

# "Let Her Be Covered": Notes on 1 Cor. 11:2-16

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## Overview

These notes are abstracted from a lengthy private correspondence that I conducted on the subject with a friend some years ago. I have arranged the material in five sections.

1. Before we delve into the details of 1 Cor. 11, we should keep in perspective why we want to understand it, and what place it should have in our spiritual lives.
2. We understand any passage correctly only when we can relate it accurately to its context. So we discuss the structure of the passage and its setting in the book.
3. With this background in place, we can move verse by verse through 1 Cor. 11:2-16, commenting on prominent issues as they arise.
4. There is so much material on Paul's argument from nature in v.14 that it would not easily fit in the verse by verse commentary, so it occupies a special section all to itself. This section is extremely technical, and may be skipped without losing much.
5. Finally, we review the various kinds of head covering that were known in the ancient world, to illustrate the variety of means that women in the first century had of fulfilling Paul's injunction, "Let her be covered."

## 1 Motivation

As recently as a generation ago, no well-bred woman of any religious persuasion would even think of appearing in public, let alone in church, without a hat. That generation is past, and head covering for women has become in the eyes of many a badge, a distinctive of particular religious movements or denominations. Even many of those who practice head covering do so out of loyalty to their own tradition more than from an understanding of the motives that led Paul to urge it on the Corinthians.

Let's be clear at the outset: head covering is not the *sine qua non* of biblical Christianity, and it must not be made the primary touchstone of whether an assembly of believers is walking orderly before the Lord. It would be a mistake to make any physical or tangible detail such a touchstone. The reason is that the key to New Testament order is Christ ruling in the church by his Spirit, and the flesh can mimic any outward form even in the absence of the Spirit.

The Word of God does reveal many physical details of how first century churches functioned. Believers who are walking in submission to the direction of the Holy Spirit will find striking agreement among themselves in applying these examples to today, so these practices will be common where the Lord indeed rules in his church. But there is nothing to keep someone else with no spiritual motivation from adopting the same practices, purely to conform outwardly with the tradition of a movement. Such conformity is like that of the Pharisees to the law of Moses (Matt. 23), deadening and tending by pride in its very outward conformity to block the inward work of the Spirit. The kingdom of God does not consist in outward conformity, but in the inner work of the Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

So the fundamental issue for any local assembly to resolve is not whether women will be covered, or whether the elders will serve without salary, or whether the meetings will be held in private homes, or whether music will be a *capella*, or whether a single cup will be used at the Lord's Table, or whether it contains wine or grape juice, or any of a myriad of other matters that too often take the high ground of our thought. It is whether those in fellowship are truly born again and are walking in submission to the Lord of the Church as his Spirit directs them through the Scriptures. Where that relation is sound, the Lord will guide an assembly daily to an increasingly pure walk with himself, and they will find themselves increasingly of one mind with other assemblies who stand in the same relation to the Lord. Where that relation is missing, all the outward conformity in the world is but the effort of the flesh, and manifests the works of the flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26).

As we study, then, let us be sure of our motive. It is not for me to persuade you that my answer to the question is the right one so that you can behave as I do. Rather, it is for us to bow before our Lord and search his word submissively for his will and direction.

## 2 Structure of the Passage

Let's consider the setting and structure of the passage by zooming in, starting with a wide-angle view and progressively narrowing our focus.

### 2.1 *The Book of 1 Corinthians in the New Testament*

1 Corinthians was written by Paul in response to a letter from the church to him, describing their growth in the Lord and asking for his input on a number of matters (7:1). As Paul responded to this letter, the Holy Spirit led him to give practical instruction on a wide variety of matters. Some of these deal with very particular situations in Corinth. Yet if we compare the opening verses of the book with those of Paul's other letters, we find that this book is addressed more widely than any other New Testament epistle. Paul records that it is "for all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:2). We know that the Holy Spirit intends all of the Bible for our doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, even those portions that are not expressly addressed to us. But he has marked this portion for our particular attention.

The reason seems to lie in the very practical nature of the instructions that Paul gives. Without 1:2, one might conclude that the exhortations to the Corinthians were intended only for their particular situation. This verse shows us that the cases presented here have been selected not only for their urgency in Corinth, but also for their applicability to "all in every place."

### 2.2 *The Sections of 1 Corinthians*

11:2-34 is a unit. "Now I praise you, brethren" at 11:2 is a major section marker. These section markers are of two kinds in 1 Corinthians.

One kind, "Now concerning X," introduces Paul's response to specific questions that the Corinthians asked in their letter.

- 7:1, the conduct of married couples
- 7:25, the conduct of unmarried people
- 8:1, the believer's attitude toward food offered to idols
- 12:1, spiritual gifts
- 16:1, material gifts of charity
- 16:12, the coming visit of Apollo to Corinth

This kind, of the form "Now I {praise, exhort, beseech, ...} you, brethren," introduces material that Paul brings up for discussion. It is based on what he has learned about them, either through their letter or by other means, but it is his emphasis, not theirs.

- 1:10, unity among the believers
- 11:2, their response to previous instruction from Paul
- 15:1, the importance of the resurrection to the gospel
- 16:15, their attitude toward spiritual leaders

Once we recognize these headings, we can see quite clearly that our passage falls in a section that extends from 11:2 to 11:34. 11:1 actually belongs to the preceding section, the one beginning in 8:1 and concerning food offered to idols.

### 2.3 *11:2-34*

This unit has two halves, marked by the parallel headings "Now I praise you" (11:2) and "Now ... I praise you not" (11:17). The second half frequently refers to the church "come together" (vv. 18, 20, 33, 34). There is no such

reference in the first half of the chapter, and the phrase "first of all" in 11:18 suggests that Paul is now turning his attention to the church assembled. That is, the first half is not talking specifically about the meetings of the church, but is more general.

This simple structural observation is critical.

- It relieves a contradiction that has been supposed between 11:5 (which suggests that a woman may pray or prophesy if she is covered) and 14:34 (which requires sisters to be silent when the church "comes together," 14:26). 11:5 deals with the general issue of women praying and prophesying, without singling out any particular setting. 14:34 does identify a particular context in which they are to be silent.
- It means that 11:2-16 is not primarily about wearing a hat to church! Now, a woman can pray silently in church, so there is good reason for her to wear a covering there, but the reason is her prayer, not the fact that she is in a meeting. And when she prays or prophesies outside of the meeting, she should also be covered.

## 2.4 11:2-16

Now we have zoomed in to the section of interest. It is structured chiastically, with the outer members corresponding to one another, then the sections nearest to the ends, and so on, ABCDCBA. Such a structure is a common way for ancient writers to arrange their material. Paul often uses it in his books, so we should not be surprised to find it here.

**A (11:2,16)** refer to Paul's instruction to the various churches.

**B (11:3-7, 13-15)** contain all the discussion about prayer and prophecy in the section, and (together with 11:10, the center of the chiasm) all the discussion about covering. They are also linked through the "shame/glory" vocabulary.

As we can see from their opening words, the **B** sections differ in the basis of their reasoning. 13-15, beginning "Judge in yourselves," offers an illustration from the Corinthian's own sense of propriety, which is highly idiosyncratic to them, and by itself hardly compelling to those of a different culture. (We will discuss this in more detail later in these notes.) 3-7, beginning "I would have you know," is the underlying argument from more basic theological principles that transcend any particular culture.

This distinction is important. vv.13-15 are not a foundational argument for Paul's position, but an illustration of his point. These verses appeal to the Corinthians' own sense of propriety. This is a fundamentally different sort of argument than the argument from the order of creation in v.9. Our own sense of propriety can be at most an illustration of what is right, not a proof of it, otherwise we could excuse ourselves from obedience with the simple statement, "I don't feel like it." Paul often argues a point at two levels: a technical level on which the weight of proof rests, and an informal level intended to illustrate and communicate rather than to be a watertight argument. Compare 1 Cor. 9:7 (illustration; counterexamples could be found) vs. 8-10 (Scripture; irrefutable in Paul's eyes); or 1 Cor. 14:1-19 (logical arguments for not abusing tongues) vs. 20-25 (the Scriptural proof that they have misunderstood). Here also there is a difference in rhetorical function between 3-12 (Scripturally based) and 13-15 (illustrative, to bring the point home to them).

3-7 is itself a chiasm.

- 3,7b are the underlying theological truths, each presented as an ordering relation: an order of headship <God, Christ, man, woman> in 3, and an order of glory <woman, man, God> in 7b.
- 4,7a teach that the man should be uncovered in prayer and prophecy.
- 5-6 teach that the woman should be covered in the same circumstances.

**C (11:8-9, 11-12)** focus on the horizontal relation of man and woman, rather than (3-7, 13-15) their vertical relation with God. The earlier element gives two reasons for the man's headship over the woman, while the latter emphasizes the parity between the sexes.

**D (11:10)**, the "angel verse," is the center. When a chiastic structure has a single unmatched element at the center like this, that element is usually the focal point of the entire structure.

## 3 Verse by Verse Exposition

With this structure in mind, we now consider each verse in the section.

**v.2.** The heading marks the topic as one that Paul wants to bring up, rather than one discussed by the Corinthians in their letter. But the "but" in v.3 suggests that his remarks may be prompted by an incidental comment by them that they are following his instructions. On this reconstruction, their comment is only incidental, so he introduces the topic as his own, not as one on which they asked advice.

**v.3.** "I would have you know." Thus Paul assumes that they may not know this already, and is offering them authoritative instruction. Contrast v.13, "Judge in yourselves."

The foundational truth at stake is the headship order. If one may unfold the anatomical imagery, it is the head's responsibility both to guide (eyes, ears, brain) and to provide (nostrils, mouth for nourishment). The rest of Scripture provides ample support for the notion that each step in this ordering involves both guiding and providing. God both guides Christ (Phil. 2:8) and provides for him (Ps. 22:9,10). Christ guides (Luke 6:46) and provides for (Phil. 4:13,19) man. Man is to guide (Eph. 5:22-24) and provide for (Eph. 5:25-30) the woman. Thus the notion of headship is at once biblical and balanced: biblical in the sense of being in agreement with other Scripture, and balanced in that it does not authorize a domineering spirit, but brings responsibilities along with privileges.

The three pairs are not arranged monotonically. Paul begins with the "Christ-man" pair, perhaps because it spans the greatest gap of the three, from earth to heaven. The following two pairs are on one side or the other of this bridge.

Paul ordains the covering to be certain that in their (entirely proper and appropriate) exercise of independent access to God, believing women do not lose sight of this order of headship. That the order itself is important is seen from its frequent description in the NT (Eph. 5; 1 Tim. 2; 1 Pet. 3). Broad experience in many churches and with many Christians confirms the importance of this teaching for spiritual well-being.

Some suggest that this passage (and those in 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Cor. 14 as well) concern husbands and wives (as in Eph. 5 and 1 Pet. 3), not men and women in general. This is possible, but there is nothing in the language of 1 Cor. or 1 Tim. to indicate such a restriction. There are specific expressions that the NT uses to indicate that a marriage relation exists; see the notes to chapter 3 of the divorce book. None of these expressions is used in these passages. Furthermore, the law of vows in Num. 30 suggests that even unmarried women are under the headship of men (their fathers). And the restriction of eldership to men in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 is very strange if the headship relation is restricted to married couples.

**v.4.** "praying or prophesying." These two activities are those in which people interact with the Lord. In prayer we speak to him; in prophecy we speak for him to others. Thus our deportment in these activities should reflect our relation with him.

Note the distinction between "the head" and "his/her head," not only here but in 5,7,10. "The head" always refers to the object covered, thus the physical cranium, at least in 4,5,7, and I would suggest for consistency in 10 as well. The construction with the possessive pronoun seems to refer to "head" in the metaphorical sense used in v.3. Then v. 4 is a statement that for a man to pray with **the** physical head uncovered would be to dishonor Christ **his** metaphorical head. This happens to be consistent with the French grammar of inalienable possession, in which one does not use the possessive for things (like physical body parts) that are unambiguously yours; I haven't traced whether the rule follows generally in Greek or not, but it certainly does work here.

It's important to note that Paul does not present v.4 as a conclusion from v.3, but as an authoritative dictum. We would both like him to have told us more about why he selected this symbol; he does not, but neither does he give us any indication that he is slipping into a quotation at this point. The symbol does make good sense. Man is directly below the Lord Jesus in the headship order, and his lack of covering in interacting directly with the Lord pictures this ordering. It's true that we pray directly to the Father, but we do so in the name of the Son, always remembering that he is our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). So the prayers of both men and women go to the Father through the Son, and the man, standing directly below the Son in the headship order, reflects this position by praying uncovered.

"Covered" in vv. 4, 6, 13; "uncovered" in 5; and the verb "cover" in 7 are all derivatives of the Greek root *κατακαλυπτ-*. This root appears in the NT only in this passage, so many biblical scholars have defined it entirely on the basis of these verses. Two important questions concern this word. First, does it require a veil, or is it satisfied with a hat or scarf? Second, what is its relation to "covering" in v.15 (a different Greek word entirely)?

We will defer the second question until we discuss v.15. To address the first, we note that the root is used several times in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (which Paul, as a Greek speaking Jew, would

have known just as we know the AV today). There it refers sometimes to a veil (Gen. 38:15), but also to the general notion of covering where there is no notion of a garment (Isa. 11:9; Exod. 29:22), always with an explicit reference to what is covered. In Gen. 38:15, when the word describes a veil, it is the face that is said to be covered, but our passage describes the head as being covered. Exod. 26:34 uses the root to describe the mercy seat as being "put on" the ark of the covenant, which clearly reflects the notion of being on top rather than surrounding. The root is also used in the writings of the early church. Among these one reference is particularly interesting, in the anonymous Shepherd of Hermas, vision 4.2.1. The root appears twice in this passage, describing two different articles of clothing: a veil which extends only up to her forehead, and a turban which sits on top of her head.

In summary, derivatives of the word "cover" in 11:4,5,6,7,13 describe the general relation of covering rather than referring explicitly to a particular article of clothing. It can refer to things that sit on top (like the mercy seat or a turban) as well as to a veil. Occurrences that refer to veils speak of them being on the face (Gen. 38:15) or up to the forehead (Hermas), phrases which are not used in 1 Cor. 11. So we should not conclude from the use of this word that a veil is required.

**v.5.** The woman is not directly below the Lord Jesus in the headship order, but stands below the man. She certainly does have direct access to the Lord in prayer, and can speak for him directly in prophecy, but in doing so gives the appearance of stepping out of the headship order. Paul ordains that she should remind herself and others of this skewing by wearing a symbol of the man's authority over her on her head when she deals directly with God.

This interpretation of the symbol suggests why a covering is adequate, and a veil is not necessary. The NT continues the OT picture of heaven as "up" with respect to the earth. Man deals with heaven uncovered, since (according to v.3) his immediate head is heavenly. Woman's immediate head is earthly. Though she may go directly to God, she is to wear a symbol; the covering interposes between her and heaven, to picture the man whom God has placed between himself and her. Paul is not concerned to hide the woman's face for reasons of modesty, but only to have something on top of her head as a reminder that God has placed man between her and himself. Perhaps this is one reason Paul does not come out and call for a veil. The objective is not veiling for modesty among humans, but covering as a symbol of the vertical order.

To some, this whole idea of a difference in the standing of men and women toward God is abhorrent, and a contradiction of passages such as Gal. 3:28. In response I can only cite v.3. Woman does stand in a different relation to God than man does, all our theological protests to the contrary notwithstanding, and the head covering is just a symbol of that distinction--no more, but certainly no less.

**v.6.** Paul's reference to shaving and thus to hair in vv.5,6 is a link to 13-15 on the other side of the main chiasm. The form of his reference shows that the covering and the hair are different: "If the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn," against those who argue that her hair is the only covering she needs. Recall that there is nothing in the word "covered" to require anything more than something on top of the head. So we cannot read the verse, "If she does not have long flowing hair, let her shave all the way." If hair is adequate for a covering, any hair on top of the head satisfies the requirements of "cover," and we would then have to read the verse, "If the woman have no hair, let her be shaved," which is tautologous. We'll discuss this more under verse 15.

"If it be a shame..." is the only appeal in the first half of the chiasm (the portion before v.10) to the reader's subjective sensitivities. In general, the argument in the first half is from the divine orders of headship and glory. The second half (and vv.13-15 in particular) develops the illustration from culture. This phrase, added almost as an afterthought, ties the two halves together, but does not change the fundamental difference in approach between them.

**v.7.** The closing verse of the smaller chiasm in 3-7 returns first to the man to balance v.4, then to the ordering of man and woman with respect to heaven to balance v.3. This time the ordering is not one of headship, but one of glory. Man is the glory of God (an interpretive paraphrase of Gen. 1:26,27), but woman is the glory of man. Again, man and woman stand in different relation to God. Again, man's relation to God is immediate, while woman's is (at least positionally) mediated through the man. This order, like the first, shows the superficial inconsistency of a woman dealing directly with God, and thus motivates the symbol of a covering on top of the woman's head to indicate that she recognizes the man's place in the divine order.

**v.8.** Turning from the human/divine relation, Paul now focuses on the horizontal relation between man and woman. This relation also attests the headship relation. v.8 gives the first of two reasons derived from the order of creation. Woman was taken from man's body, not the other way around. She is an extension of him, not vice versa.

In view of the importance some attach to the New Covenant parity between male and female before God (e.g., Gal. 3:28), it is important to notice that the argument here reaches back before the Fall. There are aspects of male domination that result from the fall (Gen. 3:16), and it is reasonable to expect these to be done away in the new creation, though some of the changes will have to await the eschaton (pain in childbirth, for instance, and even aspects of sisters' roles in the assembly, 1 Tim. 2:14). But Paul's argument here (and in 1 Tim. 2:13) goes back before the Fall, before the entry of sin, and thus describes something intrinsic to the very nature of man and woman.

**v.9.** A second reason from the order of creation is the reason for which woman was created: to be a helper for man. In this capacity, she assists him as he bears direct responsibility before God. Again, the pre-Fall setting is crucial to appreciating that the resulting order is not restricted to any one age or period of biblical history.

**v.10.** The center of the overall chiasm, the focal point of the structure. There are puzzles here, but the embarrassment is from a wealth of possible interpretations, not a dearth. What is the power--the woman's authority to preach and pray, or the man's authority over her? Is the head physical or metaphorical? Are the angels here as witnesses, or as independent moral entities liable to compromise by unseemly behavior as in Gen. 6?

Let's deal with the head first. Without the possessive pronoun, it follows the usage established in vv. 4,5,7 of referring to her physical head, not her metaphorical one, and I will understand it physically.

If it is physical, then we should understand "authority" as metonymy of the subject, representing the symbol of authority, the covering. For this figure, see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker reprint, 1968), 586-587. This is a common enough figure, and should not surprise us. A very interesting parallel is Num. 6:7, where the Nazirite is said to have "the consecration of his God upon his head" when what is actually there is the symbol of consecration, his hair. See also Deut. 22:15,17, where the parents in presenting their daughter's virginity are actually producing the tokens of that virginity; also numerous references to the Ark of the Lord as his strength, Ps. 78:6 (cf. 1 Sam. 4:11); 1 Chr. 16:11; etc.

So understood, v.10 says that the woman should wear a symbol of authority on her physical head. Is this her authority to speak, or the man's authority over her? I suppose either is possible. Personally, I find the second closer to the theme of the immediate context, but I would not object to someone preferring the other, nor would it change the fact that Paul is asking her to wear a symbol.

Another possibility is that *exousia* is here being used by folk etymology as the equivalent of Aramaic שלטוניה "veil," whose root שלט is homographic with another Aramaic root meaning "to have power, dominion over" (J.A. Fitzmyer, "A Feature of Qumran Angelology and the Angels of 1 Cor. 11:10." NTS 4, 1957-1958, 48-58). In fact, a (very minority) variant has *καλυμμα* instead of *εξουσια* here, though this is probably interpretive. I prefer the metonymy interpretation, but any one of them is in accord with the traditional understanding of the passage.

What are the angels doing here? I find the suggestion that they are liable to be tempted by the beauty of the unveiled Corinthian maidens foreign to the context. Indeed, the notions here are not those of modesty and veiling, but of covering to symbolize vertical chains of headship and glory. For the same reason, I decline the somewhat more promising idea that the sense is, "because the angels do so," in reference to Isa. 6:2.

Paul teaches in Ephesians 3:10 that the angels (of which "principalities and powers" are specific classes, compare Eph. 6:12) observe the conduct of believers and learn from it. Compare also 1 Cor. 4:9, and Ps. 138:1 LXX "before the angels I will praise you." (The idea is also strongly attested at Qumran.) v.10 is another reference to that truth. The angels know the divinely ordained order of headship. They know that humans often violate that order. Women praying or prophesying give the appearance of circumventing their head. To make it clear to those who observe (and even if there are no people around, there may be angels), they are to wear a symbol of the man's authority to indicate that they are not rebelling against it by exercising their privilege of direct heavenly access as children of God.

**v.11.** Alongside the ordering, there is also a parity between male and female. In the Lord, neither man nor woman can claim to be independent of the other. Each needs the other. Each is-εν κυριω, and that together with, not independent of, the other.

**v.12.** To further substantiate this teaching of parity, Paul notes that the woman's origin out of man (cf. v.8) is balanced by man's birth through woman in the normal course of human reproduction.

**v.13.** Paul returns to the subject of covering originally introduced in 3-7. There, his arguments grew from the two orders of headship and glory, both ideas that rest on the authority of Scripture. Here, he illustrates that conclusion with an appeal to his readers' own sensibilities.

The appeal is not to our sensibilities, but to the Corinthians'. The validity of Paul's argument rests on their perception, not ours. We will study this argument in more detail later in this paper. For now, we should recall that the presentation here is meant to provide an illustration, not a proof. The hard evidence is back in 3-7.

"Judge in yourselves." The contrast with v.3 is important. Paul expects the Corinthians to agree without any argument that men should have short hair and women should have long hair. The propriety of this behavior will be obvious to them. So he uses it as an illustration of the need to be covered, which he has already expounded in vv.3-7 and which is not obvious to them.

The contrast between Paul's assumptions in vv.3-7 (the Corinthians do not understand the need for covering, so Paul must tell them) and vv.13-15 (their own sense of propriety shows them that men should have short hair and women should have long hair) makes it clear that Paul intends women to be covered by more than their hair. Everyone in Corinth agrees about long hair for women, but there is disagreement that women should be covered. This contrast, reflected in the opening words of vv.3 and 15, is inexplicable if the covering is long hair. Long hair is not the covering. It is a widely accepted practice to which Paul can appeal as an illustration that covering makes sense.

**vv.14-15.** The general practice of their own society confirms that long hair is shameful for a man, for it is the customary attire of women and children. Thus even their own culture distinguishes men and women on the basis of what is on their heads. Certainly they cannot object to a similar symbol to emphasize an important spiritual distinction between them.

In contrast with "nature" (v.14), "covering" (v.15), Greek περιβολαιον, is a word completely unrelated to that occurring in vv. 4, 5, 6, 7, 13. We discussed the other word family in our notes on v.4, where we saw that it describes a generic covering, without referring necessarily to a garment at all, and can refer to something set on top of another thing. The word in v.15, by contrast, always refers to some sort of garment or cloth, and always implies wrapping, not just placing on top. In Deut. 22:12 it describes the garment on which the Hebrews were to place fringes. In Exod. 22:27, it is the basic outer garment in which a poor person sleeps. In Ps. 102:26, it is a generic term for a garment that one might take off or put on. Liddell and Scott cite other references in secular Greek, including "grave clothes." The word is used metaphorically in Isa. 50:3 for the clothing of heaven and in Ps. 104:6 for the role that the sea plays toward the earth. The word in v.4 could refer simply to a turban. The word in v.15 seems to refer to a much larger garment, one that not only "covers" but "wraps."

The important point for our discussion is that while the two words have similar meanings, they are not identical. If Paul wishes to say that hair provides the "covering" required by vv.3-7, we would expect him to use that word in v.15. He is not loathe to repeat a word or root to establish a connection, as we can see by the frequent repetition of the same root in vv. 4, 5, 6, 7, 13. By changing the term, he alerts us not to confuse the "garment" with which a woman's hair provides her with the "covering" that he requires.

We can paraphrase the role of vv. 13-15 in the overall argument, thus: "You will all agree that women should have long hair and men short hair. In fact, the woman's long hair is a kind of garment for her. So you should not be opposed to the notion of symbolizing the distinction between men and women by means of a garment. The covering that I'm asking you to adopt is just another example of the same sort of distinction."

**v.16.** There may well be objections to Paul's teaching at Corinth, but those who object should know that the practice they are advocating, of women praying and prophesying uncovered, has neither the approval of the apostles nor precedent among the other churches.

The "such practice" to which Paul refers has three possible references, and two of them are consistent with the view I have advocated throughout this paper.

1. "Such practice" might be the practice adopted by the Corinthians of wearing a veil. On this reading, we must understand Paul to be saying, "Head covering is a nice idea, but if you don't want to do it, nobody will insist on it." Such a statement is very unlike the authority with which Paul writes elsewhere in his letters, so we should examine other alternatives.

2. "Such practice" might be the practice adopted by the Corinthians of praying without a covering. Paul has already advocated the use of covering in the body of the paragraph. He then considers the case of someone who is contentious. This contention would naturally take the form of women praying or prophesying uncovered. Then "such practice" refers to the rebellious practice of women speaking to or for God, uncovered.
3. "Such practice" may simply refer to the fact of contention itself. Then this is an exhortation to harmony and unity along the lines of Eph. 4:1-3; Phil. 2:1-4; 4:2; etc., etc. On this reading, Paul moves beyond the issue of covering to address the contentious attitude of those who would deviate from his teaching. This reading is consistent with either view of 1 Cor. 11a. Whatever practice he is teaching (or condemning), Paul condemns those who oppose him by reminding them that challenging the apostolic instruction is not an accepted mode of procedure in any of the churches of the saints.

## 4 The Argument from Nature

We now turn our attention in more detail to Paul's appeal to "nature" φύσις in 11:14. The issue here is whether the reference is to a universal "law of nature" or to the particular culture of the first century in Corinth. At first glance, the verse seems to be an appeal to general revelation, comparable to Rom. 1. There are three important contrasts between Rom. 1 and 1 Cor. 11a that weaken such a comparison: the rhetorical function of the passage; the object of the appeal, and its scope.

In Rom. 1, Paul is *proving* his case by appealing to "creation" as a source of universal revelation. Here, he is *illustrating* his case by exhibiting the "nature" of contemporary custom in Corinth. Thus the two passages have **different rhetorical functions**. In Rom. 1, Paul rests his case on the argument from creation. He offers no other basis for condemning the savage than their neglect of the revelation of God in the world around them. In 1 Cor. 11, we have already observed the contrast between the proof from the headship order (introduced by "I would have you know" in v.3) and the illustration from nature (introduced by "Judge in yourselves" in v.13). Creation in Rom. 1 is a proof; nature in 1 Cor. 11 is an illustration.

The two passages appeal to **different objects**. 1 Cor. 11a appeals to "nature" φύσις rather than "creation" κτίσις, while Rom. 1 is founded on κτίσις and never mentions φύσις. The two are not the same.

The third distinction is in the **scope** of the words in question.

κτίσις "creation" focuses on the world external to man's psyche. The argument in Rom. 1 seems founded on Ps. 19, which directs our attention to the celestial bodies and their order as a sign of the creative intelligence. Even though every culture in history has worshipped some sort of powerful higher being, that is incidental to Paul's argument in Rom. 1. It would not matter to the logic of Rom. 1 if all the world were atheistic. The external creation has an order to it, an order that bears witness to God, regardless of whether any person ever recognizes that order or not.

φύσις "nature" appears to have a much wider scope of potential meaning (not all in the same passage, of course). It can direct our attention to the external creation, and also to man's inner being; to the soul as well as to the stars. It can refer to "human nature," as well as "natural history." By φύσις the Gentiles do the things contained in the law (Rom. 2:14), yet by it also they are children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). In the first example it incorporates the conscience; in the second, the fallen nature. In both cases it deals with nature in man, not nature around him. And that nature is not, cannot be, independent of man's culture. Some people are Jews by φύσις (Gal. 2:15); others are Gentiles by φύσις (Rom. 2:27). These verses show clearly that all men do not have the same φύσις, but that it is shaped by our ancestry and culture. Paul's statements, made after Calvary, show that this difference in φύσις even exists in the light of Gal. 3:28! Middle-class Americans share much the same φύσις, but a rather different one than does the Australian bushman. Both we and he do by φύσις the things contained in the law, but they are different things. We do not obey in the same points. Our conscience is corrupt in different ways than his is.

To put the matter sharply, κτίσις is objective, independent of the observer, while φύσις permits a subjective element, intimately involving and depending on the observer.

Appeals to these two sorts of nature are distinct. If I argue that κτίσις (or φύσις in the external sense) proves something, it does not matter at all if you are previously aware of that detail of nature or not. You can, in Agassiz's marvelous words, "go to nature, take the facts into your own hands, look, and see for yourself." Furthermore, in the

nature of the case, κτισις (precisely because it is external) is invariant over culture, so any other person at any other time, given access to the same physical phenomenon, could see the virtue of my argument. This universality of κτισις may be why Paul appeals to it in Rom. 1. His point is that all men "have sinned and come short of the glory of God," and he relies on an external appeal, visible to all men, to prove his point.

An appeal to φυσις in the subjective sense is different. It depends crucially on your perception. I can make my argument only by identifying a common point in your φυσις and mine, and (to continue the example) the bushman may not be able to understand a discussion based thus on φυσις. This observation does not mean that arguments based on φυσις are invalid, only that they may have more limited applicability than those to κτισις. And this leads to our second distinction between Rom. 1 and 1 Cor. 11.

Rom. 1 and 1 Cor. 11 differ not only in the object of their appeals, but also in their scope. In 1 Cor. 11a, Paul is not writing to us. He is writing to the Corinthians, and his appeal to φυσις must be understood in that context. His argument in Rom. 1 is much broader: "κτισις shows all men that ...." Here he only asserts, "φυσις teaches you ...." For his text to accomplish its rhetorical function (as well as for it to be true), it is only necessary for his original readers to share his perception of φυσις.

As with all Scripture, we are to read 1 Cor. 11a in its original cultural context. That context will often contain appeals to facts that are not directly accessible to us today, as when Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their perception of his conduct among them (1 Thess. 2:10), or when the writer of Joshua asserts that the stones placed by Joshua in the midst of Jordan are there (presumably verifiable to his readers) "to this day" (Josh. 4:9). (Cf. also Josh. 7:26. Not only does the name not persist to today; we don't even know what valley is intended!) The validity of such inscripturated arguments today does not depend on our being able to access their bases, only on our being persuaded that such bases were accessible to the ancients.

In sum: Paul is not asserting that "nature teaches everybody everywhere at every time," but that "nature teaches you Corinthians in Corinth in 60 AD." Thus the question for us to ask is not whether men in the OT 1000 years before Paul wrote 1 Cor. 11a had long hair, or whether we 2000 years later feel that it is a shame for men to have long hair, or whether all men everywhere at every epoch feel so, but whether the Corinthians did in AD 60.

The object of Paul's illustrative appeal to "nature" is the subjective φυσις, not the objective κτισις as in Rom. 1. The scope of his appeal reflects this distinction, since it is to the Corinthian's φυσις, not that of some other people in some other time. To understand the point of his illustration, we need to recover ancient feelings about long hair.

The most thorough discussion of classical coiffure that I have been able to find is the excellent article on *coma* in Daremberg and Saglio, *Dictionnaire des Antiquites Grecques et Romaines* (Paris, 5 volumes, 1875-1912), vol. 1 part 2 pp. 1355-1371. In this article, Mssrs. Pottier, Albert, and Saglio give extensive documentation (both literary and through sculpture and painting) to show that Greek hair styles changed rather sharply in the fifth century before Christ. Before that time, "the hairdress of men and women is long and does not differ much in appearance." Afterward, "A complete reform takes place in a rather short time. Men's hairdress is short and entirely different from that of women." Males have long hair only as children. When they reach puberty, the hair is cut and offered to Artemis or Apollo. This tendency of Greek culture is inherited by and persists in republican and imperial Rome.

In other words, historical records confirm that their φυσις did teach the Corinthians that it is a shame for a man to have long hair, but a glory for a woman.

For completeness, we should review two passages in the Discourses of the Stoic Epictetus, I.16.9-14 and III.1.27-28. (Epictetus lived about A.D. 55-135.) Both of these passages cite φυσις as the reason men and women differ in their body and facial hair. God (I.16.14) or φυσις (I.16.10) has given men beards and kept women smooth in order to distinguish them. "Wherefore, we ought to preserve the signs which God has given; we ought not to throw them away; we ought not, so far as in us lies, to confuse the sexes which have been distinguished in this fashion" (I.16.14). "Woman is born smooth and dainty by φυσις, and if she is very hairy she is a prodigy, and is exhibited at Rome among the prodigies. But for a man not to be hairy is the same thing, and if by φυσις he has no hair he is a prodigy, but if he cuts it out and plucks it out of himself, what shall we make of him? ... What a dreadful spectacle!"

These passages show that an appeal to φυσις on the basis of bodily appearance in a context of distinguishing the sexes is not at all foreign to first century Greek thought. Some commentators lean heavily on the parallel, and assert that Paul and his readers did indeed believe that men have naturally shorter hair than women. Then his appeal would

be to objective φυσις, as Epictetus' is (though Epictetus curiously uses the construction "my φυσις" or "your φυσις" several times, showing the subjective side of the word).

Probably, Paul is referring to subjective φυσις, not objective φυσις. Epictetus is looking at facial and body hair, where there is a clear sexual distinction, while Paul cites head hair, for which I do not have any evidence about natural differences in length. Also, Epictetus is pointing out the fact of hair growth, which Paul ignores. Paul's concern is with shame and glory, and it is only our assumption of an objective sense of "nature" that leads us to read into the passage any assertions about the relative possible length of human hair. Lacking any documentation of Greek views on how long hair could grow on men and women, and being able to document how long they felt it should grow, I personally am happier with the subjective interpretation of φυσις outlined above.

Once we note the illustrative nature of v.14, the subjective nature of φυσις, and the restriction of Paul's appeal to the Corinthians themselves, such problems as the morality of the Nazirite vow or OT prayer uncorrelated with covering go away. The timeless truth in 1 Cor. 11a is the headship order among God, Christ, man, and woman, not covering. The covering is simply a symbol that Paul institutes to commemorate that headship. He illustrates the appropriateness of that symbol by appealing to a cultural sensibility of the Corinthians that correlated hair length with gender. Before the HS directed him to select this symbol and illustrate it from φυσις, no moral significance attached to either covering or hair length. Once adopted into the practice of the church, though, the symbol is as normative as is baptism or the Lord's Supper. The original φυσις is morally neutral, but once adopted by the Spirit as a vehicle of truth and brought into the Scriptures, it becomes normative. One can, of course, reject this notion and hold that cultural innovations remain bound in time and are not normative, but then one must also challenge the permanence of other Christian symbols, such as the Lord's Supper and baptism, that were built on specific customs of the time.

We should be clear: the cultural dependency in the passage has to do with hair length, not covering of women in prayer. There is no evidence that head covering had any specific cultural meaning in first century Corinth, and Paul establishes it on the basis of a theological argument, not a cultural one. In illustrating the propriety of such a symbol, he does draw on a cultural norm, that of hair length, but both the symbol and the grounds on which he advocates it are not dependent on culture.

## 5 Head Coverings in Greek and Roman Antiquity

Some people suggest that if we are to obey 1 Cor. 11a today, we must do it with the kind of covering that Greek women would have used, the καλυμμα, which not only covered the head but also veiled the face. To assess this argument, we review the chronological distribution of references to the καλυμμα, the probable meaning of the term when Paul uses it, and the millinery of the first century AD.

The unabridged edition of Liddell and Scott, the standard lexicon of classical Greek, does not cite καλυμμα with the sense of "head covering" later than 4th cy BC, except for Paul in 2 Cor. 3. The word is widely used in later periods in the more generic sense of covering: gill covers on fish, shell of fruit, skull of the head, etc. But I can find no documentation for the persistence of the distinctive Greek garment called the καλυμμα into the first century.

When Paul does use the term, he probably draws it not from the classics, but from the LXX of Exod. 34:33-35. The rest of the OT uses the term for lots of generic coverings, never for the Greek item of dress! Thus it is highly unlikely that we are to understand the Greek veil in 2 Cor. 3, and there is even less reason to import that custom into 1 Cor. 11. Here are the LXX references. It's clear that Paul probably means the term in the generic sense of "covering," and does not have the Greek garment in mind.

- The leather coverings for the tabernacle (Exod. 26:14, only in the original hand of Vaticanus; 39:34; Num. 3:25; 4:25 *bis* with variants, 31 with variants) and its various instruments (Num. 4:8,10,11,12,14 *bis*);
- The hanging for the gate of the tabernacle (Exod. 27:16; 40:5);
- Moses' veil, Exod. 34:33,34,35 (Heb. מסוה, only here, no clear cognates);
- Generic term for the tabernacle, 1 Chr. 17:5 (original hand of Vaticanus);
- Armor (1 Macc. 4:6; 6:2? with variants).

What other sort of head covering could Corinthian women have worn? Lots. Here is a brief survey of headdress in the classical world, based mostly on Daremberg and Saglio, *Dictionnaire des Antiquites Grecques et Romaines* (Paris, 5 volumes, 1875-1912), but also Peck, *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities* (New

York, originally 1897, reprinted 1965) and Rich, *A Dictionary of Roman and Greek Antiquities* (London, 1901). A survey of numerous articles in these works yields the following types of coverings (my categories), based on the articles and illustrations presented from antiquities (sculpture, frescos, etc.).

### Veils

D&S summarize the uses of veiling in general as adornment and religious significance.

- *kalumma* (not attested in hellenistic period)
- *kaluptra* (classical, with one ref. in 3rd cy BC, to a bridal veil)
- wrapping the excess of the *himation* or *pallium* about the head (all periods);
- *theristrum*: Summer cloak, sometimes drawn by women over the head to protect from the sun. 3rd cy BC to 4th cy AD.
- Roman *rica* in some contexts. Authorities differ over whether this is a body garment, a shawl over the shoulders, or just a handkerchief on the head.
- *caliendrum*, at the turn of the era. 1st cy BC to 2nd cy AD (authorities differ on whether this is a wig, high bonnet, or shawl.)
- *flammeum*, Roman marriage veil--bright yellow; covered person from head to foot. 1st AD.

### Brimmed hats

- *causia*, Macedonian national costume, 3rd cy BC to 1st cy AD
- *petasus*, common in Thessalonica, also among Roman travelers as protection from the sun.

### Scarves:

- *calautica* (Gk. *krhdemnon*)
- *kekryphalon* (etymology, "that which hides the top of the head"). A female's kerchief or scarf (though also worn by the Spartan effeminates in the 2nd cy BC), tied behind the head, NOT under the chin, thus covering only the hair. 5 cy BC through 1 cy AD.

### Head bands

(I don't think these would count in anybody's book as a "covering")

- *mitra*, 1st cy BC to 3rd cy AD

### Caps

- *apex* (worn by Roman priests),
- *tiara*: Cap or fez worn by Persians, Armenians, Parthians, and other Asiatics. Assyrian period down to Jerome (5 cy AD).
- *galea* (Gk. *κυνη*) "helmet", all periods
- *galerus*: close fitting skull cap of leather. Varieties worn by rustics; priests; athletes; and gladiators. 1st cy BC to 2nd cy AD.
- *pilleus*, Felt cap with little or no brim. Sign of freedmen; mark of fishermen, sailors, and artisans
- *reticulum* (Gk. *δικτυδιον*): Hair-net cap. 1st cy BC to 2nd cy AD. May have developed from the *κεκρυφαλον*.
- *tutulus*: High priestly bonnet or feminine hair-do. Through 2nd cy AD.
- *vesica*: Animal bladder used to contain women's hair. 1st cy AD.

This range of headwear is pretty much the same that we have today. To judge from the length of the articles, the *κεκρυφαλον* scarf was one of the most common garments. Almost any headcovering you might find in a modern PB meeting has a close counterpart in antiquity. But that is really beside the point. The HS has preserved for us the need for a covering, but does not name the precise garment to be used. The important thing is the symbol indicating that the woman in prayer or prophecy has not stepped out of her position in the headship chain, but recognizes the man's position even as she enjoys direct access to God.