

Covered Glory

1ST CORINTHIANS 11 &
THE CHRISTIAN USE OF HEADCOVERINGS

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Ω 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.”

1st Corinthians 11

Paul, in this passage of Scripture, teaches on several topics including the relationships between people and the Lord, the act of prayer, the glory of God, and... having a “covered” head?! I remember how odd these instructions seemed when I first read them in my Bible. Like many Christians today, I was not very familiar with this passage and I felt personally unconnected to the practice Paul was describing. While I believed that God's Word is authoritative in directing Christians how to live, I wasn't sure how to respond to *this* direction.

Since the use of headcoverings is not a foundational part of Christianity, for a long time I left the passage alone until I could take a closer look at it. In the meantime, I tentatively concluded that the use of headcoverings were probably just an ancient cultural practice that God was re-enforcing for the members of the church in Corinth. However, if using a headcovering was still required by the Lord for Christian women today, I figured that a lady's long hair probably qualified as a “covering.”

Eventually I devoted some time to study this topic in both Scripture and in Christian history. I also happened to know a few ladies who wore headcoverings in response to this passage, and seeing the discrepancy between their choice and the familiar “Christian norm” made me more curious. My interest was further piqued when I realized that Christian men today often unconsciously follow Paul's instruction to uncover their heads when they pray.

Since the Lord calls the husband to love and lead his wife (Ephesians 5:23), I began to feel that a small part of fulfilling my role was to gain some clarity about God's teaching in this passage. This subject challenged me to study Scripture carefully, learn more about history, read from a very wide variety of Bible teachers and theologians, consider the relevant Scriptural passages in their original languages, and have some interesting conversations with other Christian brothers and sisters.

Of course, the primary reason believers should devote time to studying Scripture is to be able to learn from God, grow in their relationship with Him, and obediently follow His direction. Towards that end, I hope that this study will help provide a well-grounded understanding of the direction He gives in 1st Corinthians 11:2-16. As you read it, I would be interested in hearing from you ~

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Ω INTRODUCTION

For the most part, believers today rarely consider the Apostle Paul's teaching on the topic of headcoverings. Many Christians are not even aware that the practice is taught in the New Testament. Those who have pondered 1st Corinthians 11 often have various reactions *to* the passage and often come up with a variety of explanations *of* the passage.¹

Today, the use of headcoverings is often associated with Catholic nuns, Muslim women, and ladies living in Amish communities. However, the Christian use of headcoverings predates each of these religious groups. More than just an ancient Corinthian practice, the use of a headcovering during times of prayer has actually been the norm among Christian women up until just the last century.²

While 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 reads fairly quickly and its meaning was probably quite plain to the Corinthian Christians that Paul wrote to, believers today are frequently bewildered when reading the passage. Often, a slow and careful look at the biblical text is needed in order to draw conclusions about what the passage means. This study seeks to provide that slow and careful look.

To do so, we will pursue four main topics: **(1)** an overview of the New Testament direction for the use of headcoverings, **(2)** a discussion of First Century cultures in the area of Corinth and their potential impact on the passage, **(3)** a thoughtful consideration for how a Christian should respond to the passage nowadays, and **(4)** a review of the use of headcoverings throughout Christian history.

This study is designed to be as quick and easy to read as possible, with the essential discussion (and conclusions) being fully contained within just the first half. To accomplish this, each section is fairly straightforward and the reader is occasionally referred to the Appendices for further details and background information. I believe there is a need for focused, thorough, and well-documented resources on the topic of 1st Corinthians 11 and the Christian use of headcoverings. My hope is that this study will prompt readers to honestly grapple with an insightful section of Holy Scripture that has, unfortunately, often been mishandled or disregarded.

Additional Notes About This Study

- All Scripture references that do not specify a book or chapter refer to 1st Corinthians 11.
- Those reading the electronic version of this study can access additional information by clicking on text that appears in [blue](#).

¹ Unfortunately, some contemporary Bible “scholars” intentionally disregard the passage, while others say that Paul's message is illogical. A few even state that the passage could not have been inspired by God.

² This amounts to about 95% of Church history. An overview of Christianity's use of headcoverings begins on page 34. It covers various time periods, cultures, and locations, from the Early Church to the present day.

Common Terms and Abbreviations¹

Corinth: At the time that Paul wrote to the Corinthians (around 53-58 AD), Corinth was a major seaport city (population 400,000-600,000) and the capital of its region in southern Greece. It had been destroyed in 146 BC and a century later was rebuilt by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony.² In Acts 18, Paul devoted 1½ years to ministering in Corinth. Later, he wrote a letter (now called “1st Corinthians”) to the church while he was living 180 miles away in Ephesus³ (a city located in what is now the country of Turkey).

Gentile: A non-Jewish person. The city of Corinth was populated mostly by Gentiles.

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

Koiné Greek: A dialect of the Greek language that 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. Koiné means “common.” It is the language that the New Testament was originally written in.

Hebrew: The language of Israel, and the original language of most of the Old Testament.

Septuagint: A Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, written 200-300 years before Christ was born. It is often abbreviated “LXX.”⁴ Starting in the 2nd century BC, most Jews in Israel spoke Greek as their primary language, thus the need for a Greek translation of the Old Testament. The New Testament authors and other early Christians used the Septuagint.

Lexicon: A dictionary of foreign words with definitions provided in the reader's native language.

Abbreviations

cf. <i>confer</i> (“cf. John 3:16”)	LXX <i>Septuagint</i> (“Proverbs 1:1 LXX”)
ff <i>and following</i> (“John 3:16ff”)	v. <i>verse</i> (“v.16”)

¹ Apart from the definitions on this page, Appendix B discusses a number of key terms used in this study.

² As a result of this, the public buildings were an Italian style (not Greek) and the official language was Latin (not Greek). Both Greek and Latin were used for business and in public life. The city was settled by retired Roman soldiers, and Roman influence extended to the city's tombs, politics, currency, courts, inscriptions, and pictures of the emperor. The Philippian church was similarly located in a Roman colony (Acts 16:12). Cf. page 70ff; David Gill, *In Search Of The Social Elite In The Corinthian Church* (Tyndale Bulletin 44:2, 1993), 327-328; Elizabeth A. McCabe, *Women in the Biblical World, Vol. 2* (University Press of America, 2011), 71; Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Books, 1992), 28; Mark Harding & Alanna Nobbs, *All Things to All Cultures: Paul Among Jews, Greeks, and Romans* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 78; Edward Adams & David Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 2ff.

³ cf. 1st Corinthians 16:8.

⁴ This is the number “70” using Roman numerals. Tradition states that the LXX was written by 70 or 72 Jewish translators.

Ω HEADCOVERINGS IN SCRIPTURE

Introduction

In both the Old and New Testaments, individuals wore different types of coverings on their heads at various times. Often, the *kind* of covering was related to the person's unique situation or role. In some cases, the use of a covering was commanded by God and at other times it was worn by the person's own initiative. Below is a summary of the use of headcoverings in Scripture.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament provides a variety of *examples* of the use of headcoverings by various individuals. However, Old Testament *commands* regarding the use of headcoverings were primarily intended for only the Jewish priests. Generally, the Old Testament practice was as follows...¹

- **Men** wore headcoverings to symbolize *humility, mourning, or their priestly service*.
- **Women** wore headcoverings as a sign of *dignity and modesty*.

The New Testament

In the book of First Corinthians, God provides both *direction* and *explanation* for the use of headcoverings by Christians. The Apostle Paul devotes half of a chapter to this topic. As part of his instructions for the use of headcoverings, Paul also teaches about the relationships between God the Father, Jesus the Son, men, and women. These relationships – with the associated issues of “authority” and “glory” – are the *primary principles* of 1st Corinthians 11:2-16. The *primary practice* discussed in the passage is the use of headcoverings. This is “a passage that has become a great battlefield of the 20th Century... These issues... are a part of the swirl of controversy that has escalated into the Feminist Movement of our day.”² The next section of this study contains an overview of this passage, as well as consideration of the various questions that the passage raises.

¹ See page 51 (in Appendix B) for more information. Cf. Alan D. Ingalls, “[Headcoverings in the Old Testament](#)” in *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (Fall 2000), 5.

² Ray Stedman, *What Is Headship?* (December 3, 1978, [sermon transcription](#)).

The Practice of Headcovering In The New Testament: 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 (NASB)

- 2 Now I praise you¹ because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.
- 3 But² I want you to understand that Christ is the head³ of every man, and the man is the head of a woman,⁴ and God is the head of Christ.
- 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, 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.⁷
- 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.⁸
- 8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;
- 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.⁹
- 10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of¹⁰ 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: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?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.
- 16 But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.

¹ This praise contrasts with Paul's later disapproval of how the Corinthians practiced the Lord's Supper (v. 17, 22).

² Here, the Greek word for "but" can also be translated as "now" (cf. v.2) or "and."

³ Page 53 contains more information about the meaning of the word "head" in this passage.

⁴ A few Bibles read "husband" and "wife" but most follow the Greek text: the generic terms "man" & "woman."

⁵ *propheteuo* / προφητεύω (Strong's 4395), meaning "to speak forth." In Scripture, the word refers to not only fore-telling the future, but also "forth-telling" God's already-revealed truth. This passage includes both directions of communication: *prayer* (from man to God) and *prophecy* (from God to man).

⁶ v.6-9 each begin with the word "for" (though some English translations omit this word) as each verse is adding another point to Paul's line of reasoning. This pattern continues with the word "therefore" in v.10.

⁷ v.5-6 can be classified as a 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 or undesired conclusion. Paul speaks similarly in Galatians 5:11-12.

⁸ Cf. Proverbs 11:16 LXX, Proverbs 12:4, [1st Esdras](#) 4:17. Both genders are equally in God's *image* (Genesis 1:26-27).

⁹ Cf. Genesis 2:18. Genesis 2:22, [1st Timothy](#) 2:13.

¹⁰ The phrase "a symbol of" is not in the original Greek text (the KJV is one of the few English translations that reflect this absence). However, since "authority" is not something tangible that can be worn on a person's head, it becomes evident that Paul is using symbolism or [metonymy](#), and thus most English translations indicate this.

¹¹ In nearby context, Paul similarly uses rhetorical questions & an appeal to "judge for yourself" (10:15, 11:22).

Ω WHAT IS THE “COVERING”?

When Paul instructed the Corinthian women to cover their heads while praying, they likely understood what *kind* of headcovering Paul was referring to. However, most English translations appear to leave the type of covering unspecified. Because of this, several different kinds of headcoverings have been proposed to explain what Paul meant: (1) a *cloth covering* worn over the top of the head, (2) a *veil* worn over the woman's face, (3) a *woman's husband* as a “spiritual covering,” and (4) a woman's *long hair*. So, what exactly were the Christian ladies to cover their heads *with*? Fortunately, a careful look at the passage provides enough insight to identify what type of covering Paul was referring to.¹

THE COVERING: A CLOTH WORN OVER THE HEAD

Defining The Terms. In v.5-7 and v.13, the Greek word that refers to the covering is *katakalupto*. It is defined as “to cover with a veil, to conceal, to cover up.” The meaning is broad enough that it can be used in a variety of contexts,² but refers to a cloth covering or “veil” when used in reference to a person's head.³ Greek literature similarly documents the use of the word to refer to a cloth covering worn over the top of the head. Also, while the phrase “something on his head” (v.4) by itself is fairly ambiguous, other Greek writers used it to refer to a cloth covering on top of a person's head.⁴

Understanding of the Church Throughout History. The Early Church lived with the closest understanding of the original Christian headcovering practice. It is well-documented that these believers understood Paul to be referring to a cloth covering, as have most Christians throughout Church history.⁵ In fact, a variety of early Christians used a Greek term⁶ defined as “covering, hood, or veil” to refer to the “symbol of authority” in v.10.⁷

Alternative Proposals. Other theories about the identity of the “covering” are discussed on the following pages. As they each end up conflicting with the passage and with history, they actually serve to further identify the covering as a cloth worn over the person's head.

¹ Appendix B provides further details about the Greek terms used in this section.

² Eg., in [Isaiah 6:2 LXX](#) the word describes wings that are “covering” the feet. Cf. also [Jeremiah 28:42 LXX](#).

³ Thus, several English Bible translations specifically identify the covering as a “veil” including the [Weymouth](#), [Revised Version](#), [NAB](#) (Catholic), and [ASV](#) / [RSV](#) / [NRSV](#). A cloth covering is also specified in foreign-language Bibles including some [French](#), [Spanish](#), [Portuguese](#), and [Italian](#) translations.

⁴ Page 14 provides further information on the use of this phrase in Greek literature.

⁵ Page 34ff provides statements by Early Church leaders, links to Early Church artwork, and quotations from Christians through the centuries.

⁶ *kaluma* (Strong's #2571). This term is actually connected to the passage etymologically as well: it is derived from the root word of the term “cover” in v.5-13 (*katakalupto*, mentioned above).

⁷ Cf. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2003), [532](#); [Irenaeus](#) in *Against Heresies* (Book 1, [8:2](#)); [Theodoret](#) in Judith L. Kovacs, *1 Corinthians: Interpreted by Early Christian Medieval Commentators* (Eerdmans, 2005), [183](#).

THE COVERING: A VEIL OVER THE FACE?

Greek Terms. As discussed on the previous page, the Greek terms referring to the headcovering indicate a garment that covers over the top of the head rather than covering the front of the face.¹

Scripture's Description. The headcovering found in 1st Corinthians 11 is identified as being worn on² the *head* rather than being worn over the *face*. The passage itself does not provide any indication that Paul was concerned about covered or uncovered faces.³

First Century Culture. When women (regardless of religion) wore headcoverings during the time of Paul, the cloth covered their heads while their faces were visible. “Many extrabiblical sources” show that the headcoverings of Paul's day “were not full facial veils; they were often attached as hoods to the women's garments.”⁴ “Statuary [sculptures] makes clear that the Greco-Roman veil was the top of the garment pulled over the head; one should not think of the modern Arabic and Islamic veil that covers most of the face.”⁵ Especially among people not located to the east of the Mediterranean Sea, “most of our evidence points to a covering that concealed only the hair from view.”⁶ “There is no extant evidence that full veiling, familiar in Islam, was current in Paul's time.”⁷

The Practice of Christianity. Drawings from the Early Church show women praying with garments that cover the head but not the face. The general practice throughout Christian history was to use a cover over the top of the head.⁸ For example, [Tertullian](#) (an Early Church leader) noted this difference between Christian women and a certain group of pagan women of his time period: the Christian women covered their heads while the pagan women “cover not only the head, but the face also.”⁹

Conclusion. Both Scripture and history show that Paul was not referring to a veil worn over the face.

¹ This distinction is also seen in other Greek literature. An Early Church writer used the noun form of the verb “cover” (v.7) to refer to the garment on the head of a lady who was also wearing a *separate* veil over her face. Cf. [The Shepherd of Hermas](#) (Vision 4, 2:1).

² The Greek word for “on” in v.10 is commonly [translated](#) “upon” or “above.”

³ In a different context, 2nd Corinthians 3:13-18 reviews a situation in which Moses wore a “veil over his face.” The Greek term for “veil” in this passage is fairly general and its definition does not require that the face is covered (and so Paul specifies “face” in the passage). The term is also used to refer to the face-veil in Exodus 34:33-35 LXX.

⁴ [James B. Hurley](#), [Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective](#) (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 254-271. Cited in [Roy B. Zuck](#), [Vital Biblical Issues](#) (Kregel Academic, 1994), 169.

⁵ Everett Ferguson, [Backgrounds of Early Christianity](#) (Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 97.

⁶ [Craig S. Keener](#), [Paul, Women, and Wives](#) (Baker Books, 1992), 22.

⁷ Piper & Grudem, [Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#) (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 118.

⁸ This is documented in Appendix A.

⁹ “[On the Veiling of Virgins](#)” (ch. 17) in [Ante-Nicene Fathers](#), Vol. 4 (Book One, Part Three).

THE COVERING: A WOMAN’S HUSBAND?

This proposal states that a “covered” woman is one who is *in submission* to the person who is the “head” over her. And so, rather than a physical cloth worn on the head, the woman’s *husband* is considered to be a “spiritual covering” for her.

While submission is a biblical practice, several interpretive problems are created by substituting the concept of “submissive” for the term “covered” within the text of 1st Corinthians 11.

A Symbolic Cover. While the concept of “submission” is present in the passage, it is not present in the definition of “cover.” In other words, this interpretation confuses the identity of the woman’s *head* (authority) with the woman’s *headcovering* (garment). The passage teaches that submission to authority is *symbolized* by the covering, not that the authority *is* the covering.

A Covering “On” The Head. Most scholars agree that the “symbol of authority” (v.10) is a reference to the covering.¹ The Greek verb “to cover” is defined as “to cover with a veil, to conceal, to cover up.” A *cloth* could “cover up” or “conceal” a woman’s head in this way. However, if that “covering” is a *husband*, it does not make sense for v.10 to describe the husband as being “on”² the woman’s head.

Hermeneutical Standards. To equate the term “covering” with “husband” requires a non-literal, “spiritualized” interpretation³ of the passage. For a variety of reasons (partly demonstrated by the issues listed above), most evangelical Christians consider this method of interpreting the Bible to be invalid and unscriptural.

Conclusion: Nothing in this text requires (or even implies) that the woman’s “covering” is a man. Because of the interpretive roadblocks that come with this proposal, there have not been many Christians who have held to it (in both Church history and in the contemporary Church).

¹ This was also the view of those in the Early Church, as noted previously.

² The Greek word for “on” in v.10 is commonly [translated](#) “upon” or “above.”

³ Sometimes called “allegorical interpretation.”

THE COVERING: LONG 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 Proposal. Paul states here that long hair was “given” to women “for a covering.” Because of this, some have proposed that “long hair” is the only covering that Paul refers to in the entire chapter – and thus the only covering a woman is required to have. In this case, an “uncovered” woman would have short hair or no hair. Thus, the question is whether the covering in v.15 is the same covering described earlier in the chapter. The answer begins with two key words used in v.14-15: *for* and *covering*. These terms are somewhat unique in the original Greek text of Paul’s letter.

The Word Translated “For.” In the phrase “her hair is given to her *for* a covering,” the word *for* is a preposition that shows the relationship between “hair” and “covering.” In English, the word “for” has nearly a dozen meanings. However, this Greek word has only four definitions.

Definition of “For”	Example Usage
As a <u>substitute</u>	“Her hair is given to her <i>in place of</i> a covering.”
As a <u>cause</u>	“Her hair is given to her <i>with the purpose of</i> a covering.”
As a <u>counterpart</u>	“Her hair is given to her <i>corresponding to</i> a covering.”
As an <u>exchange</u>	“Her hair is given to her <i>in return for</i> a covering.”

Words Referring To A Covering. In v.15, the *covering* (of hair) is a noun. The term is used only once in the chapter and is defined as “a mantle or cloak that is wrapped around the body.” Everywhere else in the chapter, the verb *cover*¹ is a completely different (etymologically-unrelated) term. In relation to a person’s head, the meaning of the term refers to the use of a “veil.” Similarly, the phrase “something on his head” (v.4) was used by Greek writers to refer to a cloth covering.²

Ambiguity. The fact that 1st Corinthians 11 contains differing terms for the “covering” may indicate that there are two different “coverings” under discussion in the passage. However, the variety of meanings of the Greek term translated “for” make the situation less clear.³ In order to provide clarity, further indications from the passage are needed.

¹ This word and its derivatives (such as *covered* and *uncover*) are used 5 times in 1st Corinthians 11.

² See page 14 for further information.

³ Further, note that Paul does not specifically state that hair *is* a covering. In v.15, the word “covering” is used only as an adjective (see page 57).

Contextual Indications. Paul's instructions in 1st Corinthians 11 provide insight about the headcovering(s). His statements indicate the following differences between two separate coverings.

- A woman's 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 taught by *nature* (v.14-15). Women wear it *regardless* of their religion.
- A cloth covering is taught by *Paul*. Christian women wear it *for spiritual reasons* (v.2-10).
- Long hair is an *adornment*.¹ It is the woman's *glory* (v.15).
- A cloth covering provides the *opposite* effect: it *conceals*² glory (v.7, 15).

Interpretive Issues. Proposing a “hair-only” covering creates several interpretive problems.

- **Self-Contradiction:** In v.5, Paul states that an uncovered woman is “one and the same as” a woman who is shaved. At first this seems to fit the proposal that long hair is the “covering” that the woman is lacking. However, a problem with this concept becomes apparent in the next verse. Paul states in v.6 that when a woman does not “cover” her head (meaning she has *shaved* her head, according to this proposal) then she should “have her hair cut off.” Cutting her hair off is impossible if hair is the covering that the shaved woman is already missing. For this reason, the headcovering in v.6 cannot be the woman's long hair.³
- **The Word “Also”:** Verse 6 refers to two separate choices: (1) a woman decides not to cover her head, and (2) the woman then cuts off her hair. At this point she is missing two things: the covering and “also” long hair. The word “also” shows that these two are not the same.⁴
- **Structure of the Passage:** A “hair-only” covering would mean that Paul identifies his main topic only at the end of his line of reasoning. In addition to being an unusual way of teaching, this ignores the structure of Paul's statements. Paul uses the woman's long hair only to *support* his earlier instructions about the use of a headcovering.

Summary. According to v.4-13, the Corinthian women were to use a covering while praying or prophesying. According to v.15, long hair is a covering given to women as a glory around their heads. The following indications point to these coverings as being distinct and separate.

- The difference in *terms* used when referring to the coverings.
- The difference in *characteristics* of the coverings as indicated within the passage.
- Interpretive *problems* caused by a “hair-only” covering.
- The Early Church understood the covering of v.4-13 to be cloth rather than long hair.⁵

¹ In v.15, the Greek word “hair” refers to an *ornamental style* of hair (see page 55).

² The Greek word “cover” means “to cover with a veil, to conceal, to cover up” (see page 56).

³ Thus, v.5 refers only to the *similar impropriety* of having a shaved head and having an uncovered head.

⁴ The word “also” is present in the Greek text and in literal English translations, though [some Bibles](#) omit it.

⁵ This is also true of Christianity throughout the centuries. Only recently have a minority of writers and teachers promoted the theory that “long hair” is the only covering discussed in the passage.

Ω NATURAL HAIR LENGTH: CULTURAL OR UNIVERSAL?

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.

These verses often prompt the question of whether Paul is describing (1) the customs of the ancient Corinthian society or (2) gender-specific hairstyles that are “natural” for people universally.¹ Should men of every society avoid the “dishonor”² of having long hair? Is long hair naturally a “glory”³ for *all* women?

Defining “Nature.” Paul bases his statements about hair length on what “nature” teaches. The Greek word translated “nature” (*physis*) is defined as: *order, laws, innateness, or instinct*. This word is the source of English words such as *physics* & *physiology*. It is derived from a Greek term that means *to be born or to grow*.

Usage. The word “nature” (*physis*) is used 13 other times in the Greek New Testament. Each time, it refers to aspects of God and His Creation rather than to the norms of a particular culture.⁴ Outside the Bible, Greek writers used “nature” to refer to parts of the physical world (such as animals, water, and birth).

Practical Observations. The *physis* (or “innate law”) of hair length is seen played out within Creation.

- *Biologically natural:* As part of God's Creation, female hormones promote longer & thicker hair. Further, hair loss is more common in men than women due to gender-oriented genetic effects.
- *Innately natural:* Women around the world generally grow their hair longer than men, partially as an adornment. A man may shave his head, but it's often regarded as unnatural for a woman to do so.

God's Gift. Paul states that the woman's long hair is “given” to her for a covering (v.15). The Creator of nature, presumably, is the One that has “given” the long hair.⁵ The gift and the Giver are cross-cultural.

Conclusion. The passage itself gives no indication that Paul's teaching about hair lengths is a reference to local Corinthian culture.⁶ Instead, the *transcultural* aspect of “nature” is reflected in the Greek term's definition, by its usage within Greek literature, and by observations about “nature” within Creation. Paul states that long hair is a “glory” for women and that it is natural for men to have shorter hair.⁷

¹ Many of the topics in this section are discussed in further detail on pages 58ff.

² The Greek word is also translated as *disgrace* or *shame*.

³ This word is used in passages such as Matthew 6:29 (“not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these [flowers]”) and 1st Corinthians 11:7 (“the woman is the glory of man”). Cf. also Matthew 19:28, Acts 22:11.

⁴ For example, Romans 1:26-27 states homosexuality is “unnatural” or “contrary to nature.” Romans 11:21-24 uses “nature” in reference to plant growth, and James 3:7 uses it to refer to species of animals. Paul uses the term in Galatians 4:8 to make a distinct *contrast* between “nature” and culture.

⁵ The Greek grammar also “indicates a permanent endowment by God.” Cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (Yale University Press, 2008), 421. In the very next chapter (12:7-8), Paul again implies the same Giver (God) when using the same phrase (“is given”).

⁶ Note that Paul's appeal to “nature” is used to support a practice that occurred *outside* Corinthian culture (v.16).

⁷ Early Church Christians and councils likewise affirmed gender-specific hair lengths.

Ω HEADCOVERINGS IN 1ST CENTURY CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

Biblical scholars have sought to discover what the typical headcovering practices were within the First Century culture of Corinth. Were headcoverings worn by men or by women? Were they worn by Jews? By Greeks? By Romans? Were they part of everyday public life, or were they worn only during religious practices? This information is important because it helps determine whether or not Paul bases his instruction on headcoverings upon the norms of First Century society. “Some scholars claim that Paul deferred to the customs of his culture, and others claim that he rejected precisely those customs.”¹

SCRIPTURAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT CULTURE IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

When Paul arrived in Corinth, he began preaching to both the Gentiles and Jews² living there (Acts 18). He initially lived with an Israelite couple and met in the local synagogue to “reason with” and “persuade” the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah (Acts 18:4). However, when the Jews rejected his message, Paul turned his focus to the Corinthian Gentiles (Acts 18:6). The new focus was fruitful. Writing to them later, Paul states that the members of this church were previously “pagans” ([literally translated](#) as “[Gentiles](#)”) who had been involved in idolatry (1st Corinthians 12:2).³ Apparently the church was primarily non-Jewish.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT CORINTHIAN HEADCOVERING PRACTICES

Corinth was a prominent city of the country of Greece. Like the city of Philippi (Acts 16:12), Corinth was a *Roman colony* rather than a typical Greek city.⁴ Because of this uniqueness, along with many Jews [adopting Greek culture](#),⁵ there may have been multiple cultural practices within the location and lifetime of the early Corinthian church. The best understanding of First Century culture generally seems to be as follows.⁶

The Jews: In public and in worship, men uncovered their heads and women covered them.

The Greeks: In public and in worship, both men and women uncovered their heads.

The Romans: Men & women covered their heads in worship. Men and women were uncovered in public.

¹ Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1979), 106.

² Their presence may be due to the “[Jewish displacement](#)” initiated by the Romans (Acts 18:2, James 1:1).

³ Regarding his evangelistic work, Paul called himself “a teacher of the Gentiles.” (1st Timothy 2:7).

⁴ Corinth's various Roman distinctions were noted in this study's *Introduction* section.

⁵ Acts 6:1 & 9:29 mention these “[Hellenistic](#)” Jews. However, ethnic distinction still existed within Israelite cities (cf. Acts 6:7-8) with a clear distinction between Jewish and Roman authority (cf. John 11:48, Acts 16:20-21).

⁶ Cf. pages 62ff. Note that some Bible teachers and commentators unintentionally create confusion by attempting to draw conclusions about headcovering practices using unrelated information. For example, some attempt to explain First Century Corinthian headcovering practices using Old Testament Scripture, the behavior of ancient Germanic tribes, the culture of a previous city of Corinth (before it was destroyed in 146 B.C.), the practice of the [Spartans](#), or even modern Jewish customs. Also, some do not distinguish whether the garment they discuss is a *veil over the face* or a *covering over the head*.

Ω SCRIPTURE'S REASONS FOR THE HEADCOVERING

THE FIVE KEY ISSUES IN 1ST CORINTHIANS 11

The Lord gives some commands in Scripture without explaining His reasons for them. 1st Corinthians 11, however, includes not only *direction* for the use of headcoverings, but also a specific *explanation* for that direction. This explanation is composed of five different points that each support Paul's instructions.

1. **Distinct Gender Roles.** The topic that initiates Paul's discussion on headcoverings is God's universal order of "headship" (v.3). Paul states that the headcovering relates to gender roles – roles that are seen in God's purpose in His creation of the genders (v.8-9). Specifically, the headcovering provides a symbol for the "authority" that the woman is under (v.10).
2. **Glory & Honor.** Paul next explains the connection between *gender roles* and *communication with God*. The reason that men should not cover their heads when praying is that they are the "glory of God" (v.7). To cover the glory of God would be a dishonor (v.4). The reason that a woman covers her head is that she is the "glory of man" (v.7).¹ Uncovering her head when communicating with God would be a dishonor (v.5). Paul states that while praying or prophesying, God's people are to symbolically "uncover" the glory of Deity (man) while "covering" the glory of humanity (woman).²
3. **Angels.** Paul states that women should cover their heads "because of the angels" (v.10). He bases this reason for the headcovering on his previous two reasons,³ but does not further elaborate.
4. **Hair Length.** Nature's teaching about *hair length* is used by Paul to support the woman's use of a headcovering (v.13-15). In other words, natural hair lengths present a hint for what Christian men and women should do regarding the use of headcoverings. The passage provides for only one outcome: if a woman won't cover her head, she must cut her hair off (v.6) – but since nature teaches that this would be a disgraceful loss of her "glory" (v.15), she should cover her head (v.6).
5. **The Universal Practice of The Church.** Christianity's use of headcoverings did not begin with Paul's letter to the Corinthians – the other churches were already practicing it before the church in Corinth did.⁴ Paul states that it was the standard practice among the "churches of God" as a whole (v.16).⁵ His instructions were not only for the Corinthian church or only for the Corinthian culture, but rather were for "every man" and "every woman" (v.4-5).

¹ Paul then explains *how* woman is the glory of man: she originated *from* man and was created *for* his sake (v.8-9).

² This second reason for the headcovering is "not because she is in the presence of man, but because she is in the presence of God and his angels – and in their presence the glory of man [that is, the woman] must be hidden." [Morna Dorothy Hooker](#), *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (CUP Archive, 1990), 119.

³ Note the structure of Paul's reasoning, including the use of "for" and "therefore" in v.6-10.

⁴ It was from the rest of Christianity that Paul "delivered" (a word often [translated](#) "handed over") this practice to the Corinthians (v.2) – just as he had similarly "delivered" to them the practice of the Lord's Supper (v.23).

⁵ At the time of Paul's writing, there were churches in Israeli, Greek, and Roman cities. Additionally, Christianity may have spread to Africa (ie., the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 and the evangelists of Cyrene in Acts 11:20). The Apostle Thomas may have already planted churches in India. Early Church artwork and writings show that believers outside of Corinth followed Paul's instruction about the use of headcoverings (see Appendix A).

OTHER PROPOSED EXPLANATIONS FOR THE HEADCOVERING SYMBOLISM

The Christian woman's use of a headcovering is explained in Scripture using five individual reasons. However, some Bible teachers have proposed other explanations for Paul's instructions. Each proposal depends on a specific assumption: that Paul had *unmentioned* additional reasons for his teaching. Specifically, each proposal states that the headcovering was taught only as a Christian response to certain aspects of First Century Corinthian culture. The most common alternative explanations are considered below. An evaluation of each proposal is provided by taking a careful look at both history¹ and Scripture.

Alternative Proposal #1: The Use of Headcoverings Was A Required Aspect of Corinthian Culture

Explanation: “Paul wanted Christians to maintain the *status quo*. The use of headcoverings by women was an honorable part of First Century culture in the city of Corinth. Paul did not want the Corinthians to dismiss their cultural connections to other people, since it would hinder their witness for Christ and draw undue attention.”

In Light Of History

- 1) Rather than reenforcing the headcovering customs of the local society, Paul's instructions were actually the *opposite* of the Corinthian's Roman culture. Specifically, Roman women normally went without a headcovering while in public. Men in Roman culture wore a headcovering during religious activities. In nearby Greek culture, women did not wear a headcovering during worship. Thus, Paul's instructions cannot be a requirement for cultural conformity.
- 2) The Early Church writings on the topic also do not describe the use of a headcovering during prayer as conformity to the local society. To the contrary, Tertullian (a theologian in the Early Church) specifically stated that the Christian practice of headcovering was not something that came from the Gentiles.² Multiple Early Church sources document the use of headcoverings *outside* of Corinth.

In Light Of Scripture

- 1) The passage does not provide instruction for the general public use of headcoverings within secular Corinthian culture, but rather for its use only within times of Christian prayer and prophesy.
- 2) Within non-Christian Roman worship customs, women would wear a cover over their heads. It is difficult to imagine that Paul's motivating desire was that the Church's own worship practices would match the worship practices of the surrounding pagan religion.
- 3) Even if Paul's instructions had matched up with the Corinthian culture, “[correlation does not imply causation](#).” That is, any *similarity* to the practice of others does not automatically mean that Scripture's instructions are *based on* the practices of others. Instead, Paul gives specific intentions and theological reasons for his instructions that cannot be accounted for from within the Corinthian culture alone.
- 4) Paul would not have “delivered” (v.2) the practice of Christian headcoverings to the Corinthians if it was already a part of their religious practice. Ending the passage with an appeal to the rest of Christianity also wouldn't make sense if indeed the practice was uniquely Corinthian.
- 5) The passage itself does not state any need to maintain the *status quo* or to avoid drawing attention.

¹ Specifically, the history of First Century culture (cf. Appendix C) and the history of Christianity (cf. Appendix A).

² “[On the Veiling of Virgins](#)” (ch. 2, 8) in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4 (Book One, Part Three).

Alternative Proposal #2: Headcoverings Were A Required Cultural Symbol of Modesty

Explanation: “Paul required women to wear a headcovering because in Corinthian culture a woman's uncovered head (and visible hair) was considered immodest.”

In Light Of History

1) The Corinthian church was primarily a Gentile church. For Gentile women in First Century Roman Corinth, being in public without a headcovering was not a sign of immodesty – rather, it was the norm.¹

In Light Of Scripture

1) This proposal does not explain why Paul was concerned about the headcovering only during times of prayer and prophesy, while modesty is important during any public gathering. The passage doesn't teach the use of a headcovering as general public attire, but specifically for times of prayer.

2) Paul's reason for *why* it is inappropriate to pray uncovered is not that it immodestly reveals a woman's hair. Rather, he states it has the opposite effect: it is equivalent to the woman having no hair (v.5).

3) This proposal does not account for why Paul prohibits men from wearing a headcovering.

4) As discussed previously, women in the Old Testament sometimes (but not always²) wore a covering to show modesty and propriety. [Philo of Alexandria](#), a Jewish philosopher who lived during the time of Paul, stated that the headcovering was the Jewish woman's “symbol of modesty.”³ However, in contrast to Paul, nowhere did *God require* Jewish women to wear a headcovering in the Old Testament.⁴

5) Even if Corinthian culture had required a headcovering for the sake of modesty, “[correlation does not imply causation](#).” In other words, Paul's reasons for the use of a headcovering are not necessarily the same as the culture's reasons. In fact, the concept of modesty is simply not found in the passage. Rather, Paul states that the symbolism of the headcovering is related to *headship* (not modesty).⁵

6) In the Gospels, two women applied their hair to Jesus' body.⁶ In response, He has nothing but praise for them. Jesus demonstrates no concern for supposedly “immodest” hair being revealed in public.

7) The Corinthian church was primarily Gentile (not Jewish). Any concern for modesty within Jewish culture does not explain the Christian practice of using a headcovering *outside* of Jewish areas (cf. v.16).

¹ See page 9.

² For example, Rebekah had not yet put on her veil but was still in the presence of a male (Genesis 24:65). Rather than being a symbol of modesty, Tamar's covering was an *indication* that she was a prostitute (Genesis 38:15).

³ Philo, [Special Laws](#), X:56.

⁴ The [Talmud](#) is a collection of Jewish writings that taught a variety of religious rules not given in the Bible. It provides the opinion of some rabbis who stated that a woman's hair is erotic ([Berakhot](#) 24a), required married Jewish women to cover their heads, and stated that a married woman who appears in public with uncovered hair can be divorced without the benefit of a marriage settlement (Ketubot 7:6). However, the Talmud was not inspired by the Lord, its writings are dated well after Paul's lifetime, and it was specifically Jewish. It thus does not serve as a good explanation for Paul's instructions to the Gentile Corinthian church. Note also that some of its statements applied to married women only, while Paul speaks to “every woman” (v.5).

⁵ Regarding the proposal that visible hair was considered immodest, Paul's emphasis is on the *head* (not the *hair*) since it is the head (not the hair itself) that provides the theological word picture for the headship relationship.

⁶ Mary does this in John 12:3. In a separate incident, an unidentified woman does the same in Luke 7:37-38.

Alternative Proposal #3: Headcoverings Were Necessary to Avoid Looking Like A Prostitute

Explanation: “Paul required women to wear a headcovering (and grow long hair) because in First Century Corinthian culture a woman without a headcovering (or long hair) was usually a prostitute. Specifically, the Temple of Aphrodite¹ in Corinth housed 1000 temple prostitutes with uncovered, shaven heads. Corinth was known for its immorality, and Paul desired the women in the local church to avoid any shame or 'appearance of evil'² – specifically, to avoid dressing like a prostitute associated with a pagan religion.”

In Light Of History

- 1) Scholars have pointed out that this explanation is, for multiple reasons, historically inaccurate. The Temple of Aphrodite was destroyed over 200 years before Paul wrote 1st Corinthians. Further, the Corinthian prostitutes were not known for having shaved/short hair and uncovered heads. Corinth's reputation as a very immoral city was long gone by the time of Paul.³
- 2) This explanation contradicts the fact that First Century Greek and Roman women *normally* had uncovered heads while in public.⁴
- 3) The Early Church writers, when discussing the use of a headcovering, make no mention of its purpose as being to avoid looking like a pagan temple prostitute. This proposal is very Corinth-centric, but multiple Early Church sources document the use of headcoverings *outside* of Corinth.

In Light Of Scripture

- 1) This proposal does not account for why Paul commanded men not to wear a headcovering.
- 2) This proposal does not account for the connection (v.3-10) that headcoverings have to *gender roles*, as well as the relationship between the headcovering and *glory* during communication with God.
- 3) This explanation doesn't explain why creating the visual distinction (between a Christian woman and a Corinthian prostitute) would be important only during times of prayer and prophesy. The passage doesn't teach the use of a headcovering as general public attire, but specifically for times of prayer.
- 4) Within Paul's instructions about headcovering and hair lengths there is no reference to prostitution. Even if the historical record had indicated that Corinthian prostitutes did have uncovered and shaved heads during the time of Paul, “[correlation does not imply causation](#).” That is, a cultural norm of uncovered and shaved prostitutes would not automatically mean that Scripture's instructions are a response to that practice.
- 5) This proposal is very Corinth-centric. It does not take into consideration the fact that the use of headcoverings was standard practice among the rest of the churches *outside* of Corinth (v.16).

¹ “Aphrodite” was the Greek goddess of love. The equivalent Roman name was “Venus.”

² 1st Thessalonians 5:22 (KJV).

³ See page 70ff for further details.

⁴ Page 9 provides an overview of First Century culture.

Alternative Proposal #4: Male Headcoverings Imitated Pagan Worship Within Roman Culture

Explanation: “Paul prohibited men from wearing a headcovering because in First Century Corinthian culture Roman men covered their heads with a toga when making sacrifices to false deities. Paul didn't want Christian men to shame their 'head' (Christ, v.3-4) by bringing the clothing styles of pagan religions into the Corinthian church.”

In Light Of History

- 1) The writings of the Early Church refer to the reasons for a headcovering that Paul gave, but never discuss a connection to Roman sacrificial customs.
- 2) If indeed an association with pagan Roman worship was the reason that Paul did not want Corinthian men to cover their heads, then “one would wonder why Paul would not have similar problems with women covering their heads, since that was also the norm for Roman worship.”¹
- 3) While the phrase “something on his head” (v.4) could be used when describing a toga pulled over a man's head during a Roman sacrifice, a specific religious context is not inherent in the phrase. In other words, the Greek phrase can just as easily refer to someone who covered their head in a public setting after being humiliated or simply to hide their appearance.²

In Light Of Scripture

- 1) This proposed explanation states that Paul's primary concern is a shameful imitation of pagan religious practices. However, the passage itself reveals a completely different set of primary issues (namely, gender roles and the symbolic covering of human glory). The passage does not include any mention of pagan religious practices.
- 2) This proposal does not provide an explanation for why a woman was obligated to wear a headcovering.
- 3) The theory is itself inconsistent. Roman *women* also veiled their heads during pagan religious practices. According to this proposal, Paul would have desired to instruct them to similarly avoid wearing a headcovering. However, he actually instructed them to do the opposite.
- 4) This theory doesn't match with the fact that the use of headcoverings was Christianity's practice in non-Roman areas as well (v.16), while this proposed theory seeks to explain only Roman culture.
- 5) The connection between the specific context of this proposal (religious sacrifices) and the context of 1st Corinthians 11 (prayer and prophesy) is questionable. In other words, it seems unlikely that Corinthian Christian men assumed they should come dressed to perform pagan sacrifices during their church's time of prayer. The passage gives no indication that this was the case.

¹ Roy E. Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2010), 514.

² For example, Esther 6:12 LXX uses the same Greek phrase to describe Haman's behavior after being forced to honor his enemy Mordecai. Also, [Plutarch](#) (a Greek historian who lived during the time of Paul) used the phrase (in a Roman non-religious context) to describe a man walking through a city while covering his head in order to avoid being recognized. Cf. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 506-507; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2003), 517.

Alternative Proposal #5: Female Headcoverings Imitated Pagan Worship Within Roman Culture

Explanation: “When making a vow to their local gods, pagan Corinthian women would sometimes shave their heads and dedicate their locks of hair to the false deities. If a Christian woman were to similarly 'uncover' her head, then she would dishonor God by imitating local pagan worship practices.”

In Light Of History

- 1) The writings of the Early Church mention the reasons for the use of a headcovering, but never mention the sacrifices of pagan Corinthian women as being one of the reasons.
- 2) The Early Church used a cloth headcovering in response to Paul's instructions, whereas this proposal identifies the headcovering as being “locks of hair.”
- 3) This proposal seeks to explain a rejection of pagan religious customs that existed in the city of Corinth. However, multiple Early Church sources document the use of headcoverings *outside* of Corinth.

In Light Of Scripture

- 1) The primary issue with this proposal is that it mistakenly interprets an “uncovered” head to mean a “shaved head” or “short hair.” Instead, Paul used the term “uncovered” to refer to the lack of a cloth headcovering.¹
- 2) The passage itself does not mention any concerns about imitating pagan worship. Further, this proposal does not account for the passage's connection between *gender roles* and the *glory of God*, which Paul describes as being at the foundation of his instructions for the use of headcoverings.
- 3) The *reason* that Paul stated women should keep their long hair does not match up with this proposal's reason for why a woman should keep her long hair. Paul states that women should have long hair because this is what “nature teaches.” This proposal states that women should keep their long hair to avoid a similarity to certain pagan worship practices.
- 5) Paul states that the context of his instructions are the specific activities of Christian *prayer and prophesy*. Thus, it would be a contextual stretch to propose that this passage is addressing the imitation of pagan *sacrificial practices*.
- 6) This proposal does not explain Paul's direction for men not to wear a headcovering.
- 7) Paul stated that the use of headcoverings by women was the standard practice of churches *outside* the city of Corinth (v.2, 16). However, this proposal seeks to explain only the religious customs of Corinth.

¹ See page 6ff.

Alternative Proposal #6: The Headcovering Was A Sign of Being Married in Roman Culture

Explanation: “In Roman culture, if a woman uncovered her head in public it would have meant that the woman considers herself to be *independent* – to have withdrawn from being under the authority of her husband. Paul's goal was to make sure that married women in the Corinthian church would not make that type of fashion statement.”

In Light Of History

- 1) Tertullian (an Early Church theologian) specifically stated that the Christian practice of headcovering was not something that came from Gentile culture.¹ History records that Roman women, after they were married, sometimes wore a garment called the *palla* that could be pulled over the top of the head. However, in contrast to Paul's instructions, the *palla* was not always worn (much less *required* by the culture). Further, when worn, it was also not always pulled up over the top of the head.
- 2) Rather than the *palla*, the wearing of the *stola* (a type of sleeveless Roman dress) was the more-standard symbol of being a married woman.² In actuality, Roman women (including those who were married) are *most often* presented in First Century portraits *without* any covering on their heads.
- 3) The Greek word for “woman” in 1st Corinthians 11 is generic. It can refer to either married or unmarried women. Thus, some Christians in the Early Church brought up the question of whether or not Paul intended the headcovering to be worn by unmarried women. This indicates that the Early Church felt the question could not be decided by a quick look at *traditional Roman culture*. Instead, Tertullian noted that the unmarried women in most of the *churches* throughout Greece – including the single ladies in the church of Corinth – used headcoverings. Later, [Jerome](#) (an early Latin theologian) also referred to unmarried women wearing a covering on their head in obedience to Paul's instructions.

In Light Of Scripture

- 1) This proposal refers to what Roman women wore in public to indicate their marital status. Paul, though, was concerned only about what Christian women wore during times of prayer & prophesy.
- 2) This proposal is based only on Roman culture. However, Paul's instructions matched up with the practice of churches outside of Roman culture (v.16). Rather than a native custom, the practice was something that Paul “delivered” to the Corinthian Christians (v.2).
- 3) Paul states his instructions were for “every woman” (v.5), not just married women. Similarly, Paul's appeal to natural “hair length” (v.13-15) is something that applies to all women, not just married women.³
- 4) This proposal doesn't explain why Paul directs men to keep their heads uncovered.
- 5) This proposal states the covering simply indicated marital status. However, Scripture's purpose reaches further: the headcovering conceals human glory during communication with God (v.7).

¹ Tertullian, “[On the Veiling of Virgins](#)” (ch. 2, 8) in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4 (Book One, Part Three).

² cf. Judith Lynn Sebesta, Larissa Bonfante, *The World of Roman Costume* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), [49](#); Kelly Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman* (Routledge, 2012), [1-12](#); Lynn Cohick; *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Baker Academic, 2009), [61](#); Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), [82, 84](#).

³ Similarly, it is not just *married* men who have Christ as their head (v.3), who are in “the image and the glory of God” (v.7), and who “have their birth through women” (v.12). Paul's statements are about males in general, regardless of marital status. His statements that women are “the glory of men” (v.7) and have glorious hair (v.15) are thus most likely statements about the female gender in general (including unmarried women).

Alternative Proposal #7: Paul Promoted Headcoverings to Prevent A Rejection of Biblical Gender Roles

Explanation: “Paul's statement 'there is neither male nor female' (Galatians 3:28) had been taken out of context by the Corinthian believers. Ladies in the Corinthian church wanted to remove their headcoverings in order to symbolize that they were independent from their husbands and equal in authority – perhaps even to state that they were usurping the church's male leadership (a First Century Corinthian “woman's liberation movement”). Paul sought to restore biblical gender roles by using the *cultural* cue of the headcovering and the *natural* cue of hair length.”

In Light Of History

- 1) Within the Corinthian culture, an uncovered woman did not imply a rejection of gender roles. Roman women were *normally* uncovered when in public. Also, Roman men wore a headcovering in religious settings. Thus, Paul's instructions did not match up with the Corinthians' cultural gender distinctions.
- 2) This proposal states that Paul's instructions come from a culture cue found in the Corinthian culture. However, Tertullian (a theologian in the Early Church) specifically indicated that the Christian practice of headcovering did not come from Gentile culture.¹ Early Church artwork and writings document the use of headcoverings as being the practice of Christians outside of Corinth, and never attribute the practice to Corinthian confusion about gender roles.

In Light Of Scripture

- 1) This proposal presents Paul's message as a correction or rebuke to the Corinthian believers for rejecting the gender roles that God established. Rather than a rebuke, though, Paul's attitude in this passage is one of praise (v.2). The passage itself contains no specific evidence that Paul was seeking to reverse a “woman's liberation movement.”² When Paul does seek to correct the Corinthians, he does so later (v.17) and clearly indicates that he is switching his tone.
- 2) It was on the basis of God's glory (v.7) and “the angels” (v.10) that Paul “delivered” (v.2) the use headcoverings to the praying women of the Corinthian church. This indicates that Paul considered the headcovering to be more than just a handy “cultural cue” that he found in the Romans' pagan society.
- 3) This proposal is very Corinth-centric. Thus, there is a disconnect between it and the fact that Paul's instructions about the headcovering were the universal practice among the rest of the churches (v.2, 16).
- 4) Had Paul not mentioned headcoverings at all, his other statements would have been sufficient to correct confusion about gender roles. The amount of time Paul takes to specifically promote the headcovering indicates that there is more to the issue than gender role confusion. Further, gender roles affect many aspects of life while the headcovering was used only during times of prayer and prophesy.

¹ Tertullian, “[On the Veiling of Virgins](#)” (ch. 2, 8) in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4 (Book One, Part Three).

² The passage also contains no indication that the Corinthian church was misinterpreting the phrase “there is neither male nor female.” Since the Corinthian church did not possess the complete New Testament at this time, and since Paul's time with the Galatians came *after* he had ministered in Corinth (Acts 18:18, 23), it's very possible that the believers in Corinth had not even heard this phrase.

Alternative Proposal #8: A Headcovering Should be Worn To Prevent Offending The Jewish Culture

Explanation: “Paul was telling the Corinthian Christians to adopt the Jewish use of a headcovering. Because of the Jews that were living in the Corinth, Paul wanted the Christians there to avoid offending the Jewish sense of proper worship attire.”

In Light Of History

1) Paul's instructions to the Corinthians make it a clear *requirement* that the men pray with their heads uncovered. Scholars state that Jewish men during the First Century “probably” prayed with their heads uncovered. However, they also state that the evidence for this is minimal, with perhaps *no* evidence that it was a religious *requirement* (beyond being simply a cultural practice). It is not a requirement found in the Old Testament. “The *de facto* requirement that Jewish men cover their heads for prayer is a relatively recent phenomenon, arising largely as a reaction to the Christian practice of praying bareheaded.”¹

2) The writings of the Early Church discussed Paul's reasons for a headcovering. However, they never mention Jewish culture as the reason for the use of the headcovering.

In Light Of Scripture

1a) Prior to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the Apostles and other Jewish church leaders had brought up the question of whether Gentile Christians should be required to obey Jewish religious rules (Acts 15:5). The group adopted the proposal of Apostle James (a Jew), who said that they should “not trouble” the Gentile Christians in this way, but rather should place on them “no greater burden” except four specific “essential” practices (15:19,28-29). None of those practices included the use of headcoverings.

1b) Paul, as a member of this Acts 15 discussion group, was involved in announcing their decision to the Gentile churches (Acts 16:4). In writing to the Corinthians, Paul (also a Jew) followed through on the decision to not increase the burden of the Gentiles – but rather decreased it.² Increasing the Gentile burden (through a new universal Christian practice of adhering to Jewish headcovering customs) would have contradicted the decision made in Acts 15.

1c) In a different situation, Paul himself confronted another Christian for trying to “compel the Gentiles to live like Jews” (Galatians 2:14). He similarly made a special point to say that a Gentile disciple named Titus didn't feel compelled to adopt Jewish practice (Galatians 2:1-5). In view of Paul's typical response to Gentiles in matters of Jewish custom, it is difficult to imagine him requiring the Roman Corinthians to take on Jewish cultural and worship practices.

2) Paul elsewhere did teach “cultural accommodation” in certain situations when a Christian is with someone from a different society.³ However, this is different than Paul giving commands related to Christian worship that all believers in all locations are to follow (as presented in v.2-16).

3) The passage itself provides no indication that Paul is seeking to promote the adoption of Jewish religious practices among the Corinthian Christians.

4) Paul appeals to the practice of the *Christians outside* of Corinth, not to the sensitivities of *Jews inside* of Corinth. This proposal doesn't explain use of headcoverings within churches in non-Jewish locations.

¹ E. Frankel & B. Teutsch, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 90-91.

² He permitted some situations of eating food sacrificed to idols (1st Corinthians 10:25-33), whereas the Acts 15 decision had provided a blanket ban on the practice.

³ Cf. Romans 14:13-21, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, 10:25-33, Galatians 2:3.

Reasons for the Headcovering: Conclusions

A variety of culture-based proposals seek to explain 1st Corinthians 11:2-16. While each of the explanations are “creative” in attempting to find some kind of societal connection for the use of headcoverings, they are merely speculative and cannot be harmonized with history and Scripture. Darrel Bock, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, states, “Suggestions that the presence or absence of a head covering was associated with prostitution, adultery, homosexuality, pagan worship, mourning, immodesty, etc... often suffer from a lack of evidence... Moreover, they often only explain why the behavior of just one of the sexes is forbidden.”¹ This, as well as the fact that these explanations widely differ from each other, betrays the fact that an obvious historical-cultural interpretation does not exist. Those who assume there *must* be a cultural basis for Paul's instructions are unable to identify one.²

However, the role of Scripture and the historical record in disqualifying these interpretations is only a side-effect of the fact that Paul specifically bases the practice of headcovering on *universal* issues. William Kelly, a theological scholar of the 1800's, noted that Paul appealed only to universal principles: “It is an admirable way of settling questions... by conveying to others the ways of God in creation and providence... It [the headcovering] is not argued on grounds of habit, modesty, or the like, but of the facts as revealed by God... Creation is the proof, not... the ordinary course of things since.”³

Similarly, S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote that 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.”⁴ He concluded, “Is the head covering merely a cultural matter? That's frequently said today. We don't really have to pay much attention to this passage because this is just cultural... [But] look at what the reasons are the apostle says, the reasons that Paul gives, for what he's talking about here... Creation. Woman's hair itself. Nature itself. Angelic beings are looking down upon us. Those are not cultural reasons.”⁵

Obviously, sometimes perspectives from *outside* the Word of God contradict the truths *inside* the Word of God. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Luke stated that the Jews in Berea were “noble” because they searched the Scriptures to see if what the apostles were teaching was in fact true (Acts 17:11). Similarly, believers must be careful to evaluate various perspectives about the use of headcoverings in the full light of Scripture and history.

¹ Darrell Bock, *The Bible Knowledge Word Study: Acts-Ephesians* (David C. Cook, 2006), 283.

² For example, in his search for a culture-based explanation of Paul's prohibition for the use of headcoverings by men, Fee states: “In the final analysis... we simply have to admit that we do not know [of any culture-based explanation].” Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), 508.

³ William Kelly, *Notes on the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (London: G. Morrish, 1878), 171-174.

⁴ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. (Pfeiffer and Harrison, ed.), “1 Corinthians,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1247-48.

⁵ S. Lewis Johnson, *Covering the Head in Worship* ([sermon transcription](#)).

Conclusions, continued...

These observations point to broader issues within the practice of Bible interpretation – namely, *consistency* and *integrity*. Robertson McQuilkin, former president of Columbia Bible College, expresses it this way when writing in the [Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society](#)...

“The task of bridging the gap between the distant world of the Biblical writers and the contemporary world is not new. It has always been important for any who would understand the meaning of the Bible to study the context in which a passage was written... But since the text itself is God-given, contemporary understanding of the ancient cultural context may not be used to change the meaning of the plain words and expressions... [such as Paul's statement that] women must wear a head covering... In each of these, cultural understanding of the context of the original author and recipient may well clarify the meaning. But if it is used to set aside that meaning, the interpreter has assumed greater authority in determining truth than he has permitted [of] the Bible itself.”¹

Similarly, theologian & pastor R.C. Sproul addresses these concerns in his book *Knowing Scripture*...

It is one thing to seek a more lucid understanding of the biblical content by investigating the cultural situation of the first century; it is quite another to interpret the New Testament as if it were merely an echo of the first-century culture... For example, with respect to the hair-covering issue in Corinth, numerous commentators ... [state] the reason why Paul wanted women to cover their heads was to avoid a scandalous appearance of Christian women in the external guise of prostitutes. What is wrong with this kind of speculation? The basic problem here is that our reconstructed knowledge of first-century Corinth has led us to supply Paul with a rationale that is foreign to the one he gives himself. In a word, we are not only putting words into the apostle's mouth, but we are ignoring words that are there. If Paul merely told women in Corinth to cover their heads and gave no rationale for such instruction, we would be strongly inclined to supply it via our cultural knowledge. In this case, however, Paul provides a rationale which is based on an appeal to creation, not to the custom of Corinthian harlots. We must be careful not to let our zeal for knowledge of the culture obscure what is actually said. To subordinate Paul's stated reason to our speculatively conceived reason is to slander the apostle and turn exegesis into eisegesis.”²

The practice of headcovering is a *uniquely* Christian command, especially because the *reasons* for the command are uniquely Christian. “It's totally inappropriate to assign to Paul a reason for his saying something that is different from the one he himself gives.”³ Rather than Paul appealing to First Century culture, God's direction for the use of headcoverings was actually *counter-cultural*. Further, the *meaning* of the Christian headcovering symbolism did not match the *meaning* of the First Century headcovering practice. The “culture-only” explanations for v.2-16 ignore both the “universal principle” and “universal practice” aspects the passage.

¹ J. Robertson McQuilkin, “Limits of Cultural Interpretation” in the [Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society](#) (Vol. 23/2, June 1980), 113-120.

² R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1977), 110.

³ R. C. Sproul, “To Cover or Not To Cover?” in *Hard Sayings of the Apostles* (Ligonier Ministries via [MP3](#), Audio Tape #675 Side B, or [YouTube](#)).

Ω CHRISTIAN HEADCOVERINGS FOR TODAY?

INTRODUCTION

The Exegetical Task. Christians today are not the original recipients of Paul's letters. Every look at Scripture is, to a certain extent, like reading someone else's mail.¹ The question then becomes: is the practice of headcovering a command meant for one specific group of people² (the First Century Corinthian believers) or did God intend that it would be followed by the Church as a whole (believers of all locations and time periods).³ Two prominent evangelical scholars provide some helpful advice for answering this type of question:

“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.”⁴

John Piper and Wayne Grudem

The Principles & The Practice. The Apostle Paul taught that all Scripture is inspired by God Himself, and every passage of the Bible has practical benefit for the believer (2nd Timothy 3:16-17). Most evangelical Christians agree that the *principles* found in 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 are universal⁵ and should be honored by Christians of all time periods and cultures. The next question is whether the *practice* of headcovering should also be honored by Christians of all time periods and cultures. The previous section of this study discussed the reasons Paul gave for his instruction. It contrasted those reasons with several *interpretive proposals* based on First Century Corinthian society and found that the Christian use of headcoverings was not simply a re-enforcement of *ancient culture*. In this section, the same Scriptural reasons for the headcovering are discussed but now in relation to *proposals for application* based on *modern culture*.

¹ While some aspects of Paul's letter speak to issues related specifically to the Corinthian believers (cf. 1:14, 3:5, 4:17, 5:1, 6:7, 7:1, 11:18, etc.), many sections include teaching for the Church universally. In fact, Paul's letter may be *specifically* addressed to a wider audience than just the Church in Corinth, depending on how the second verse of the book 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.”

² Similar to Luke 10:24: “Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way.”

³ Similar to Romans 12:9: “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”

⁴ John Piper & Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 1991), 67-68.

⁵ That is, the principles regarding the distinctions between gender roles, the prominence of God's glory, and the unseen presence of angels.

REASONS AGAINST CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE

The Situation. The New Testament gives direction for the use of a headcovering by Christian women during times of prayer. Most Christians in Western culture, though, could hardly imagine following Paul's instructions nowadays. This may be expressed in various ways, such as...

- *“This passage can't really mean what I think it says. I mean, none of the Christian women that I know use a headcovering, and we can't all be wrong.”*
- *The use of headcoverings as described in 1st Corinthians 11 is just an ancient “cultural issue that we are not concerned about today.”¹*

The Proposals. However, to dismiss any command in Scripture requires clear exegetical reasons. In other words, the question is not *“Why would God require obedience to a straightforward Scriptural command?”* but rather *“Are there any valid reasons to not follow the instruction in this passage today?”* Those who do not practice headcovering often give at least one of the following four reasons...

- The headcovering symbolism is meaningless in today's culture, so it should not be used.
- The headcovering symbolism is meaningless in today's culture. A new symbol should be chosen.
- The headcovering symbolism is unnecessary because only the principles in the passage matter.
- The passage is too obscure to confidently know what is being commanded.

¹ J. Lee Grady, *Twenty-Five Tough Questions About Women and the Church* (Charisma Media, 2003), [147](#).

The Symbol Is Meaningless In Contemporary Culture And Shouldn't Be Used

Explanation: *“Paul was concerned about appropriate headcoverings only because of the 'message' that wearing the coverings sent to First Century residents of Corinth. A headcovering does not have the same meaning in modern Western culture, so wearing one today would be pointless since modern society wouldn't understand the intended symbolism.”*

A Message to Culture? Often, the source of confusion on this issue is the assumption that the headcovering provided a symbolic message for *the culture*. Paul does not give any indication that the headcovering is intended to “speak” a message *to* the unbelieving culture, nor reflect a God-approved message *from* First Century culture. In other words, Paul's *reasons* for the headcovering were meaningful specifically to *Christians* and only within a *Christian* perspective. With the symbol's relationship to God's authority structure, God's glory, and God's angels (v.3-5, 10), those outside of the Church would not have understood the theological basis and reasons for the headcovering – just as they do not understand the Christian symbolism in baptism and the Lord's Supper. These teachings are given specifically to the *churches* – not the secular public. Those that the symbolism *is* intended for *do* understand it.¹

An Obsolete Symbolism? Christians today (and throughout history) practice other Scriptural commands, regardless of whether they are understood by the Christian's local culture. The question could similarly be asked: “How do baptism and the Lord's Supper speak to modern culture?” Most non-Christians do not understand the biblical meaning of these symbolic actions, but this does not prompt believers to give them up. Christians recognize that Scriptural symbolism has meaning beyond the often-changing culture that believers live in (especially symbolism that is specifically cross-cultural).

Biblical Commands With Cultural Connections. At times, culture may promote behavior that the Bible teaches (e.g., “Thou shall not murder”). However, Christians do not discount biblical teachings just because they have the support of the surrounding non-Christian culture. In other words, [correlation does not imply causation](#). The idea that “because they did it in their culture means that it doesn't apply to our culture” isn't enough to propose that a command is *only* cultural. For example, the Christian practice of the Lord's Supper² is rooted in Jewish culture (the Old Testament “Passover” celebration). In the New Testament, Jesus established the uniquely *Christian* meaning of the Lord's Supper. Baptism was a religious practice in use before it became a God-ordained practice of the Church. Christians do not discount it because of its pre-Christian cultural connections. The use of headcoverings was similarly a practice found in certain cultures throughout history. However, it didn't have the same theology, purpose, or requirements as it has within Christianity. Though baptism and the Lord's Supper have ancient cultural roots, they are meaningful to Christians today because believers are *taught* the biblical and uniquely-Christian message that they symbolize. The only reason that the headcovering has little meaning to many Christians today is that in the last century Western churches generally stopped teaching the meaning.

¹ For the headcovering, this includes the Lord, angels (v.10), and Christians familiar with 1st Corinthians 11:2-16.

² Also found in 1st Corinthians 11.

The Symbol Is Now Meaningless – A New Symbol Should Be Chosen

Explanation: *“If Scripture commands the use of a symbol to represent the principles discussed within 1st Corinthians 11:2-16, then Christians today can find a new, culturally-relevant symbol.”*

A Purposeful Symbol. The headcovering is apparently a very *intentional* symbol. Scripturally, it is *because* of a woman's positional “head” (man) that she covers her physical “head.”¹ Thus, the headcovering creates an appropriate word-picture – and if something else were substituted for the headcovering, there would be a loss of symbolism. Elliot Johnson, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, writes, “If we accept... the practice of substituting cultural equivalents, the danger of abandoning [the] prescribed form of response involves the related problem of losing or distorting the type of meaning... In the case of headcovering (1 Cor 11), the basis for the form must be clearly demonstrated to be nontheological before the form itself can be dismissed without possible loss of theological truth taught in the apostolic practice.”²

Other Options? Verse 10 states that the symbol should be “on” the head. This disqualifies most alternative symbols that have been proposed (a wedding ring, a dress, etc). This also disqualifies many options due to the fact that whatever the woman is putting on during times of prayer and prophesy is (according to the passage) also the same thing that the man is to be taking off. Some symbols (such as a wedding ring) also cannot be used by “every woman” (v.5) – specifically, those that are unmarried. In Western culture today, there is not an alternative outward “symbol” that points to the Christian principles that Paul describes in 1st Corinthians 11 (not to mention that Paul's instructions about feminine submission is itself counter-cultural to most “modern” societies).

Scriptural Alternatives? Both Paul and the Early Church used no alternative symbol among different cultures. The symbol Paul gives is one that he states is universal to the churches. Christians likewise don't have the authority to change the other symbolic actions (baptism and the Lord's Supper) that Scripture provides for believers to participate in.

¹ This is not a word play created by the English translators. The Greek word for “head” in v.3 is [the same](#) Greek word for “head” as used in the rest of the chapter.

² [Elliott E. Johnson](#), *Expository Hermenutics: An Introduction* (Zondervan, 1990), 259-260.

The Symbol Is Unnecessary – Only The Principle Counts

Explanation: “*God looks at a person's heart, not their outward appearance. The principles represented by the headcovering symbolism are still valid, but Christian women can practice these principles without actually wearing a headcovering.*”

The Principle. A person's “heart” matters *much* more than a person's attire.¹ The *meaning* of a symbol is always more important than the symbol *itself*. Christ's death is what saves a person, not the Lord's Supper that represents it. The thief on the cross next to Jesus experienced salvation, even though he was never baptized. Further, it is quite possible to *use* the headcovering symbol while *acting* contrary to it, just as the Corinthians abused the symbolism of the Lord's Supper.

The Practice. Similar to baptism and Lord's Supper, the headcovering symbol is to indicate *a condition of the heart*. The headcovering *reflects the principles* of 1st Corinthians 11. Christians still practice the symbolic actions taught in Scripture because (1) the symbolism is meaningful, and (2) the symbolism is commanded. In v.16, Paul stated that among the churches the “practice” (not just the *principle*) was the standard. The Corinthian women could likewise have argued, “I respect God's order of headship when I pray, so I don't need something on my head to show it” – but Paul still required it for them.

¹ Cf. 1st Samuel 16:7, Matthew 15:19, Proverbs 4:23, Luke 6:43-45, and Matthew 7:17-18.

Obscurity Prevents Confident Obedience

Explanation: *“The topic of Christian headcoverings is found in only one chapter of the New Testament. It must not be an important issue if it wasn't repeated in other passages or mentioned by Jesus. Because Paul's direction is not very clear, it's safe to say that it is not necessary for his instructions to be followed by Christians today.”*

Prevalence. Many Christians wish that Scripture contained more information about certain topics. Some of these subjects are indeed “obscure” in that they are contained within only a single verse.¹ However, more than making a passing reference to the use of headcoverings, Paul devotes half of a chapter to discussing the topic. While the use of headcoverings is not frequently discussed throughout other New Testament books, v.16 states that it was widely taught and practiced throughout the New Testament churches.² Early Church artwork & writings document this as well, and the Church has continued the practice through most of Christian history.³

Clarity. Some passages in Scripture are “vague” in that they do not provide detailed information about a specific topic. The instructions in 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 are different in several ways.⁴ *Clarity* is Paul's goal: he starts by writing, “I want you to understand” (v.3). Instead of leaving the practice of headcovering unexplained, he provides five reasons for it. Rather than a societal custom understood only by the a certain ancient culture, Paul needed to deliver, explain, and even defend the practice to the Corinthian Christians. Many New Testament practices are taught without this amount of explanation.

Authority. Because 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 was inspired by God, it has complete authority. The importance of a biblical command can't be evaluated simply by counting up the number of times it was repeated in Scripture.⁵ Though the use of headcoverings has been downplayed relatively recently in Church history, this does not limit the authority or usefulness of the passage (2nd Timothy 3:16-17).

Summary. Are Paul's instructions shrouded in obscurity? Quite the opposite. The use of the headcovering by Christian women has been the *prevailing practice* within Church history. This is due to Paul's detailed, authoritative instructions. Core Christian practices, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper, have been the cause of major confusion (and debate) at different points in Christian history, yet both are still practiced to this day. The instructions of 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 are similar. They reflect the believer's relationship to God and are valid, understandable, and applicable for Christians today.

¹ Such as baptism for the dead (1st Corinthians 15:29), the statement that “women shall be saved through childbearing” (1st Timothy 2:15), the prophesy that Christians will judge angels (1st Corinthians 6:3).

² Thus, like many other Scriptural practices, early churches were individually taught this practice before it was written in Scripture. On a related note, not every teaching of Scripture is recorded in multiple books of the Bible.

³ God's communication is intentional and His Word is sufficient (cf. 1st Peter 1:3). For this reason, believers can be content with the way that the Author of Scripture decided to communicate His instructions on this topic.

⁴ The following factors are absent from certain other commands in the Bible (cf. the “holy kiss” in Romans 16:16).

⁵ This “method” of evaluating importance is not used in relation to other important doctrines or commands. The amount of space that Paul devotes to the headcovering (15 verses) is nearly the same amount he devotes to the Lord's Supper (18 verses). There is no passage on baptism that is this long. Only 12 verses in the Bible directly reference the virgin birth of Christ (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:18-25, and Luke 1:27, 34-35). Even the foundational doctrine of the “Trinity” has no passage devoted to its explanation.

Conclusions About Contemporary Obedience

Christians are commanded to “examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good” (1st Thessalonians 5:21). This study has examined alternative *interpretive proposals* (based primarily on First Century culture) and found that each is contradicted by both Scripture and First Century culture. Next, alternative *proposals for application* (based on modern culture) were examined. Each was similarly found to be disconnected from Scripture. How did such disconnects come to exist?

The source of this discrepancy is not Scriptural, but human. R. C. Sproul wrote, “I am convinced that the problem of the influence of the twentieth-century secular mindset is a far more formidable obstacle to accurate biblical interpretation than is the problem of the conditioning of ancient culture.”¹ In other words, a “modern” secular mindset can easily hinder a Christian from viewing Scripture accurately. That mindset can cause even more problems than the mindset of those who view the words of the Bible as just an ancient document intended primarily for historic societies that no longer exist.

Robertson McQuilkin, former president of Columbia Bible College, wrote about a trend he observed regarding the interpretation of Scriptural passages that conflict with personal preferences and opinions. “Suddenly I find myself confronted with a new brand of interpreter who assures me... that divorce is to be preferred to a ‘dead’ marriage, that homosexual conduct is fine so long as it is faithful... [and] that husband/wife roles should be interchangeable... [However,] I am convinced that God intended the Bible to mold our culture, not to have the meaning of Scripture molded by our culture.” As one example of his opposition to this new trend in Bible interpretation, McQuilkin wrote that “I have found myself increasingly willing... that my wife let her hair grow long and cover it in church.”²

This emphasis on a careful and humble application of the Bible provides integrity to Christianity. The need for interpretive integrity and consistency plays out in both individuals and churches. For example, most theologically conservative churches permit only men to become pastors. They do so in view of passages such as 1st Timothy 2:11-14,³ which connects the gender roles of Christians with the events of Genesis. Paul similarly uses Genesis 1-3 to teach the use of headcoverings. “The same argument Paul uses in one passage for forbidding women to teach he uses in another passage to argue [for the use of headcoverings]... [Those within contemporary Western Christianity often] take the argument as transculturally applicable in one case, but not so in the other. This seems very strange indeed.”⁴

However, Scripture is both alive (Hebrews 4:12) and consistent. The Word of God provides truthful and current direction. “If there’s ever an indication 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.”⁵

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 118.

² J. Robertson McQuilkin, “Limits of Cultural Interpretation” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Vol. 23/2, June 1980), 113-120.

³ “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” Cf. 1 Timothy 3:2ff and Titus 1:6ff.

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, & Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 19.

⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question!* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 348.

EXEGETICAL REVIEW AND SUMMARY

The Old Testament. The New Testament teaches that Christians should value the teaching of the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:16, Romans 15:4). However, most of the Old Testament passages on the subject of headcovering are *descriptive* of what people did, rather than *prescriptive*.¹ While the Old Testament provides a helpful perspective regarding the use of headcoverings in ancient Israel, it does not include any direction for Christians to follow on this topic.²

History of the Church. The practice of Christians throughout history can be informative and interesting, but it is not an authoritative source of Christian doctrine and practice.

First Century Culture. It is important to interpret Scripture with its historical context in view. However, First Century society does identify any cultural source for Paul's instructions about the use of headcoverings. Culture-based interpretations depend on unmentioned (speculative) reasons the use of headcoverings. In contrast, Paul gives *trans-cultural reasons* while explaining a *trans-cultural practice*.

Modern Culture. While modern Western culture often finds the use of headcoverings to be uncommon, there is no biblically-valid reason that modern culture negates Paul's instructions in 1st Corinthians 11.

Conclusion. In view of the interpretive advice given by Piper and Grudem at the beginning of this section, Paul's instructions are to be applied today. 1st Corinthians 11 teaches is that it is not "proper" for a woman to go without a headcovering while praying or prophesying (v.13). Since man is the head of woman (v.3), Christian women "ought" to cover their heads with a "symbol of authority" (v.10). Also, since the woman is the "glory of man" (v.7), she should symbolically cover her head when communicating with God (v.6). Beyond teaching standard *principles* for Christians, Paul is teaching a standard "practice" (v.16). Though it has been proposed that "the rule ceases when the reason of the rule ceases,"³ each of Paul's reasons for using the headcovering still stand.

¹ That is, the Old Testament passages that mention headcoverings are usually narratives; they are not giving commands. Those passages that are prescriptive speak only of males (Jewish priests) wearing a headcovering, which is the opposite of the New Testament instruction for Christians.

² Though Paul appeals to Creation in his explanation (v.7-9), the Bible indicates that headcoverings were not used by Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:25). After all, Paul bases his instructions only on the *principles* related to Creation, not on *practices* that occurred at that time. While headcoverings were later used by some (perhaps even most) Jewish ladies, there is no Old Testament command for the practice. The key difference in the New Testament is that Christian men are identified as being under *Christ* and it is for *this* reason (v.3-4) they ought not cover their heads when praying or prophesying. Paul makes no appeal to the traditional practice of the Jews. In fact, the Old Testament priests (serving *before* Christ's sacrifice) were commanded by God to wear a covering on their head, the opposite of Paul's instructions. While some of the same Creation-based principles were at play in the Old Testament, the New Testament context provides for a different application of them. Note that 1st Corinthians 11 is not the only time when Paul bases a uniquely New Testament *practice* on information and *principles* provided by the book of Genesis (cf. 1st Timothy 2:12–14).

³ [Daniel Denison Whedon](#), *Commentary on the New Testament, Volume 4* (Hunt & Eaton, 1903), 79.

UNBIBLICAL REASONS FOR WEARING A HEADCOVERING

Tradition Alone. While many Christian groups have a godly heritage, the practice of headcovering is promoted by some groups *only* because of the group's heritage. When the “tradition of man” becomes the only reason for wearing a covering, the “ordinance of God” becomes ignored.¹ At the point that the *practice* of headcovering is divorced from the *purpose* of the headcovering, the result is a form of legalism.

Modesty. God's Word teaches that Christian women should dress modestly.² For many Christian women who wear a headcovering, the covering goes along with their modest attire. At the same time, modesty is not one of the reasons given by Paul for wearing a headcovering.³ The context for Paul's direction about the use of headcoverings is not modesty, but rather headship, glory, and communication with God.⁴

Style. A biblical headcovering is not intended as merely a fashion accessory. Rather than drawing attention to the wearer, its Scriptural purpose is to symbolically *conceal* human glory.

Gender Inequality. Headcoverings may serve a demeaning or repressive role for women in some cultures or religions. In the Bible, though, God's direction for how men should treat their wives is the opposite.⁵ Both genders are equally made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Paul proclaims gender equality in the realm of salvation (Galatians 3:28) and in the middle of his discussion on headcoverings he was careful to show the inter-dependence between man and woman (v.11).⁶ The world often confuses “equality” with “sameness”⁷ and often believes that “submission” means “inferiority.” However, Scripture does not describe submission as demeaning. As the Son submits to the Father and is yet equal in value, so the wife submits to the husband and is equal in value. The various New Testament teachings on the woman's submission have their foundation in God's good Creation (v.8-9, cf. Genesis 1-2). Further, God's standard of submission (symbolized by the woman's headcovering) does not begin with the woman. As v.3 teaches, men must submit to the authority over them (Jesus) and Jesus submits to the authority over Him (the Father).⁸ This is the opposite of male chauvinism. Christian women should be able to find great examples of submission by looking at the lives of godly men (who humbly choose Christ's desires over their own desires) and Jesus Himself (who submitted to His Father in everything).

¹ Conversely, the choice to begin wearing a headcovering is not the same as a choice to adopt the identity of any specific Christian group, nor is it a choice to adopt a certain style or design of headcovering.

² cf. 1st Timothy 2:9-10, 1st Peter 3:3-5.

³ However, when “modesty” is [defined as humility](#), then it can be symbolized by a headcovering (v.3, 10).

⁴ It is Islam, not Christianity, that officially teaches that a lady's uncovered head is immodest. However, because of their local cultures, some Christians (in various times & locations) have felt that the headcovering promotes modesty. Though Scripture doesn't make this connection, for some believers this may be valid on a cultural level.

⁵ Husbands are to love their wives sacrificially (Ephesians 5:25) and to “show them honor” (1st Peter 3:7).

⁶ See also [1st Timothy 2:15](#) and Psalm 127:3-5.

⁷ Thus, sometimes secular culture has sought to blur the lines between the genders. However, *equality in essence* does not imply *sameness of role*. As Jesus and the Father are of equal divinity and yet have unique roles, man and women are equally human and have unique roles.

⁸ Jesus said to His Father: “Not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42). The submission of Jesus to the Father is also referred to in John 5:19, 30; 6:38, 14:28; 1 Corinthians 3:23, 15:28; Philippians 2:6-11.

THE SNARE OF LEGALISM

Legalism refers to unbiblical requirements for how to live life. While the term *legalism* is not found in the Bible, Scripture does warn believers against the concept. Legalism is often an attempt to create (works-based) self-righteousness, rather than submit to God-directed (and grace-based) process of sanctification.

It was, of course, appropriate for the Corinthian believers to respond in obedience to the God-inspired instructions regarding the use of headcoverings. But would the same response by Christians today be a form of legalism? Three types of legalism should be considered when answering this question.

1) Legalistic Beliefs About Salvation. “Legalism” is often used to describe attempts to *earn God’s forgiveness* by living obediently. This is the “classic” definition of legalism, in which God’s mercy is falsely thought to be received by following religious rules. This is the type of legalism Paul warned the Christians in Galatia about after they had been taught they needed to obey the Old Testament law in order to be accepted by God.¹ Legalism is completely contrary to the Scriptural concept of *salvation by grace*, in which forgiveness is an *unearned* and *undeserved* gift from God through the death of His Son Jesus on the cross.

2) Legalistic Unbiblical Rules for Living. “Legalism” can also refer to *non-Scriptural requirements for behavior* – without any connection to the issue of salvation. This type of legalism appears when Christians create “moral rules” beyond those given by God. These rules often originate from a misinterpretation of Scripture,² false teaching,³ or as the fruit of “spiritual pride.”⁴ This type of legalism can also happen when one particular application of biblical principles is set forth as a universal command.⁵

3) Legalistic Biblical Rules For Living. “Legalism” can describe a *wrong kind of emphasis on behavior* – behavior that is otherwise biblical, right, and good. The improper emphasis is on obeying “the letter of the law” to the exclusion of “the spirit or principle of the law.” In other words, biblical behaviors can become legalistic if the obligation of the behavior itself is emphasized over the reasons for the behavior. *Obedience to God* becomes divorced from *relationship with God*. This can occur with almost almost any Christian activity, including church attendance, financial giving, prayer, and Christian ministry.

Conclusions: (1) The Bible does not teach that wearing a headcovering earns God’s love or forgiveness. (2) If the use of headcoverings is biblically required *only* in the Corinthian cultural context, then any other requirement for their use would be legalism. (3) The use of a covering can also become legalistic if the Scriptural *purposes* and *principles* of the covering are ignored. (4) Legalism is spiritually toxic and can produce confusion, hurt, and separation. Therefore, much caution ought to be exercised in relation to any groups that legalistically practice headcovering. (5) The solution to legalism is not an avoidance of behavioral rules. Paul, who was known for preaching against legalism and man-made traditions (cf. Romans 14:1-10 & Colossians 2:20-23), still taught God’s rules for Christian behavior. Jesus indicated that the solution to legalism is to honor both the Scriptural rules *and* the Scriptural principles (Matthew 23:23).

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

² Such as when non-Jewish churches avoid eating pork because of Old Testament dietary rules.

³ Such as the idea that God approves of only one particular denomination or one certain translation of the Bible.

⁴ Prideful legalism can result from an attempt to gain a “superior” spirituality through “higher standards.”

⁵ Examples: “To promote modesty (1st Timothy 2:9), our congregation believes that ladies *must* wear dresses to church services.” “To avoid the sin of becoming drunk (Ephesians 5:18), Christians *must* never drink alcohol.”

NEXT STEPS

Faithfully Teaching Scripture

A Nigerian church leader once reminded an American missionary that the Bible gives commands against theft and also against women praying with their heads uncovered. He then asked, “Why is it that you missionaries teach us that we are to obey the one command and to ignore the other?”¹

Indeed, 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 is rarely touched in most Evangelical circles. When seeking to understand and follow the direction of Scripture, the believer’s goal is to “accurately handle the word of truth” (2nd Timothy 2:15). But “sometimes we have so ‘domesticated’ the faith, we’ve ‘tamed’ the Scriptures... to where it only says what we want it to say... and we only focus on those things that we want to focus on.”²

When believers do take the time to focus on 1st Corinthians 11:2-16, the risk is *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*.³ “The danger lurks that interpreters will try to make it say what they would like to say.”⁴ Thus, there is a need for Western Christians to become carefully and thoughtfully re-acquainted with the passage. In this, Paul leads by example. He told the Christians in the city of Ephesus: “I did not shrink from declaring to you the *whole* counsel of God” (Acts 20:27, emphasis added). The practice of headcovering was important enough that it was not only taught among the assemblies of the Early Church, but was included in Scripture to be read as long as believers are on the earth. Thus, it is important enough for churches today to hear the “whole counsel of God” on this topic. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “If anyone thinks he is...spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment” (1st Corinthians 14:37).

Paul’s instructions leave “many of us puzzled, because head covering has no symbolic meaning in modern, Western culture.”⁵ Like baptism and the Lord’s Supper, modern society *outside* the Church does not understand the Christian headcovering – it must be taught from within the church. This type of issue exists *within* the Church as well. The Jewish background of the Passover lamb and the Passover dinner is often forgotten when Christians participate in the Lord’s Supper. The practice of baptism was understood by the Jews of Jesus’ time, but many Christians today are unclear about its actual meaning. Similarly, much of Western Christianity is in need of being re-taught the headcovering symbolism that was practiced throughout the history of the Church. A careful and detailed consideration of the passage (as well as evidence from First Century culture) simply reenforces the simple and straightforward direction that Paul gives for the use of headcoverings when communicating with God.

¹ Charles H. Kraft, “[Interpreting in Cultural Context](#)” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Vol. 21/4, 1978), 363.

² Milton Vincent, *Head-coverings in Worship, Part 9* (Cornerstone Fellowship Bible Church, Feb. 10, 2002), 52:53.

³ A term that comes from a Greek word meaning, “to lead out.” *Exegesis* is the process of gaining meaning *from* a text. It is contrasted with *eisegesis*, which is when an outside meaning is “read into” a text.

⁴ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2003), 505.

⁵ Iver Larsen, “[1 Corinthians 11.10 Revisited](#)” in *The Bible Translator* (Vol. 48 No. 3, July, 1997), 345-350.

Faithfully Obeying Scripture

“Paul appeals to universal custom and to the fact that this is the habit throughout the Christian churches... [however] in the Western world of our day, the custom of a veil or covering is not generally followed.”¹ The initial reaction for many Christian women in Western churches today is that wearing a headcovering would be a social discomfort. Personal appearance is often considered to be in the realm of “personal freedom” (often with an emphasis on “cultural conformity”) such that it becomes uncomfortable to consider that the Lord may have direction on the matter.

As Daniel Wallace, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote, “The argument that a real head covering is in view and that such is applicable today is, in some respects, the easiest view to defend exegetically and the hardest to swallow practically... The real danger, as I see it, is that many Christians simply ignore what this text says because any form of obedience to it is inconvenient.”² This danger is often present not only for members of today’s churches, but also for those today who are teaching, preaching, and pastoring.

However, obedience is important – not only because disobedience dishonors God, but because the instruction exists for a *purpose*. The purpose is to honor God’s structure of authority and to promote His glory during communication with Him. God’s authority and His glory are highly valued among His people. They are especially “on display” within marriage, a covenant intended to symbolize the relationship between Christ and the church.

Still, knowing that resistance to this practice would yet occur, the Lord included v.16: “If one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” It can be tempting to forgo God’s direction for the sake of a human alternative. One of Jesus’ concerns with the Jewish religious leaders was that they had let go of the “commands of God” in order to “hold onto the traditions of men” (Mark 7:8-9). During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns against downplaying the importance of even the “least of these commandments” from God (Matthew 5:19³). His principle of obedience still stands: “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10). In other words, “‘Let her cover her head’ (1 Corinthians 11:6) may not be as important as ‘pour yourself out for the hungry’ (Isaiah 58:10) - if you can call any part of God’s Word unimportant. But I figure if the king tells you to go conquer the hinterlands one day, and tells you to shoe his horse the next day, you should do them both without slacking. He is the king.”⁴ “The wearing or not wearing of the veil may seem to be a small matter. Everything depends upon what the wearing or not wearing implies.”⁵

¹ Paul Hamar, *The Book of First Corinthians* (Gospel Publishing House, 1980), 98-99.

² Daniel B. Wallace, *What is the Head Covering in 1 Cor 11:2-16 and Does it Apply to Us Today?* (bible.org, 1997).

³ Jesus taught that obedience “ought” to include the “weightier matters” of God’s commands “without neglecting” the commands that less foundational (Matthew 23:23 ESV).

⁴ Andrée Seu, “A Symbol of Glory” in *World Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 20 (June 02, 2007).

⁵ Arch Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *First Corinthians* (C. Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 235.

Practical Next Steps

In a letter that Paul wrote to another church, he provided this exhortation: “Brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (2nd Thessalonians 2:15). The word “traditions” here is also translated “instructions” or “ordinances.”¹ It is the same word Paul used in the opening verse of his instructions about headcoverings. Here, he praised the believers in Corinth for “holding firmly to the traditions.” This is one of the few things that Paul praised the Corinthian Christians for.

A biblical “ordinance” is defined as a *symbolic action*² that is designed by God to reflect the believer’s relationship with Him. The two primary ordinances taught in Scripture are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. For these, the Lord (1) modified a known practice of ancient society, (2) gave it a uniquely Christian *meaning, purpose, and theology*, and (3) presented it to the universal Church to reflect the believer’s relationship with God. In view of these three components, the use of headcoverings is essentially a third ordinance.³ The headcovering symbolism, according to the Bible, points to two spiritual truths that are important during communication with God: relationships and the glory of God.

“There are a growing number of churches in evangelical North America that have reinstated the biblical practice of women wearing a head-covering in public worship. It is being rediscovered that Paul’s use of theological arguments in support of this position makes it clear that godly women wearing a head-covering in public worship is a divine ordinance taught in God’s Word and not a result of legalism or tradition... A careful study of 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 teaches that God’s precept regarding head-coverings is binding for the New Testament church until Christ returns.”⁴

This study has discussed the interpretive issues of 1st Corinthians 11. There are several practical issues that this study has not discussed.⁵ A supplement entitled “Practical Issues” seeks a biblical perspective for questions such as: “Exactly *when* and *where* is a headcovering to be worn? Does Paul indicate what *style* is to be used? How should a Christian handle any relational concerns connected to the use of headcoverings?” While Christians have held a variety of opinions on these issues, the Church throughout history has, by and large, been unified on the general requirement for the use of headcoverings.

¹ Παράδοσις / *paradosis* (Strong’s #3862). The word is used in Scripture both *negatively* (referring to man-made traditions, cf. Matthew 15:3) and *positively* (the instructions given by the apostles, as in 2nd Thessalonians 2:15).

² That is, a physical act that represents a spiritual reality.

³ As noted above, Paul uses the word “ordinance” to introduce the topic of headcoverings in 1st Corinthians 11:2 (cf. KJV). His focus on ordinances continues beyond v.16 with the subsequent discussion of the Lord’s Supper.

⁴ Bartel Elshout, “The Wearing Head Coverings by Women in the Worship Services” in *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth* Vol. 20, No. 6 (Grand Rapids: Heritage Reformed Congregations, July/August 2012), 158.

⁵ For those who find themselves not “fully convinced in your own mind” (Romans 14:5) about the contemporary application of 1st Corinthians 11:2-16, this question is helpful until a firm conclusion is made: “Would it be better to treat a (possibly) local custom as a universal command (and thus follow it) and *be guilty 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?” (This rhetorical question was proposed by R.C. Sproul on [his website](#) and on his recording titled “To Cover or Not To Cover?”)

Ω APPENDIX A: HEADCOVERING THROUGHOUT CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Beginning with the Early Church, the use of headcoverings during prayer has the norm for Christian women throughout history. In the churches of Western society, this practice greatly declined (and often ceased) within the last century.¹ However, even today most men remove their hats when praying; throughout the centuries this practice “has ever ruled the custom of the Christian church.”²

Below is a historical overview of the Church's practice of 1st Corinthians 11:2-16. This overview includes quotations from believers such as Augustine, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, and Charles Spurgeon.³ Also included are more recent theologians that endorse the use of headcoverings (R.C. Sproul, Charles Ryrie, K.P. Yohannan, etc.) as well as countries and denominations in which the Christian practice continues.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY TO THE REFORMATION⁴

- **The Early Church:** “Early church history bears witness that in Rome, Antioch, and Africa the custom [of wearing the headcovering] became the norm [for the Church].”⁵ “Early Christian women accepted St. Paul's teaching as the directly inspired Word of God and therefore implemented the practice.”⁶ “The men prayed with their heads bare... the women covered.”⁷ Because of the “apostolic precept... women of the Oriental and African churches covered their heads... in the congregation.”⁸ “The apostle Thomas took the gospel to India and also taught the converts to Christ the importance of the head covering practice.”⁹ “Pictures on the walls of the Roman catacombs show the early Christian women wearing one.”¹⁰
- **Clement of Alexandria** (*theologian from Alexandria; c.150 - c. 215*): “Woman & man are to go to church decently attired... for this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.”¹¹ “Because of the angels... let her be veiled.”¹²

¹ For approximately 19 of the last 20 centuries, the Church has followed Paul's instructions in 1st Corinthians 11.

² Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers, Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 1041.

³ Several pictorial collections provide an overview of Christian women's attire throughout history. Online displays are offered by [La Vista Church of Christ](#) and [Scroll Publishing](#). Cf. Gary Sanseri, *Covered or Uncovered*, 182ff.

⁴ The headcovering instructions in 1st Corinthians 11 are distinct from the monastic practice of veiling in later times. In this, bishops would conduct a ceremony to “marry” a “perpetual virgin” to Christ by presenting her with a veil (to indicate her celibacy) and then pronounce a “marriage blessing.” Cf. Ronald A. Simkins & Gail S. Risch, *Religion and the Family* (Fordham University Press, 2008), 254-255; David Hunter, “Clerical Celibacy and the Veiling of Virgins” in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity* (Univ. of Michigan Press, 1999), 143ff.

⁵ [S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.](#), “1 Corinthians” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1247-1248.

⁶ Elizabeth Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (Random House LLC, 2007), 55.

⁷ [William Cave](#), *Primitive Christianity, 3rd Edition* (London: J. G., 1676), 286.

⁸ William Smith & Samuel Cheeatham, *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, Vol. 1* (J.B. Burr Publishing, 1880), 761.

⁹ Warren A. Henderson, *Glories Seen and Unseen* (Scroll Publishing, 2007), 33.

¹⁰ Renée Ellison, *The Biblical Headcovering* (2009), 27; cf. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Volume IV* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 162; The online [Bridgeman Art Library](#) provides pictorial examples.

¹¹ [Ante-Nicene Fathers](#), Volume Two, Book Five, The Instructor, [Book 3](#), Chapter 11.

¹² Clement, *Hypotyposes* ([Book 3](#)). Cited by [Oecumenius](#), a 10th century commentator.

- **Tertullian** (theologian from Carthage; c. 160 – c. 220): “The Christian man... [is] under no obligation to wear a covering” and the woman’s head “is bound to have the veil.”¹ “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... In fact, at this day the Corinthians do veil their virgins. What the apostles taught, their disciples approve.”² He also expresses how perplexed he is about “all the labour spent in arranging the hair” by Christian women when it has no bearing on their salvation. He states that it is in vain because “God bids you ‘be veiled.’”³
- **Hippolytus** (Roman theologian; 170 - 236 A.D.): “Let all the women have their heads covered.”⁴
- **Ambrosiaster** (early Bible commentator, c. 366-384 A.D.): In responding to Paul’s statement (v.7) that the praying man should be uncovered “since he is in the image and glory of God,” Ambrosiaster states, “Indeed, it [the man’s head] ought not to be hidden, for the glory of God is seen in the man.” When referring to the woman’s submission, he states that “a woman therefore ought to cover her head... in church out of reverence.”⁵
- **Jerome** (Roman translator of the Latin Vulgate; c. 347 – 420): When describing ladies living in monasteries of his time period, he states they would “not... go about with heads uncovered in defiance of the apostle’s command, for they wear a close-fitting cap.”⁶
- **John Chrysostom** (preacher, theologian, bishop of Constantinople; c. 349 – 407): “If it [the woman’s hair] be given [to] her for a covering... wherefore need she add another covering [cloth]? [In order] that not nature only, but also her own will may have part in her acknowledgment of subjection.”⁷ Going without a headcovering, contrary to Paul’s command, is an “indecentcy.”⁸
- **Severian of Gabala** (Syrian bishop, preacher in Constantinople; d. 408): After stating his belief that angels (v.10) must be present “when the Spirit is at work,” he wrote that “for this reason women ought to be covered.”⁹

¹ Tertullian, *De Corona*, Chapter 14.

² Tertullian, “On the Veiling of Virgins” (ch. 2, 8) in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4 (Book One, Part Three). Tertullian wrote specifically about the use of headcoverings by virgins in order to support the view (accepted by Greek scholars now, but disputed by some during Tertullian’s time) that the meaning of the Greek word for “women” in 1st Corinthians 11 included *unmarried* women. Cf. Tertullian, *On Prayer*, ch. 20-22.

³ Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, Book 2, Chapter 7.

⁴ *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus of Rome* (18:4).

⁵ Ambrosiaster (ed. Gerald Bray), *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 172.

⁶ Jerome, *Letter CXLVII*:5.

⁷ John Chrysostom, *Homily 26: 1st Corinthians 11:2*.

⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homily 15: Ephesians 4:31*.

⁹ “Fragmenta in epistulam i ad Corithios,” ed. K. Staab, *Pauluskommentar aus der griechischen Kirche aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt*, (Aschendorff: Münster, 1933), 262. Translated in: A. Philip Brown II, *A Survey of the History of the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (Aldersgate Forum, 2011), 7.

- **Basil of Caesarea** (*theologian*; c. 329 – 379): In a letter, he quoted Paul's command that men should not wear a headcovering during prayer and praised a man for following that command.¹
- **Theodoret of Cyrus** (*theologian*; c. 393 – c. 457): “[Paul] demonstrated sufficiently from [her] long hair that being covered² is fitting for the woman.”³
- **Augustine** (*theologian and writer in Roman Africa*; 354 - 430): “It is not becoming, even in married women, to uncover their hair, since the apostle commands women to keep their heads covered.”⁴
- **Northern Europe**: “A white veil... was worn by females at the time of receiving the eucharist during the 5th and 6th centuries. These veils were ordered by the councils of Autun (578) and Angers.”⁵ In A.D. 585, the **Synod of Auxerre** stated that women should wear a head-covering during the Lord's Supper.⁶ In the 7th century (c. 657), “**Cuminius the White**” (an Irish abbot) promoted the same.⁷ In Anglo-Saxon England around the 7th and 8th centuries, “it is likely that headcoverings for women became an established convention after the conversion... St. Paul taught that women should cover their heads when at prayer.”⁸ In the 10th & 11th centuries, Anglo-Saxon England was “a Christian society which followed St. Paul's dictum that women should cover their heads.”⁹
- **Catholic Church**: In the 6th century, Pope Gregory I **stated** that priests are not permitted to cover their heads while in church, unless they have an illness.¹⁰ In 743 A.D., the **Synod of Rome** stated that a “woman praying in church without her head covered brings shame upon her head, according to the word of the Apostle”¹¹ and “Let no bishop presbyter or deacon presume to enter upon the solemn celebration of masses... with his head covered because the apostle forbids men to pray in Church with covered head.”¹² In 866 A.D., Pope Nicolaus I stated that women should be veiled during church services.¹³

¹ Basil of Caesarea, *To the Clergy at Neocaesarea* (Letter 207), ch. 4.

² Referring to a cloth veil. Cf. Judith Kovacs, 1 Corinthians (Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 183.

³ *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli* in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)* (MPG) 82 (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), p. 312. Translated in: A. Philip Brown II, *A Survey of the History of the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (Aldersgate Forum, 2011), 9.

⁴ St. Augustine, *Epistula CCXLV*.

⁵ John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Vol. 10) (Harper & Bros., 1891), 739.

⁶ “The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church” in *The Church Quarterly Review*, Volume 10 (Spottiswoode, 1880), 78; Alvin J. Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced* (Mercer University Press, 1989), 136.

⁷ “The Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church” in *The Church Quarterly Review*, Volume 10 (Spottiswoode, 1880), 78.

⁸ Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 157.

⁹ Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 219.

¹⁰ Samuel Cheetham, *A History of the Christian Church During the First Six Centuries* (Macmillan, 1894), 384.

¹¹ Synod of Rome (Canon 3). Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, 382.

¹² Synod of Rome (Canon 13). Giovanni Domenico Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, 384. Cited in Oswald Joseph Reichel, *A Complete Manual of Canon Law*, Vol. 1 (Hodges, 1896), 103.

¹³ Alvin J. Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced* (Mercer University Press, 1989), 136.

- **Thomas Aquinas** (*philosopher and theologian*; 1225 – 1274): “It pertains to a man's dignity¹... not to wear a covering on his head... to show that he is immediately subject to God; but the woman should wear a covering to show that besides God she is naturally subject to another.”²

FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE LAST 100 YEARS

- **Martin Luther** (*German theologian and “father” of the Protestant Reformation*; 1483 – 1546): “The wife... shall not rule over her husband, but be subject and obedient to him. For that reason the wife wears a headdress, that is, the veil on her head.”³ “The wife should put on a veil, just as a pious wife is duty-bound to [her husband].”⁴ In reference to v.10, Luther states that “women should... be covered with a veil for the sake of the angels.”⁵
- **Hugh Latimer** (*chaplain to the English King Edward VI & martyr under Mary I*; c. 1487 – 1555): “Paul saith that ‘a woman ought to have a power on her head.’ What is this, to have a power on her head? It is a manner of speaking in Scripture... to have a sign and token of power, which is by covering her head... for she is not immediately under God, but *mediately*.” He then expresses concern that the Christian women of his day were using their headcoverings as a fashion item rather than as the meaningful symbol described by Scripture.⁶
- **The Augsburg Confession** (*doctrinal statement of the Lutheran churches*; 1530): “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 tranquility.”⁷
- **David Dickerson** (*Scottish theologian*; c.1583 - 1663): “It is dishonourable to the female sex to lay aside her veil.”⁸
- **John Cotton** (*English clergyman & colonist*; 1584-1652): “All the members of the Church... are to join together... the men with their heads uncovered, the women covered.”⁹
- **The Church of England** (1604¹⁰): “No man shall cover his head in the church or chapel.”¹¹

¹ Aquinas explains “dignity” as being man's relationship under God and man being the “glory of God” (v.7).

² Thomas Aquinas (Fabian Larcher, trans.), *Commentary On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Aquinas provided his own explanation for why bishops, nuns, and singers of his day were not contradicting the instruction of 1st Corinthians 11 when they wore (or did not wear) a covering on their heads.

³ Susan Karant-Nunn & Merry Wiesner (ed.), *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 95.

⁴ Susan Karant-Nunn & Merry Wiesner (ed.), *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 31.

⁵ John H Treadwell, *Martin Luther* (London: Marcus Ward & Co, 1881), 217.

⁶ *The Sermons of Hugh Latimer, Volume 1* (London: J. Scott, 1758), 280-281.

⁷ *The Augsburg Confession*, Article 28:54-55.

⁸ David Dickerson, *Commentaries on the Epistles* (1659).

⁹ John Cotton, *The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church* (Samuel Satterthwaite, 1642).

¹⁰ The quote cited is from the 1706 publication of *The Book of Common Prayer*. However, the statement dates back to 1604 edition. Cf. Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Volume 1 (Boydell & Brewer, 1994), 202.

¹¹ Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer: “Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical”* (Charles Bill, 1706), 5.

- **Anthony Sparrow** (*bishop in the Church of England; 1612 – 1685*): As a priest, he discussed the situation of women coming to church to give thanks after they give birth to a child. He stated that she “is to have a veil; and good reason, for it is as St. Paul says, every woman when she prays in public ought to have a veil or covering on her head, in token of her modesty and subjection.”¹
- **George Montaigne** (*British bishop; 1569–1628*): Because “most churches in, and about the citie of London” had “men and boyes sitting covered with their hats on their heads, without all shew of reverence or respect,” in 1627² Montaigne stated he felt the need for a change in this practice, in order for the churches to return to the “practise of all Christians in all ages in their... assemblies.”³
- **George Gillespie** (*Scottish theologian; 1613 – 1648*): **Arguing against the king's attempt** to impose a Catholic style of worship upon the church in Scotland, Gillespie wrote that the Catholic ceremonies have no basis in Scripture or in nature, in contrast to the use of headcoverings. “The Apostle... urgeth it [the headcovering] both by the... subjection of the woman... and by the long hair which nature gives to a woman... What need we [of] any more [reasons]? Let us see nature's institution, or the Apostle's recommendation, for the [Catholic Church's] controverted ceremonies (as we have seen them for women's veils), and we yield the argument.” Later he states that Paul provided “sufficient reasons for that order of covering or veiling the woman,” reasons well beyond his appeal (v.16) to the practice of the rest of the churches.⁴
- **John Bunyan** (*writer and pastor in England; 1628 - 1688*): “‘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.”⁵
- **John Edwards** (*pastor and theological author; 1637–1716*): “Paul's will is that the Corinthian men, who were converts and saints, should be bare-headed in their religious assemblies. And from St. Paul all Christians generally have received and practiced this usage... The Christian Churches at this day conform to this usage... That which the Apostle delivers in this chapter concerning women's behaviour in the churches did not only oblige the women of that time, but is obligatory to this very day. All Christian women are engaged by virtue of what the Apostle here saith, to be always with their heads covered in time of prayer and other religious exercises... But it will be said, ‘The argument of the Apostle will not hold now, covering the head being not a sign of subjection [in our culture]’... I answer, Christian women may... observe the Apostle's injunction [for reasons *beyond* the issue of submission, because]... there are other reasons, which will always hold... [Regarding Paul's mention of ‘angels’ in v.10,] this reason is perpetual.”⁶

¹ Anthony Sparrow & Lancelot Andrewes, *A Rationale Upon the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England* (T. Garthwait, 1840), 286.

² Cf. Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge University, 2003), 186.

³ Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Volume 1 (Boydell & Brewer, 1994), 202.

⁴ *The Works of Mr. George Gillespie* (R. Ogle and Oliver & Boyd, 1846), 117, 125.

⁵ 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), 418.

⁶ John Edwards, *An Enquiry Into Four Remarkable Texts of the New Testament* (J. Hayes, 1692), 125 & 130-135.

- **William Beveridge** (*British bishop*; 1637 – 1708): “Among those who disturbed the new-founded church of Corinth, there were some who contended, that in the public congregation men ought to have their heads veiled or covered, but that women should be unveiled or uncovered. Against this... the Apostle argues... and demonstrates that the contrary custom ought to be universally observed... In the last place he [Paul] produces his clearest and strongest argument, which he expresses in these words: *But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom [of covered men and uncovered women], neither the churches of God...* the appeal is here made to the Universal Church.” In support of this statement, Beveridge then refers to other theologians who lived approximately 3-7 centuries after Paul and who likewise supported the practice. Beveridge further explains, “the rites [practices] which were always common to the Universal church, that is to all churches through all ages... the same ought to be observed even now by every particular church.”¹
- **Roger Williams** (*theologian*; c. 1603 – 1683): As “one of New England's most prominent biblical interpreters,” he taught the rapidly-growing church in Salem (Massachusetts) to follow Paul's instructions about the use of headcoverings. “Shortly thereafter, some members of the Boston church suggested that it should follow Salem's model.” “Through his [William's] and others' influence, veils were worn... [in Boston] abundantly.” When this was later challenged, they “endeavoured to retain it [the headcovering] by the general argument of St. Paul.”² **John Endecott**, former governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, also sought to support the practice.³
- **Frédéric Louis Godet** (*Swiss theologian*; 1812 – 1900): “Was this conviction [of headcovering] 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... if they were true for his time, [they] are still so for ours.”⁴
- **Charles Spurgeon** (*British baptist preacher*; 1834 – 1892): “The reason why our sisters appear in the House of God with their heads covered is ‘because of the angels.’ The apostle says that a woman is to have a covering upon her head because of the angels.”⁵
- **Robert Dabney** (*pastor and theologian*; 1820 – 1898): Protesting a trend towards accepting female preachers in the mid-to-late 1800's, he stated: “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
- **Women of the Moravian Church**⁷ and the **early Methodist churches** wore headcoverings.⁸

¹ [London-Area Bishops], *An English Translation of a Latin Sermon Before the Convocation* (London: 1738), 6-8.

² Joseph Felt, *The Annals of Salem* (W. & S. B. Ives, 1827), 64; Lisa M. Gordis, *Opening Scripture* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 121-122; Larzer Ziff, *The Career of John Cotton* (Princeton University Press, 1962), 88.

³ Richard Hughes, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (University of Illinois Press, Jan 1, 1988), 21.

⁴ Frédéric Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, Volume 2* (T. & T. Clark, 1893), 132-133.

⁵ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Sermons on Angels*, (Kregel Academic, 1996), 98.

⁶ Robert Dabney, “Public Preaching of Women” in *The Southern Presbyterian Review*, Vol. 30 (October, 1879), 698.

⁷ The **Moravian Church Archives** provides information in **Issue 16** of their newsletter, as well as **pictures** in their online photo gallery. Cf. Mike Atnip, *Handmaiden of the Lamb: The Story of Anna Nitschmann*, 22-23, 27, 63.

⁸ Renée Ellison, *The Biblical Headcovering* (2009), 28.

- **London Presbyterians (1844):** A group of pastors associated with the [Westminster Assembly](#) stated that God's authority is to be the basis for Church government *universally*,¹ and that the “light of nature” is one expression of His authority. As an example of this, they wrote that, “In case of the habits of men and women in their public church assemblies, that women's heads should be covered, men's uncovered in praying or prophesying.. 'Judge in yourselves, is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man hath long hair, it is a shame to him? but if a woman have long hair it is a glory to her'... Here the apostle appeals plainly to the very light of nature for the regulating and directing of their habits in church assemblies.”²
- **John Darby** (*Bible teacher & [translator](#)*; 1800-1882): “The greatest truths are brought into connection with commonplace subjects. Here is a question, whether a woman is to have a covering on or not. The whole ordering of God is brought in to say whether a woman is to wear a cap on her head (v. 3-16)... The man is the head of the woman, and she puts a covering on her physical head to shew that there is authority over her.” Referring to a family that he knew personally, Darby stated that they did not follow the principles of 1st Corinthians 11:1-16 and he provided this correction: “The woman's head was to be covered. The apostle shews by her hair that God had covered her, and her mind and will are put on the same ground.”³
- **Elizabeth Stanton** (*agnostic feminist*; 1815 – 1902): “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... 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.”⁴
- **Frederick William Grant** (*Anglican priest*; 1834-1902): The headcovering is “in itself a very small thing... that which it signifies [is] not small at all.” The headcovering and what it symbolizes “has reference, of course, to [the] present... It is God's order as He has instituted it, and which we are bound to respect. There is meaning in it also, and we shall suffer if we refuse it.”⁵
- **Thomas Teignmouth Shore** (*British royal chaplain*; [1841-1911](#)) noted that the use of headcovering continued “in succeeding ages” beyond the time of Paul. He [wrote](#) that “to this day the universal custom [continues] in Christian places of worship, of women being covered and men uncovered.”⁶
- **Charles H Blois-Bishop** (*vicar in [Hertfordshire, England](#)*; early 1900's): “In my opinion it is just as bad for a woman to enter a church with her head uncovered as it would be for a man to enter with his hat on. The custom of women wearing hats and men removing theirs in the Christian church goes back for about 2,000 years to the preaching of St. Paul.”⁷

¹ The document notes that it is referring to: “not churches, but church, in the singular number, that is, of one... [not just] the church of Corinth, or any one particular church, but only of that one general Church on earth.”

² Thomas Henderson, ed, [The Divine Right of Church Government](#) (New York: R. Martin & Co, 1844), [ch. 3](#).

³ J.N. Darby, [Notes of Readings on 1 Corinthians](#) (Belfast: 1871), [ch 11](#).

⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, [The Woman's Bible](#) (CreateSpace, 2010), 139.

⁵ F.W. Grant, [The Numerical Bible](#), Vol. 6 (Loizeaux Brothers, 1902).

⁶ [C.J. Ellicott](#), ed, [A New Testament Commentary for English Readers, Volume 2](#) (Cassell & Company, 1884), [330](#).

⁷ Reported by the [North Towanda Evening News](#) on [January 15, 1929](#) and the [Associated Press](#) on [May 28, 1929](#).

- **Salvation Army** (late 1800's): [H. A. Ironside](#), in his commentary on 1st Corinthians 11:10, described how the young female members of the Salvation Army of his time wore blue [bonnets](#) in following Paul's instructions.¹
- **Catholic Church** ([1917 Code of Canon Law](#), 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."²
- **Henry Thornhill Morgan** (*British clergyman*; 1840-1910): Paul's instruction about headcoverings were part of the "faith and worship" that was "set up at the first [in the beginning], and has prevailed throughout the Church." Morgan recommends adhering to the original practices of the Church, which "applies not only to small things, like women covering their heads, but to all matters which are in dispute amongst Christians."³
- **Henry Goudge** (*head of Wells Theological College*): 1st Corinthians 11:2-16 "is the great N.T. [New Testament] example of the principles, upon which ceremonial and ritual questions must be decided. It is noticeable, in the first place, that S. [Saint] Paul regards this question [about the use of headcoverings] as worth deciding, and does not brush it aside as trivial. There is a right, and a wrong, way of worshiping God. Secondly, he decides it by the touchstone of Christian doctrine. It is not a matter of taste; it is not a matter of national custom... Christian ritual must conform to and express Christian doctrine... The duty of a local...church is to... see that it does not set at nought [as nothing] Apostolic practice." To do so would be "contrary to the mind of the Spirit [of God]."⁴
- **Alice Morse Earle** (*American historian & author*; 1851 – 1911): In her 1903 book entitled *Two Centuries of Costume in America*, she states: "One singular thing may be noted in this history, – that with all the vagaries of fashion, woman has never violated the Biblical law that bade her cover her head. She has never gone to church services bareheaded."⁵
- **Charles Andrew Coates** (*Christian author & hymn-writer*; 1862-1945): "This principle [of headship] should always regulate us, but 1 Corinthians 11 teaches us that it is to do so in a formal manner even as to our outward appearance whenever we take our places definitely as in relation to God, either in speaking to Him or speaking for Him... I think there is a growing exercise amongst the dear sisters relative to the question of being covered in prayer, and one is thankful for this. The scripture in 1 Corinthians 11 is plain enough... We have precise instruction as to the woman having her head covered when she prays or prophesies. This marks her place in the great economy of headship, and she does well to cherish it as her own peculiar glory... I do not think I have seen any instance of sisters walking about uncovered."⁶

¹ H. A. Ironside, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (1938), 124.

² Catholic Church, *The 1917 Or Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law* (Ignatius Press, 2001), 427.

³ [Henry Morgan](#), *Practical Reflections on Every Verse of the New Testament* (London: Rivingtons, 1889), 319.

⁴ Henry Leighton Goudge, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Third Edition (London: Methuen & Co, 1911), 97.

⁵ Alice Morse Earle, *Two Centuries of Costume in America (1620-1820)*, Vol 2 (The Macmillan Company, 1903), 582.

⁶ [C.A. Coates](#), *Letters of C. A. Coates* (Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 1947), 148, 204, 312-13. Cited at [MyBrethren.org](#).

A TRANSITION IN THE LAST CENTURY

Into the late 1800's, Christian writers could refer to the "church at large" and state that "as a general rule Christian women... have covered their heads in the place of assembly. Men, to speak generally, have always prayed with uncovered head."¹ In 1920, a British writer and physician noted: "Even at the present day St. Paul's injunction is still observed by Christendom."² However, in approximately the last 100 years, many churches slowly ended the practice.

- **North American Transitions:** In the early 1900's it was observed that some "churches which once upheld [the use of headcoverings]... have now dropped it."³ "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 America until the 1950's."⁴ Similarly, "in the late 19th century, American women opted for hats in lieu of bonnets and veils... It took only another 20 years [into the 1950's] before women generally grew tiresome of wearing hats during Protestant religious services."⁵ "Writing in reference to 1st Corinthians 11, a Presbyterian pastor noted in the 1990's that the passage "has stirred up considerable controversy especially in the last twenty-five to fifty years."⁶ The Reformed Presbytery of North America reversed their traditional use of headcoverings as recently as 2001.⁷
- **R.C. Sproul Jr.** (*theologian and author*): "The church has rejected this practice in the last thirty or forty years, not because of new interpretive insights, but because of pressure from the world."⁸
- **Mennonites:** Some Mennonites switched to hats by the 1930's and some gave up the use of headcoverings by the end of World War II.⁹ The [General Conference Mennonites](#) had largely abandoned the headcovering practice in the early 1900's¹⁰ but brought it back as an official doctrine in the 1960's.¹¹ Soon afterwards, the Mennonite Conference of Ontario "decreed that the head-covering ordinance had neither scriptural or historical foundations."¹²

¹ William Smith & Samuel Cheetham, *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, Vol. 1 (J.B. Burr Publishing, 1880), [761](#).

² [Havelock Ellis](#), *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 1* (F.A. Davis, 1920), [56](#).

³ [Daniel Kauffman](#), *Bible Doctrine* (Mennonite Publishing House, 1914), [423](#).

⁴ [Robert Spinney](#), *Should Christian Women Wear Head Coverings Today?*

⁵ Warren A. Henderson, *Glories Seen and Unseen* (Scroll Publishing, 2007), 33.

⁶ Richard Bacon, "Paul's Discourse on the Use of Head Coverings During Public Worship – Part One" in *The Blue Banner* (Volume 7, Issue 5, May 1998), [2](#).

⁷ The Reformed Presbytery In North America, [The Practice Of Headcoverings In Public Worship](#) (2001).

⁸ Gary Sanseri, *Covered Or Uncovered* (Milwaukie, OR: Back Home Industries, 1999), x.

⁹ Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2008), [196-197](#).

¹⁰ Cf. C. Henry Smith, *The Mennonites of America* (Mennonite Publishing House, 1909), [388](#).

¹¹ [Mennonite Confession of Faith](#) (Herald Press, 1963). Cf. Articles [8](#) & [14](#).

¹² Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Univ. of Manitoba Press, 2008), [192](#).

- **Roman Catholics:** Women often stopped wearing headcoverings to church in the 1960's.¹ Some nuns ceased wearing them in the 1970's.² "The Church officially required it of women at Mass until the requirement... was dropped in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. However, it remains part of the Catholic tradition for many women to continue the practice even today."³
- **Luma Simms** (*guest writer for Christianity Today*): "The practice of head covering continued even up to the early 20th century... By the 1960s in the West, the biblical practice had become merely a tradition, so when hats fell out of style, the practice was dropped in Christian churches."⁴
- **Mary Kassian** (*author & seminary professor*): "It is only in the past three or four decades [since the 1960's] that its observance has slipped away — particularly in Western society."⁵
- **R. C. Sproul** (*theologian & pastor; b. 1939*): "During my high school years, when I went to church on Sunday morning, I never saw a woman in that church (this was a mainline Presbyterian church) whose head wasn't covered with a hat or a veil. That is one of those customs that has simply disappeared for the most part from Christian culture."⁶
- **Susan Foh** (*author on women's issues*): "The discontinuance of coverings for women... [happened within] most denominations only in this century."⁷
- **Robert D. Culver** (*college & seminary professor, author*): "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."⁸
- **J. Robertson McQuilkin** (*university president*): "Historically, evangelicals held that God communicated truth through men in such a way that it could be understood and serve as a divine guide for thought and life... [but perhaps because of] the influence of postmodernism... [now we have a] divided evangelical household... Some among us have become relative relativists, yielding more and more ground to the realm of uncertainty... [for example] we gave up... head coverings... Now we are challenged by fellow evangelicals to give up Adam and Eve, role distinctions in marriage, limitations on divorce, exclusively heterosexual unions, hell, faith in Jesus Christ as the only way to acceptance with God and —most pivotal— an inerrant Bible."⁹

¹ The *1917 Code of Canon Law* required the use of headcoverings, however the *1983 Code of Canon Law* did not. There is debate whether Canon 6 of the *1983 Code* indicates a removal of the 1917 guideline on headcoverings, or if Canons 20-21 & 27-28 of the *1983 Code* indicate otherwise. 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) 31.

² Jennifer Heath, *The Veil: Women Writers on Its History, Lore, and Politics* (University of California Press, 2008), 82.

³ Elizabeth Kuhns, *The Habit: A History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (Random House LLC, 2007), 55.

⁴ Luma Simms, *Uncovering the Head Covering Debate* (Christianity Today Online, September 2013).

⁵ Mary Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Crossway Books, 1990), 179.

⁶ R.C. Sproul, *Now, That's a Good Question!* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 347.

⁷ Susan Foh (Clouse & Clouse, ed.) *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (InterVarsity Press, 1989), 86-87.

⁸ Robert Culver (Clouse & Clouse, ed.), "A Traditional View" in *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (InterVarsity Press, 1989), 29.

- **Klock** (*Rector, Reformed Episcopal Church*): “This practice of bearing the outward sign of obedience to God’s design has slipped away so quietly, that it hasn’t even been an issue in most Western churches. And yet, there are many of you here – say those over fifty or sixty – who have seen this shift in practise take place in your own lifetime. When some of you were children every woman wore a hat to church and yet today it’s extremely rare... The practice [of women without a headcovering] has mainly followed wherever the feminist agenda has been pushed and has won out in the culture.”¹

CONTINUING INTO THE PRESENT

In the last century, use of headcoverings has greatly decreased in Western countries. However, many believers continue to wear headcoverings in response to Scripture.

Western Churches & Denominations That Currently Practice Headcovering

- **Anabaptists:** Some Christian groups with an Anabaptist heritage practice headcovering. This includes women from [Amish](#), some [Mennonite](#),² [Old German Baptist Brethren](#), [Hutterite](#), and [Apostolic Christian](#)³ groups.
- **Other Denominations:** Some Reformed Baptists churches, the Free Presbyterians,⁴ the [Plymouth Brethren](#),⁵ the Dutch Reformed churches,⁶ the [Church of the Brethren](#)⁷ all practice headcovering. Most professors at [Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary](#) are in favor of the practice of headcovering.⁸
- **Other Christians:** Some churches from other backgrounds practice headcovering,⁹ and [some individuals practice headcovering](#) even though their church does not make it an official practice.

⁹ Robertson McQuilkin and Bradford Mullen, “[The Impact of Postmodern Thinking on Evangelical Hermeneutics](#)” in the [Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society](#) (Vol. 40/1, March 1997), 69–82.

¹ [William Klock](#), *Headship and Its Symbols* (British Columbia: Living Word Reformed Episcopal Church, October 2009), [sermon transcription](#).

² 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 website](#)), and the *Church of God in Christ, Mennonite* (as [documented](#) in their *Principles of Faith*).

³ [We Believe](#), Apostolic Christian Church of North Pheonix.

⁴ Their [website](#) has a [specific section](#) with a statement on headcoverings.

⁵ A conservative, evangelical movement also called “Christian Brethren” (not to be confused with the “Church of the Brethren”). [Most women](#) in the [Plymouth Brethren](#) churches [practice headcovering](#). “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.” The Christian Brethren of Pawtucket, *Our Legacy* (Pawtucket, MA: 2012).

⁶ Such as these denominations: “[Netherlands Reformed](#),” “[Heritage Reformed](#),” and “[Free Reformed](#).”

⁷ 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.”

⁸ Per author’s correspondence with seminary faculty.

⁹ Including some from the following groups: [Baptist](#), [Presbyterian](#), [house churches](#), Bible churches, [Gospel Chapel](#), etc.

Other Locations Where Christians Currently Practice Headcovering

- **Generally:** “The practice [of headcovering] continues to appear with many of the Chinese, Asian, African,¹ and Eastern European Christians. Women there wear one today just by learning about it from the Scriptures, without having been taught about it.”²
- **China:** “Chinese Christians in the underground church...are following the head covering teaching.”³
- **The Middle East:** Women in Eastern Orthodox churches,⁴ including [Egyptian](#) Christians,⁵ cover their heads during church.⁶
- **India:** The Christian use of a headcovering during times of prayer has been “the common practice in the whole country, regardless of denominational differences,” (though some Indian believers have now begun to ask about using headcovering because of “the influence of the West in the recent past”).⁷ “In India, women will often put part of their *sari* over their heads while in church. Those who wear *salwar kameez* use the accompanying shawl as a covering... And in Northeast India and Nepal, a small scarf is used as a head covering.”⁸ 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.”⁹
- **Northern Asia:** “Even today, born again Christians from the former Soviet Bloc countries still cover their heads with a veil.”¹⁰ For example, Christian women in Kazakhstan wear the headcovering today (not as a cultural tradition, but specifically in response to 1st Corinthians 11).¹¹ Many Russian Orthodox churches and Russian Baptist churches (even those outside of Russia) continue the practice taught in 1st Corinthians 11:2-16.¹²

¹ Cf. Gaius Anonaba Umahi, [Head Covering in Selected Churches in Igboland, Nigeria](#) (VDM Publishing, 2010).

² Renée Ellison, [The Biblical Headcovering](#) (2009), 28.

³ Warren A. Henderson, *Glories Seen and Unseen* (Scroll Publishing, 2007), 33.

⁴ The second largest Christian group in the world, after Roman Catholicism.

⁵ Cf. Christine A. Mallouhi, *Miniskirts, Mothers and Muslims: A Christian Woman in a Muslim Land* (Monarch Books, 2004), 67; Lara Iskander & Jimmy Dunn, [An Overview of the Coptic Christians of Egypt](#).

⁶ Luma Simms, [Uncovering the Head Covering Debate](#) (Christianity Today Online, September 2013).

⁷ K.P. Yohannan, [Head Coverings](#) (Kerala, India: Believer’s Church Publications, 2011), 8.

⁸ K.P. Yohannan, [Head Coverings](#) (Kerala, India: Believer’s Church Publications, 2011), 35.

⁹ Daniel Botkin, [The Validity and Value of the Woman’s Headcovering](#) (East Peoria, IL: Gates of Eden, 1995), 8. Also included in the book *Women of Worth*, Reneé Lovelace (Xulon Press, 2009), 109.

¹⁰ R.J. Vogel, [Is the Headcovering Really An Issue?](#) (1999).

¹¹ Per author’s personal correspondence with missionaries to Kazakhstan.

¹² Per author’s personal correspondence with a missionary to northern and central Asia. See also: [On The Covering of Heads](#), Parish Life (Washington, DC: Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, August 1994); *Laity Guidelines*, (New York, NY: Orthodox Church in America); *FAQ’s: Top Ten Questions Visitors Have* (Austin, TX: Holy Protection Orthodox Church). An [online video](#) shows the use of headcoverings in a Russian Orthodox church.

Bible Scholars and Authors Who Advocate The Practice of Headcovering

- **Michael Sadler** (*British theologian*; 1819 – 1895): The headcovering “involve[s] great principles of Divine order” and Paul “bases it upon the primacy [supremacy] of God Himself.” “It may be asked why have these ordinances or traditions not been preserved and come down to us?” Even though it is now contrary to “modern religious sentiment,” “the direction in which the Church was to sail must have been given from the first [that is, the beginning].”¹
- **Harry A. Ironside** (*Canadian-American theologian & author*; 1876 – 1951): Ironside believed that he himself ought not wear a head covering while in the pulpit, and that a woman ought to wear one while in church. According to him, the woman's 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 the believer's response to Paul's instructions about the headcovering “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 customs of the day in which we live.”²
- **Daniel Kauffman** (*Mennonite author and educator*; 1865 – 1944): “May every local church, or any sister in the Lord who drops [the use of] her devotional covering, honestly test herself whether it is not simply exchanging the divine plan for a man-made plan.”³
- **John Murray** (*Scottish theologian, Princeton professor, seminary founder*; 1898 – 1975): “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.”⁴
- **Watchman Nee** (*influential Chinese church leader*; 1903 – 1972): “As to the sisters covering their heads, there are many benefits to the practice.”⁵ “God has sovereignly willed that...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.' ...There is no such custom among the apostles that the sisters are not covered. This is a matter which is non-negotiable.”⁶ The practice of “head covering is definitely in the Bible... we have to stand on the side of what is in the Bible.”⁷ “It [the headcovering] expresses a profound principle... the sign of submission... We ask all the sisters in the church to cover their heads in the meetings when a message is given or when they pray... The sisters are declaring to the world the proper standing that everyone should take before Christ... Head covering may appear to be a small thing; yet it is a great testimony!”⁸

¹ Michael Ferree Sadler, *The First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (George Bell, 1897), 166-167.

² H. A. Ironside, *Epistle to the Corinthians* (Louizeaux Brothers, 1973), 331-332, 339.

³ Daniel Kauffman, *Bible Doctrine* (Mennonite Publishing House, 1914), 423.

⁴ John Murray, “A Letter To The Evangelical Presbyterian Church” in *Presbyterian Reformed Magazine* (Winter 1992).

⁵ Watchman Nee, *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 22* (Living Stream Ministry, 1993), 106.

⁶ Watchman Nee, *Love One Another* (Christian Fellowship Publications, 1975), 87.

⁷ Watchman Nee, *Further Talks on the Church Life* (Living Stream Ministry, 1997), 60-61.

⁸ *Head Covering*, Watchman Nee, Living Stream Ministry (Anaheim, CA: 2003).

- **Witness Lee** (*Chinese preacher closely associated with Watchman Nee*; 1905 – 1997): “We should practice such things as baptism by immersion...and head covering.”¹ “[Paul’s] instruction concerning head covering is not based upon any religious practices or human customs... Therefore, in the church meetings the sisters should wear a head covering to signify that we recognize God’s authority and respect His headship.”² “It is important to care for the matter of head covering because it is related to the headship of Christ.”³
- **William MacDonald** (*Bible college president & author*; 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.”⁴
- **Charles C. Ryrie** (*author, seminary professor, Bible college president*; b. 1925): “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.”⁵ Paul’s command “was not connected with some local Corinthian peculiarity.”⁶
- **R. C. Sproul** (*theologian & pastor*; b. 1939): “We are persuaded that the biblical mandate is still in effect... If there’s ever an indication of a perpetual ordinance in the church, it is that which is based on an appeal to Creation... 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
- **Bruce Waltke** (*seminary professor & author*; b. 1930): “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.”⁸
- **Mary Kassian** (*seminary professor & author*): “Both the principle [headship] and its commanded behavioral expression [headcovering] are seen as applicable today... women should veil themselves today.”⁹

¹ Witness Lee, *A Brief Presentation of the Lord’s Recovery* (Anaheim CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1990), 54.

² Witness Lee, *Life-Study of 1 Corinthians: Messages 48-69* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1990), 470-471.

³ Witness Lee, *Basic Training* (Living Stream Ministry, 1978), 28.

⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 1786.

⁵ *The Ryrie Study Bible Expanded Edition* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1832.

⁶ Charles Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church, First Edition* (Moody Publishers), 74; Charles Ryrie, *The Pauline Doctrine of the Church* (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 115:457, January 1958).

⁷ R. C. Sproul, *Now, That’s a Good Question!*, 347-348. Sproul further expresses his belief that headcovering is a universal command in: *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1977), 110; “Table Talk Magazine” (*Coram Deo*), June 17-21 1996.

⁸ Bruce Waltke, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978), 55-56.

⁹ Mary Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Crossway Books, 1990), 104.

- **Robert D. Culver** (college & seminary professor, author): 1st Corinthians 11 “has taught believers of every clime and time... [that] she is to wear an additional headcovering.”¹
- **S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.** (seminary professor; 1915-2004): 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 symbol and practical submission] is the ideal.”² “Is the head covering merely a cultural matter? That’s frequently said today. We don’t really have to pay much attention to this passage because this is just cultural... [But] look at what the reasons are the apostle says, the reasons that Paul gives, for what he’s talking about here are not cultural reasons... Creation. Woman’s hair itself. Nature itself. Angelic beings are looking down upon us. Those are not cultural reasons.”³
- **Gary Inrig** (seminary professor, pastor, author): “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.”⁴
- **Susan Foh** (author on women's issues): “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.”⁵
- **Andrée Seu** (World Magazine writer): “I read in 1 Corinthians 11 that the woman's head is to be covered in worship. The modern Christian consensus tells me that is a relative and obsolete command, dealing with some first-century problem in the city of Corinth. My high-school literary skills tell me otherwise: The command is rooted in creation (verses 7-9) and in nature (verse 14). And if that weren't ironclad enough, I am to cover my head 'because of the angels.' 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?”⁶
- **K.P. Yohannan** (founder of *Gospel for Asia*; b. 1951): “Wearing the head covering is biblical, and... is to be taught and obeyed... Paul makes it absolutely clear that this teaching is for everyone, in every place.”⁷

¹ Robert Culver (Clouse and Clouse, ed.), “A Traditional View” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 28.

² S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. (Pfeiffer and Harrison, ed.), “1 Corinthians,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1247-48.

³ S. Lewis Johnson, *Covering the Head in Worship* (sermon transcription).

⁴ Gary Inrig, *Life in His Body* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1975), 165, 172.

⁵ Susan T. Foh (Clouse and Clouse, ed.), “A Male Leadership View: The Head of the Woman Is the Man” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 86-89.

⁶ Andrée Seu, “A Symbol of Glory” in *World Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 20 (June 02, 2007).

⁷ K.P. Yohannan, *Head Coverings* (Kerala, India: Believer's Church Publications, 2011), 8, 16.

- **R. C. Sproul Jr.** (*theologian*, b. 1965): “I believe in head coverings at church.” “He [God] does tell us what our wives ought to be wearing on their heads... Our family has followed the practice.” “I’m also happy to boldly suggest that virtually every Christian, from the time of Paul’s epistle to about half a century ago, agrees with me on this issue.”¹
- **William Klock** (*Rector, Reformed Episcopal Church*): “I think we in the modern Western church would do well to take this [v.16] to heart. The apostles of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ have dictated this practice, with the guidance of the Spirit, and this is the only practice we have... This isn’t ad hoc and it isn’t just to address a local situation. This is the practice of the churches of God. The practice described here is the only biblical option, the only apostolic option, and the only practice of the Church universal.”²

¹ R.C. Sproul Jr.’s blog ([#1](#), [#2](#), [#3](#)).

² William Klock, *Headship and Its Symbols* (British Columbia: Living Word Reformed Episcopal Church, October 2009), [sermon transcription](#).

Ω APPENDIX B: KEY TERMS AND PHRASES

When seeking to understand a section of the Bible, it can be helpful to look at a word's definition(s) in the original language of the passage. This is especially true in regards to 1st Corinthians 11, in which a person's conclusions about Paul's teaching can depend on the specific meaning of the words Paul used.¹

This Appendix contains further information on the following key terms and phrases.

- Headcoverings in the Old Testament
- The word *head* in 1st Corinthians 11
- The phrase *have her hair cut off* in 1st Corinthians 11
- The word *hair* in 1st Corinthians 11
- The terms referring to the coverings in 1st Corinthians 11
- The word *for* in 1st Corinthians 11:15
- The word *nature* in 1st Corinthians 11:14

¹ For the Greek and Hebrew definitions given in this study, the following resources were consulted: [Strong's Bible Dictionary](#) (James Strong), [Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament](#) (Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider), [Smith's Bible Dictionary](#) (William Smith), [Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon](#), [Vine's Greek Dictionary](#) (William Vine), [Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament](#) (Spiros Zodhiates), [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"), [Theological Lexicon of the New Testament](#) (Ceslas Spicq), [The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament](#) (Danker & Krug), and [Louw-Nida Greek Lexicon](#) (Eugene Nida, Johannes Louw).

FEMALE HEADCOVERINGS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

Hebrew Term	Passage	Summary
<i>tsa`iyph</i>²	<i>Genesis 24:65</i>	Rebekah covers herself with her shawl when she sees her future husband
	<i>Genesis 38:14,19</i>	Tamar put on a veil as a prostitute ³
<i>para</i>⁴	<i>Numbers 5:18</i>	The priest uncovers the head of women accused of adultery ⁵
<i>radiyd</i>⁶	<i>Song of Solomon 5:7</i>	The wife's veil was taken by the city watchmen
	<i>Isaiah 3:23</i>	God removes the turbans of prideful women
<i>tsammah</i>⁷	<i>Song of Solomon 4:1,3 & 6:7</i>	The wife's eyes are behind her veil
	<i>Isaiah 47:2</i>	God shames the “daughter of Babylon” by removing her veil
<i>pě'er</i>⁸	<i>Isaiah 3:20</i>	God removes the veil of prideful women
<i>tsaniyph</i>⁹	<i>Isaiah 3:23</i>	God removes the turbans of prideful women

¹ Headpieces such as crowns (Esther 2:17, 2nd Samuel 12:30) and helmets (1st Samuel 17:5, 38) are not included in this section. Genesis 20:16, with the phrase “a covering of the eyes” (KJV), is also omitted since this archaic English phrase (not shared by modern translations) is not referring to a literal “cover” over the eyes.

² *tsa`iyph* / צַעִיפָה (Strong's #6809), which means “wrapper, shawl, or veil.”

³ Tamar's veil was the *cause* for Judah's belief that she was a prostitute (Genesis 38:15). This obviously was not same signal that Rebekah's veil gave (Genesis 24:65, above).

⁴ *para* / פָּרַע (Strong's #6544), which means “to loosen restraints.”

⁵ Generally, newer translations render this verse as “unbind her hair” while older translations have “uncover her head.” The Hebrew text has the word “head” rather than “hair.”

⁶ *radiyd* / רָדִיד (Strong's #7289), meaning “something spread, wide wrapper or large veil.”

⁷ *tsammah* / צַמְמָה (Strong's #6777), meaning “veil.”

⁸ *pě'er* / פֶּאֶר (Strong's #6287), meaning “head-dress, turban, or bonnet.”

⁹ *tsaniyph* / צַנִיפָה (Strong's #6797), meaning “turban or headdress” (from a word meaning “to wrap around”).

MALE HEADCOVERINGS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Hebrew Term	Passage	Summary
<i>mitsnepheth</i>¹	<i>Exodus 28:4, 37, 39; 29:6; 39:28, 31; Leviticus 8:9, 16:4</i>	The priest wears a turban
<i>migba`ah</i>²	<i>Exodus 28:40, 29:9, 39:28 Leviticus 8:13</i>	The priest wears a cap
<i>macveh</i>³	<i>Exodus 34:33-35</i>	Moses veiled his face after standing in God's presence
<i>para</i>⁴	<i>Leviticus 10:6</i>	Moses tells the priests not to uncover their heads
	<i>Leviticus 13:45</i>	A leper must uncover his hair
	<i>Leviticus 21:10</i>	The high priest must not uncover his head
<i>chaphah</i>⁵	<i>2nd Samuel 15:30</i>	David covered his head when mourning
	<i>Esther 6:12</i>	Haman goes home in shame with his head covered
	<i>Jeremiah 14:3-4</i>	The farmers cover their heads in shame
<i>addereth</i>⁶	<i>1st Kings 19:13</i>	Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle
<i>kacah</i>⁷	<i>Isaiah 29:10</i>	God covered the seers' heads, to discipline them
<i>pe'er</i>⁸	<i>Isaiah 61:10</i>	A bridegroom wears a turban like a priest
	<i>Ezekiel 24:17, 23</i>	God tells Ezekiel to not remove his turban
	<i>Ezekiel 44:18</i>	The priests must wear turbans
<i>karbla</i>⁹	<i>Daniel 3:21</i>	Wearing turbans , Daniel's friends were thrown into the fire
<i>tsaniyph</i>¹⁰	<i>Zechariah 3:5</i>	In a vision, a clean turban is put on Zechariah's head

¹ *mitsnepheth* / מצנפה (Strong's #4701), meaning "turban" or "mitre" of the high priest.

² *migba`ah* / מגבעה (Strong's #4021), meaning "turban" or "bonnet" or "headgear."

³ *macveh* / מסוה (Strong's #4533), meaning "veil."

⁴ *para`* / פרע (Strong's #6544), meaning "to loosen restraints."

⁵ *chaphah* / חפה (Strong's #2645), meaning "cover, overlay."

⁶ *addereth* / אדרת (Strong's #0155), meaning "mantle/cloak made of fur or fine material."

⁷ *kacah* / כסה (Strong's #6380), meaning "to cover, conceal, or hide."

⁸ *pe'er* / פאר (Strong's #6287), meaning "head-dress, turban, or bonnet."

⁹ *karbla* / כרבלע (Strong's #3737). The meaning is debated, but may include "mantle, robe, cap, turban, helmet."

¹⁰ *tsaniyph* / צניף (Strong's #6797), meaning "turban or headdress" (from a word meaning "to wrap around").

THE WORD “HEAD”

As in English, the Greek word translated “head”¹ can refer to either a *physical* head (ie., “the hair on your head”) or a *positional* or *authority* head (ie., “the head of a company”).²

The beginning of 1st Corinthians 11 uses “head” to refer to position or authority.

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.

In this passage, the *covered*, *uncovered*, and *shaved* heads are obviously referring to a physical head. But in the middle of this passage, it's less clear which type of “head” is “disgraced.”

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.

Is the “disgraced head” referring to the person's own *physical* head or to the person's *authority* head? Either meaning could create a true statement, which makes it difficult to narrow down Paul's meaning.

The reference to authority (v.3) is in close context here, so perhaps the “disgraced” head is referring to the person's authority head. On the other hand, perhaps the shame of having a shaved head is primarily the woman's own *personal* shame. Since this is equated (v.5) to the shame of not wearing a headcovering, the shame of no headcovering may also be personal.³ In the end, perhaps the effect may be the same – *both* personal disgrace and disgrace to one's authority could result.⁴

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

² While most scholars conclude that “head” refers to *authority*, a minority argue that it means *source*. Two observations from v.2-16 are: (1) that *authority* (not *source*) is in view by Paul when he says, “God is the head of Christ” (each have eternally co-existed) and (2) v.10 specifically uses the word “authority” when referring to the symbol of headship.

³ This “personal” connection may also be strengthened through the relationship between personal hair length and the personal use of a headcovering (v.14-15).

⁴ Similarly, shame can be brought to both an organization and its designated representative when it becomes publicly known that the representative made some embarrassingly poor choices.

THE PHRASE “HAVE HER HAIR CUT OFF”1st Corinthians 11

- (4) Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying 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) 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.
 (7) For a man ought not to have his head covered...

Paul says (v.6) that a woman who does not wear a covering should “have her hair cut off.” The Greek word translated “cut off”¹ means *to cut short, clip, shear, or crop*. The word indicates hair cut with scissors or shears,² while the word “shaved”³ (also used in v.6) indicates hair cut with a razor.⁴

However, the NIV Bible provides an alternative rendering⁵ of v.4-7...

1st Corinthians 11

- (4) Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head.
 (5) But every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair dishonors her head—she is just like one of the “shorn women.”
 (6) 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.
 (7) A man ought not to have long hair...

This rendering (not found in any other translation nor in the original Greek text) removes the concept of “covered” and replaces it with “long hair.” This adjustment in wording creates several inconsistencies:

- In v.5, the word “shaved” is replaced by the word “shorn.”⁶ This modification was apparently necessary because the text would otherwise be inconsistent with the original message.⁷
- In the beginning of v.6, the commanded action (“let her have her hair cut off”) is changed into a command for non-action (“let her be for now with short hair”). This happens again at the end of the verse: “let her cover her head” becomes “she should grow it again.”
- This modification of Scripture suffers from the interpretive inconsistencies listed on page 6ff.

¹ *keirō* / κείρω (Strong’s #2751). The NASB’s literal rendering of this phrase is: “let her also shear herself.”

² In Acts 8:32, the same word “shorn” is used in reference to shearing sheep.

³ *xurao* / ξυράω (Strong’s #3587). Used in Leviticus 21:5 LXX to refer to shaving a beard.

⁴ Both words are used in Acts to describe men who are under a vow: Acts 18:18 (“crop”) & Acts 21:24 (“shave”).

⁵ This rendering is found within the NIV footnote for v.7.

⁶ These are two different Greek words. Interestingly, the NIV is faithful to differentiate them in v.6.

⁷ As in all English translations, the phrase “she is just like” is used to express similarity. But the alternative rendering of “with no covering of hair... she is just like a shaved woman” would express equality, not similarity.

THE WORD “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.

In this passage, two different terms are used to refer to hair.¹ They are somewhat unique words; neither of them are the common term for “hair” in the New Testament.

#1) “...if a man has long hair ... if a woman has long hair...”

- The phrase “has long hair” comes from only one Greek word. The word means simply “to wear long hair” or “to let one’s hair grow long.”²
- [Plutarch](#), who lived during the time of Paul, also used this word when he wrote:
 “In Greece... men cut their hair short; women let it grow.”³
- This is the only chapter in the New Testament where this term is used. This word is derived from the other Greek word for “hair” used in this passage (listed below).

#2) “...her hair is given to her for a covering.”

- Here, the term “hair” specifically refers to “ornamental locks.”⁴
- *Length* is not the specific emphasis of this word, but rather *style*.⁵
- “From classical to hellenistic times κόμη often denotes hair perceived as an ornament... [in contrast to] hair in a more anatomical sense.”⁶

¹ In the Greek text, v.14-15 are the only verses of the chapter which use the word “hair.” English translations often add the word “hair” within v.6, but the original literal phrase is “let her shear herself.”

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

³ Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 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](#)).

⁴ *kome* / κόμη (Strong’s #2864), used only once in the Bible. This word is also found in the Septuagint (Numbers 6:5 and Ezekiel 44:20). In both passages, the NASB translates the word “locks.” The word’s extra-biblical usage is [noted](#) in Liddell-Scott’s Greek Lexicon.

⁵ As noted in Strong’s Bible Dictionary, Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, BDAG, and Zodhiates’s Word Study Dictionary. Liddle-Scott-Jones [states](#) that Aristotle used this term in [his book on meteorology](#) when describing the luminous tail of a comet. The English word “comet” [finds its roots](#) in this Greek word because of the resemblance of the comet’s tail to long, streaming hair.

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), [825](#).

THE COVERINGS1st Corinthians 11

- (4) Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.
- (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.

v.4 → *kata kephalē* (prepositional phrase): to have something over the head

- The phrase is literally *down/over/along [the] head*.
- It is used by other Greek writers to refer to a cloth covering over the head (cf. page 14)

v.5-7 & 13 → *katakalupto* (verb): to cover with a veil, to conceal, to cover up¹

- This is a compound word, the combination of *kata* (“down” or “over”) and *kalupto* (“to cover” or “to conceal”).² The combined meaning can have the idea of *to cover wholly*.
- 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 word means *veil, hide, or cover*.³
- Outside the Bible, the word is used by Greek authors during the time of Paul (including [Philo](#) and [Josephus](#)⁴) to refer to a cloth covering worn over the head.⁵

v.15 → *peribolaion* (noun): a wrapper, a mantle/cloak, or clothing “thrown around” the body.⁶

- This word is derived from the verb *periballo*, meaning “to wrap around” or “to clothe.”⁷
- It is [used in the Septuagint](#) to refer to clothing and to the covering of a ship.
- [Outside the Bible](#), it is used to refer to such things as chariot covers, bed covers, and gowns.

¹ *katakalupto* / κατακαλυπτο (Strong's #2619). Variations of this word occur eight times in this passage.

² This word is found in 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”), and 1st Peter 4:8 (“love covers a multitude of sins”). It is the source for the word *kaluma* (Strong's #2571), meaning “covering, hood, or veil.”

³ Cf. Piper & Grudem, [Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#) (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 130.

⁴ BDAG cites [Antiquities of the Jews](#) (Book 7, Chapter 10, [Section 254](#)).

⁵ Piper & Grudem, [Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#), (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 118-119; Darrell Bock, ed, *The Bible Knowledge Word Study: Acts-Ephesians* (Cook Communications, 2006), [282](#); Geoffrey Bromiley (ed. Kittle & Friedrich), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1985), [406](#).

⁶ *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 foundations of the earth and the heavens] up.”

⁷ *periballo* / περιβαλλο (Strong's #4016), a compound word: *peri* = “around” (the source of English words such as *perimeter* and *peripheral*) and *ballo* = “throw.” It is used in Acts 12:8 (“[Wrap](#) your cloak around you”), Revelation 19:13 (“He is [clothed](#) with a robe dipped in blood”), and Matthew 6:28-29 (“Observe how the lilies of the field grow... not even Solomon in all his glory [clothed](#) himself like one of these”). In the New Testament, the word is often used in relation to a robe or cloak.

THE WORD “FOR” (v.15)

In v.15, Paul states that “her hair is given to her for a covering.” The English word “for” has nearly a dozen definitions. However, in this verse, the Greek word translated “for”¹ had only four primary meanings during New Testament times.

1. “Hair is given to her in place of a covering” (that is, a substitute or replacement)²
2. “Hair is given to her with the purpose of a covering” (that is, a reason or cause)³
3. “Hair is given to her corresponding to a covering” (that is, a counterpart or opposite)⁴
4. “Hair is given to her in return for a covering” (that is, an exchange)⁵

Several aspects of v.15 become a little more obvious when the last phrase is rendered using the original word order of the Greek text: “Does not even nature itself teach you that... if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For *her ornamental hair (for a mantle) is given to her.*” The word *covering* (or “cloak”⁶) is used as an adjective to describe the *hair*.⁷ The word *anti* defines the connection between this *mantle/covering* and the *ornamental hair*.⁸

¹ *anti* / ἀντί (Strong’s #473). The word originally meant “opposite” or “over against,” which is where the English prefix *anti-* comes from. It is used only 22 times in the New Testament. In contrast, the word *for* in the phrase “for God so loved the world” (John 3:16) occurs over 1000 times, and the word *for* in the phrase “for her hair is given to her” (v.15) is used over 1300 times.

² Examples of ἀντί used this way: Matthew 2:22 (“Archelaus was reigning over Judea *in place of* his father Herod”) and Luke 11:11 (“give him a snake *instead of* a fish”). The Septuagint uses it this way in Genesis 4:25 and Genesis 22:13. Thus, the Darby Bible renders v.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.”

³ 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”). Cf. 2nd Thessalonians 2:10 and Ephesians 5:31.

⁴ ἀντί is used this way in the New Testament only as part of compound words such as *antichristos* (1st John 2:18,22, 4:3, 2nd John 1:7), *antitype* (Hebrews 9:24, 1 Peter 3:21), and *antidikos* (Matthew 5:25).

⁵ Examples of ἀντί used this way: Romans 12:17 (“Never pay back evil *for* evil”) and Hebrews 12:16 (“Esau, who sold his own birthright *for* a single meal”). See also Matthew 5:38, Matthew 17:27, Genesis 9:6 LXX, and Hebrews 12:2. Frequently, when *anti* is used to indicate an exchange, the context states that something is “given” or “sold.” Such is the case in v.15 (“hair is given to her *for* a covering”), which provides this scenario: God *gives* the woman “glorious” (v.15) hair, and *in return* she wears a covering for Him when praying.

⁶ As noted previous, the word is defined as *clothing “thrown around” the body*.

⁷ Note that the word “covering” here is a noun, despite the verb-like “ing” suffix in English. The grammar of the Greek phrase indicates that “covering” is a *descriptive noun* (called a “genitive case”), meaning that it “modifies” (describes) another noun. Similarly, for example, the *noun* “business” is used *as an adjective* in the phrase “business attire.” What noun is described by the word “covering”? There are only two other nouns in the phrase (“her” and “hair”). The word “her” is in the “dative case” (that is, a noun to which/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 “covering,” and so “covering” describes the “hair.”

⁸ The word “hair” in this verse refers to *style* rather than *length* (as discussed previously).

THE WORD “NATURE” IN v.14

This section supplements the discussion of “nature” on page 8.

Definition: The meaning of the Greek word for “nature”¹ is *order, laws, innateness, or instinct*. The word can refer to a “natural endowment or condition inherited from one’s ancestors.”² It comes from another Greek word³ meaning *to be born, to produce, or to grow*.

Outside the Bible: Greek writers [used the word “nature”](#) as used to refer to animals, water, birth, etc.

- “Aristotle considered *physis* as the original substance of the elements.”⁴
- [Plato](#) used the phrase “nature itself teaches” (without referring to any societal customs) when he discussed what works and what does not within the process of trial and error.⁵
- The [Book of Wisdom](#) refers (19:20) to the “quenching nature” of water.
- [4th Maccabees](#) has a statement (5:8) that “nature has granted” an animal’s meat for use as food.
- During Paul’s time, [Epictetus](#) wrote: “Woman is born smooth and dainty by nature; if she is very hairy she is a prodigy. But for a man... if by nature he has no hair he is a prodigy. If he removes his hair... you complain against your nature.”⁶
- [Ignatius](#) contrasted character that comes “by nature” with character that is “by usage or habit.”⁷

Within the Bible: The word “nature” is often used in Scripture with reference to biology and reality.

- Romans 1:26-27 states that homosexuality is “unnatural.”⁸
- Romans 2:14 states that the conscience is cross-cultural and is “instinctive.”
- Romans 11:21-24 use “nature” in reference to plant growth.
- Romans 2:14 each state that uncircumcision is the “natural” condition of mankind.
- Galatians 2:15 refers to the Jewish ethnicity as something that comes “by nature” (by birth).
- Galatians 4:8 provides a contrast between idol worship and “nature.”⁹
- Ephesians 2:3 refers to the spiritually fallen condition of mankind, which is “by nature.” In contrast, 2nd Peter 1:4 states that it is by God’s promises that Christians can “become partakers of the divine nature.”
- James 3:7 uses “nature” twice: once to refer to “species” of animals, and once to refer to the human “race.”

¹ *physis* / φύσις (Strong’s #5449).

² BDAG, 2nd ed., 869.

³ *phyō* / φύω (Strong’s #5453).

⁴ “Nature” in [William Mounce](#), *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary* (Zondervan, 2009).

⁵ Roy E. Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), [539](#).

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), [845](#).

⁷ BDAG (2nd ed., 869), citing Ignatius’ [Letter to the Trallians](#) (1:1).

⁸ Paul describes unnatural practices as “vile, degrading, or disgraceful” (*atimia* / ἀτιμία, Strong’s #819) in both Romans 1:26 and 1st Corinthians 11:14.

⁹ Note that the statement in this verse would be false if “nature” referred to cultural practice, because the Galatians were in fact slaves to that which were gods culturally.

Nature: God's Universal Creation

- In nature, female hormones promote longer hair growth, while male hormones influence hair loss, and so women biologically have the ability to grow *longer* hair than men.¹
- “Hair follicles undergo several phases... hair length is proportional to the duration of the anagen [growth] phase... Estrogens prolong the anagen phase.”² “The male hormone testosterone speeds up the loss of hair in men. Estrogen causes women's hair to grow longer, and for a longer time.”³
- The male hormone *androgen* “shortens the duration of anagen” while estrogen “prolongs anagen” with the result that “a longer anagen phase = longer hair.”⁴
- “Estrogen lengthens the life cycle of each hair so that it stays on the head longer, which results in thicker hair... What is called estrogen deficiency alopecia [*alopecia* is the medical term for “hair loss”] generally starts some months before or just after menopause.”⁵
- “The most common type of female hair loss is *androgenetic alopecia*... It is caused by an excess of male hormones.”⁶
- “The best-known example of a sex-influenced gene is the gene for pattern baldness.”⁷ “Geneticists tell us that it takes two genes in a woman to produce baldness, but only one in a man. Some women do get bald, but it is very rare. Here is a natural factor that has been functioning since the race began which does, indeed, display the very thing that Paul declares.”⁸ “More women than men are not bald. It has been shown that baldness is due to peculiar genes, called sex-influenced genes. The character is dominant in men and recessive in women. A man is bald if he has only one gene for baldness, but in a [bald] woman two genes are present.”⁹ “The gene credited with male hair loss is on chromosome 15. Baldness is autosomal dominant in men, and women only show the phenotype of hair loss when they're homozygous for the gene.”¹⁰

¹ John MacArthur, *First Corinthians MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Moody Publishers, 1984), 262; John MacArthur, *Divine Design: God's Complementary Roles for Men and Women* (David C. Cook, 2010), 49; John MacArthur, *Women, Prophecy, and Headcoverings. Constable's Notes* (1 Corinthians 11:14-15): “I understand that women’s hair generally grows fuller and faster due to the estrogen in women, whereas men’s hair tends to become thinner and fall out faster because of the testosterone in men.”

² Fima Lifshitz, *Pediatric Endocrinology* (CRC Press, 2007), 329.

³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Studies: 1 Corinthians* (Thomas Nelson, 2006), 70. Cf. Clarence R. Robbins, *Chemical and Physical Behavior of Human Hair* (Springer, 2012), 34.

⁴ Asra Ali, *Dermatology: A Pictorial Review* (McGraw Hill Professional, 2007), 3.

⁵ Ellen Phillips, *Everything You Need to Know About Menopause* (Rodale, 2003), 158.

⁶ Barbara Seaman, Laura Eldridge, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Menopause* (Simon and Schuster, 2008), 295.

⁷ Daniel D. Chiras, *Human Biology* (Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2013), 380.

⁸ Ray Stedman, *What Is Headship?* (December 3, 1978, sermon transcription).

⁹ A. V. S. S. Sambamurty, *Genetics* (UK: Alpha Science Int'l Ltd., 2005), 295.

¹⁰ Tara Rodden Robinson, *Genetics For Dummies* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 79.

Nature: Mankind's Universal Practice

- Many women that lose their hair (whether due to biological issues, disease, the effects of chemotherapy, or other causes) wear a wig, a hat, or some type of cloth covering. Women consider their hair as their “glory” (v.15).¹
- Since Paul appealed to “nature” as support for a Christian practice (headcovering) that occurred *outside* the Corinthian's local society (v.16), it is very likely that churches outside of Corinth also followed the “teaching” of nature in regard to hair length.
- In Romans 1, Paul speaks of homosexual activity without providing any *command* that “thou shall not participate in homosexual behavior.” Because no command was given, some have proposed that Paul had no concerns with homosexual behavior. However, Paul's disapproval is obvious from the passage, including his statement that it is “contrary to nature.” Paul similarly states that it is contrary to nature for men to have long hair and women to have short hair.² The lack of a command about hair lengths doesn't mean there is no direction to follow. When Scripture describes certain choices as right or wrong (or “honorable” and “dishonorable”),³ God expects Christians to follow that direction even if He does not phrase that direction as a command.

Natural Hair Lengths & Church History

- **The Catacombs:** “In the sculptures of the catacombs... the men have the hair short.”⁴
- **Basil of Caesarea** (c. 330 – 379 A.D.): “The Apostle... says: ‘Does not even nature itself teach you that a man, indeed, if he has long hair, it is a shame to him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her,’ and so on. Properly, then, we should follow the customary ways of nature.”⁵
- **The Council of Gangra** (A.D. 370) prohibited women from cutting their hair short like men.⁶

¹ One survey showed that 75% of British women who experienced hair loss felt less attractive, with one-third considering the loss of their hair as being the most disturbing event in their life. This study cited in: Faith Hickman Brynie, *101 Questions About Your Skin* (Twenty-First Century Books, 1999), 51.

² Interestingly, God prohibited the Old Testament priests from growing their hair long (Ezekiel 44:20). 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. Cf. Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 202.

³ As it does with both homosexuality and hair length.

⁴ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament, Volume 3* (Charles Scriber's Sons, 1905), 248; cf. Arch Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *First Corinthians* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), 236.

⁵ Basil, *Ascetical Works*, translated by M. Monica Wagner (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 408.

⁶ William Smith, Samuel Cheetham, *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities, Volume 1* (Little, Brown, And Company, 1875), 581. See also John MacArthur, *The Role of the Godly Woman*.

Natural Hair Lengths & Church History, continued...

- **Severian of Gabala** (Syrian bishop, preacher in Constantinople; d. 408): “It has always been forbidden for women to shear their hair.”¹
- **Epiphanius of Salamis** (theologian; c. 315 – 403 A.D.) stated that a “form of error” was found in some “brethren of ours.” This error was that they were “deliberately having their hair long like a woman’s... [which was] out of place... because of the apostle’s injunction, ‘A man ought not to have long hair.’” He argued that “long hair was proper only for Nazirites.”²

Nature: Interpretive Notes

- The implied question of v.6 (“Is it disgraceful for a woman to have her hair shaved?”) is answered (“Yes”) in v.14-15.³ In context of this chapter, Paul is not trying to promote appearance that is consistent with *cultural gender distinctions*, but rather with *universal gender roles*.
- Though some may consider long hair on men or short hair on women to be normal, their opinion does not negate “nature.” As Romans 1:26-27 states that homosexuality is unnatural, this does not prohibit some people from choosing against nature or being accepted by a culture as “normal.”
- As v.15 states, it is “natural” for women to have longer hair than men and that they consider it part of their distinct beauty. It is often considered to be somewhat unusual to see a bald woman or one with a crew cut, both of which are normally accepted for men. Women undergoing chemotherapy often buy wigs or wear some type of cover on their heads. This correlates with Paul’s indication that it is a considered improper for a women to shave her head (v.6).⁴
- Similarly, for the Jews, the Nazarite vow (and Paul’s vows in in the Book of Acts) indicate that long hair was the exception, not the norm. In Scripture, the Creator of Nature deems certain “unnatural” choices as dishonorable⁵ while deeming others to be acceptable in certain situations (in which He provides specific instructions).⁶ This is often (but not always) recognized by non-Christian culture. For example, in ancient Corinth men who had long hair were considered to be effeminate or homosexual.⁷

¹ “Fragmenta in epistulam i ad Corithios,” ed. K. Staab, *Pauluskommentar aus der griechischen Kirche aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt*, (Aschendorff: Münster, 1933), 262. Translated in: A. Philip Brown II, *A Survey of the History of the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (Aldersgate Forum, 2011), 7.

² Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Books II and III (Sections 47-80, De Fide)*, trans. By Frank Williams (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill: 1994), 634-635.

³ Since Paul, beyond v.6, continues to promote the use of a headcovering, it is evident that Paul expected a “Yes” answer to the question.

⁴ However, this is not an exact correlation. Paul does not imply that women who lose their hair due to health or medical causes are suffering a “disgrace” or are at fault. In v.6-7, Paul is referring to a *voluntary decision* of the woman to cut her hair off, not the involuntary effects of biological/chemical processes.

⁵ Such as homosexuality (Romans 1) and the practice of maintaining unnatural hair lengths (1 Corinthians 11).

⁶ Such as circumcision (Ephesians 2:3), the long hair of Sampson, and the long hair of those who took Nazarite vows.

⁷ Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 142-143.

Ω APPENDIX C: FURTHER DETAILS ON 1ST CENTURY CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

There were three main cultures among the early New Testament Church: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. Each had its own societal norms for when men and women would wear headcoverings. These are overviewed on the following pages.¹ “In the ancient world head coverings were apparently in vogue in some parts of the Graeco-Roman empire. Some groups expected the men to wear head coverings; others expected women to wear them. Still others felt that such were optional for both men and women.”² While it is helpful to observe cultural & religious patterns for the use of headcoverings during the First Century, 1st Corinthians 11 itself does not provide any indication that its instruction was based on those patterns.

Edwards (*Principle of University College of Wales*): “The injunction to men to pray uncovered and to women to pray ... veiled... is peculiar to the Christians.”³

Clark (*author & Christian leader*): “There is no exact parallel to Paul’s instructions here in either the Jewish or the Greco-Roman sources of the time.”⁴

Lias (*Professor, University of Cambridge*): “The Christian custom was not... due to the Hellenic custom being followed in the Hellenic churches, but is rather to be explained by this passage.”⁵

Klock (*Rector, Reformed Episcopal Church*): “The lack of covering for men and the covering for women [as Paul described] has often been very counter-cultural... Men in the Greco-Roman world did just the opposite of the Christian custom. When the men of Corinth went into the temples to pray, they covered their heads with a scarf or the well-to-do would pulled their toga up over their heads... The culture’s norms were opposed to God’s, but that’s what we should expect.”⁶

Terry (*professor, theologian*): “The tradition which Paul advocated in I Corinthians 11 was, contrary to popular opinion today, not grounded in the social customs of Corinth, but opposed to them.”⁷

¹ A summary of these considerations was noted on page 9.

² [Daniel Wallace](#), *What is the Head Covering in 1 Cor 11:2-16 and Does it Apply to Us Today?* (bible.org, 1997).

³ [Thomas Charles Edwards](#), *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd Edition (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1886), 270.

⁴ [Stephen B. Clark](#), *Man and Woman in Christ* (Servant Books, 1980), 168.

⁵ [John James Lias](#), *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (University Press, 1885), 106.

⁶ [William Klock](#), *Headship and Its Symbols* (British Columbia: Living Word Reformed Episcopal Church, October 2009). [Sermon transcription](#).

⁷ [Bruce Terry](#), *A Discourse Analysis of First Corinthians* (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1995), 31.

Jewish Culture: MEN'S HEADCOVERINGS

Some Bible teachers assume that Jewish worship attire of recent centuries must reflect the conventions of the First Century. However, upon further examination, scholars have concluded that this is not so.

In Public

- » “Jewish men in the time of Paul... probably did not wear a yarmulke... in public.”¹

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.”²
- » Jewish men covered their heads *after* the apostolic age.³
- » “Male headcovering customs like the yarmulke are far too late to be of relevance.”⁴

» “It is doubtful whether the Jews used the *tallith* or veil in prayer as early as this.”⁵

» “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.”⁶

» “Evidence for the customary Jewish practice of men wearing a tallith or prayer shawl is dated well past Paul's lifetime.”⁷

» “Jewish men in the time of Paul... probably did not wear a yarmulke in worship... nor cover their heads in worship with a prayer shawl, as many Jews do today.”⁸

» “The Jewish custom for men to cover their heads when praying and studying the law is later than New Testament times.”⁹

» “The word '*kippah*'... also *yarmulke* [Yiddish] or 'skullcap'... [describes] the shape of the typical head covering worn nowadays by Jews... The evolution of head coverings in Jewish tradition is long and complicated... The *de facto* requirement that Jewish men cover their heads for prayer is a relatively recent phenomenon, arising largely as a reaction to the Christian practice of praying bareheaded.”¹⁰

» “Head covering at prayer was not a Judean custom among Israelites during Paul's day, as it was to become in later Jewish religion.”¹¹

¹ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Servant Books, 1980), 169.

² *Reformation Study Bible* (ed. R.C. Sproul). *Commentary on v.4*.

³ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), 120.

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Books, 1992), 27.

⁵ Arch Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *First Corinthians* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), 229.

⁶ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1987), 507.

⁷ Darrell Bock (ed) *The Bible Knowledge Word Study: Acts-Ephesians* (David C. Cook. 2006), 281.

⁸ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Servant Books, 1980), 169.

⁹ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 97.

¹⁰ E. Frankel & B. Teutsch, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 90-91.

¹¹ Bruce Malina and John Pilch, *Social-science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Fortress Press, 2006), 106-107.

Jewish Culture: WOMEN'S HEADCOVERINGS**In Public**

- » Philo, a Jewish philosopher who lived during the time of Paul, provides the following statement about the Jewish woman's headcovering (note the use of the present-tense): "the head-dress on her head [is]... the symbol of modesty, which all those women are accustomed to wear."¹
- » Tertullian, a writer from the Early Church, stated: "Among the Jews, so usual is it for their women to have the head veiled, that they may thereby be recognized."²
- » "In Paul's day Jewish women always wore veils in public."³
- » "Jewish women were always veiled in public in the first century."⁴
- » "Jewish women were required to wear veils in public."⁵
- » "In Tertullian's day Jewish women were prominent in North Africa because they wore veils on the streets."⁶

- » "Jewish women in the Palestine of Paul's day always covered their heads and faces when in public."⁷
- » "When the Jewess of Jerusalem left her house, her face was hidden by an arrangement of two head veils, a head-band on the forehead with bands to the chin, and a hairnet with ribbons and knots, so that her features could not be recognized."⁸
- » "Since biblical times, married Jewish women have traditionally covered their heads out of modesty."⁹
- » "Jewish sources rather uniformly call for women to be veiled in public."¹⁰

- » "A headcovering was a necessary sign of public modesty for all Palestinian Jewish women who could afford it."¹¹

In Worship

- » "Jewish women always covered their head in worship."¹²
- » "Jewish women in the Palestine of Paul's day... definitely covered their heads in the temple and synagogue."¹³
- » "Among the Jews of the New Testament age it appears to have been customary for the women to cover their heads... when engaged in public worship."¹⁴

¹ Philo, *Special Laws*, 3:56.

² Tertullian, *De Corona*, ch. 4.

³ Walter Elwell, Philip Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 328.

⁴ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 148.

⁵ Daniel Harrington, *First Corinthians* (Liturgical Press, 1999), 410.

⁶ Geoffrey Bromiley (ed. Kittle & Friedrich), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1985), 406.

⁷ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Servant Books, 1980), 169.

⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation Into Economic and Social Conditions During the New Testament Period* (Fortress Press, 1969), 359.

⁹ E. Frankel & B. Teutsch, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 90-91.

¹⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 96.

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Books, 1992), 26.

¹² NIV Life Application Study Bible, [Commentary on 1st Corinthians 11:2ff], (Zondervan/Tyndale, 1991).

¹³ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Servant Books, 1980), 169.

¹⁴ William Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4 (Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1888), 3370.

Greek Culture: MENS' HEADCOVERINGS**In Public**

- » “The Greeks remained bareheaded... in their ordinary outdoor life.”¹

In Worship

- » In Greek culture, “men normally remained uncovered during religious ceremonies, and in which an uncovered head indicated authority.”²
- » “The Greeks (both men and women) remained bareheaded in public prayer.”³
- » “The Greek practice was to keep the head uncovered at their religious rites.”⁴
- » “The men ... covered their heads when praying and prophesying, each of which was a Grecian custom.”⁵

- » “It was the Greek custom... for men in worship to be uncovered.”⁶

- » [Plutarch](#) indicated that Greek worship practice was to pray with an uncovered head.⁷

- » “Greek men were also to worship bareheaded.” This is supported by a direction quote from a Greek inscription.⁸

- » “Among the Greeks men... prayed bareheaded.”⁹

- » “The Greek practice was for men to have their heads uncovered when joining in religious ceremonies.”¹⁰

¹ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Scribner, 1890), [246](#).

² Robert Morey, “Head Coverings”, [The Encyclopedia of Practical Christianity](#) (Las Vegas, NV: Christian Scholars Press, 2004), 5.

³ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (1931), 159.

⁴ W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Vol 2* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1856), [57](#).

⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homily XXVI: On the Veiling of Women*.

⁶ Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments, Vol. 2* (S.S. Scranton & Company, 1871), [283](#).

⁷ Cf. Richard Oster, *First Corinthians* (College Press, 1995), [250](#).

⁸ [Craig Keener](#), *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Books, 1992), [28](#).

⁹ Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, 2nd Edition* (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1886), [270](#).

¹⁰ Charles John Ellicott (ed.), *The New Testament commentary for schools: Corinthians* (Casswell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1879), [99](#).

Greek Culture: WOMEN'S HEADCOVERINGS**In Public**

- » “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.”¹ “There is no evidence to support the view that Greek women were under any compulsion to be veiled in public.”²
- » “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.”³
- » “Grecian pottery provides abundant information concerning elegant hair styles and an absence of headcoverings among the Greeks from a very early period.”⁴

- » 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 marriage ceremony, funerals, mourning... Hellenistic women did not normally wear a garment over their heads.”⁵
- » “Greek... women were not obligated to wear a headcovering in public. Some did cover their heads and this practice was even common among some groups, but it was not an obligation.”⁶

In Worship

- » “Among the Greeks... women prayed bareheaded.”⁷

- » “In most Greek religious activities women uncovered their heads.”⁸

- » “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.”⁹

¹ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament 3:562. Cited in Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 152-153.

² Geoffrey Bromiley (ed. Kittle & Friedrich), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 1985), 406.

³ William Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 202.

⁴ Hurley, *Man and Woman in 1 Corinthians* (1973), 44. Cited in Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 153.

⁵ Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 155, 200. cf. 152-155.

⁶ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Servant Books, 1980), 169.

⁷ Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd Edition (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1886), 270.

⁸ Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Books, 1992), 25.

⁹ Philip B. Payne, “Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16” in *Priscilla Papers*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 2006).

Roman Culture: MENS' HEADCOVERINGS**In Public**

- » Compared to the use of headcoverings during times of mourning, for Roman men it was “more usual... to go forth in public... with their heads uncovered.”¹

In Worship

- » “Roman men sometimes pulled the loose folds of their toga over their head while they worshiped pagan gods.”²
- » “In pagan Roman piety the person (male or female) offering the sacrifice would cover their head as the sacrifice was offered (a ritual act referred to as *capite velato* [a Latin phrase that means 'with covered head']).”³
- » “The statue from Corinth of a veiled Augustus – with his toga pulled over his head in preparation to offer a libation – may offer an important clue... Wearing the toga over the head at pagan sacrifices was a familiar practice.”⁴

» “The practice of men covering their heads in a context of prayer and prophesy was a common pattern of Roman piety and widespread during the late Republic and early Empire.”⁵

» “It was common practice for Romans, however – including men – to wear head coverings for liturgical settings of prayer and prophecy in both public and private devotional contexts.”⁶

» “The head was covered not only when offering a sacrifice but also during the prophetic reading of the entrails.”⁷

» [Lucretius](#) (a Roman poet and philosopher) notes the Roman custom of having the head covered when at an altar.⁸

» “The Romans... prayed with the head veiled.”⁹

» According to “Virgil, the famous Latin author who wrote shortly after the time of the refounding of Corinth as a Roman colony,” “it was sacred law for the Romans to veil their heads when worshiping and sacrificing to their gods and goddesses.”¹⁰

» “[Dionysius of Halicarnassus](#) [a Greek historian] likewise observed that this use of the devotional head covering was an important Roman religious practice used when participating in prayer, prophesy, or sacrifice.”¹¹

» For the Romans, “Paul’s argument that a man should not cover his head during the ritual gatherings since he is God’s image must have sounded odd. Statues of emperors that intended to make them look pious, represent them with covered heads while in the act of sacrificing.”¹²

¹ Plutarch, [Roman Questions](#). Cf. Richard Oster, *First Corinthians* (College Press, 1995), 250.

² *ESV Student Study Bible*, note for 1st Corinthians 11:4.

³ Roy E. Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2010), 515.

⁴ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 2003), 517.

⁵ [Richard E. Oster](#), “Use, Misuse and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians” in [Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft](#) (1992), 62.

⁶ [Richard E. Oster](#), “Going to Worship in Ancient Corinth” in *Leaven*, Vol. 6:1 (Pepperdine University, 1998), 2.

⁷ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 234.

⁸ [Richard Oster](#), *First Corinthians* (College Press, 1995), 250.

⁹ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Scribner, 1890), 246.

¹⁰ [Richard Oster](#), *First Corinthians* (College Press, 1995), 251.

¹¹ [Richard Oster](#), *First Corinthians* (College Press, 1995), 250.

¹² [Jorunn Økland](#), *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space* (Continuum, 2004), 244.

ROMAN CULTURE: WOMENS' HEADCOVERINGS**In Public**

Some writers, by pointing to historical evidence regarding Roman weddings, have sought to show that Roman women wore a headcovering in public. However, the yellow veil worn by brides during their wedding (called a *flammeum*¹) was used only for the ceremony. It is to be distinguished from the rectangular covering (called the *palla*²) that was sometimes (but not always³) worn over the top of the head by married Roman women.

» Marble portraits of Roman women suggest “it was socially acceptable in a Roman colony for women to be seen bare-headed in public.”⁴

» “Woman, at least those of the upper class, are most frequently depicted with their head uncovered in Roman portraits.”⁵

» “Existing public portraits of women (presumably well-to-do women) from Roman Corinth often show them bareheaded.”⁶

» “Public marble portraits of women at Corinth, presumably members of wealthy and prestigious families are most frequently shown bare-headed.”⁷

» “There is a general consensus within scholarship that Roman women were not required to wear any garment over their heads. This does not mean, however, that veiling never occurred or that it was rare for women to wear a garment over their heads. It does mean, however, that evidence is lacking that Roman culture at large regarded it as disgraceful for a woman not to wear a garment over her head.”⁸

» “Roman women were not obligated to wear a headcovering in public. Some did cover their heads and this practice was even common among some groups, but it was not an obligation.”⁹

» “Roman sources are mixed in their evidence” regarding whether or not “first century women wore veils in public.”¹⁰

¹ Judith Lynn Sebesta, Larissa Bonfante, *The World of Roman Costume* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 55; Lynn Cohick; *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Baker Academic, 2009), 61; Francis Marion Dana, *The Ritual Significance of Yellow Among the Romans* (University of Pennsylvania, 1919), 12-14.

² cf. Lynn Cohick; *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Baker Academic, 2009), 61; Judith Lynn Sebesta, Larissa Bonfante, *The World of Roman Costume* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 48; Kelly Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman* (Routledge, 2012), 33; Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 80.

³ Judith Lynn Sebesta, Larissa Bonfante, *The World of Roman Costume* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 228.

⁴ David Gill, “The Importance of Roman Portraiture For Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16” in *Tyndale Bulletin* 41.2 (1990), 251.

⁵ Burge, Cohick, and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Context*, (Zondervan, 2010), 306.

⁶ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 234.

⁷ David W.J. Gill, “The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16” in *Tyndale Bulletin* 41.2 (1990), 245-260. In the context, “bare-headed” is referring to a lack of a cloth veil, not to a lack of hair.

⁸ Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 155-156.

⁹ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Servant Books, 1980), 169.

¹⁰ Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 96.

- » “Modern authors have stated that the covered head was part of the everyday costume of the Roman *matrona*. But again we note a disjunction between literary and artistic evidence. The vast majority of female portrait busts we possess show the woman with an unveiled head, probably in order to display her elaborate hairstyle to the viewer.”¹
- » “Considerable evidence indicates that covering a woman’s head with a veil was... much less prevalent in western Roman areas by the middle of the first century.”²
- » “All statues, except one, of Roman women found in Corinth portrayed them with heads unveiled.”³
- » “Roman women had to cover their heads when offering sacrifices.”⁵
- » “[W]omen devotees of the Dionysus cult [were depicted] with their heads... uncovered and hair down. Roman worship customs regarding a garment over the head made no distinction between the sexes.”⁶
- » The “liturgical covering of the head applied equally to woman.”⁷
- » “In pagan Roman piety the person (male or female) offering the sacrifice would cover their head as the sacrifice was offered (a ritual act referred to as *capite velato* [a Latin phrase that means ‘with covered head’]).”⁸

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.”⁴

¹ Kelly Olson, *Dress and the Roman Woman* (Routledge, 2012), 34.

² Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Fortress Press, 2005), 8.

³ Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 129.

⁴ Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009), 155.

⁵ Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Books, 1992), 28.

⁶ *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Context* (Zondervan, 2010), 306.

⁷ Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 234.

⁸ Roy E. Ciampa, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2010), 515.

WAS A SHAVED OR UNCOVERED HEAD THE STYLE OF FIRST CENTURY CORINTHIAN PROSTITUTES?

- **McGee:** “In 146 B.C. Corinth rebelled and was totally [destroyed by \[Lucius\] Mummius](#), the Roman general... For a century it lay desolate... In 46 B.C., the Emperor Julius Caesar rebuilt the city.”¹
- **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 [new] Roman shrine was far more modest.”²
- **Baugh:** After reviewing the claims for an active Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth, 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.”³
- **Lenski:** “All the evidence that has been discovered proves that only a few of the very lowest types [of prostitutes] 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
- **Martin:** “There does not seem to be enough evidence in the works of secular writers to suggest that 'shorn hair' was the mark of a prostitute.”⁶
- **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).”⁷

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *I Corinthians* (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Books, 1987), 7.

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

³ S. M. Baugh, “[Cult Prostitution In New Testament Ephesus: A Reappraisal](#)” in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Vol. 42.3, 1999), 459-460.

⁴ Ancient pictures of the *hetairai* show them wearing long hair, often with a headband holding it in place. Some examples ([#1](#), [#2](#), and [#3](#)) are available online.

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

⁶ William J. Martin (Gasque & Martin, eds), *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Paternoster Press, 1970), [233](#).

⁷ [Gordon D. Fee](#), *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1987), 2-3, 511, 496.

- **Garland:** “The old view that made Corinth almost synonymous with prostitution should be abandoned... [These references are] to Greek Corinth, destroyed in 146 B.C., not in Corinth after it had been resettled and rebuilt as a Roman colony. It is anachronistic to apply the epithets to the Corinth of Paul’s day.”¹
- **Adams & Horrell:** “Older commentaries on Paul’s Corinthian letters often... [depict] the city as a particular hotbed of sexual license and vice... Paul’s Corinth was no more sexually promiscuous than any other cosmopolitan city in the empire.”²
- **Oster:** “The assumption that Paul’s position is constructed in response to the lack of head coverings or veils on women of shame is likewise without support in either the text or the relevant ancient historical evidence.”³
- **Clark:** “Some older scholarly works and some popular works hold that an unveiled woman in Corinth would be mistaken for a prostitute. However, this opinion cannot be substantiated.”⁴
- **Winter:** The *hetairai* actually wore “transparent veils” as a “distinguishing feature.”⁵
- **Gardner:** Though some have proposed that prostitutes and women convicted of adultery were compelled to wear a certain indicative style of clothing, “there is no firm evidence that they [prostitutes in Roman culture] were prevented from wearing the modest, concealing garments usually associated with Roman matrons.” In fact, “elaborate hairdressing and make-up were part of the self-presentation for the better-class whores.”⁶
- **Keener:** “The evidence for *head coverings* distinguishing wives from prostitutes is slender... [any evidence for the practice was] from far to the east of Paul’s cultural world, and from well over a thousand years before him.”⁷

¹ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Baker Academic, 2003), 240.

² Edward Adams & David Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 7-8.

³ Richard E. Oster, “Going to Worship in Ancient Corinth” in *Leaven*, Vol. 6:1 (Pepperdine University, 1998), 2.

⁴ Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Servant Books, 1980), 169.

⁵ Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 81.

⁶ Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law and Society* (Indiana University Press, 1991), 190.

⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Books, 1992), 24-25.

- **O'Connor:** The original source of the theory that “one thousand-plus sacred prostitutes who served the temple of Aphrodite” (something “many New Testament introductions and commentaries have stressed”) is [Strabo](#), a Greek historian. “However, the context clearly indicates that Strabo is here referring to the pre-146 B.C. city and not to the newly constituted Roman colony that he visited in 29 B.C... Even for the pre-146 B.C. city [well before Strabo's lifetime] the reliability of Strabo's account has been called into question... Sacred prostitution was never a Greek custom.”¹
- **Ciampa:** “The ancient geographer Strabo's famous account of 1,000 prostitutes in the temple of Aphrodite refers to the Corinth destroyed in 146 B.C. by the Romans and not the new Corinth, which was founded by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony... Recent publications in fact raise doubts about the reality of cult prostitution anywhere in the ancient world.”²
- **Fant & Reddish:** “A temple to Aphrodite stood on the higher east peak of the Acrocorinth, and Strabo claimed that a thousand sacred prostitutes served there... However, he had misunderstood an earlier reference to the woman... who had entered the temple to pray during the wars with the Persians. Furthermore, no evidence of any structure large enough to accommodate so many people has ever been found on the Acrocorinth... Sacred prostitution was not a practice among the Greeks.”³
- **Budin:** After extensive analysis, “we are left with *no* firsthand accounts of this practice [of sacred prostitution] in the classical repertoire... The majority of our supposed documentation of sacred prostitution comes from Strabo... We have been far too blithe in accepting what classical authors have told us about far-of, long-gone societies without considering the actual evidence from those societies themselves.”⁴

¹ [Jerome Murphy-O'Connor](#), *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Liturgical Press, 2002), 56.

² [Roy E. Ciampa](#), *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 248.

³ Clyde Fant & Mitchell Reddish, *A Guide to Biblical Sites in Greece and Turkey* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 55.

⁴ Stephanie Budin (ed. Faraone & McClure), *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 90-91. Emphasis in original.