” but Paul wanted them to consider it as “public,” etc). But if they were in disobedience, we have no Scriptural reason why.
- With the exception of the headcoverings used by the Israelite priests, the wearing of Jewish headcoverings was dictated by culture and religious tradition, not Scripture. Note the lack of commands in the list of Old Testament passages (starting on page 6). See also page 17. Jewish men did not wear headcoverings until the 3rd century, but the Jewish Talmud did require them for women. Some commentators do not take this into account, but rather assume that current Jewish headcovering practices are the same as in Paul's day.

¹ There is also an interesting analysis on this topic at [this site](#), which details not only the Greek and Jewish customs but also the Roman (as Corinth was a Roman colony). This site also provides some good [additional notes](#) on this topic.

Jewish Men's Headcoverings¹

→ In General / In Public

- “Jewish men at that time were easily recognized by their broad brimmed hats.”²

→ In Worship

- “What little evidence that exists seems to indicate that, with few exceptions, men in the first century left their heads uncovered while worshipping. The Jewish custom of men covering their heads at prayer probably does not go back to the New Testament period.”³
- “Most scholars believe that the prayer shawl is a later custom which came into general use among Jews during the third century.”⁴
- Jewish men wore a covering when praying (multiple sources cited).⁵
- “It not certain whether the Jews at this time used the [tallith](#), a four-cornered shawl having fringes consisting of 8 threads, each knotted 5 times, as they did later.”⁶
- Jewish men covered their heads *after* the apostolic age.⁷
- ““The evidence for the use of the *tallith* in prayer is much too late to be helpful for [showing] Jewish customs in the time of Paul.”⁸

¹ Such as the [yarmulke](#).

² See [this site](#).

³ R.C. Sproul's commentary in the Reformation Bible (a version of the New Geneva Bible). Quoted on [this site](#).

⁴ See [this site](#).

⁵ Robert Morey, “Head Coverings”, [The Encyclopedia of Practical Christianity](#) (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2004), p. 4.

⁶ A. T. Robinson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 4 (Baker Books), p. 159

⁷ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), p. 120

⁸ Fee, *First Corinthians*, pg. 507.

Jewish Women's Headcoverings¹→ In General / In Public

- “Many non-Christian women during this time did not cover their heads with a veil, although there were some who wore a veil or other head covering.”²
- Jewish culture was actually opposed to women covering their heads. “The [Jewish] women went without a [cloth] covering.”³
- “In *Kittel* (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament), it is demonstrated concerning the dominant practice in Paul's day that the veiling of women was primarily an Eastern or Oriental custom... Orantes in the catacombs often picture Mary and other holy women without veils (as well as Jesus with short hair). Hence it is concluded that the veiling was not a general custom: it was Jewish. The veiling of Jewish women was common in the West and can be assumed to have been the accepted rule in the East.”⁴
- “As for Jewish women, there is clear evidence that in the first century they covered their heads not only for prayer but whenever they were outside of their own home.”⁵
- William Ramsay⁶: “Historically, it was a covering commonly worn in public by women of Jewish origin but not by the Greek women. The covering used by Jewish women is thought by many commentators to have been a large piece of cloth which was a common article of clothing such a shawl or cape.”⁷

→ In Worship

- “Jewish women always covered their head in worship.”⁸
- “As for Jewish women, there is clear evidence that in the first century they covered their heads not only for prayer but whenever they were outside of their own home.”⁹
- The “woman's hair is always covered” [Talmud, c. 200-500 A.D., Nedarim, p. 30b].¹⁰

¹ Such as the [tichel](#), and [Jewish snood](#).

² See [this site](#).

³ Robert Morey, “Head Coverings”, [The Encyclopedia of Practical Christianity](#) (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2004), p. 4. The article quotes a variety of sources for this statement.

⁴ See [this site](#).

⁵ See [this site](#).

⁶ An expert in the culture of Paul's day.

⁷ [The Cities of St. Paul](#), William Ramsay, p. 202. Quoted on [this site](#).

⁸ NIV Life Application Study Bible, [Commentary on 1st Corinthians 11:2ff], (Zondervan/Tyndale, 1991).

⁹ See [this site](#).

¹⁰ See [this site](#).

Greek Mens' Headcoverings

→ In General / In Public [no information found yet]

→ In Worship

- “The Corinthians were probably primarily Gentile (Greek culture), in which men normally remained uncovered during religious ceremonies, and in which an uncovered head indicated authority.”¹
- “‘The Greeks (both men and women) remained bareheaded in public prayer...’ (Robertson’s Word Pictures of the N.T.; see also Pulpit Commentary, etc.).”²
- “The Greek practice was to keep the head uncovered at their religious rites.”³
- “In Greco-Roman culture... men wore head coverings in religious contexts.”⁴
- “The men ... covered their heads when praying and prophesying, each of which was a Grecian custom”⁵

¹ Robert Morey, “Head Coverings”, *The Encyclopedia of Practical Christianity* (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2004), p. 5. This document quotes a variety of sources.

² See [this site](#).

³ W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Vol 2* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts: 1856), p. 57. [\[Available online \]](#)

⁴ [This site](#) contains a good overview of this topic, displaying a variety of ancient artwork to support the text.

⁵ See [this site](#).

Greek Women's Headcoverings→ In General / In Public

- “The veils worn by Grecian women were of different kinds...the custom was universal for all respectable women to appear veiled in public.”¹ But apparently the author had in mind a *peplum* or *peplos*², which was common used *before* 500BC.³
- “There was no universal practice of women being veiled in public among the Greeks.”⁴
- “Many non-Christian women during this time did not cover their heads with a veil, although there were some who wore a veil or other head covering.”⁵
- “Wearing a veil [was] a sign of being married in first-century culture.”⁶
- “Public marble portraits of women at Corinth, presumably members of wealthy and prestigious families are most frequently shown bare-headed.”^{7, 8}
- “It used to be asserted by theologians that Paul was simply endorsing the unwritten law of Hellenic and Hellenistic feeling for what was proper. But this view is untenable... It is quite wrong that Greek women were under some kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public... Passages to the contrary are so numerous and unequivocal that they cannot be offset... Empresses and goddesses...are portrayed without veils.”⁹
- William Ramsay¹⁰: Indicating that Greek women did not cover themselves in public: “Only one Tarsian characteristic...was...utterly different from the Hellenistic custom... the extremely modest dress of the Tarsian women, who were always deeply veiled when they went abroad.”¹¹
- “Grecian pottery provides abundant information concerning elegant hair styles and an absence of head-coverings among the Greeks from a very early period.”¹²
- Wearing a headcovering was only for special occasions: “Women of the Hellenistic royal families...are portrayed on coins with a *himation* draped over their heads... [other times women wore a garment on their head include] match-making, the bride in her

¹ Charles Hodge, *Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1878), 209.

² Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of 1 and 2 Corinthians*, (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), p. 120

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peplos>

⁴ Greg Price, *Headcoverings in Scripture*, p. 8. Quoted on [this site](#).

⁵ See [this site](#).

⁶ A note from the English Standard Version, regarding their footnote in verse 5.

⁷ In the context of this article, “bare-headed” is referring to a lack of a cloth veil, not to a lack of hair.

⁸ *The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, David W.J. Gill, Tyndale Bulletin 41.2 (1990) 245-260. [[Available online](#)]

⁹ TDNT 3:562, quoted in Payne, 152-153.

¹⁰ An expert in the culture of Paul's day.

¹¹ William Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 202. [[Available online](#)]

¹² Hurley, *Man and Woman in 1 Corinthians*, 44. Quoted in Payne, 153.

marriage ceremony, funerals, mourning... Hellenistic women did not normally wear a garment over their heads.”¹³

¹³ Payne, 155, 200. cf. 152-155.

→ In Worship

- “In Greco-Roman culture, both women and men wore head coverings in religious contexts.”¹
- “There is virtually no evidence that veiling was a custom or that the lack of a shawl in daily life or in worship was generally regarded as disgraceful. Women in Greek culture typically participated in worship without a veil or shawl.”²

¹ [This site](#) contains a good overview of this topic, displaying a variety of ancient artwork to support the text.

² “Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16,” Philip B. Payne, *Priscilla Papers* , Vol. 20, No. 3, Summer 2006. [\[Available online \]](#)

Roman Mens' Headcoverings

→ In General / In Public [no information found yet]

→ In Worship

- “Roman men sometimes pulled the loose folds of their toga over their head while they worshiped pagan gods.”¹

Roman Womens' Headcoverings

→ In General / In Public

- Portraits of Roman women suggest “it was socially acceptable in a Roman colony for women to be seen bare-headed in public.”²

→ In Worship

- “A woman leader in Roman worship or sacrifice would, as customary practice, pull part of her *stola* or *palla* (the Greek *himation*) over her head just as men did in the Roman Empire.”³

¹ ESV Student Study Bible, note for 1st Corinthians 11:4.

² Gill, *Head-Coverings*, 251. Cited by Payne, 160.

³ Payne, 155.

Does Paul Contradict The Old Testament? What About The Headcoverings of the Old Testament Priests? What About the Long Hair of the Nazarite Vow?

Some believe the prohibition against male “headcovering” of 1st Corinthians 11 must be in reference to hair because if it were a cloth headcovering then the Bible would contradict itself: God prescribed the Jewish priests of the Old Testament to cover their heads.¹ Additionally, if verses 5-7 (which prohibit male headcoverings) are taken as input from “nature” (v.14), then God-created nature would also contradict these Old Testament commands. Some observations...

- The Head of a Christian man is Christ. Through Jesus a Christian man relates to the Father. But an Old Testament priest never viewed Jesus as his Head.
- With the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ and the establishment of the Church, the leadership role of the Old Testament priest as leader of the believing community was basically replaced by the New Testament elder/pastor. It appears that with the coming of Christ, God's Old Testament commands for priests basically expired. Old Testament Jewish practice does not become a New Testament rule for believers.
- 1st Corinthians 11 is in reference to praying and prophesying. Christian men pray differently than the priests of the Old Testament -- with the authority of Jesus' name (John 14:13-14). Christian men are to speak differently than Old Testament priests, too - as if speaking the words of God (1st Peter 4:11).
- Given the *reasons* why Old Testament men veiled themselves (see page 7), one thought is that as Moses covered his face to veil God's glory from the Jews (2nd Corinthians 3:7-18), men who become Christians have the “veil taken away” (verse 16)² and can now stand before God boldly and unashamed.³

Nazarite Vow and Summary:⁴ The abnormal effect of the Nazarite vow on women was temporarily having no hair, while the effect on men was temporarily having long hair. Prior to Christ, the priest wore a headcovering. Each of these are God-ordained exceptions to the God-created norms.⁵ Regarding the nature-taught norms of hair length and the Nazarite vow, God cannot (and does not) contradict Himself.

¹ Page 7 summarizes the Old Testament use of headcoverings by men.

² In addition, note the similar symbolism in Mark 15:38, where the “veil of the temple was torn in two.”

³ Since Old Testament women did not seem to cover their heads for the same reasons as Old Testament men, and God did not prescribe them to cover or uncover (as He did the priests), it would be inappropriate to apply this reasoning to women as well.

⁴ Examples: Samson (Judges 13:7), Samuel (1st Samuel 1:11), and probably Paul (Acts 18:18; Acts 21:23-6). While these are men, the Old Testament law allowed both genders to take the vow (Numbers 6:2). Apparently, “Josephus tells of a time when the Jewish queen Berenice (who was contemporary with Paul, and once met him) had shaved her head to observe a Nazarite vow (Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, 2:15:1).”

⁵ Long hair was “given” to the women by God, but when a man took a Nazarite vow the long hair was prompted by a human choice. Long hair was given to women, but taking a Nazarite vow did not cause any confusion about whether the man was being feminine. In other words, there was no clash of values.