

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

An Examination
of
the section on head covering,
a review of the historical and cultural
background,
a critical analysis of various
interpretations,
and some suggestions as to how this
section should be helpfully understood
and applied today

by Averil & Ian McHaffie

2020

Abbreviations

- KJV = King James Version (1611)
NEB = New English Bible (1961)
RSV = Revised Standard Version (1971)
GNB = Good News Bible (1976)
NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989)
ESV = English Standard Version (2001)
NIV = New International Version (2011)
LXX = The Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament)

Quotations are generally from the Revised Standard Version (1971) or the New International Version (2011)

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1 Corinthians 10:31 – 11:16

(Revised Standard Version translation, 1971)

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. ² I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. ³ But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head, ⁵ but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. ⁶ For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil. ⁷ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.) ¹⁰ That is why a woman ought to have a veil^[a] on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹ (Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹² for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.) ¹³ Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God.

RSV Footnote

a. 1 Corinthians 11:10 Greek *authority* (the veil being a symbol of this)

1 Corinthians 10:31 – 11:16

(English Standard Version translation, 2001)

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.³² Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. ¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. ² Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. ³ But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife^[a] is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head, ⁵ but every wife^[b] who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.⁶ For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. ⁷ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. ⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.^[c] ¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; ¹² for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

ESV Footnotes

- a. 1 Corinthians 11:3 Greek *gunē*. This term may refer to a *woman* or a *wife*, depending on the context
- b. 1 Corinthians 11:5 In verses 5-13, the Greek word *gunē* is translated *wife* in verses that deal with wearing a veil, a sign of being married in first-century culture
- c. 1 Corinthians 11:10 Or *messengers*, that is, people sent to observe and report

Acknowledgements

Considerable help has been given to us by brothers and sisters who have offered advice and comment on our various drafts of this book. We have done our best to incorporate their suggestions and would like to thank them for their contributions.

We will be pleased to receive any further comments, corrections or criticisms of our material, will study them with interest, and will attempt to take account of them in any future versions.

This material has been compiled from a large number of sources. We are grateful to the authors whose works we have consulted and quoted. A few sources are given in the footnotes for those who wish to read in further detail. These discuss the text, the background, the meaning and the use of the original words.

We have usually printed texts in full rather than simply referring to them by giving the reference. This is partly to make it easier to follow what we are referring to. But partly because people often do not bother to look up quotations, and because in our experience, when quotations are cited, when we turn them up, they often do not appear to support what is claimed. We wish our readers to examine the Bible carefully to see if we are correctly analysing what it says.

This leads to some repetition and overlap, but better to provide too much than too little.

Since we first wrote this material in the early 1990s, the Internet has become widely available. This enables everyone to check the current state of debate about the meaning of words, and the interpretations of passages. Many ancient sources are now online, both in the original text and in translation. Websites also enable the reader to observe the bias from which various people approach the issues.

This book is available by email from us free as a PDF, as well as in a printed version.

Acknowledgements are gladly made also to “The On-Line Bible” and “Oremus Bible Browser” which were originally used in researching and preparing the text, and more recently to “The Bible On One Page” (on various Internet sites) which very helpfully gives access to a range of versions in English and in other languages.

Ian & Averil McHaffie,
26 April 2020

1 | Preface

Our purpose in writing this book is three-fold.

(1) To encourage unity and understanding within the Christadelphian community in accordance with the teaching to exercise tolerance (“forbearing one another in love”) where different interpretations are held:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, **forbearing one another in love**, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

(2) To encourage careful analysis of Bible teaching.

(3) To encourage a re-assessment of some of the interpretations of 1 Corinthians 11 which are frequently asserted with great confidence but which, it seems to us, are not adequately supported by Scripture.

Photographs of our ancestors in Victorian and Edwardian Britain show men and women, children and babies wearing hats. During the twentieth century this custom changed, and for the most part hats are now worn as appropriate to the weather, on formal occasions, or as part of a uniform (in the police or army, for example).

Changes in Christadelphian practice also occurred. In 1895 Robert Roberts commented that “The question of women being covered or uncovered in the exercises of worship is not of very great importance ... it does not matter much one way or the other” (*The Christadelphian*, April 1895, page 140). But this was largely theoretical, because hats were generally worn, as photographs of ecclesial events attest.

Changes gradually occurred, perhaps most obviously at inter-ecclesial events like conferences, gatherings and campaigns. We remember several incidents.

In the 1960s discussion took place as to whether sisters on a campaign should wear hats when the Bible readings were done together at the start of the day. At a youth gathering, hats were not worn at most sessions, but when a “Devotional Session” took place

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one young brother (in his twenties) took it on himself to go round and say to the sisters: “This is a Devotional Session. Put your hats on.” Sisters did as he ordered.

In the 1960s one sister roundly scolded two teenage sisters for taking off their hats *after* a Sunday Morning meeting had ended and after they had left the main meeting room.

At gatherings, a major change occurred over the last 50 years. As hats slid out of fashion, they were worn less and less, resulting in a line being added on some fraternal gathering programmes: “Sisters are respectfully requested to wear head coverings”. At conferences and longer gatherings, hats tended to be worn only at the Breaking of Bread, and instead of hats, many sisters began to use scarves. Sometimes new rules were issued: head covering for sisters was to apply only at main sessions. Gradually, as people began to feel an increasing inconsistency in worshipping and praying at most sessions without any head covering but suddenly changing when it came to the Breaking of Bread, hats/head coverings were abandoned almost entirely. In individual ecclesias, the practice changed too. Some accepted freedom of conscience on the issue; some insisted on head covering at the Breaking of Bread, but not at Bible classes or special efforts – although prayers were said at all these meetings. The issue has arisen time and time again in many ecclesias; the usual outcome being that sisters have been compelled to wear a hat or a head covering even when they did not think it right to do so.

It should be asked: What is the spiritual value of a sister being forced to do something she does not believe in or agree to?

Can we in any biblical or spiritual way agree that forced compliance is either good or moral? Do we not demean Christ, one another and our ecclesias by such behaviour?

Pressure is applied in a number of ways to ensure that sisters *do* wear something on their heads, regardless of whether they regard this as biblical or not. Informed, personal choice is generally not permitted. Any sister who does not wear a head covering is sooner or later confronted by those who think she should, on the grounds that she is not conforming to Bible teaching. The question examined in this book, therefore, is whether the wearing of head coverings is a specific biblical requirement for sisters attending meetings, regardless of changes in fashion.

Fashion in Hat Styles in the 1900s



Christadelphian Mutual Improvement Societies' Conference, Newcastle-on-Tyne, 1909

Christadelphian Fraternal Gathering, Birmingham, 1928



Methodist Sunday School, Sheffield, 1928



Christadelphian Fraternal Gathering, Birmingham, 1954

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There is only one passage in the Bible which mentions the subject: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. It is generally considered to be one of the most difficult passages to explain. Feelings can run high on how these verses should be understood and applied. Some ecclesias and some individuals are very insistent that hats, scarves or berets should be worn, considering that this is the only possible understanding of the apostle Paul's words. The terminology used is the word "head covering", which has the appearance of being a biblical term (though in fact there is no such expression used in the Bible). If a sister does not accept this interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11, she risks being forced not to attend meetings and fraternals unless she complies. Sisters have been reduced to tears; some have been threatened with disfellowship; some have switched ecclesias to avoid being disfellowshipped. Some have left altogether. It is easier therefore to conform to a practice which many do not regard as biblical, because so much trouble can be caused by those who are insistent on head covering.

"God is spirit," said Jesus (John 4:24), "and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." It is clearly an unsatisfactory approach from the point of view of spiritual worship for sisters to follow a practice which does not come from the heart.

If head covering is a biblical practice which should be followed today, it should be done in good conscience and in the right spirit not because it is imposed by others. It should not be practised in a grudging spirit, nor done because it is fashionable when dressing up to wear a hat. If, on the other hand, head covering is a first century social practice like foot washing or anointing with oil, the application today is to follow the principle not the first century practice or an updated version of it.

It might be thought strange to write at length on a small section of the Bible, but there is a need for a detailed analysis. Our purpose in writing is to attempt a fair judgment, a realisation that there are several possible interpretations, and to encourage a tolerance within the community for genuinely held differences of practice. We aim to be faithful to Scripture and to pursue a consistent approach to biblical principles. Whether we are successful or not is for the reader to decide. Comments by way of correction or further elucidation will be welcome and will be studied with interest.

2 | Keeping Things in Proportion

There is a commendable desire amongst us to follow properly what the Bible teaches.

Important principles are given about Christlike behaviour, both as individual believers and in ecclesial situations. It is important always to act towards other people as Jesus instructed: "... in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

In 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul tries hard to keep the believers in Corinth united.

I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.
(1 Corinthians 1:10)

Unfortunately, the history of Christianity from the New Testament onwards has frequently been one of division and dispute. Paul's teaching is to leave the decision to God:

Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.... I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God. I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favour of one against another.
(1 Corinthians 4:1-7)

There are times, as the New Testament shows, when judgment and division are justified – with behaviour which is agreed to be immoral:

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you

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not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

But this is an extreme position. Usually Paul seeks to keep the community together despite the differences which are there. So, though food rules don't apply, damaging other brothers or sisters by one's behaviour is very serious:

... sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

(1 Corinthians 8:12)

Respecting a brother or sister's conscience is important because refusing to do so is sinning against Christ.

Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour.

(1 Corinthians 10:24)

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God – even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:32-33)

It is easy to cause people to stumble by insisting on one's own way. The immediate subject in these verses was eating foods, and causing believers to stumble, i.e. to fall away from their faith. It applies in other areas too. Those who advocate the wearing of head coverings are frequently intolerant of the conscience of those who believe this is a misapplication of Bible teaching. And those who argue against head covering can also be intolerant. Consciences should always be respected. But that means there is a need to exercise self restraint on all sides, a need for "forbearing one another in love":

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

(Ephesians 4:1-6)

Being "eager to maintain the unity of the body in the bond of peace" and "forbearing one another in love" are important principles, and should make all of us cautious about insistence on our own position and any rejection of those who disagree with us.

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Human beings – all of us – are very ready to see our own point of view and not to see that of others. In this book we examine issues on which there is disagreement of interpretation within the Christadelphian community.

Are not Jesus's words also relevant here?

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

(Matthew 7:1-6)

If we behave with respect to one another, with love and concern for one another, we will keep together despite our differences. We will unite on issues that are really important in God's sight, and avoid being put off or putting others off by issues that are open to a considerable variety of interpretation.

The comment that Jesus makes about clothes, though in a different context, can have some relevance:

... do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

(Matthew 6:31-33)

Doing God's will and seeking after righteous behaviour are far more important than what we wear. Let us keep a sense of proportion on the things on which we place our values. Let us all do our best to build all believers up in a joint, united fellowship.

Ancient Corinth



Ruins of shops, temples, houses, public buildings – the site of many problems in working out Christian standards in a pagan environment

Questions of conscience

Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.'

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours.

(1 Corinthians 10:25-29, NIV)

3 | A Simple Answer

For a simple explanation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, we suggest the following.

When meetings took place in Corinth at which prayers and public speaking in prophesy were given by both men and women believers, Paul prescribed that husbands should speak without being veiled in the style of Roman priests, and that wives should wear their marriage veils.

Otherwise, Christ was dishonoured: by the men who gave the impression of worshipping like pagans and by the women as they appeared to be acting immodestly, thereby disgracing their husbands.

The question arises: What is the appropriate application today?

In answering that, we begin to see complications.

Was what happened in first century Corinth a matter linked to practices of the times?

If so, the application today is to dress modestly and certainly not to dress or behave in any way which brings disrepute on other people – whether on the ecclesia, on husbands or wives, or on Christ or God.

However, statements made in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 about Christ and God, and about the creation of human beings suggest to many brothers and sisters that the issue is more than a cultural one. For that reason, extensive exposition is often applied to elucidate a theological understanding of non-head covering for men and head covering for women.

The application today then presents difficulties. Is the application still to do with head covering, or is it to do with some modern equivalent?

The interpretations presented are anything but simple. They are long and complicated. It is interesting that almost everyone who looks at 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 produces a different explanation. In Chapter 20 we print examples of Christadelphian expositions, none of which says exactly the same as any other. Thus caution should be exercised because the issue is not a simple one. There is a great variety in the understanding and in the application of these verses.

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This book attempts to present a fair understanding of the issues, and a biblical one. However, we are just as fallible as anyone else.

Everyone needs to be cautious in claiming to know answers. It is not possible to know for certain how this passage should be translated and understood. We suggest that the one certainty on these verses is that anyone who claims to be certain is certain to be wrong!

4 | Is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 an Exception?

There are a number of practices in the New Testament which we do not follow today in their literal detail. We do not wash each other's feet nor anoint the sick with oil, although these are specifically commanded in clear language (John 13:14-15, James 5:14). We seek, however, to follow the principles behind these by caring for one another and by visiting the sick and praying for them. There are only two practices which we generally agree should be carried out today: baptism to mark entry into the body of Christ, and remembrance of Jesus in bread and wine. We consider that commandments given by Jesus, such as foot washing and fasting, were applicable in their literal detail only to the days in which they were given, though the principles behind them hold good for all time. The clash between Jesus and the Pharisees and the conflict between the apostle Paul and those who wished to regard ritual practices as essential both demonstrate that true Christianity is not a matter of outward practices but of moral and spiritual behaviour from the heart. This is the normal Christadelphian approach but it is frequently rejected with respect to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Is this section therefore an exception?

Every time we read a passage of the Bible, we approach it with some prior thoughts. Our understanding is coloured by the way in which the translators have rendered it into English, by our previous knowledge, and by the comments upon it made by others. In the case of 1 Corinthians 11 our thoughts are also influenced by the fact that many sisters wear hats or some form of head covering, and we are aware that this passage is used to justify the practice. An initial reading of 1 Corinthians 11 looks straightforward because we make assumptions about the meaning of certain phrases and because problems of interpretation are often obscured in translation.

There are at least four ways of looking at 1 Corinthians 11. None is simple, which seems regrettable if we feel that a simple answer is desirable. But Bible teaching is frequently complicated, and if we wish the truth we need to face up to complicated answers.

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On the other hand, important Bible truths are clearly enough expressed in numerous passages, and the fact that we are faced with many different possibilities in this section of 1 Corinthians, should not be a stumbling block to any of us.

In recent years this passage has been examined in detail by expositors both within the Christadelphian community and without. Studies into the text, translation, Paul's manner of writing in the rest of 1 Corinthians, and the attitudes to women in the ancient world have been extensive. There are at least four interpretations which aim to take account of the complicated nature of this passage.

Four Ways of Understanding 1 Corinthians 11

Four basic ways of looking at 1 Corinthians 11 can be summarised as follows.

(1) The Symbolic interpretation

According to this interpretation a veil symbolically covers up human glory (for "the woman is the glory of man", verse 7), thus allowing God's glory (represented by the man, for he is the "image and glory of God", verse 7) to shine and be on display when the believers are gathered together for worship. A woman should have on her head a covering during ecclesial services because this is an important symbol of her secondary place in creation and of her submission to her husband, or to men in general, or to men in the ecclesia.

Undergirding this view is the deduction from verse 3 that there is a divine hierarchy of headship: God, Christ, Man, Woman. The reference back to Genesis is understood to further underline woman's secondary position. She was made "for man" verse 9. The divine intention (it is argued) was and is for men in general to rule women in general.

Additional explanations are offered. For example, it is said that the women collectively represent sinful mankind while the men represent Christ. Therefore women should be covered, so that Christ alone is on display at the Breaking of Bread. This explanation is produced from the teaching by the apostle in Ephesians 5 where he says that wives should submit to their husbands "as you do to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:2), and that husbands should love their wives "just as Christ loved the church".

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For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour.

(Ephesians 5:23)

Paul cites Genesis about the husband and the wife being “one flesh”, and then adds:

This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church....

(Ephesians 5:32)

By combining 1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5 and Genesis 1 and 2, it is then concluded that the man or husband represents Christ, the woman or wife represents the church. The church is sinful and therefore needs to be covered when worship of God takes place, so women should wear head coverings as they represent sinful mankind and men (representing Christ) should not wear a head covering.

This symbolic interpretation, with various explanations, is the one generally presented by those who support head covering in ecclesias today.

Within the Christadelphian community it has usually been assumed that hats can reasonably be substituted for veils, despite the anomalies of substituting attention-drawing fashionable clothing for what appears originally to have indicated the reverse. Perhaps in recognition of this, and in view of the difficulty and expense of purchasing hats, scarves are often now worn in many ecclesias instead of hats.

(2) The Cultural Context interpretation

This explanation sees head coverings and long hair as practices of the ancient world which no longer carry the same meaning today. The context is the first-century Graeco-Roman world, including the immoral atmosphere of Corinth. When a Roman priest or the head of the household offered a sacrifice he wore a veil – his toga pulled over his head. If, after becoming a Christian, he continued this practice, it would imply worship of pagan gods. Additionally, long hair on a man was often associated with self-glorification and sexual promiscuity. For a man to wear long hair would be a sign of his not having properly turned away from paganism and its immoral behaviour.

Veils for women indicated a woman’s status as a modest, married woman. A parallel can be seen in how officials wear a uniform to indicate the position they hold in the job they are doing. For a woman not to wear her veil in public (at least in some societies in the ancient

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world) was considered tantamount to deserting her husband. However, the wearing of veils and the length of hair no longer convey the meaning they did in the first century. The modern application of the principle is for husbands and wives to respect their marriage vows by the highly moral conduct they display towards one another as they live their Christian lives together. Just as we no longer consider that washing one another's feet or anointing the sick with oil are applicable today, the same applies about head covering. The literal application is no longer relevant; the eternal principles are.

Ironically, the types of hats often worn during the twentieth century were not veils to obscure a wife's beauty from the gaze of other men, as was intended by veils in ancient times; rather they were the opposite: chosen to enhance attractiveness! To consider that such hats were applying the teaching of the New Testament was, therefore, a misunderstanding of 1 Corinthians 11.

(3) The Hairstyle interpretation

This suggests that the passage is not referring to veils or hats. The context is the immoral atmosphere of Corinth where some members of the ecclesia continued practices associated with pagan worship. The issue concerns length of hair on men and hairstyles on women. The principles behind 1 Corinthians 11 are still relevant, as indicated in (2) above, but hairstyles are a cultural matter with specific meaning in the first century, and it is not appropriate to specify hairstyles today. The modern application is to wear modest clothing and to behave in a Christlike manner.

(4) The Answering Questions interpretation – Alternative translation

According to this view, it is not Paul who taught head covering but some of the members of the ecclesia in Corinth. As in many other places in 1 Corinthians, Paul quotes part of their letter to him, analyses it, and gives his answer. Whether about veils or hairstyles, the passage can be translated to indicate that the apostle Paul is strongly opposed to any rule on the matter. Head covering (by veils, long hair, hats or scarves) is no part of Christian behaviour and insistence on it is contrary to the Gospel: "We have no such custom [as rules on head covering]" (1 Corinthians 11:16).

5 | “In spirit and truth”

Before we examine 1 Corinthians 11 itself, it is important to remember the overall context of New Testament teaching.

According to Hebrews 10:20, in Christ we have “a new and living way”. This is in contrast to the previous approach to God where specific physical regulations were laid down such as head coverings for priests, clean and unclean food, and types of animals to be sacrificed. The temple in Jerusalem was the only place where sacrifices could be offered. The mark of entry to the community of the people of God was circumcision (male only). A good religious Jew would keep physically separate from Gentiles (Acts 10:28, Galatians 2:12), and ritual washings were observed both for people and for objects (Mark 7:4).

With the coming of Jesus there was a radical change.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23-24)

The end of the old system was marked at the crucifixion when “the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51). Previously there was a barrier between ordinary people and God. This is removed, as the writer to the Hebrews says:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, and having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22, NIV)

Where before there had been a barrier under the Law, now we all, male and female, have access to the Most Holy Place – to the presence of God Himself. Paul commented:

Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified

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by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:23-28)

The consequences were revolutionary and the previous regulations were swept away. Entry now was by baptism, and this applied to both men and women; sacrifices were to be offered, but they were to be spiritual ones:

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

The temple was no longer a literal one in Jerusalem but a spiritual community:

... you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

... like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

When Jesus had been challenged as to why his disciples did not live “according to the tradition of the elders”, he was very critical:

“You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.” (Mark 7:8)

His teaching removed the regulations on clean and unclean animals:

“Do you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot defile him, since it enters, not his heart but his stomach, and so passes on?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.)

(Mark 7:18-19)

And Jesus gave the reason. What is needed is a transformation of the heart, an internal change, not an external one.

And he said, “What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness,

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deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man.”

(Mark 7:20-23)

So, as Jesus said to Nicodemus:

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
(John 3:3, KJV)

Since the “new and living way” involved an inner transformation, no longer an observance of external forms, both Old Testament commands and subsequent Jewish traditions were affected. Believers from a Jewish background found this difficult to accept, and controversy ensued over circumcision, food regulations, and whether Jewish Christians should eat with Gentile believers in Jesus.

The apostle Paul took a strong stand against any return to the Law and to compulsory external regulations for believers. He opposed Peter when Peter refused to eat with Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-21); he opposed those who sought to insist on circumcision for Gentile converts (Galatians 5:2); he opposed those who sought to enforce the regulations of the Jewish Law, such as keeping special days like the Sabbath (Galatians 4:10, Colossians 2:16-17). He taught that Christ had abolished what he called “the law of commandments and ordinances” (Ephesians 2:15), uniting Jew and Gentile as one new person on a new basis. Paul taught that we are “called to freedom”, a freedom to be used not as an opportunity to do wrong or to be selfish, but through love to “be servants of one another”:

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”
(Galatians 5:15)

In putting this into practice Paul was careful not to disturb the faith of new converts who were shaky in their understanding. Where problems about eating meat arose (in a Gentile context), he advised caution in exercising the full Christian freedom to eat anything (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8). He was nevertheless adamant on preserving the true position in Christ:

On circumcision, he says:

... we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to

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righteousness under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (Philippians 3:3-7)

On food:

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean. If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love.¹ Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. (Romans 14:14-18)

On special days:

You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have laboured over you in vain. (Galatians 4:10-11)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

It is evident that Paul considered that to insist on physical, external, observances is to undermine the Gospel. In the New Covenant, arranged by God in His grace, freely entered into by each one of us at baptism, we all have freedom – not the legalism of Judaism. When we look closely at 1 Corinthians 11, and at the detailed minutiae presented in the following analysis, let us remember that the New Covenant is a matter of the spirit, not the literal; of the heart, not the external appearance; and any outcome needs to be understood in the light of our freedom in Christ.

Paul is an enthusiastic advocate of this new freedom in Christ. We would expect to find him consistent. In 1 Corinthians 11 there appears to be an insistence on external requirements: short or long hair; covered or not covered; veils or no veils; honour or dishonour ascribed to physical things. These look like the legalism which Jesus and Paul denounce.

¹ This passage is sometime used to say that even if a sister does not consider it is biblical to wear a head covering, she should do so for the sake of those who consider she should. We discuss the meaning of “offence” in Chapter 21.

6 | 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Why is it difficult?

It's tempting to think: "I am just an ordinary Christian. I read this passage as it stands!"

Attractive and humble though that sounds, we can't. It's in Greek. And when it is read in Greek, it is still necessary to engage with it to see what it means. For example, is 1 Corinthians 11 about "man" or "husband" or "woman" or "wife"? It makes a big difference to our understanding, but the Greek doesn't give us an unequivocal answer.

We would much prefer that this passage had no difficulties. It is not perverseness on our part, nor any desire to avoid clearly expressed Bible teaching, which makes us list the following. These are difficulties which make *any* exposition of this passage uncertain, and *any* application has to be a matter of balancing the issue in relation to clearly expressed Bible principles as a whole.

(a) New Life in Christ

The essence of Paul's understanding of the significance of the new life in Christ is that it is not a matter of following regulations on food, ceremonial observances or special days.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Galatians 5:1)

If no head covering for men but head covering for women was in itself a basic principle, we would expect to find it specified in other passages in the Bible. While it is not impossible for a new doctrine to be introduced in just one passage, it is odd that there is no mention of any requirement for head covering for women elsewhere. What is emphasised elsewhere is a criticism of ritual practices and a stress on spiritual worship. If therefore this passage is enunciating a new ritual practice for all time, it appears to run counter to the spirit and teaching of Jesus and of the rest of the New Testament.

(b) Brothers and Sisters, or Husbands and Wives?

Is the passage talking about brothers and sisters in general, or about husbands and wives?

The King James Version translates verse 3:

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3, KJV)

The RSV translates:

I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3, RSV)

In Greek the same word is used for man as for husband (*anēr*); likewise the Greek word *gynē* means either woman or wife according to context.² It is sometimes argued that Paul teaches here that sisters in general in the ecclesia are subordinate to brothers in general: that every brother is the head of every sister. Although Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 11:12 to Adam and Eve and then to human reproduction in general, it does not seem likely that this whole passage is to be

² The Greek Words “*Anthrōpos*”, “*Anēr*”, and “*Gynē*”. There are two words in Greek which can be translated “man”. *Anthrōpos* generally means “man” or “mankind” (as distinct from God). The plural is *anthrōpoi* which usually means “men and women” or “people”, or “human beings”. The other word is *anēr* (plural *andres*) which usually means “man/men” as distinct from “woman/women”. It also is the Greek word for “husband”. *Gynē* means “woman” or “wife”. In some passages the inclusion of the word “his” or “her” in the Greek clarifies whether the word *gynē* means “wife” or “woman”, and *anēr* “husband” or “man”, e.g. “... let each one of you love *his* wife as himself” (Ephesians 5:33). Greek usage, however, is not the same as English. Whether *anēr* should be translated “husband”, or *gynē* “wife”, sometimes depends solely on the context and (as indicated by the translations) this depends on the translators’ understanding. Occasionally *anēr* appears to be used in a more general sense, perhaps in Acts 17:34 “some men [*andres*] ... among them ... Damaris [a woman]”, and in James 1:7-8 and James 1:19-20 where *anēr* and *anthrōpos* are taken in parallel and refer to “human being”. The same applies on one occasion in Paul’s writing when he quotes Psalm 32:2 in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament): “blessed is the man [*anēr*]” (Romans 4:8). This is probably not the case, however, in passages where *anēr* (“man” or “husband”) is used alongside and in contrast with *gynē* (“woman” or “wife”) as in 1 Corinthians 11.

taken as referring to men and women in general for 1 Corinthians 11 is singular throughout, i.e. it does not say “the sisters” or “the brothers”. If reference is made to Genesis 3:16 (“he shall rule over you”), of which several interpretations are possible, that passage nevertheless is in a husband-wife situation and does not say that all men in general should rule over all women. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that brothers are the head of the sisters, only that the husband is the head of his wife as in Ephesians 5:23. Verse 5 of 1 Corinthians 11 says “any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours *her* head”, which suggests her husband rather than all the men in the ecclesia. In 1 Corinthians 7 there are extended instructions to husband and wife, using exactly the terminology used in 1 Corinthians 11, i.e. *anēr* for husband and *gynē* for wife. There seems good reason to think, as the RSV and ESV translators have done (see the full text on pages 4 and 5), that Paul is talking about the relationship between husband and wife in 1 Corinthians 11.³ But others disagree and consider that the passage refers to men and women in general in society (only men should have positions of authority), and to brothers and sisters in the ecclesia (only brothers should speak, teach and have positions of authority).

(c) Head covering for men in the Old Testament

Head covering for men in the form of bonnets/caps was prescribed for the priests, so would have been observed in the Temple. Jewish practice for men in general, perhaps in the first century and certainly later, approved the wearing of head coverings for men when at prayer. It is strange, therefore, if Paul without further explanation denounces this as a disgrace (1 Corinthians 11:4), especially as a few verses previously he has instructed the Corinthians to be as accommodating as possible towards both Jews and Greeks.

Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.

(1 Corinthians 10:32)

Paul was careful to fit in with the Jews over circumcision for Timothy (Acts 16:3) and in Acts 18 he grew his hair long according

³ See “Gender Versus Marital Concerns – Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Address the Issues of Male/Female or Husband/Wife?”, Preston T. Massey, *Tyndale Bulletin* 62, 2 (2013).

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to the Nazirite vow. It seems surprising and inconsistent if he is now condemning Jewish practice as disgraceful (1 Corinthians 11:4,7).

(d) What Kind of Covering? Veils or Long Hair?

In translation, the impression is given that the same types of coverings are under discussion; men are not to wear head coverings, while women must.

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered, dishonoureth her head.

(1 Corinthians 11:4-5. KJV)

In Greek however the expressions are different, and the passage therefore may be referring to two different things. The Greek translated “having his head covered” is literally “having down (his) head” (*kata kephalēs echōn*), while of the woman the expression is “with the head uncovered” (*akatakalyptō tē kephalē*). In verse 6 & 7, however, the same verb is used of both (*katakalyptesthai* – “to be covered”). Some translations use the term “veil”, but the word “veil” never appears in the original Greek. In some texts, the word “authority” in verse 10 has been changed to *kalumma* = “veil”, but it is generally agreed that the original text, as shown by the majority of manuscripts, said *exousia* “authority”. Please see our comment (n) “The Woman ought to have authority” on page 33.

In verses 6, 14 and 15 mention is made of hair. There is therefore some difficulty in knowing how much the instructions are about hair length, and whether it is hair length or veils that are under discussion. Indeed, it is strange how the passage starts by using language normally connected with veils, and then without explanation of a change, discusses hair. Perhaps this is an indication that Paul is addressing several separate particular issues that have been raised by people in Corinth.

(e) Does Paul mean all who attend?

Is the passage referring to all who are at a meeting, or only to those who speak in praying and prophesying? Since prophesying has to be a spoken activity and praying and prophesying are linked, it seems reasonable to think that the reference is only to those who are speaking out loud in prayer or prophecy. This is what the text specifically says: “any man who prays or prophesies any woman

who prays or prophesies...” (verses 4-5). Such brothers and sisters would be in the public eye and could, according to the customs of the time, be thought to be breaking accepted standards.

(f) Does Paul mean praying on every occasion?

If the passage refers to silent praying, not just spoken prayer, should sisters cover their heads when grace is said at meals, when offering silent prayers during the day, or when prayer is said before going to sleep at night? Sometimes prayer is introduced by a phrase such as “Let us come into the presence of God”, but we are always in the presence of Jesus and of God. This is a permanent spiritual reality, and is independent of where we are and what we are wearing:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

(g) What was happening in Corinth?

The facts are unknown, and here, as elsewhere, we need to deduce the circumstances from the letter Paul wrote. Since Paul had started the ecclesia in Corinth (Acts 18:6-11) and had taught there for 18 months, changes must have taken place after he left. Evidently some brothers were covering their heads (in whatever sense the words are translated) when praying and prophesying, and were possibly wearing their hair long. Some sisters, by contrast, when praying and prophesying were not covering their heads.

Interpretation depends considerably on what was actually happening, on what was being said, and on what the Corinthians were asking when they wrote (1 Corinthians 7:1). It would help us greatly if we knew what these were rather than our having to guess by ‘reading between the lines’.

(h) Different usage of “Head” between 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5

The manner in which “head” is used in this passage appears to be different from usage elsewhere. In Ephesians 5 Paul teaches that “the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church” – and explains that this means he should nourish his wife and care for her.

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In the sense that Christ is head of the church, Christ is head of each believer, and since the church consists of both men and women, Christ is also head of each woman.

In 1 Corinthians 11, the impression is given that this is not so: Christ is head of every man, and the head of a wife/woman is her husband/the man. Is Christ not therefore the head of the wife too? Or is he only indirectly her head, through her husband? Does such a concept fit with what is taught elsewhere in the New Testament where believers, male and female, are individually responsible directly to Christ and to God? For example: “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10, KJV), or “the judgment seat of God” RSV)?

(i) The Meaning of “Head”

Head is used both literally and metaphorically in this passage. It is not always clear when a literal meaning is intended and when a metaphorical one.

It is also not clear what the word “head” means when used metaphorically. Does it mean chief or ruler? It is easy to use modern ideas of what a head is and does, but did the word mean the same in New Testament times as we use it today? For a detailed examination, please see Chapter 16.

(j) “because of” or “for”?

The word *dia* occurs four times in verses 9-10⁴. In verse 9 it is translated as “for”, in verse 10 as “That is why” and “because of”. In the RSV it reads as follows (with the words translating *dia* italicised):

Neither was man created *for* woman, but woman *for* man. *That is why* a woman ought to have a veil on her head, *because of* the angels.

That translation, and other following the same pattern, give the impression the woman was created to be the man’s servant, that she is less important than the man.

Kenneth E. Bailey suggests that it would be better to translate *dia* as “because of” on each occasion, so it would read:

⁴ That is, *dia* followed by the accusative case which means “because of”, not to be confused with *dia* plus the genitive case (as in verse 12) which means “through”.

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Neither was man created *because of* woman, but woman *because of* man. *Because of this* a woman ought to have a veil on her head, *because of* the angels.⁵

This would fit better with Genesis 2:18 where God declares that “It is not good for the man to be alone”. The man needed someone who was “bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh” – to do the work with him that he could not do on his own, and it fits better with what Paul then says in 1 Corinthians 11:11 “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman”.

(k) “The shorn woman”

The last part of verse 5 is translated in the RSV: “– it is the same as if her head were shaven”. The NIV alternative translation offered in the footnote says: “she is just like one of the ‘shorn women’”, giving the impression that the term “shorn women” is a well understood expression.

The literal translation is: “It is one and the same thing to the [feminine] shaved”.

It is an obscure phrase, and no one knows what it means; in its context it was presumably meaningful to those to whom Paul wrote. A suggestion often made is that a woman who was accused of adultery was punished by having her hair shaved off.

There is no clear evidence that in the Roman, Greek or Jewish world a woman accused of adultery had this done to her. References suggested by commentators are to Tacitus *Germania* 19 where he says this happened amongst the Germans (outside the Roman Empire) and to Dio Chrysostom in *Discourses* “On Fortune” 64.2-3 which says, “I will tell you a certain Cyprian tale, if you wish” and speaks of Demonassa, an otherwise unknown lawgiver in Cyprus, who, he says, gave the law that “a woman guilty of adultery shall have her hair cut off and be a harlot”. It’s a tale, attributed to “the days of old”, related for entertainment, and little veracity can be given to it.⁶

On the other hand, a novelist and satirist, Lucian of Samosata (2nd century AD), describes a Corinthian woman who shaved her

⁵ Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, page 309.

⁶ The text can be accessed at:

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/64*.html

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head like a male athlete in order to have a lesbian relationship.

the Corinthian, sweating and very hot, pulled off her false hair – I had never suspected her of wearing a wig. And I saw her head was smooth-shaven as that of a young athlete.⁷

Perhaps it is this type cross-dressing practice that is alluded to in 1 Corinthians 11:6.

(l) The Image of God

Verse 7 appears to imply that only man (masculine) is the image of God; yet Genesis 1:26-27 states that man (i.e. male and female human beings) is created *in* the image of God.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... and let them have dominion...” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Some commentators consider that Paul is inaccurately drawing the term from Genesis 1. We suggest, instead, that this could be taken as an indication that Paul is dealing primarily with Genesis 2, and is using the phrase to make a specific point relevant to the situation in Corinth. For a detailed examination, please see Chapter 9.

(m) Glory of God

According to verse 7, “... man is the glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.”

Does this mean that woman is not the glory of God? In Isaiah both men and women are created, God says, “for my glory”.

... bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the end of the earth,
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

If both men and women are created to be “for my glory”, does that not mean that both could properly be described as the glory of God, male and female? If, however, it is in a husband/wife context, the term

⁷ <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/motc/motc09.htm>

could be used in the same way as Paul writes to the believers in Thessalonica: “you are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:20). It is understandable that a wife can be described as her *husband’s* “glory”. It would be more difficult to generalise this outside the Corinthian context and suggest that all women are the glory of all men.

(n) “The Woman ought to have authority”

“Authority” in verse 10 is sometimes translated as “veil” (thought by translators to be a symbol of authority) and sometimes as “husband’s authority” (GNB). Elsewhere in the New Testament the expression “have authority” always refers to the authority of the person who possesses it, the authority someone has in order to do something. In verse 10 the normal translation would mean that the woman/wife has authority over her own head (i.e. how she dresses it), or over herself in how she behaves, or her authority to speak and pray in the ecclesia. It is not someone else’s authority over her. It is her *own* authority. Compare Paul’s use of “authority” in 1 Corinthians 7:37 and 8:9, where it means the right or liberty to do something. Some people see in this passage a “chiastic construction” i.e. a pattern where verse 10 (“the woman should have authority”) is presented as the key point.

(o) “In the Lord”

Although the first half of the passage seems to present the woman/wife as in a subordinate position to the man/husband, verse 11 qualifies or even revokes this.

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

“In the Lord” – which is the true position for believers – there is “not male and female”, as Paul has stated in Galatians 3:28.

(p) “The main point”

Some commentators point out that the word “except” or “nevertheless” (*plēn*) in Greek, though often just meaning “except” as in English, is also used several times to introduce the important point in contrast to what was said before. On this argument, Paul’s main point is expressed in verse 11: men and women/husbands and wives

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are to work in cooperation, both praying and prophesying harmoniously in the ecclesia, not seeking independence from one another, i.e. “The main point is that in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman”. It is this which Paul wants the Corinthians to know. If so, the RSV, in putting verses 11 & 12 in brackets, misses the real emphasis!

(q) “Because of the angels”

There are many suggestions but no certain knowledge as to the meaning of the phrase “because of the angels” (verse 10). Suggestions include:

(1) Angels present with God when men and women were created in God’s image:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”
(Genesis 1:26-27)

(2) “Sons of God” as in Genesis 6:2, who therefore could be tempted by attractive, unveiled, sisters.

(3) Angels in charge of order in the world:

... we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.
(1 Corinthians 4:9)

(4) Good angels present with believers:

Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?
(Hebrews 1:14)

(5) Personal guardian angels:

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.”
(Matthew 18:10)

(6) Angels watching the behaviour of believers:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without favour, doing nothing from partiality.
(1 Timothy 5:21)

(7) Angels being submissive to Christ and therefore setting an example:

... Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.
(1 Peter 3:21-22)

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(8) Inter-ecclesial messengers, like the messengers (*angeli* – the same word exactly) who were sent to Jesus by John the Baptist (Luke 7:24, cf. James 2:25). Phoebe could be considered in this category too (Romans 16:1-2).

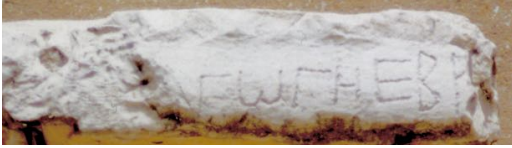
(9) Spies: Paul describes “false brethren secretly brought in ... to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 2:4). In Galatians he is talking about spies from Jerusalem. But the Romans used informants to report back to the government. Security services today infiltrate groups which are under suspicion. Gallio in Acts 18:15 dismissed the dispute which led to the founding of the church in Corinth as an internal Jewish dispute: “... it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law”.

Romans, Jews and Christians at Corinth



The “judgment seat” or “tribunal” (Acts 18:16) at Corinth which is said to be where Gallio delivered his judgment, dismissing the trouble in Corinth as a matter of dispute among the Jews. Behind is the high hill called the Acrocorinth, a well-known landmark to everyone in Corinth.

The Jews had special dispensation to meet weekly, but Rome did not allow this to others. Rome was worried about subversive movements, and at times allowed societies and clubs to meet only



ΣΥΝΑΓΩΓΗ ΕΒΡΑΙΩΝ = SYNAGOGĒ HEBRAIŌN

Evidence of the presence of Jews at Corinth, though these are from a later date than Paul’s time there: the lintel of a door which says “Synagogue of the Hebrews”, and a stone with three menorah candlesticks.

once a month. It would soon be evident that the Christians were not regarded as Jews by the Jews in Corinth, and their weekly meetings might be regarded as illegal if the authorities realised that something un-Jewish was happening. Praying and prophesying by women would certainly mark a difference, and even more so if they behaved in a manner which infringed the Roman concern for dress and propriety. “The messengers”, therefore, may be those who could take such information to the Roman authorities: the meetings were public, and unbelievers could attend (1 Corinthians 14:23).

(r) “Does not nature teach you?”

It seems strange to say that nature (verse 14) teaches that long hair is degrading to a man. When left uncut men’s hair by nature grows long, and this receives approval in other parts of the Bible. In Acts 18:18 Paul cut his hair after a vow, which means that he was living and teaching at Corinth for some time before this with long hair himself (Acts 18:5-18). See instructions for the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6. Anthony C. Thiselton suggests that by “nature” Paul may mean “the way things are in society” – what we would call custom.⁸ However, the evidence from the Greek and Jewish world does not suggest that long hair in general was viewed with disapproval, so whether “nature” meant the natural world, or the human world of societies, there is still a difficulty in saying that nature itself teaches that it is degrading for man to have long hair.

⁸Anthony C. Thiselton in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (page 845)

This statement might be an indication that the earlier part of chapter 11 is reporting comments or questions from people at Corinth.

(s) “For a covering” or “Instead of a covering”?

What does verse 15 mean when it says that long hair is a woman’s pride and is given to her for/instead of a covering? The words “to her” are considered as of dubious textual validity⁹. The word “for” (*anti*) would normally be translated as “instead of”, “in place of” but because translators have felt that Paul could not have meant this, they have said “as” or “for” a covering.

(t) Hair decoration

The comments about fancy hair decoration in 1 Timothy 2:9 (in the context of prayer) and 1 Peter 3:3 imply that the hair of sisters could normally be seen in public. It is not so easy to fit this in with having their heads covered, unless the veils were very slight; hence the alternative interpretation (explained on pages 67-72) that this passage is talking about a kind of hairstyle which received social acceptance as respectable.

(u) “It is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered”

It is possible to translate verses 13-15 as follows:

Judge for yourselves. It is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered, and nature itself does not teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair it is her glory, for hair is given [to men and women] instead of a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no such practice [as head covering] – nor do the churches of God.

(1 Corinthians 11:13-15)

No question words are used to indicate a question in any of these sections, and the original Greek had little or no punctuation, so we rely on translations and the text-editors’ punctuation.

By translating the first few verses of 1 Corinthians 11 as statements, verses 13-15 are normally seen as questions. But perhaps

⁹ The 1966 Greek text by Aland, Black, Metzger & Wikgren surrounds *autē* (“to her”) by square brackets to indicate this.

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the position should be reversed: Paul starts with questions – questions put to him from Corinth – and produces verses 13-15 as statements of his position.

As explained on pages 77-90, it is possible to translate the whole passage differently.

(v) **“We have no such practice”**

Verse 16 does not say “We recognise no other practice” (RSV). It literally says: “We have no such practice (NEV)”. Such a practice as what? Such a practice as head covering, other than by long hair?

With an awareness of these points, let us examine the four suggested interpretations in the hope that some satisfactory explanations may be discovered. And if we feel worried by the difficulties of understanding, let us remember that 1 Corinthians 11 is considered by everybody to be a difficult passage. The approach of Jesus and Paul is to follow positive, general principles, and though this passage may present us with problems, the basic Christian attitudes are clear elsewhere.

7 | The Symbolic Interpretation

Rather than regarding the practice of head covering for the woman (and non-head covering for the man) as a cultural practice, the symbolic interpretation sees deep spiritual meaning, firmly rooted, it is claimed, within Scripture.

The brothers in the ecclesia are said to symbolise Christ and represent the glory of God. The sisters are said to represent human glory, symbolised by their hair. At worship only divine glory should be on display. Therefore, it is argued, the brothers should not cover their heads but the sisters should.

An example of the symbolic interpretation

Here, for example, is an extract from 1988.

The head of every brother symbolises the Headship of Christ. The head of every sister present (whether married or not, for no distinction is made) represents the (temporary) headship now entrusted to man. It follows from this key idea that brethren should openly display their heads (and thus honour Christ the Head of the ecclesia), but sisters should show *the ecclesia's wish* to conceal the importance of mere man.

(“Sisters and Hats”, *The Christadelphian*, 1988, Vol. 125, pages 405-408)

These kinds of symbolic explanations seem to us to be unsatisfactory.

It should be noted firstly that these are *interpretations*, i.e. explanations produced on the basis of various assumptions and inferences. They are not a “straight” reading of what the text says.

Assumptions

Here are some of the assumptions in the above quotation (in bold type), with our comments in brackets.

(1) **“The head of every brother symbolises the Headship of Christ.”**

(Where does the text mention “symbolises”? It says “the head of every man *is* Christ.”)

(2) **“the head of every sister present ... represents the (temporary) headship now entrusted to man.”**

(Where does the text say that a sister’s head “*represents*” something? It says “the head of the woman *is* man” or “the head of the wife *is* her husband” (NIV footnote, 1 Corinthians 11:3). Nothing about her head “representing” something.)

(3) **“whether married or not, for no distinction is made”**

(Is there no distinction made? In 1 Corinthians 7, exactly the same terminology is used and refers to husband and wife. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says “her head”, and according to Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 5:23 “the husband is head of the wife” – not of all the women in the ecclesia or of the unmarried women).

(4) **“brethren should openly display their heads”**

(Where does it say “openly display”, which implies some sort of deliberate show? What it says is that “any man who prays or prophesies with his head *covered* dishonour his head” and “a man ought not to *cover* his head”. It says nothing about “openly displaying”.

(5) **“sisters should show *the ecclesia’s wish* to conceal the importance of mere man.”**

(Where does the text say anything about “the ecclesia’s wish”? Where does it mention “sisters” in the plural? Where does the text mention “mere man”? We can see where “mere man” comes from. It is a deduction from “woman is the glory of man” – which can also be translated as “a wife is a husband’s glory”. But “to conceal the importance of mere man” involves a series of assumptions and inferences.

A second example of the symbolic interpretation

Here is another, this time from 2000:

Because the man represents Christ, he is to appear before God bareheaded. If he covered his head, he would be covering the glory of Christ and would thus dishonour his spiritual Head (verse 4). The women, on the other hand, as representing the ecclesia, must show the need we all have for the covering provided by the sacrifice of Christ. When the ecclesia meets to worship God, it is like a microcosm of the Christ-body, the sisters showing the covering needed by us all for our sins.

("Recognising the Headship of Christ",
The Christadelphian, 2000, Vol. 137, pages 23-26)

Again, statements in this extract are not a "straight" reading of the Bible text.

Further assumptions

Some of the assumptions in the above quotation are:

- (1) **"the man represents Christ"**
(Where does 1 Corinthians 11 say that the man *represents* Christ?)
- (2) **"he would be covering the glory of Christ"**
(Where does it say he would be *covering* the glory of Christ? It says "dishonours his head", i.e. dishonours Christ (verse 4).)
- (3) **"The women, on the other hand, as representing the ecclesia"** (Where does 1 Corinthians 11 say that the women *represent* the ecclesia?)
- (4) **"must show the need we all have for the covering provided by the sacrifice of Christ" ... "the sisters showing the covering needed by us all for our sins."**
(Where does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 mention the sacrifice of Christ, or that the *sisters* must show the need for our sins to be covered, or that there is any teaching here about *showing* "the need for our sins to be covered")
- (5) **"the covering needed by us all for our sins"**
(Is this a biblical expression? Romans 4:7 says: "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are

covered” (quoting Psalm 32:1). The word in Romans 4 is a different compound of the word “cover” used in 1 Corinthians 11. Is there any reason to connect this with a sister praying or prophesying with covered head in 1 Corinthians 11?

(5) **“When the ecclesia meets to worship God”**

(Where does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 say “When the ecclesia meets to worship God”? This is inserting modern Christadelphian terminology. The text specifically says: “any man who prays or prophesies..., any woman who prays or prophesises”. It is likely this is on the occasion of an ecclesial meeting, but it does not *say* “When the ecclesia meets to worship God”.)

General assumptions

In addition, both of the extracts quoted above and the symbolic interpretations in general make the following assumptions:

(a) That the covering itself has some literal meaning of universal significance.

(What can be discovered about the biblical, social and historical background is ignored.)

(b) That the passage is talking about brothers and sisters in general, not about relationships between husband and wife.

(Note that the singular is always used in the text, i.e. it does not say “the brothers” or the “sisters”.)

(c) That the passage is saying that *every* brother should be uncovered, *every* sister covered.

(The text says, “Any man *who prays or prophesies*, ... any woman *who prays or prophesies....*”, i.e. it specifically refers to those brothers and sisters who are taking an active *spoken* part in the meetings.)

(d) That the sister represents *human* glory.

(The text says, “woman is the glory of man”. It does not say that she *represents* the glory of man. Further, “man” is the word *anēr*, i.e. man masculine or “husband” not mankind as in the word “human”, which would more likely be the Greek word *anthrōpos*. The phrase, therefore, is better understood to mean that a wife is a husband’s glory, or a wife is a husband’s

pride. She should act so as to bring him honour, not dishonour.)

(e) That “glory” as applied to the woman is a bad thing, which is why it needs to be covered.

(The alternative is that this is a complimentary comment about a wife. It is a *good* thing that she is the glory of her husband. Therefore she should cover her head – keeping her attractiveness for her husband alone according to customs of the time – and thus show by her modest behaviour that she really is her husband’s glory.)

Christ and the Bride

The Symbolic interpretation is based, in part, on combining 1 Corinthians 11 with 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 and with Ephesians 5 where husbands and wives are told to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”. The relationship of husband and wife is described as based on that of Christ and the church:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

Paul, who is not married and therefore can’t apply it directly to a married life of his own, explains this as referring to Christ and the church. But his immediate purpose is to specify how the married

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couple are to submit to one another, as he explains in verse 33: “However¹⁰, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” To the ancient world, this was very counter-cultural! A husband was expected to rule, not to be told to “be subject to one another” (verse 21)!

The reference to “This mystery is a profound one” has encouraged people to make connections to marriage references elsewhere.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul describes the Corinthians as married to Christ, with Paul himself having played the part of the bridegroom’s friend whose job it was to see that the bride was a pure virgin.

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

(2 Corinthians 11:2-3)

Paul means that he preached the gospel to them, explained what it meant, encouraged them to be baptised and thereafter to continue their commitment. Paul’s concern is that the Corinthians were being drawn away by those in Corinth who opposed the teaching he gave them. The message is that they were supposed to be faithful to Christ, like a good wife to her husband, and they weren’t being.

Note, however, that we are dealing with analogies. Paul is not actually a bridegroom’s friend (sort of “best man” in modern wedding terms). The church is not actually a bride. Jesus is not actually a bridegroom. The terminology is a useful word picture, but should it be taken beyond that? The reality is that we should all behave according to Christ’s principles as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 4-7), the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), whole-heartedly loving God and neighbour (Mark 12:29-31).

Marriage analogies were not new. In Isaiah they are used of God as the husband and Israel as his bride:

“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.

¹⁰ “However” is *plēn* again. See our comment on page 33 (p) “The main point”, and footnote 37 on page 83.

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For your Maker is your husband,
the LORD of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.
For the LORD has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God. (Isaiah 54:4-6)

When Paul, therefore, in Ephesians 5 says that leaving father and mother and becoming one flesh refers to Christ and the church, he is speaking of Christian commitment to a new way of life, with Christ as the standard and Christ as the example. Believers are to commit their lives fully by being subject to Christ, just as Christ submitted himself to the believers in his death on the cross.

In the book of Revelation there are also analogies drawn from marriage:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Revelation 19:6-8)

Another bride analogy is in Revelation 21:

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:2-4)

In this case, the bride is the New Jerusalem in heaven coming down to earth. The result is harmony because God is with his people on earth.

In Revelation 22 there is a further analogy:

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let him who hears say, "Come." And let him who is thirsty come, let him who

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desires take the water of life without price. (Revelation 22:17)

The Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, along with the church (the Bride), making an appeal to people to take up the new life in Christ.

Where, however, is there any statement that in our ecclesial lives the man or husband represents Christ, that the wife represents the church, that the church is sinful and therefore needs to be covered when worship of God takes place, and that therefore women should wear head coverings and men (representing Christ) should not wear a head covering?

If anything, it is the opposite. The church is not sinful, it has been cleansed by Christ (“by the washing of water with the word”, Ephesians 5:26), so the Bride wears “fine linen” which is “the righteous deeds of the saints” (Revelation 19:8).

Symbolism in the Bible

The Bible does indeed contain symbolism. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul says:

Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction.

The New English Bible translates this:

All these things that happened to them were symbolic, and were recorded for our benefit as a warning.

But unless the symbolism is specified by Scripture itself, symbolic interpretations serve too easily as a way of inserting human ideas into the text.

Invented explanations?

In recent years for example it has been argued that in the Law the hair and head reflect the flesh, and therefore the priests had to cover their heads to indicate in symbol that the natural way of life was being subjected to God. Or, again, it is asserted that the priests had to wear a covering as they were not covered by the atonement of Christ; brothers now are so covered, and therefore should not wear a covering. But are sisters not also covered by Christ’s atonement?

Or again, it is claimed that in Scripture head covering is identified with humiliation, servitude and wretchedness of spirit, and this is how sisters should feel because of the sin of Eve. This, once more, is a misunderstanding of what Christ has done for all who believe in him

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– men and women. Sisters in Christ cannot be blamed for Eve’s sin. Such interpretations are not stated in Scripture but are inventions of later times.

Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

The symbolic approach relies on considerable assumptions not only about the immediate text but also about the ecclesia in Corinth. Although later readers, not aware of the context of Paul’s letters found some things difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:16), it is sensible to think that the original recipients would have found them clear. But if it is necessary to be aware of many Old Testament passages to understand a complex symbolism, one is entitled to wonder whether this meaning was either understood by the original readers or intended by Paul himself. Paul was giving direct answers to issues that had become a problem. Most of the ecclesia would hear the answers read out to them rather than being able to read for themselves. They would be surprised at the complicated explanations produced in later ages.

If a deep symbolism had been involved, and if this had been clearly explained previously by Paul, is it likely that brothers or sisters would have refused to do something which had been specifically taught to them as affecting their relationship with Christ and with God?

When we discover how some people felt about veils and long hair, this seems to confirm that the problem was basically with contemporary attitudes and in particular in the practices then current in pagan religion and society.

Further explanations based on Symbolism

To save space at this point, we have put into Chapter 20 some short extracts from Christadelphian writers and speakers who support the symbolic view. We illustrate the variety of different explanations given and point out the kinds of assumptions on which symbolic interpretations are constructed.

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Although each writer tends to present a slightly different explanation, there are certain common features of symbolic interpretations:

(a) The order given in 1 Corinthians 11 (man to God, woman to man, Christ to God) is re-arranged.

(b) A husband-wife context is rejected in favour of all men over all women.

(c) Although 1 Corinthians 11 specifically ascribes the same spoken activity to male and female (“any man who prays or prophesies... any woman who prays or prophesies”), sisters are considered to be precluded from speaking or praying today.

(d) Although occasional criticism is made of elaborate or expensive hats, it is generally considered that any sort of head covering will do.

(e) The explanations can look impressive, with abundant citations of biblical references, especially to the Old Testament, but when the references are examined, they often do not bear the interpretation put on them.

(f) From a passage about sisters speaking and praying in public, most symbolic interpretations arrive at maintaining the traditional *status quo*: men speak and pray; sisters wear head coverings and are forbidden to speak or pray.

(g) There is considerable anti-women bias: a great enthusiasm to stop women speaking or praying on the grounds that women should be subject (1 Corinthians 14:34, Ephesians 5:22) without taking account that we are all asked to be subject to one another (Ephesians 5:21) and the young to their elders (1 Peter 5:5). Does being subject to elders stop the young from speaking and praying? We do not suggest that this bias is deliberate. We believe it comes not from the Bible but from the centuries of mis-reading the Bible – from which we Christadelphians have aimed to break away.

(g) The words “clear”, and “certain” often appear – at points where things are neither clear nor certain!

(h) It is noticeable that anyone who disagrees with the symbolic interpretation is sooner or later accused in a dire fashion of undermining the saving work of Christ and the plan of God for the ecclesia.

So, is there a better way?

8 | Cultural Context: First Century Background

Head covering for men

Corinth was a mixed Greek-Roman city. After destruction by the Romans in BC 146, Julius Caesar in 44 BC re-established it as a Roman colony. The establishment of colonies throughout the Roman empire encouraged Roman language, laws and religious practices.¹¹ After Caesar was assassinated, reconstruction was completed by his successor Augustus.



Roman Emperor Augustus at Corinth with head covered in the Roman manner for prayer

Rome was a highly class-conscious society. Seats at the theatre were marked out to show social distinction: important people at the front, slaves at the back, other classes in between. Clothing played its part in marking social class: you were what you wore.

In the large civic building at the end of the forum in Corinth stood a larger-than-life statue of the Emperor Augustus, his head covered by his toga as he offered sacrifice. Augustus had been appointed *pontifex maximus* (chief priest of Rome) in 13 BC.

¹¹ Latin was the official language and most of the Latin inscriptions found in Corinth are first century AD. Gradually Greek took over. Favorinus speaking in the second century AD spoke of Corinth as by then thoroughly hellenized (Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 37.26). For analysis of the Roman/Greek nature of Corinth, see Robert Dutch, *The Educated Elite in 1 Corinthians, Education and Community Conflict in Graeco-Roman Context* (Bloomsbury, 2005), pages 46-56.

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Roman priests normally covered their heads when offering sacrifice. Roman religion was considered especially particular as to how a priest offered prayer or sacrifices.¹² In this context we can understand “Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head [i.e. Christ].” In other words, any brother who followed Roman practice gave the impression of honouring not Christ but the Roman gods.¹³

This was particularly demonstrated in 250 AD. Under the Emperor Decius, loyalty to Rome was demanded by insisting that everyone (Jews excepted) should offer sacrifice to the Roman gods and to the wellbeing of the Emperor. Those who refused were persecuted, often to death. Cyprian (200-258 AD), in praising the Christian men who resisted, wrote:

Your head has remained free from the impious and wicked veil with which the captive heads of those who sacrificed were there veiled; your brow, pure with the sign of God, could not bear the crown of the devil, but reserved itself for the Lord’s crown.

(Cyprian, *On the Lapsed*, 3:2)

A brother in Corinth, by wearing a Roman style veil, could dishonour Christ in at least two ways. People would see him in the same light as they had seen him before he became a Christian, and would think of him as giving glory to Zeus or one or other of the pagan gods. And only an elite citizen would do this, so for a Christian brother to do so would be to claim a higher position than the others, thereby claiming a leadership position for himself instead of giving honour to Christ – “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). Other beliefs about a Roman priest’s head covering could also be objectionable. It was felt that the head covering warded off evil

¹² “Hairstyles, Head-coverings, and St. Paul”, *Biblical Archaeologist*, June 1988, page 101. *After Paul Left Corinth*, by Bruce W. Winter, (Eerdmans 2001) pages 121-123, and *Roman Wives, Roman Widows – The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*, Bruce W. Winter, (Eerdmans 2003) pages 77-96.

¹³ For a detailed exposition of the significance of being veiled at Roman sacrifice, see “Veiling among Men in Roman Corinth: 1 Corinthians 11:4 and the Potential Problem of East Meeting West”, by Preston T. Massey, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, No. 2 (2018) pages 501-57.

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influences and protected the priest from those around him. Again, this would be something of a slight against his fellow believers and would set himself apart from his brothers and sisters in Christ with whom he was supposed to share fellowship.

If what Paul prohibits, in its context, is brothers in the ecclesia wearing head covering like Roman priests, it is not head covering in itself that is prohibited for men, but this Roman practice. There is therefore no conflict with Jewish priests wearing bonnets or turbans as described in Exodus 28, nor in that of Jewish men wearing a prayer shawl (tallit) or a cap (yarmulke or kippah). Later customs, such as that men should take off their hats when a hearse passes in the street (as used to be customary) or during a graveside ceremony, cannot properly be justified by 1 Corinthians 11, though they may well be drawn from this passage.

Elite Romans at Corinth?



This inscription at Corinth says: “Erastus, in return for the aedileship, laid this pavement at his own expense.”

Paul said: “Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many of you were of noble birth” (1 Corinthians 1:26). But some, evidently were. In Romans 16:23 Paul mentions Erastus “the city treasurer” as a member of the ecclesia at Corinth. This could well be the same Erastus.

Head covering for women

Head covering for women can be shown to have had a different significance. In Paul’s native city of Tarsus it was the custom for women to be totally veiled. Dio Chrysostom (first century AD) wrote:

... many of the customs still in force [in Tarsus] reveal in one way or another the sobriety and severity of deportment of those earlier days [i.e. end of first century BC]. Among these is the convention regarding feminine attire, a convention which prescribes that women should be so arrayed and should so deport themselves when in the street that nobody could see any part of them, neither of the face nor of the rest

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of the body, and that they themselves might not see anything off the road. (*Thirty-Third Discourse*, 48)

It does not follow that the practice in Corinth was the same, or that the apostle Paul took this view, but this shows how the veiling of women was perceived at least in some places. Putting on a veil was part of the marriage ceremony. Plutarch, in questioning why various customs were observed, said, “it is more usual for women to go forth in public with their heads covered and men with their heads uncovered”.¹⁴ According to various ancient sources, as quoted below, respectable wives generally wore veils in public. Any wife who did not wear a veil could be thought to be renouncing her marriage vows and her action would be grounds for divorce.

The intention of being veiled was to hide the woman from the gaze of other men, and thus indicate that she was to be seen by her husband alone.¹⁵ This explanation of the veil is given by Valerius Maximus writing in the first century AD about Gaius Sulpicius Gallus, Roman consul in 166 BC:

He divorced his wife because he had caught her outdoors with her head uncovered: a stiff penalty, but not without a certain logic. “The law,” he said, “prescribes for you my eyes alone to which you may prove your beauty. For these eyes you should provide the ornaments of beauty, for these be lovely: entrust yourself to their more certain knowledge. If you with needless provocation, invite the look of anyone else, you must be suspected of wrongdoing.”

(*Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 6. 9.)

Plutarch gave a similar explanation about women in Sparta, referring, however, to a comment from the 8th century BC!

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

(*Moralia, Sayings of the Spartans*, 232c)

¹⁴ Plutarch (1st Century AD), “The Roman Questions”, *Moralia* IV, 267B

¹⁵ The Latin term for “I marry a man” is *nubo viro*, literally “I am veiled for a man”, though this etymology has recently been questioned. Our word “nubile” (marriageable) comes from this. A similar background is possibly shown in English. Some dictionaries consider that “wife” originally meant “veiled one”.

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The Jewish Talmud said:

The following married women are to be divorced without the marriage portion: Such as go out with their heads uncovered. ... It is a godless man who sees his wife go out with her head uncovered. He is duty bound to divorce her.¹⁶

Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215 AD) spells out the same argument, writing in a Christian context:

... neither is it seemly for the clothes to be above the knee, ... nor is it becoming for any part of a woman to be exposed. ... it is prohibited to expose the ankle ... it has also been enjoined that the head should be veiled and the face covered; for it is a wicked thing for beauty to be a snare to men. (*Paedagogus* “*The Instructor*”, Book 2, chapter 11 “On Clothes”)

Tertullian, about 201 AD, commented:

Among the Jews the veil upon the head of their women is so sacred a custom, that by it they may be distinguished.

(*De Corona*, IV)

It is difficult to know to what extent the beliefs and practices shown in the above quotations form a background to the statements in 1 Corinthians. It would be unwise to be dogmatic, since these extracts come from a wide date range and geographical area. However, the ecclesia at Corinth was not living in a bubble, and Roman, Greek and Jewish practices form the backdrop to other issues on which Paul gives instructions in his letters to the Corinthians.

With attitudes towards veils as depicted above, it is understandable that married women in the ecclesia who were taking a prominent part by praying and prophesying might be thought to be denying their marriage relationship if they took off the customary veil. This was probably not their intention, but it is how people could perceive what they were doing. Hence:

... the head of a woman is her husband ... any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours her head [*i.e. her husband*].
(1 Corinthians 11:3, 5)

If we consider how this problem may have arisen, it could be because meetings took place in houses. The brothers and sisters were,

¹⁶ Quoted from R.C. Prohl *Woman in The Church*, quoting in turn from H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuentestament aus Talmud und Midrash* (Munich, 1954) III, 429.

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in Christ, a family, and when at home with the family women would not feel the need to be veiled. However, in a sense the meeting was in public, and Paul spoke in 1 Corinthians 14:23 of “outsiders or unbelievers” entering. The sisters may not have been deliberately flouting conventions, but there was a risk that this is how their lack of a veil could be seen.¹⁷ To ask sisters prophesying to show modesty would accord with Paul’s earlier exhortation, “Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God”.

Women in the Ancient World

Women in the ancient world were always very much ‘second class’ citizens. The extent to which they could act independently from their husbands or male guardians varied, but women had nothing like the freedom and independence – social, financial, or educational – of women today. The opportunity provided within the ecclesia was a radical change, and it is not surprising, therefore, that difficulties arose.

Valerius Maximus expressed Roman disapproval of women taking part in activities regarded as a man’s preserve:

What business has a woman with a public meeting? If the ancient custom be observed, none.

(Memorable Deeds and Sayings, 3.8.6)

It may be that, because in Christ they could pray and prophesy like the brothers, they considered (probably rightly) that in itself traditional manners of dress were no longer appropriate. What they may have failed to realise was the need to take account of the extent to which they could bring disrepute on the ecclesia by rejecting accepted concepts of propriety. To some people, they would be appearing to reject their marriage vows. If so, it is understandable why Paul needed to remind them of what was universally agreed: “... the head of every woman is her husband”, and to remind husbands that likewise they weren’t independent, “the head of every man is Christ”, and indeed Christ was not independent either, “the head of Christ is God”.

¹⁷ Or, in some cases, it may have been their intention. Bruce Winter suggests that some women deliberately removed their veils to assert independence as part of a 1st century movement away from home and husband. *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, page 96.

Alternative view of First Century Background

However, caution needs always to be observed when drawing deductions from ancient sources as well as from modern. Despite the above quotations about veiling of women, an alternative view can be presented. Tertullian, in saying that Jews may be distinguished because their women wore veils, suggests that veils were not general in the Greek and Roman world. Portrait evidence, it has been argued, shows little evidence of veils being worn. For example,

It used to be asserted by theologians that Paul was simply endorsing the unwritten law of Hellenic and Hellenistic feeling for what was proper. But this view is untenable. ... It is quite wrong that Greek women were under some kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public.... Passages to the contrary are so numerous and unequivocal that they cannot be offset.... Empresses and goddesses, even those who maintain their dignity, like Hera and Demeter, are portrayed without veils....
(*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:562, Ed. Gerhard Kittel, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965)

Ralph Bruce Terry in “A Discourse Analysis of 1 Corinthians” gives a detailed assessment of the sources and concludes that there is no uniform practice at Corinth: both men and women among the Romans covered their heads at worship, while in the Greek world they uncovered their heads. He therefore considers that 1 Corinthians 11, in prescribing no covering for men but a covering for women, was opposing social customs in Corinth and introducing a new practice.¹⁸

If so, it is strange that Paul did not announce this elsewhere and make it crystal clear what he intended. And as we commented earlier, in general Paul was very much against literal practices as necessary requirements

The difficulty is that different people draw different conclusions from the literary and archaeological evidence just as they do in analysing 1 Corinthians 11 itself.

A monumental work, well researched and documented, with full sources given, is the book by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Women of Ancient Greece*. He demonstrates the veiling customs of the ancient world from Hittites through Classical

¹⁸ Ralph Bruce Terry “Aspects of Culture at Corinth” (1993)
http://bible.ovc.edu/terry/dissertation/u-2_4-aspects.htm

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Greece to the Roman Empire, and draws useful comparisons with the veiling practices in the Muslim and Hindu worlds too. Some women, like slaves, may not have worn head coverings, but according to his analysis, most respectable women wore veils, and the portrait evidence has often been misinterpreted to suggest they didn't. On the one hand, the covering could be protective, preventing molestation by men outside the home; on the other it could be oppressive, restricting the woman and her activities and supporting a misogynist view, based on the assumption that women are full of lust and need to be repressed, controlled and restricted by men, principally husbands, fathers, husbands, or brothers. From this background, sisters at Corinth who prayed and prophesied could be seen as immoral and making themselves sexually available if not wearing a veil.¹⁹

By contrast, Jesus saw that the problem lay with the men, so men should control their thoughts:

I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away....

(Matthew 5:28-29)

It is worth noting that the issue was not that women who normally didn't wear veils should put one on when attending the meeting. The problem was that women who normally wore veils had taken their veils off. If, therefore, we wish to replicate the head covering as practised in the first century, where the wearing of veils showed respect to husbands, then should not sisters wear a head covering at all times when outside the house, as many Muslim women do, not just when the meeting starts?

¹⁹ *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Women of Ancient Greece*, (2003, The Classical Press of Wales), ISBN 0-9543845-3-9

9 | Men and Women in the Image of God

In a background such as described above, it seems reasonable to think that veiling was a custom of the times, like foot washing or anointing with oil. The comments, however, in verses 7-8 suggest to those who believe in the symbolic interpretation that literal head covering for women and non-head covering for men is in itself an important divine principle.

For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.)

(1 Corinthians 11:7-9)

Because of this comment Paul has often been criticised as being anti-women. He has also been accused of misusing Genesis by thinking that only man (masculine) is in the image of God. Genesis 1 states that both male and female are *in* God's image:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1:26-27)

There is a difference between the usage in 1 Corinthians 11 and the description in Genesis 1:26. Genesis chapter 1 says that both men and women are *in* the image of God, whereas 1 Corinthians 11:7 says that man (masculine) *is* the image and glory of God, while woman *is* the glory of man. It is easy to get the impression that Paul considers that woman is not in the image of God, but to do this, we suggest, is to misunderstand the use Paul is making of Genesis. Paul, may be using the term "image" from Genesis 1, but his argument seems mostly based on Genesis 2, as is appropriate for the situation he is addressing at Corinth.

The Septuagint (LXX, for short) is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, frequently used in early ecclesias. The Greek word for "man" or "husband" (*anēr*) and for "woman" or "wife" (*gynē*), used in 1 Corinthians 11, does not occur in Genesis 1 in LXX (where

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the words for “male” and “female” are used), but both are used in the Garden of Eden account in Genesis 3, describing how the man and woman ate the forbidden fruit. The word “image” does not occur in Genesis 2 & 3, but could be considered to lie behind the thought of the text when it says in Genesis 2:7: “...then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground”, that is, He made an image, and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”.

That seems to be confirmed by Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 15. In describing the resurrection of believers (male and female) Paul says:

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

(1 Corinthians 15:49)

If we are correct in thinking that Genesis 2 is in view, at this point, rather than the more general statement in Genesis 1, it is significant. For this section of Genesis is dealing with the relationship of husband to wife, and this suggests in turn that the problem in Corinth arose from the attitudes some wives were displaying towards their husbands.

What is 1 Corinthians 11 saying, then, based on the account of the creation of Adam and then Eve in Genesis?

The key may lie in the word “glory”. “Glory” has a large number of possible meanings. In some circumstances it means brightness or splendour, but this literal meaning is not applicable here. From the metaphorical meaning grows the idea of fame, the good reputation which public acknowledgement brings. Describing man as “the glory of God” can therefore mean that man is intended to bring glory to God by the way he acts towards Him and towards others. In this context the estimate people hold of God is compromised if a man acts as a pagan by covering his head for religious activities. By contrast, the wife who undertakes the same religious activities without her head covered brings ill-repute on her husband when she ought by divine intention to be his glory,²⁰ that is, arouse public respect towards him by her behaviour and demeanour.

²⁰ This in itself is an indication of the exalted position in which Paul held women. It was a common pagan view that a woman was an improperly formed male.

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Proverbs 12:4 uses a similar metaphorical expression: “A good wife is the crown of her husband”. Likewise Paul says to the Thessalonians that “you are our glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:20) and he calls the Philippians “my joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1).

If this interpretation is correct, it nevertheless means that Paul was writing with the background of propriety according to the customs of the times. Paul stresses by his further comments that a wife was not created to be independent of her husband. In case anyone decides to conclude the opposite, that a husband can be independent of his wife, Paul next adds a corrective, pointing out that men and women are entirely interdependent and that this is the true Christian position (“in the Lord”):

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man [Eve from Adam], so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. (1 Corinthians 11:11)

It is important to recognise that here there lies a clearly stated divine principle: “in the Lord”. Within the ecclesia of Christ, there is no place for independence of either sex from the other.

It is significant that Paul accepts here that both brothers and sisters speak to the ecclesia in prophecy and prayer, both (presumably) out loud, and it is reasonable to consider that this practice is included in what Paul described in verse 2 as “the traditions even as I have delivered them to you”.²¹ The wording is identical in 1 Corinthians whether referring to men or women: “any man who prays or prophesies... any woman who prays or prophesies” (11:4-5). While prayers can be spoken or silent, prophesying involves public speaking, and there is no reason to presume that prayer here is a silent activity since the two are so closely interlinked in this passage.

In working from Genesis 2-3 Paul was being relevant to the situation in Corinth and his words would be equally relevant to any strong feminist, anti-marriage approach if adopted today. Marriage is intended by God. We should not extrapolate from this, however, that marriage is the only suitable position in which to serve God, whether from a male or female perspective. Previously Paul has advocated

²¹ The work of brothers and sisters in the ecclesia is analysed at greater length in our book *All One in Christ Jesus* (2010). Chapter 10 deals specifically with both brothers and sisters offering prayer in ecclesial meetings.

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celibacy as appropriate (1 Corinthians 7:25-38), and women like Phoebe and Lydia are not described in relation to husbands. But, we suggest, the issue in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11 specifically concerned married people. In Paul's day, head covering and veils were recognised as having particular significance in the culture of the times. It is not so today, other than in Islamic countries.

There is no direct equivalent in our society to express the marriage relationship, except perhaps a wedding ring. When a couple marry, the wife generally indicates her relationship to her husband in three ways: she takes his name, she wears a wedding ring, she sets up house with him. The first two were conventions in twentieth century British society, and conventions slowly change. If a wife reverts to her maiden name or declines to wear her ring, this is sometimes considered a sign that her marriage is over. Such signs are important so long as convention gives them meaning. But times change, and some women now keep their maiden name after marriage, and some use their maiden name in one situation (like at work) and their married name otherwise. The real importance from a Christian point of view lies in the relationship itself. This approach is fundamental to the teaching of Jesus. It is not the outward form which is important but the inner attitude of mind.

How, then, should we read and understand 1 Corinthians if we are to take this ancient context into account?

Before we look at this in the next Chapter, let us consider further the teaching that both men and women are created in the image of God.

Both Men and Women are in the Image of God

Augustine (354-430 AD) argued that women stand in the image of God only through their husbands (*De Trinitate*, 12:7), despite Genesis 1:26-27. Likewise Ambrosiaster (4th century AD), who said that women "must cover their heads because they are not in the image of God... How can anyone maintain that woman is the likeness of God when she is demonstrably subject to the dominion of man and has no kind of authority" (*On Corinthians* 14:34).

Can Genesis 1 be understood to indicate that the man is the image of God, not the woman? One Christadelphian presentation suggests

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that this can be done by attaching “male and female he created them” to verse 28, instead of its being connected to the end of verse 27.

This rearrangement is not followed by any translation, but that does not in itself make the idea incorrect.

Genesis 1:26-28 reads in the RSV:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

The rearrangement makes it read:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.

Male and female he created them, and God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

The intention of this suggested rearrangement is to allow for the events in Genesis 2 to be inserted in between the two paragraphs, so that only man is “in our image, after our likeness”.

We don’t think this is a legitimate way of solving the problem of how 1 Corinthians 11 refers to man as the image and glory of God, and woman as the glory of man, as if she is not “in our image, after our likeness”.

Genesis 5:1 comments:

In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them; and blessed them and

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called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.
(KJV)

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And he named them “Mankind” [Hebrew *adam*] when they were created. (NIV, 2011 version)

Genesis 5 says that God created both male and female in His likeness. Is not the phrase “image and likeness” in Genesis 1:27 the same as expressed here by “likeness”?

The rest of the Bible considers that human beings are in the image of God. Murder is forbidden because men are in the image of God:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:6)

Should this be considered only applicable to men? Is it all right to kill women because they are not in the image of God? Or does this refer to both?

Modern translations make it clear:

Whoever sheds human blood,
by humans shall their blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made mankind. (Genesis 9:6, NIV)

Likewise in the New Testament, James comments:

With it [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God.
(James 3:9)

“Men” (*anthrōpoi*), as usual in the New Testament, means “human beings”, male and female. Hence the NIV translation:

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness.

Genesis 1, therefore, should be understood as describing both men and woman as in the image and likeness of God. It is this that makes them different from the animals and the rest of creation.

Genesis 2 does not contradict this. It presents a complementary perspective, that marriage is intended by God, that man is inadequate on his own, that man needs a suitable companion the same as himself. The creation of woman for this purpose is picked up in 1 Corinthians 11, as is appropriate to the situation in Corinth. That does not mean that woman is in any way inferior to the man, or vice versa, or less able or less entitled to take an active part in all ecclesial activities.

10 | An Expanded Version: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in the light of the Ancient Context

The Cultural Context Interpretation

The following is based on the RSV translation, assuming that the passage should be read as a whole, that it contains Paul's own words, and that he was not quoting or paraphrasing comments from people at Corinth.²² We have expanded as we think Paul would have done had he been asked, taking into account the context of the times and attempting to solve many of the problems of interpretation listed on pages 25-38. The translation is in bold type. Our explanatory suggestions are in capital letters within the square brackets. We start with chapter 10 from verse 31, where Paul is encouraging everyone to behave in a manner which brings glory to God, and to take care not to cause offence in any direction.

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.
[IF ANY OF YOU CORINTHIAN MEN THINK THAT YOU CAN DRESS AS YOU DID WHEN YOU OFFERED WORSHIP TO PAGAN GODS, YOU ARE NOT HONOURING CHRIST TO WHOM YOU SHOULD BE

²² In Chapter 13 we discuss the possibility that 1 Corinthians 11 contains quotations or Paul's paraphrasing of comments from people in Corinth.

LOOKING UP. IF ANY OF YOU CORINTHIAN WIVES THINK, BECAUSE YOU CAN PRAY AND PROPHECY JUST AS YOUR HUSBANDS DO, THAT YOU ARE THEREBY INDEPENDENT FROM YOUR HUSBANDS, NOTE THAT THIS IS NOT THE WAY THINGS ARE. YOUR HUSBANDS ARE NOT INDEPENDENT IN THEMSELVES, FOR THEY HAVE CHRIST AS THEIR HEAD, NOR IS CHRIST INDEPENDENT FOR HE HAS GOD AS HIS HEAD. SIMILARLY EACH ONE OF YOU HAS YOUR HUSBAND AS YOUR HEAD AND IT IS NECESSARY WHEN YOU ARE PRAYING OR PROPHECYING THAT YOU DRESS IN THE RECOGNISED MANNER AS RESPECTABLE MARRIED WOMEN.] **Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head,** [BECAUSE THIS IS HOW ELITE ROMANS WORSHIP THEIR GODS AND YOU BROTHERS MUST NOT GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF WORSHIPPING PAGAN GODS OR PLACING YOURSELVES ABOVE OTHER BELIEVERS. YOUR HEAD IS CHRIST.] **but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled²³ dishonours her head** [i.e. HER HUSBAND] – **it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil** [FOR OTHERWISE YOU GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU ARE AN IMMORAL WOMAN]. **For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God;** [AS IT SAYS IN GENESIS 2, GOD MADE A MAN, MOULDING DUST INTO AN IMAGE AND BREATHING INTO IT THE BREATH OF LIFE. A MAN SHOULD THEREFORE ACT SO AS TO GIVE GOD GLORY, SHOWING HIS PROPER RELATIONSHIP TO GOD HIS CREATOR. THEREFORE HE MUST NOT FOLLOW THE PAGAN ROMAN PRACTICE OF WEARING A VEIL WHEN HE PRAYS OR PROPHECIES, FOR THIS GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT HE ACKNOWLEDGES NOT HIS CREATOR BUT THE ROMAN GODS.] **but woman is the**

²³ In Chapter 11 we discuss whether this passage is talking about veils or hair styles. Here we are assuming (with the RSV) that veils are meant.

glory of man. [i.e. THE WIFE IS A HUSBAND'S GLORY. BY WEARING A VEIL SHE HONOURS HER HUSBAND IN PUBLIC AND SHOWS THAT SHE RESPECTS HIM AND HER MARRIAGE VOWS TO HIM.] **For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.** [EVE FROM ADAM.] **Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.** [EVE WAS CREATED BECAUSE IT WAS "NOT GOOD THAT THE MAN SHOULD BE ALONE" AND HUSBAND AND WIFE SHOULD BE "ONE FLESH". IT IS THEREFORE NOT APPROPRIATE FOR WIVES TO REJECT THEIR MARRIED STATE OR ACT IN A MANNER WHICH COULD BE THOUGHT TO BE REJECTING THEIR HUSBANDS.] **That is why a woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels.** [THE ANGELS ARE GOD'S AGENTS AND ARE CONCERNED TO SEE PROPER ORDER IN SOCIETY. BY WEARING HER VEIL, A WIFE HAS THE AUTHORITY OF A MARRIED WOMAN, AUTHORITY IN THIS INSTANCE TO STAND RESPECTABLY IN THE MEETING AND SPEAK IN PRAYING OR PROPHECYING.] **Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.** [SO FAR I HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT HUSBANDS AND WIVES. HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH EVE WAS CREATED FROM ADAM, MEN ARE NOW BORN FROM WOMEN, WHICH ILLUSTRATES THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF MEN AND WOMEN – WE ARE ALL CREATED BY GOD – AND IN THE ECCLESIA SISTERS ARE NOT INDEPENDENT OF THE BROTHERS NOR VICE-VERSA. BOTH PRAY AND PROPHECY, BUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THAT WHEN DOING SO, NO IMPRESSION IS GIVEN THAT WIVES DO NOT SUPPORT THE GOD-GIVEN INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE, FOR SPEAKING IN PUBLIC IS NOT NORMALLY CONSIDERED ACCEPTABLE FOR WIVES. WHEN THERE IS SO MUCH IMMORALITY IN SOCIETY IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE BELIEVERS SET A HIGH STANDARD. WHILE, THEREFORE, YOU HAVE NEW FREEDOM IN CHRIST, IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO ACT IN SUCH A WAY THAT BELIEVERS COULD APPEAR TO

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BE MAKING LIGHT OF MARRIAGE. AS I SAID ABOVE, “WHETHER YOU EAT OR DRINK, WHATEVER YOU DO, DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD. GIVE NO OFFENCE TO JEWS OR TO GREEKS OR TO THE ECCLESIA OF GOD.” (1 CORINTHIANS 10:31-32)]

Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? [YOU ARE SENSIBLE PEOPLE; MAKE YOUR OWN JUDGMENT. YOU KNOW WHAT IS CONSIDERED PROPER IN RESPECTABLE SOCIETY.] **Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him,** [BY NATURE MAN IS MASCULINE. I CONSIDER THAT MEN SHOULD NOT GROW THEIR HAIR LONG AND LOOK LIKE WOMEN.] **but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?** [NATURALLY LONG HAIR IS A SIGN IN OUR SOCIETY THAT THE WOMAN IS RESPECTABLE; ONLY IMMORAL WOMEN CUT THEIR HAIR SHORT.] **For her [LONG] hair is given to her for a covering.** [NATURE THUS AGREES WITH WHAT IS CONSIDERED RESPECTABLE: A WIFE SHOULD KEEP HER HAIR LONG AND COVER HER HEAD WITH IT AS IS CONSIDERED RESPECTABLE.]

If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God. [NORMAL PRACTICE AMONGST ALL THE ECCLESIAS IS FOR THE BROTHERS WHO PRAY AND PROPHECY TO DO SO WITHOUT THE ROMAN-STYLE COVERING, FOR THE WOMEN WHO PRAY AND PROPHECY TO DO SO WEARING THEIR VEILS TO INDICATE THEIR MARRIED STATUS; BROTHERS KEEP THEIR HAIR SHORT, SISTERS THEIR HAIR LONG. IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE CONTENTIOUS ABOUT THIS, PLEASE ACT AS I INSTRUCTED ABOVE WHEN I SAID THAT I TRY TO PLEASE EVERYONE IN EVERYTHING I DO, NOT SEEKING MY OWN ADVANTAGE, BUT THAT OF MANY, THAT THEY MAY BE SAVED. BE IMITATORS OF ME, AS I AM OF CHRIST.]

11 | What Kind of Covering? Hair, or a Veil?

The Hairstyle Interpretation

There is no clear reference in the text of 1 Corinthians 11 to describe the kind of covering under discussion. Although various Greek authors can be cited who use similar language, it has not been possible to find any exact parallels.²⁴

The lack of any noun such as “veil” has encouraged re-examination of the passage for any clues. Verse 4, as translated in the RSV, says: “Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head”. Not only is there no noun to describe the covering, there is no word for “covering” here in the Greek at all. The phrase is *kata kephalēs echōn*, which literally means “having (something) down from head”. The “something” is not specified. If Paul had meant to say “something *on* his head”, it is suggested by some writers that he would not have used *kata* (“down from”) but *epi* (“on”), the word used of the woman in verse 10 “on her head”.

We think our previous explanation is more likely: that it refers to a man with Roman style clothing coming down from his head, in the style of a Roman priest at sacrifice. But verses 14 and 15 mention hair.

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

(1 Corinthians 11:14-15)

²⁴ Parallels are in Plutarch, in the Septuagint (LXX), and in the Apocrypha. In *Apothegmata* 200E Plutarch writes “*kata tēs kephalēs echōn to himation*” = “with his cloak down over his head”, but in this phrase a noun (*himation*) is specified. In 1 Corinthians 11 there is no noun. In Esther 6:12 in LXX we read that Haman went home, “mourning and having his head covered” *lypoumenos kata kephalēs* (literally “mourning down from his head”). Again there is no noun and no verb for “covering” – though it may well be correct to assume both.

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Some writers suggest that Paul is talking about long hair on the man, left flowing down (*kata*) his head, to which Paul objects, and long hair on the woman wrapped up *on* her head in the style considered acceptable in those times.²⁵

If so, this would obviously require a different understanding from that suggested by us earlier when we looked at veils, whether the toga pulled over his head by a Roman priest at prayer or a veil worn by women to preserve them from masculine eyes.

The “long hair” explanation would solve the problem of why Paul should appear to object so vehemently to something which was normal in Jerusalem where the priests prayed with something on their heads – turbans, caps, mitres or bonnets (Exodus 28). Paul (it is suggested) is not objecting to men praying with something *on* their heads but to their praying with long hair flowing *down from* their heads. Pseudo-Phocylides (probably a Jewish writer in Alexandria, c. 30 BC to 40 AD) advised parents:

If a child is a boy, do not let locks grow on his head. Braid not his crown nor make cross-knots on the top of his head. Long hair is not fit for men, but for voluptuous women. Guard the beauty of a comely boy, because many rage for intercourse with a man.
(Pseudo-Phocylides 210-214)

²⁵ James B. Hurley in *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (1981), and *Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women? A Consideration of I Cor. 11:2-16 and I Cor. 14:33b-36* in *Westminster Theological Journal*, Winter 1973. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, no. 42, (1980). Cynthia L. Thompson, *Commentary on Women's Hairstyles and Head-coverings*, in *Biblical Archaeologist*, June 1988. David W. J. Gill, “The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16”, *Tyndale Bulletin*, 41.2 (1990) pages 245-260). Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 2009, pages 141-173. “Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16”, *Priscilla Papers*, Vol 20, No. 3, Summer 2006 – available at https://www.pbpayne.com/wp-admin/Payne2006PP1Cor11_2-16.pdf. By contrast, see Richard Oster, *When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11.4*, in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 34, 1988, pages 481-505; Curtis E. Montier, *Let her be shorn, 1 Corinthians 11 and Female Shaving in Antiquity*, 2015.

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Long hair on a man was regarded as effeminate: long hair, braided on the top of the head was a feminine style.²⁶

Philo criticised men for “the provocative way they curl and dress their hair”, and he accused them of falsifying “the stamp of nature” (*Special Laws* 3:36, 38).

Why, then, does Pseudo-Phocylides appear also to disapprove of long hair on women in that he describes it as “fit ... for *voluptuous* women”? The answer may be in 1 Corinthians 11 as well as in the archaeological evidence from ancient Corinth. Respectable women had long hair but they wound it up on top of their heads. It was their hair, wound up, which was their head-covering.

In Euripides’ play *The Bacchae* (which means the followers of Bacchus – in Greek mythology, Dionysus, the god of nature, emotional religion and wine) women revellers abandoned home and husband and ran wild in ecstatic dancing in a form of possessed worship. They let their hair down and followed the god. Dionysus also annoyed convention by having long, flowing hair. *The Bacchae* was written in the 5th century BC, but similar attitudes towards long hair on men and free-flowing long hair in women seem to have continued – as did worship of Dionysus. The female followers of Dionysus are sometimes represented in Greek art as “raging with madness or enthusiasm, their heads thrown backwards, with dishevelled hair”.²⁷ Paul mentions that in the ecclesia at Corinth some had previously been influenced by pagan cults:

You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved.

(1 Corinthians 12:2)

This statement is at the beginning of Paul’s description of the spiritual gifts they received in Christ; could it be that free-flowing hair was one of the problems which underlay the comments in chapter 11?

Verse 15 can fit this explanation: “... long hair is given to her as a covering”. The word “as” is a translation of *anti*, which could alternatively be translated “instead of”. The word translated “a covering” is *peribolaion*, something which is thrown round or

²⁶ See also Walter T. Wilson, *The sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides, Commentaries on early Jewish literature, Text of poem in Greek with English translation*. ISBN 3-11-018241-6 (2005).

²⁷ *A Smaller Classical Dictionary* by William Smith (1910) page 197

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wrapped round, which is how hair is shown on portraits. It is wrapped round the woman's head and tied or pinned in place. This would then mean that a woman's long hair is given to her instead of a veil!

The NIV Margin Reading

An alternative translation is offered in the NIV margin, both in the original NIV and in the 2011 updated version:

Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonours his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair dishonours her head – she is just like one of the 'shorn women' (verses 4 & 5).

The analysis behind this translation can be read in *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* by James B. Hurley, pages 168-171, where the explanation is basically as follows: The word "uncovered" in 1 Corinthians 11 (*akatakalyptos*) occurs in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which would have been used by the ecclesia at Corinth. In Leviticus 13:45 the Hebrew reads literally (of a leper) "his head shall be unbound". The Septuagint²⁸ translates this "his head shall be *akatakalyptos*". The RSV translates the same phrase "let the hair of his head hang loose". In Numbers 5:18 when a woman is accused of adultery, she was to be brought before the priest who would "unbind the hair of the woman's head" (RSV). The verb used in the Septuagint for unbind is *akatakalyptō* or *akalyptō*. It is suggested therefore that *akatakalyptos* in 1 Corinthians 11 means "with hair hanging loose" while the opposite "to cover the head" (*katakalyptesthai*) means "to bind hair up upon the head".

Andrew Perry gives a detailed examination of Leviticus 13:45 and Numbers 5:18 and argues that removing a covering from the head rather than letting the hair hang loose is the meaning.²⁹ James

²⁸ There are two readings in the LXX. *Akalyptos* seems to be the commoner, and *akatakalyptos* less well-attested. Both mean "uncovered" but the longer word contains the word *kata* "down".

²⁹ *Head-covering and Creation* by Andrew Perry, Willow Publications, (1997), pages 115-126 (ISBN 0 952619245). Andrew Perry gives a detailed explanation of his understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, with a scholarly analysis of this and associated passages, including Genesis. He produces a challenging critique of other explanations (including the hairstyle suggestion and the quotation approach). We nevertheless find ourselves in disagreement

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Hurley's argument that the covering is hair not cloth, is presented in the appendix to his book, and is likewise based on considerations of how the Hebrew should be translated.³⁰ Several translations seem to think that the Hebrew refers to loosened hair (NIV, GNB, RSV, NRSV) and since these are produced by people from varying perspectives, there is no reason to see any theological bias in their translation concerning hair.

One more passage, from the LXX Apocrypha, has some bearing on the issue:

Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement, and beautiful in appearance. As she was veiled (*katakekalymmenē*), the wicked men ordered her to be unveiled (*apokalypthēnai*), so that they might feast upon her beauty.

(Daniel and Susanna 31-32)

This passage might make more sense if she were wearing a veil which fully covered her head, for a hair style would still enable her beauty to be seen. Perhaps, though, her long hair hanging down would be regarded by the men as showing her beauty even more, as it says in 1 Corinthians 11:15: "if a woman has long hair, it is her glory" (NIV).

Whether *akatakalyptos* ("uncovered") means "unveiled" or "with hair hanging loose" remains a matter for debate.

We conclude, therefore, that it is not possible to give a certain answer as to whether Paul is talking about veils or about hair styles. We incline towards the view that a veil is intended. That nothing clearer can be said is again an indication, we suggest, that local and time-related practices are involved or we would have been given positive and clear details. We need today to apply the principle behind these practices, but the actual practice is no longer discoverable or relevant.³¹

with his analysis on several issues, and are puzzled why he does not arrive at the usual Christadelphian approach for dealing with first century practices like footwashing and anointing with oil, that is, to follow the principle, but not the literal application.

³⁰ *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* by James B. Hurley, (1981) pages 260-269.

³¹ In support of hair rather than a veil: A. Philip Brown II, Ἐικὼν καὶ Δόξα Θεοῦ [Eikōn kai Doxa Theou]: An Interpretive Key to 1 Cor 11:2-16 (2003) and "Veils vs Hair, Uncut vs. Long?: Assessing Recent Claims in the Light of Available Data", Aldersgate Forum (2011). In support of veils rather than

The Acrocorinth



On top of the Acrocorinth in Paul’s time there was a small temple to Aphrodite, Greek goddess of erotic love.

Sometimes biblical commentators quote Strabo (64 BC-24AD):

And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich...

However, to be accurate, it is important to note that this account by Strabo, in context, refers to the city that was destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, not to the one re-established in 44 BC. Nevertheless, prostitution with its exploitation existed widely in the ancient world. Demosthenes (or Pseudo-Demosthenes) said:

Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.

(Apollodorus Against Neaera, III, 122, 4th century BC)

It is evident from 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 and 2 Corinthians 12:21 that prostitution was widespread in ancient Corinth – as was likely in an important seaport and a busy commercial centre. That believers had to avoid behaviour that could give any suspicion of immorality may well lie behind the issues about head covering in 1 Corinthians 11. In 2 Corinthians 12:21, Paul expressed regret:

I fear that ... I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced.

hair: “Honour, Head-coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 in its Social Context” by Mark Finney, JSNT (2010) pages 31-58; “Dress Codes at Roman Corinth”, by Preston T. Massey, JGRChJ 11 (2015) pages 51-81.

12 | Approval of Long Hair

Although we have given a few passages on pages 67-69 which suggest that some people found long hair on men objectionable, more passages can be produced which say the opposite.

Approval of Long Hair in the Bible

From the Bible there is the Nazirite vow:

And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar made from wine or strong drink, and shall not drink any juice of grapes or eat grapes, fresh or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, not even the seeds or the skins. All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy; he shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long.”
(Number 6:1-5)

Both men and women could take this vow, and after their hair had grown long, it was shaved off.

And the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering.
(Numbers 6:18)

Samson said to Delilah:

“A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb. If I be shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man.”
(Judges 16:17)

Samuel’s mother prayed:

And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.”
(1 Samuel 1:11)

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Absalom was greatly admired for his hair:

Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his beauty as Absalom; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight. There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a beautiful woman. (2 Samuel 14:25-27)

Paul or Aquila “cut his hair, for he had a vow” (Acts 18:18). In Jerusalem, James and the elders of the church asked Paul to take part in a ceremony, presumably the Nazirite vow:

“We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads.” (Acts 21:23-24)

Since the above people are noted for growing their hair long, the majority of people most of the time presumably cut their hair shorter. But there is no suggestion (apart from in 1 Corinthians 11) in Old or New Testaments that in itself long hair was a disgrace or a dishonour.

Approval of Long Hair in the Greek World

In Greek history the famous Greek army which destroyed Troy consisted largely of the Achaeans. They are proudly described as “long-haired Achaeans” (Homer c. 800 BC, e.g. *Iliad* II:51). In New Testament times Corinth was the capital city of Achaea.

Not far from Corinth is Sparta. The Spartan soldiers were known for their long hair. Before the battle of Thermopylae and expecting an imminent death, they calmly combed their hair. Plutarch writing about 75 AD comments that at Delphi there is a statue of the Spartan general Lysander “representing him with his hair at full length, after the old fashion, and with an ample beard.” He comments that the reason Spartans wear long hair is because it is

one of the ordinances of Lycurgus, who, as it is reported, was used to say, that long hair made good-looking men more beautiful, and ill-looking men more terrible.

(Plutarch, *Life of Lysander*)³²

³² Translated by John Dryden, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/lysander.html>

There was also a practical reason. By braiding their long hair tightly they could protect their heads better from sword blows.

At Athens, down to the Persian wars, the hair was worn long...
... a free Athenian citizen did not wear his hair very short, or he would have been mistaken for a slave, who would be obliged to do so. (Oskar Seyffert, *A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities*, page 296)

Portraits of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) show him with longish hair, but he is said to have instructed his soldiers to wear their hair short so that they could not be grabbed so easily in battle. Alexander's invasion of the east resulted in the spread of the Greek language and the consequent writing of the New Testament in Greek.

Epictetus, c. 100 AD, commented, that people see a man with long hair and conclude that he is a philosopher³³ – which could mean that he was dressing differently to show his disdain for conventional customs.

The above comments suggest that men generally cut their hair, but it was not thought in any way a disgrace or degrading for men to have long hair.

Romans and Long Hair

As with the Greeks and Jews, Roman practice varied.

In early times the Romans wore their hair long, as was represented in the oldest statues in the age of Varro (*De Re Rust.* II.11 §10), and hence the Romans of the Augustan age designated their ancestors intonsi ["uncut"] (*Ov. Fast.* II.30) and capillati ["longhaired"] (*Juv. VI.30 [sic=V.30]*). But after the introduction of barbers into Italy about B.C. 300, it became the practice to wear their hair short. (William Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, pages 328-330)³⁴

However, as the quotations we gave on pages 68-69 suggest, it was not long hair as such to which objection was taken, but long hair on men done in a woman's style and with the implication of luxurious

³³ Epictetus, *The Discourses*, Book 4, chapter 8

³⁴ William Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, John Murray, London 1875, pages 328-330, available on website: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Coma.html

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personal adornment and the offer of sexual promiscuity. The poet Juvenal describes men involved in a Mother Goddess cult: “one initiate [is] busy with eye-brow pencil ... and mascara; another sips wine ... his long luxuriant curls caught up in a golden hair net” (*Satire II*).

Whereas previously the Bible had approved long hair on men, under contact with Greece and Rome, the practice began to be discouraged amongst Jews because of the immoral associations long hair began to have in the Hellenistic world. If this practice is what is referred to when 1 Corinthians 11:4 speaks (euphemistically?) of any man “with something down from his head”, then opposition to the practice is understandable.

Some of the Corinthian believers had formerly been involved in pagan cults, and may have continued with former practices, as had been mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6 about prostitution, in 1 Corinthians 10 about food sacrificed to pagan gods, in 1 Corinthians 13:2 referring to pagan styles of worship: “noisy gong”, “clanging cymbal”.

You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved.

(1 Corinthians 12:2)

Nevertheless, it is strange to say that nature teaches that it is a disgrace for a man to have long hair (1 Corinthians 11:14), since by nature a man’s hair, like a woman’s, does grow long, as the Old Testament indicates.

Interestingly, verse 14 can be translated differently and quite straightforwardly to say: “And nature itself does *not* teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him”. That would agree with previous Biblical practice.

Can there be alternative ways of translating this passage? We consider suggestions in the next Chapter.

13 | Alternative Translations: “We have no such practice”

Alternative translations

Translating from one language to another is always difficult. There are ways of indicating something in one language which are not necessarily the same in another. Some languages introduce questions by a specific question word. Others by changing the word order. Others simply by the tone of the voice – difficult to express when written down.

For example, in English:

“Are you coming to tea?”	A question.
“You’re coming to tea?”	A question.
“You’re coming to tea.”	A statement.
“You aren’t coming to tea?”	A question.
“You aren’t coming to tea.”	A statement.

If there were no question mark provided at the end of the sentence, it would be difficult to say whether it is a statement or a question unless you heard it spoken.

Sometimes specific words can be inserted.

For example:

“Surely you are coming to tea?”
“You’re coming to tea, aren’t you?”

These questions imply that the answer will be “Yes”.

“Surely you are not coming to tea?”
“You’re are not coming to tea, are you?”

These questions imply that the answer will be “No”.

When Paul asks a question to which the implied answer is “Yes”, he uses “*ouchi*”, and he does so repeatedly in 1 Corinthians (1:20, 3:3, 5:2, 5:12, 8:10, 10:16).

If the implied answer is “No” he uses “*mē*” (“*μη*” with a long “*ē*”), as in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 where he uses it seven times in succession. In 1 Corinthians 10:15-16 Paul says: “I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing

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which we bless, is it not (*ouchi*) a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not (*ouchi*) a participation in the body of Christ?" This looks similar to 1 Corinthians 11:13: "Judge for yourselves". In 10:16, however, we observe Paul's characteristic introductory question words (*ouchi*), but there is no such introductory question word in 11:13-14.

The original Greek texts have no punctuation marks, so where question marks should be inserted is a matter of judgment.

In 1 Corinthians 11, there are no question words. Verse 14 begins with the word "*oude*", which regularly means "and not", and is not used elsewhere by Paul to introduce a question, though there are three occurrences in the gospels (Mark 12:10, Luke 6:3, & 23:40).

Therefore, it is possible to translate 1 Corinthians 11:13-15 as follows:

Judge for yourselves. It *is* proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered, and nature itself does not teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair it is her glory, for hair is given [to men and women] instead of a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no such practice [as head covering] – nor do the churches of God.

(1 Corinthians 11:13-15)

If these verses existed on their own, this is how they would be translated. But because of verses 2-12, editors and translators assume that we have here two rhetorical questions (questions put to the readers for them to produce their own answers). The usual translation, as in RSV, is:

Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:13-15, RSV)

Paul asks questions regularly, but nearly always he shows this by an introductory question word. As elsewhere in 1 Corinthians you would expect to have *ouchi*. There is a grammatical reason, therefore, to wonder whether it is correct to translate verses 13 to 15 as questions rather than statements.

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If, however, we translate verses 13-15 as statements, like this, the difficulty is that to do so seems to say the reverse of the usual understanding of the earlier verses.

So, can it be done? Should 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 be understood differently?

A special feature of the letters to the Corinthians is that Paul is answering, and says he is answering, comments forwarded to him or questions put to him from people in Corinth. Does this feature help to explain what is happening in 1 Corinthians 11?

Questions or Statements within Paul's Letters

In several places in this letter Paul indicates that he is responding to matters which have been reported to him. And some translations, like the RSV, put inverted commas round what are considered to be things reported or written to Paul from Corinth.

... it **has been reported to me** by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. (1 Corinthians 1:11)

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you.
(1 Corinthians 5:1)

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...
(1 Corinthians 7:1)

Now concerning food offered to idols... (1 Corinthians 8:1)

"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. **"All things are lawful,"** but not all things build up.
(1 Corinthians 10:23)

I hear that there are divisions among you (1 Corinthians 11:18)

About the other things I will give directions when I come.
(1 Corinthians 11:34)

Now concerning spiritual gifts ... (1 Corinthians 12:1)

Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, **how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?**
(1 Corinthians 15:12)

Sometimes he responds to information received, sometimes he responds to written questions. Paul's method seems to be to paraphrase or quote the words or terminology of his critics or his correspondents at Corinth, and then either partly agree and give the argument a twist, or directly contradict what has been said by them. In the following passage Paul is thought to be quoting or echoing terminology used by those with whom he disagrees, using words such as "rich", "kings", "reign".

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Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! ... We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute.

(1 Corinthians 4:8-10)

Opinions differ on how much he quotes, but it can be more than a single word or sentence. For example, the following words in italics have been suggested as quotations in 1 Corinthians 6, followed by Paul's response.

"All things are lawful for me" – but not all things are helpful.

"All things are lawful for me" – but I will not be enslaved by anything.

"Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other" – but the body is not meant for immortality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body, and God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

(1 Corinthians 6:12-16)

"Every sin which a man may commit is outside his body" – but the immoral man sins against his own body.

(1 Corinthians 6:18)

Likewise, 1 Corinthians 8 is generally agreed to contain quotations, though it is not possible to be sure how long or short. Again, the sections in italics may be quotations of things written or spoken by people at Corinth:

Now concerning food offered to idols: *"We know that all of us possess knowledge"*. *"Knowledge"* puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him.

Concerning, therefore, the eating of food offered to idols, *"We know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one. For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords' – yet there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."* – but not all possess this knowledge. Some, through being hitherto accustomed to idols, eat food as really offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. *"Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and*

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no better off if we do.” – but take care lest this liberty of yours somehow becomes a stumbling block to the weak...

(1 Corinthians 8:1-9)

Verses 5 and 6 are usually attributed directly to Paul, but they could as reasonably be part of the letter or comments presented to him as backing for the position taken by the believers in Corinth who laid claim to special Christian “knowledge”.

We have quoted from chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12 and 15 of 1 Corinthians firstly to illustrate the possibility of quotations which Paul then answers or rebuts, and secondly because these sections are not controversial. Some quotation or paraphrase is definitely there, and the apostle is clearly disagreeing with views emanating from Corinth or modifying them or answering them. Paul’s correspondence with Corinth, more than in any of his other letters, seems to contain a continual “to and fro” between himself and the Corinthians, as he notes further in 2 Corinthians. And note that this is a quotation:

For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”

(2 Corinthians 10:10)

Quotations or Echoes in 1 Corinthians 11

It is suggested, therefore, that the same can reasonably be done in 1 Corinthians 11 in a manner which resolves some of the problems. Further, it would be surprising if there is not some echo or quotation in this section as there is in so many others. If some of the verses are questions to Paul, or Paul’s paraphrasing of “the matters about which you wrote”, this would present the whole picture in a different light.

Paul commends the Corinthians (verse 2), which implies he is pleased with their response. It is only when he gets to verse 17 that he says “I do not commend you”. It would make a better reading, therefore, of 1 Corinthians 11 if verses 2-16 are expressing approval, rather than the strong disapproval which comes across in the conventional reading.

Those who questioned Paul would recognise their questions and the answers given. We can pick out some possible questions (e.g. “If a woman will not veil herself, should she cut off her hair?”) but the difficulty is to know what might be the original question, what might be a paraphrase of comments made, what might be expansion on the comments, and at what point Paul gives his answers.

Suggested alternative translations of 1 Corinthians 11

Below we offer two alternative translations, adapted from the RSV. The basic text is in bold type. The words printed in italics and surrounded by quotation marks are, we suggest, either echoes or quotations from what has been written to Paul, or a paraphrase of them, or actual questions.

We insert explanatory comments in capitals within squared brackets, explaining how we think Paul would have explained if Paul later had been questioned on this passage and asked to expand on his meaning.

In Alternative Translation (1) we are putting verse 3 as a question. In Alternative translation (2) we put it as a statement by Paul.

Alternative Translation (1)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. I commend you because [AS YOU SAY] you “remember me in everything” and “maintain the traditions” even as I have delivered them to you. But do I want you to understand that “the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God”?

[I TAUGHT YOU, (AS I TEACH IN MY LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS, CHAPTER 5) THAT THE HUSBAND IS HEAD OF THE WIFE JUST AS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH. BECAUSE CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH, HE IS THEREFORE THE HEAD OF BOTH HUSBAND AND WIFE, NOT JUST OF THE HUSBAND, AS SOME OF YOU ARE SAYING. FURTHER, SINCE CONTROVERSY HAS ARISEN ABOUT HEAD COVERING PRACTICES, YOU ASK:]

“Does every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonour his head? And does every woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonour her

head? Is it the same as if her head were shaven? For [AS SOME PEOPLE SAY] if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair, but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil”.

[HERE IS MY ANSWER:] **Indeed³⁵ a man ought not to cover his head, since [AS YOU SAY] he is the image and glory of God; but the wife is a husband’s glory. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created because of the woman, but woman because of man.³⁶** [SINCE A WOMAN IS THE GLORY OF HER HUSBAND, SHE SHOULD NOT COVER HER HEAD EITHER. THERE IS NO TEACHING IN THE BIBLE THAT RESPECT FOR ANOTHER IS SHOWN BY COVERING ONE’S HEAD.]

Here is why a woman ought to have control over her head [TO DECIDE WHETHER TO WEAR A HEAD COVERING OR NOT, RATHER THAN BEING PUSHED INTO IT BY THOSE WHO FAVOUR SOCIETY’S DRESS CODES]: **because of the angels.** [THE ANGELS WERE PRESENT AT THE CREATION OF HUMAN BEINGS WHEN GOD SAID, “LET US MAKE MANKIND IN OUR IMAGE”, AND THEY KNOW WELL WHAT GOD INTENDED.] **The point is,³⁷ in the Lord woman is not**

³⁵ Translating the word *gar* (“for”) as in 1 Thessalonians 4:10 where RSV translates *gar* by “... and indeed ...”, and NIV: “... and in fact...”.

³⁶ The word *dia* “because of” appears four times in verses 9 & 10. The translation of it as “for the man” gives a different impression from “because of the man”. We noticed this point in Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, (SPCK 2011) page 309. Hence “because of” here.

³⁷ “The point is” translates the word *plēn* (πλήν), which often means “except” or “nevertheless”. Paul uses it in Philippians 1:18, 3:16, 4:14, here in 1 Corinthians 11:11, and in Ephesians 5:33. Tom Shoemaker suggests that it “serves as a pointer in each case to an important statement” and suggests translating it as “The point is...”. “Unveiling of Equality: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16” (<http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/~tomshoemaker/BTB.html>).

Kenneth E. Bailey suggests that *plēn* means “more specifically” or “in any case”, and cites the standard New Testament dictionary (BAGD) that *plēn* is “breaking off a discussion and emphasising what is important”, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, page 310.

apart from the man [AS REGARDS HEAD COVERING] nor man apart from the woman [AS REGARDS HEAD COVERING]; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. [THIS, THEN IS WHAT I ACTUALLY WANT YOU TO KNOW.]

Judge for yourselves. It is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered, and nature itself does not teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair it is her glory, for hair is given [TO MEN AND WOMEN] instead of a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we [PAUL AND SOSTHENES³⁸] have no such practice [AS HEAD COVERING OR RULES ABOUT HAIR LENGTH] – nor do the churches of God.

Comments on suggested Alternative Translation (1)

(1) This resolves the apparent inconsistency in the usual translations that Paul seems very keen to stress a hierarchy in verse 3, but then presents a non-hierarchical view in verses 11 and 12. To say – “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God” – fits better if Paul has not appeared to teach the opposite of this a few verses earlier.

(2) In Ephesians 5:23, Paul teaches that the husband is head of the wife, as Christ is head of the church. This is slightly different from what is expressed in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Because Christ is head of the church which consists of both men and women, Christ is the head of the husband and head of the wife directly. Our suggested alternative translation suggests that the Corinthians had misunderstood Paul’s teaching that the husband is head of the wife and were suggesting that Christ is not her head directly but only through her husband (as Augustine and Ambrosiaster took it³⁹).

³⁸ The writers of 1 Corinthians – see 1 Corinthians 1:1.

³⁹ Augustine (354-430 AD), *De Trinitate*, 12:7, Ambrosiaster, *On Corinthians*, 14:34 – cited on page 60.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

(3) It seems more compatible with Paul's teaching about equality in Christ in Galatians 3:28, and about equality in marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:3-4.

(4) It responds to the claim that Paul is misusing Genesis or that he considers woman is not in the image of God. He is responding to others who use such arguments.

(5) It resolves the seemingly rather weak claim that nature itself teaches it is a disgrace for a man to have long hair.

(6) It fits well with Paul's usual attitude to ritual practices, whether circumcision, or keeping of special days. He regards these as no longer applicable now that the Messiah has come and has established spiritual worship.

(7) It does not force *oude* ("and not") in verse 14 to introduce a rhetorical question.

(8) The text literally says: "we have no such practice" – which fits better if the practice of head covering (rather than the non-practice) was the subject of discussion.

(9) It is interesting that the Vulgate, the Latin translated from the Greek in the late 4th century AD, likewise does not insert any interrogative phrases in verses 13 and 14,⁴⁰ although Latin would normally use interrogative words. The punctuation, as in the Greek, is inserted in later times.

(10) Some of the comments about the consequences of not veiling sound harsh, and surprising in the context, since Paul is commending the Corinthians for following his teaching. If they are questions from Corinth, or a paraphrase of what has been said in Corinth, the harshness is on the Corinthians' side, not Paul's. And here we have Paul's answer: "It is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered".

(11) It may seem surprising to quote from a Corinthian correspondent at such length, but ancient writers can quote extensively.⁴¹ One further possibility is that a later hand with access to the original letter to Paul

⁴⁰ In Latin: "Vos ipsi iudicate: decet mulierem non velatam orare Deum? Nec ipsa natura docet vos, quod vir quidem si comam nutriat, ignominis est illi: Mulier vero si comam nutriat, gloria est illi: quoniam capilli pro velamine ei data sunt." Note the question mark inserted by later editors.

⁴¹ For example, Tertullian quotes 1 Corinthians 7:12-14 in *Second Book To His Wife*, II, and in *On Modesty*, XIII, he quotes 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 in full.

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could have inserted the questions beside his reply, and they could subsequently have been incorporated in the text.

This is not the only alternative way the passage can be translated and understood. It is worth offering a second, partly because further alternatives can be presented, and partly because we do not wish to give the impression that we regard this as *the* definitive answer!

Second suggested alternative translation of 1 Corinthians 11

The basic text is in bold type. The words printed in italics and surrounded by quotation marks are, we suggest, either echoes or quotations from what has been written to Paul, or a paraphrase of them, or actual questions.

We insert explanatory comments in capitals within squared brackets, explaining how we think Paul would have explained if Paul later had been questioned on this passage and asked to expand on his meaning.

In Alternative Translation (2) we are putting verse 3 as a statement by Paul.

Alternative Translation (2)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. I commend you because [AS YOU SAY] you “*remember me in everything*” and “*maintain the traditions*” even as I have delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.
[I TAUGHT YOU, (AS I TEACH IN MY LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS, CHAPTER 5) THAT THE HUSBAND IS HEAD OF THE WIFE JUST AS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH. A HUSBAND MUST THEREFORE HONOUR CHRIST IN THE WAY HE BEHAVES TOWARDS HIS WIFE, JUST AS A WIFE MUST HONOUR HER HUSBAND IN HER BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS HIM, AND CHRIST

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

GIVES US THE EXAMPLE HIMSELF IN HOW HE HONOURS GOD. IN THIS CONTEXT YOU RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT HEAD COVERINGS:]

“Does every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonour his head? And does every wife who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonour her head?”

Is it the same as if her head were shaven? For [AS SOME PEOPLE SAY] if a wife will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair, but if it is disgraceful for a wife to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil”.

[HERE IS MY ANSWER:] **Indeed⁴² a man does not have to cover his head,⁴³ since [AS YOU SAY] he is the image and glory of God; but the wife is a husband’s glory. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created because of woman, but woman because of man.⁴⁴ [SINCE WOMAN IS THE GLORY OF HER HUSBAND, SHE SHOULD **NOT** COVER HER HEAD EITHER. RESPECT FOR ANOTHER IS NOT SHOWN UNDER THE NEW COVENANT BY EXTERNAL PRACTICES LIKE COVERING ONE’S HEAD.]**

For this reason a wife ought to have control over her head [TO DECIDE WHETHER TO WEAR A HEAD COVERING OR NOT, RATHER THAN BEING PUSHED INTO IT BY THOSE WHO FAVOUR SOCIETY’S DRESS CODES]: because of the angels. [ANGELS VIEW THE FACE OF GOD DIRECTLY (JESUS – MATTHEW 18:10). THEY DO NOT VEIL IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD, NEITHER SHOULD WE.] The point is, in the Lord woman is not apart from the man [AS REGARDS HEAD COVERING] nor man apart from the woman [AS

⁴² Translating the word *gar* (“for”) in the same way as in 1 Thessalonians 4:10 where RSV translates *gar* by “... and indeed ...”, and NIV: “... and in fact...”.

⁴³ As far as we can see, the phrase “a man ought not to cover his head” can as readily be translated “a man does not have to cover his head”. The same applies to the Latin translation: *Vir quidem non debet velare caput.*

⁴⁴ See footnote 36 on page 83 for the explanation of why we have put “because of man” rather than “for man”.

REGARDS HEAD COVERING]; **for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.**

Judge for yourselves. It is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered. Nature itself does not teach you that if a man has long hair it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair it is her glory, for hair is given [TO MEN AND WOMEN] in place of a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we [PAUL AND SOSTHENES] have no such practice [AS HEAD COVERING OR RULES ABOUT HAIR LENGTH] – nor do the churches of God.

The above translations are drawn from the various suggestions we have read, along with a careful reading of the Greek text.

In presenting these two suggested translations, we are not making any dogmatic claim that these are “the correct translations.” If any reader considers we have misused the Greek language or made serious mistakes of logic or Greek grammar, we would be pleased to have these pointed out to us with a specific explanation based on the Greek text.

“Entirely different, even opposite things”

Norman E. Anderson commented that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 “is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to interpret, not the least because at each of several points it can mean entirely different, even opposite things.”⁴⁵

Verse 10 is a good example:

That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels.
(1 Corinthians 11:10, RSV)

⁴⁵ Norman E. Anderson “A Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16” (2004), <http://home.comcast.net/~walkswithastick/1Cor11comm.html>. Unlike the dogmatic certainty of many commentators, he wisely remarks: “This commentary is only as good as the evidence it presents. It does not rest upon any ‘authority’ of its author. I view every commentary just that way, and commend that approach generally, all the more so when the source is the Internet.”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

The RSV footnote says: “Greek *authority* (the veil being a symbol of this)”. Traditionally this has been understood to mean her husband’s authority over her.

The realisation, however, that “have authority” in the New Testament only ever means “have authority or right to do something” has caused a rephrasing in translations. Hence the 2011 NIV places the traditional translation in the margin, and in the main text it gives:

It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over
her own head (1 Corinthians 11:10, NIV)

The NRSV says:

For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority
on her head.

and in the footnote it comments that the Greek text lacks “a symbol of”. It gives an alternative translation: “a woman ought to have freedom of choice regarding her head”.

This is understood to mean that she should be able to decide for herself whether to wear a veil or not. Or, since verse 2 says that her head is her husband, does it mean: “It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her husband”?

Surely Paul can’t mean that! Or can he? What does he say in 1 Corinthians 7?

... the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife
does. (1 Corinthians 7:4)

Having given an equality to both husband and wife in 1 Corinthians 7:4 (see the whole verse), we can presume that this is the kind of thing Paul taught and which he considered as amongst “the traditions even as I have delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:2). And this fits well with his teaching in verse 11: “... in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.”

This “answering questions” approach would resolve some of the difficulties, but it brings problems of its own like each interpretation offered. The alternative translations cannot merely be dismissed, but nor can they be advocated as definite. Accordingly, we have sought in our expanded version on pages 63-66 to explain the passage as a unified whole.

By reading the Greek text, we first observed the possibility of translating verses 14 and 15 as statements rather than questions about

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1989. We subsequently found that several writers had suggested something similar: John Lightfoot (1602-1675), then Katharine Bushnell (1856-1946) in her book *God's Word to Women* (1923)⁴⁶.

More recently, several others writers and commentators have produced alternative translations, usually incorporating quotations from Corinth.⁴⁷

Norman Anderson concluded his detailed analysis:

Not only is it possible but it seems probable that the entire passage means exactly the opposite of the traditional understanding. What matters to Paul is not the outward appearance, but one's authority in the Lord, including a woman's. While yet recognizing differences between men and women associated with the present age as conceived by Paul, in the Lord and particularly in a prophetic capacity they are the same.

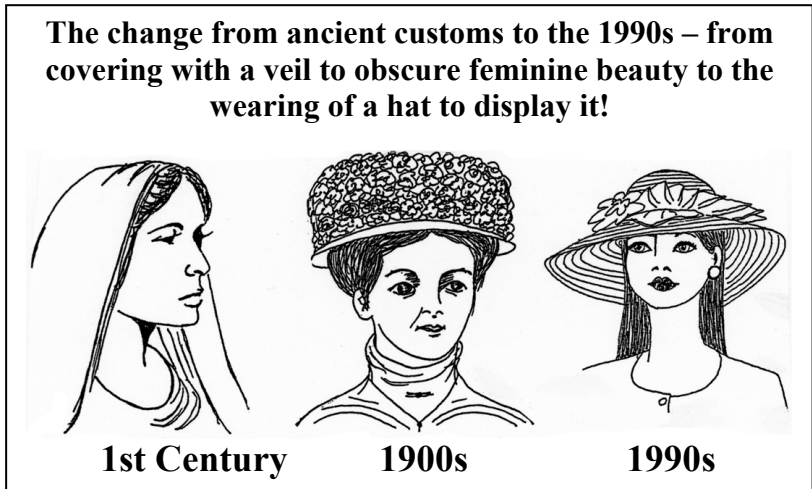
We should nevertheless not allow the uncertainties in this passage to obscure very many clear principles which can be understood and put into practice (see Chapter 15, pages 95-102).

⁴⁶ <http://godswordtowomen.org/main.htm>

⁴⁷ Alan Padgett in "Paul on Women in the Church — The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984), available at <http://jnt.sagepub.com>, and more recently: Alan Padgett, "Beginning with the End in 1 Cor. 11:2-6 – Understanding the passage from the bottom up", *Priscilla Papers*, Summer 2003, pages 17-2. Norman E. Anderson "A Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16" (2004), <http://home.comcast.net/~walkswithastick/1Cor11comm.html>, *Rethinking the Veil: Another Approach to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* by William P. Welty (2002) page 8. This article gives a good bibliography. Tom Shoemaker, "Unveiling of Equality: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16" (<http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/~tomshoemaker/BTB.html>). *Paul in Conflict with the Veil – An Alternative Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, Thomas Schirmacher, ISBN 3-933372-46-1, translated into English from the fifth German edition 2002. <https://epdf.tips/paul-in-conflict-with-the-veil.html> *Unveiling Paul's Women*, Lucy Peppiatt (Cascade Books, 2018)

14 | Is a Hat a Covering in accordance with 1 Corinthians 11?

As far as can be observed, head covering in 1 Corinthians 11 was either a veil which concealed the sister's head and thereby her beauty from masculine gaze, or a special type of simple hair-style considered respectable.



It may be that, in the distant past, hats or bonnets were sufficiently all-covering that they obscured the woman's beauty from the gaze of other men. That however long ceased to be the position. A glance at the hats worn by many sisters during the 20th century indicated a careful choice of attractively designed hats. They did not cover and therefore conceal feminine beauty but were selected to make the sister look attractive. Fashion pages in magazines and newspapers demonstrated this clearly. For example, a feature on hats in *The Daily Mail*, May 29th, 1989, was headed: "Brimming with style" and "The hat is back with a new elegance that is designed to turn heads for summer".

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The kinds of hats shown in the newspaper photographs were the same as could be seen at many ecclesial meetings and fraternal gatherings.

In that respect, the hats often worn by Christadelphian sisters represented the opposite of veils, and the wearing of hats could not be considered a fulfilment (either literally or spiritually) of 1 Corinthians 11.

Towards the end of the 20th Century, the displays of hats often received the adverse comment that our meetings looked like fashion shows or like Ascot. Complaints were often heard that some sisters' hats prevented people in the row behind from being able to see the speaker, and the hats were a considerable distraction!

Five different responses have made to these comments:

(1) “Although hats may not be ideal, it is important that a sister does wear something on her head because there is a deep symbolism involved.”

We find this argument unconvincing because of what is known about the meaning of veils in the ancient world.

As regards the symbolism, it is worth observing the variety of explanations given by Christadelphian authors to explain their understanding. The explanations are often very complicated, and sometimes contradictory, and seem to involve considerable supposition, as we comment in Chapters 7 and 20.

(2) “Hats should not be worn. Instead sisters should wear a plain, simple scarf.”

This has become common practice in some ecclesias, perhaps in recognition that hats are not what Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 11.

This avoids the appearance that some of our meetings looked like fashion shows, but current practice of normal 21st century clothing, with the addition of a scarf or large shawl can also be distracting. It gives an odd impression and makes our meetings look more like Muslim assemblies than Christian. 1 Corinthians 11 refers to *normal* clothing as was acceptable at the time, not something odd and different.

(3) “I just like seeing sisters wearing hats to the meeting and therefore they should do so.”

This is a feeling from social custom rather than from a biblical analysis. When sisters began to adopt simple berets or a plain scarf, it was reported in the past that they were told to wear a “proper hat” or “a hat with a brim”! Again, a gap was demonstrated between biblical principles and ecclesial practice, confusion between social custom and Bible teaching.

(4) “I prefer to wear a head covering. I feel more comfortable as that is what I am used to.”

Fair enough, as long as others are not compelled to agree.

(5) “The principle behind 1 Corinthians 11 is that brothers and sisters should not act in a manner which brings marriage into disrepute, or gives the impression that Christians are immoral. The wearing of hats, shawls or scarves in our society is not relevant to this principle, and whether such coverings are worn is a matter for individual preference. Clothing should be modest, and not distracting to others, and the obvious application for today is that normal, everyday clothing should be worn, not something elaborate, expensive or unusual. The idea that both sexes can wear attractive clothing is now acceptable and normal; we should not, however, confuse this with the practice described in 1 Corinthians 11 which is in a completely different social context.”

That is our position.

“A Still More Excellent Way”



**In New Corinth today – a pillar with 1 Corinthians 13
in Greek and English**

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13)

15 | Clear Principles

Despite the difficulties of interpretation, there are many principles we can take from this passage with confidence, and follow in appropriate ways today.

(1) Do everything for the glory of God

...whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

(1 Corinthians 10:31)

This is a good example of how a principle derived from one situation has application in others, and this is the difference between a rule and a principle. “Love your neighbour as yourself” is a principle which has the widest of individual applications. We can develop these into rules such as “I only buy bananas if they are fair trade” or “I make it a rule always to drive slowly when reversing the car”. But basically under the New Covenant we aim not to be rule-based, since we then risk feeling pleased with ourselves if we have kept all the rules! “...whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” is a principle, like “love your neighbour” and we can never claim to have fully carried it out. It therefore gives us high standards to aim for, but encourages humility in realising our limitation and our need to rely on God’s grace.

(2) Give no offence

Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.

(1 Corinthians 10:32)

We should not needlessly cause distress or upset to other people. And we should be especially careful in case by our behaviour we cause others to lose faith or to be driven away from the Gospel. But that is not to say we should not stand up for our beliefs, and for the values taught in the Bible. If, in doing so, some are disturbed, that is unfortunate, but at times necessary.

(3) Don’t seek personal advantage

I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage.

(1 Corinthians 10:33, NRSV)

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“You can’t please all of the people all of the time”, and Paul couldn’t. But seeking to be helpful to people is important, and the key point is in the last part: not to do things from personal ambition or for one’s own advantage. As Paul expresses it in Philippians, taking Jesus as his example:

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who ... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant...

(Philippians 2:3-7)

(4) Imitate good practice

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

We know more about the apostle Paul than about most people in the Bible. We see how he was misunderstood and maligned by those who opposed him (2 Corinthians 12:10); and we see his determination amidst hardship and suffering (see 2 Corinthians 11:24-29). Through all these he was sustained by his love of Christ and his desire to take Jesus as his example.

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

(Philippians 3:8-12)

(5) Keep Following good instructions

... you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions”

(1 Corinthians 11:32)

Paul had started the ecclesia in Corinth and given them their understanding of the Gospel. He is pleased that they have remembered what he taught them; they have maintained “the traditions”.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

Traditions can be bad if they are attitudes and teaching handed down from the past and followed just because they are old. Jesus criticised traditions of this kind:

And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’ You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.” And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!”
(Mark 7:6-9)

See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.
(Colossians 2:8)

The term “traditions” can also be used in the good sense, as here in 1 Corinthians 11:2, to refer to Paul’s teaching. The word basically means “things handed over”, just as details were “handed over” as to what happened at the Last Supper:

I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...
(1 Corinthians 11:23)

The word “delivered”, is “handed over”, the same basic words as in “tradition”. Likewise in 2 Thessalonians:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.
(2 Thessalonians 3:6)

Because of the negative meanings often associated with the word “tradition”, it is sometimes translated by a word like “teaching”, as in the NIV:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.
(2 Thessalonians 3:6, NIV)

The challenge for each of us is to ensure that we examine the traditions handed down by our parents, our society and our ecclesia, and compare them with what can be established by sound scriptural exposition. We should not be frightened to change, as many brothers and sisters have done over the years, if we find after further study that

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our previous position needs amended. As someone said: “Only the most prejudiced minds cannot change as they look at new evidence”.⁴⁸

(6) We each are under authority

... but I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

We all acknowledge Christ as head of the church (Ephesians 5:23), and beyond Jesus we acknowledge the authority of God Himself.

In everyday life we have heads to whom we owe appropriate honour: headmaster or headmistress at school, head of department at work, head of government. To all of these we owe appropriate respect within their respective spheres of influence and authority:

Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. ... Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor. (1 Peter 2:13-17)

We should be models of good behaviour in every aspect of life.

However we understand the head covering interpretations, an important principle is for married people to love and respect each other and their relationship together before God.

(7) Service in the ecclesia is not gender-based

Any man who prays or prophesies ... any woman who prays or prophesies... (1 Corinthians 11:4-5)

It is an important principle in the New Testament that service to Christ in the ecclesia is *not* defined by gender. Only two passages seem to say the opposite (1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12). The majority of passages support both brothers and sisters taking an active part in all areas of ecclesial life, the distinguishing point being not gender but “having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Romans 12:6). Here, in 1 Corinthians 11, this principle is well illustrated, because although Paul teaches that the husband is head of the wife, both husband and wife pray and prophesy.

⁴⁸ James Jones, “Thought for The Day”, Radio 4, 13 August 2003

(8) We are interdependent

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

(1 Corinthians 11:11-12)

Although there are observable distinctions between men and women in appearance, thinking and biological function, we should not make more of these differences than is appropriate and necessary. Nor should we seek to perpetuate man-made stereotypes which demean both men and women. God made us all. He made us to be interdependent, to complement each other, and we should work together with this realisation. To discriminate positively or negatively is contrary to the will and purpose of God.

(9) Make your own judgment

Judge for yourselves. (1 Corinthians 11:13)

In committing ourselves to Christ in baptism, we made an individual, intelligent decision. In living the Christian life we are called upon to use our intellects in Christian service, and to think out for ourselves the implications of the New Covenant. Paul regularly presents logical arguments to his readers to examine what he says and to come to a sensible decision. As he says in 1 Corinthians 10:15 (NIV):

I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

(10) Don't enjoy controversy

If any one is disposed to be contentious ...

(1 Corinthians 11:16)

“Contentious” is the opposite of the principle expressed above:

I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.

(1 Corinthians 10:33)

The word is used in the Septuagint in Ezekiel 3:7 to translate the word “obstinate”. We should not be keen on controversy, nor aim to support our own view come what may. Our proper aim is to seek and understand God’s truth, and to do it in a peaceful and gentle spirit.

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone.

(Titus 3:1-2, NRSV)

(11) Unity and Universal church practice

The apostle Paul aimed to preach a consistent message and to encourage all brothers and sisters in Christ to agree together.

... we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.

(1 Corinthians 11:16)

Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.

(1 Corinthians 7:17)

Jesus prayed for unity among his followers, including ourselves:

“I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

(John 17:20-23)

Paul likewise:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

(Ephesians 4:1-7)

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all

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in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:12-17)

Peter too:

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

Despite unity being intended as an indication to the world that Jesus really did come from the Father, the evidence is that unity has been impossible to achieve and maintain.

Lack of unity was a problem in New Testament times, and has been so ever since. If we ask, “Why?”, several reasons can be suggested.

(a) Our limited understanding

Paul said:

For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

Only in the Kingdom will “the perfect” come:

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

(1 Corinthians 13:9-12)



Bronze mirror at Corinth – surface now tarnished, but even when pristine, the image would be dim compared to modern silvered mirrors.

(b) Varying backgrounds

This is obviously the case in the New Testament, where there were Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, spiritually minded and fleshly minded. It is our case too, for people have been brought up in different ways, some within the community, some without, and amidst considerable variety of approach and practice amongst Christadelphian ecclesias.

(c) Human sinfulness

This can take many forms, and one which has always been a problem is when members claim to have superior knowledge, to know better than others, and then assert that everyone else must agree with

them. Such a view has been the cause of divisions and splits throughout history from the first century ecclesias until today.

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” “Knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if one loves God, one is known by him. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

(d) Personal ambition and enjoyment of power

There was trouble in the early ecclesias where people acted from personal motives. Peter exhorted elders not to do the job “for shameful gain” and not to misuse their power (“domineering”):

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed. Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. ... Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. (1 Peter 5:1-6)

There is a saying: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” The difficulty is in agreeing where the dividing line comes between essentials and non-essentials; we all agree that Christian love and concern (“charity” *agapē* as in 1 Corinthians 13) should always apply; the difficulty lies in putting it into practice. Our aim, as indicated in the few quotations above, should be to act “with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love”; to “have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind”; to “clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another”.

When, therefore, we find we do not agree with one another, the spirit in which we discuss should be clear, and the unity for which Christ prayed will be manifest among us, even though there is diversity of understanding and practice. We should be humble enough to be accommodating towards different, genuinely held convictions.

16 | The Meaning of the Word “Head”

We all know what “head” means. It is the front part of an animal, the top part of a human being, the part of the body with the brain, the eyes, the nose, the mouth and the ears.

But what does “head” mean when used not literally but metaphorically?

We use the term metaphorically, often without thinking of the literal meaning: headmaster/headmistress, often simply “the head” (meaning the one at the top of the school, the one in charge); head of department (the one who organises how the department is run); headquarters (the part of an army camp from which the commanding officer gives orders); head of a river (its source as distinct from the estuary where it flows into sea); headstone (stone on top of a grave); header (the line of print at the top of a page, as distinct from the footer, at the bottom).

In different ways, these metaphorical expressions are all drawn from observations of the literal head as the top of the body.

There has been much discussion over the last few decades on the meaning of the word *kephalē* in Greek, and in particular on the meaning of *kephalē*, “head”, in the New Testament.

The word *kephalē* is used in 1 Corinthians 11 in both a literal sense and a metaphorical one. It is metaphorical in verse 3 that “the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God”. It is literal when it says “with his head covered” (verse 4), and metaphorical in the second part “dishonours his head”.

Because of our frequent use of “head” in expressions like “headmistress”, we English readers are inclined to read “head” in the sense of “ruler”, “chief” or “boss”. Because, also, of our modern knowledge about the brain, we can think too of the head as being that which controls the body. Then, combining the two understandings, one from English usage, the other from biology, we can easily transfer these meanings to the Bible and conclude that the man is the ruler and

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controller of the woman; so, Paul is understood to be saying that the ruler of every man is Christ, the ruler of the woman is the man, and the ruler of Christ is God.

It is then a short step to rearranging the list and drawing up a hierarchy of rule and command: God, Christ, man, woman. This then (by many readers) is taken to apply to everyday life (men should always rule in society), in marriage (husbands should rule wives), and in the church (men should be in charge, not women).

This has been the traditional way of understanding 1 Corinthians 11, with the added reinforcement of this interpretation by the mistranslation of verse 10 as a woman should wear a sign of her *husband's* authority on her head. Ephesians 5:24 is understood similarly: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church”, i.e. Christ rules the church, he has authority over it, and likewise the husband is to rule the wife and express his authority over her.

Is this in fact the meaning of “head” in the New Testament, and in the specific passages in 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians? It might be a surprise to see the meaning of head understood differently.

The word for “head” in Hebrew is *rosh*. In Greek “head” is *kephalē*, in Latin *caput*. The Jewish New Year is *Rosh Hashanah*, the “beginning” of the year. The Greek and Latin words give us terms like chief, chef, capital, chapter, captain.

The Hebrew word *rosh* is used both literally and metaphorically. But it can be observed that the translators of the Old Testament into Greek (known as the Septuagint, or LXX for short) have a marked reluctance to use the word *kephalē* to translate the metaphorical meaning of *rosh*. When *rosh* means “head” in a literal sense, the LXX translators use *kephalē*. But when it is used to mean “leader” or “the one in command”, instead of *kephalē* they usually use *archōn*, the regular Greek word for “commander, chief, or captain”.

Does “Head” Mean “Chief” or “Ruler”?

We might have expected therefore that if Paul had meant that the husband should be ruler of his wife, he would have used *archōn* (e.g. Matthew 9:18 “a ruler came in and knelt before him”) or other Greek words with the recognised meaning of ruler such as *hēgemōn* (Mark 13:9 “rulers and kings”), *hēgoumenoi* (Hebrews 13:17 “obey your

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leaders”), or *proistamenos* (Romans 12:8 “he that *ruleth*”), or *proestotes* (1 Timothy 5:17 “let the elders who *rule*...”) When we look at *kephalē* elsewhere in the New Testament, it seems not to be used in the sense of “ruler”.

The relevant passages where “head” is used metaphorically are 1 Corinthians 11:3-4, are Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 4:15, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, 2:10 and 2:19.

We know that our brain is in our heads, and we feel as if we think inside our heads. In Bible times, this was not the understanding. Thinking was done in the heart or the kidneys (“reins”, KJV)!

And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts?”

(Matthew 9:3-4)

I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.

(Revelation 2:23, KJV)

I am he who searches mind and heart.

(Revelation 2:23, RSV)

Nowhere will you find thinking, in the Bible, is a function of the head.

In Ephesians 4:15-16 Paul uses the word “head” as that which supplies nourishment to the rest of the body, the head feeds the body, presumably from the observation that this is where food is taken in, that is where the energy comes from, the heads is the source of growth and upbuilding.

... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the **head**, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

It has been suggested therefore by some writers that “source” rather than “chief” make better sense.

In the New Creation, we all have our source in Jesus.

But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (1 Corinthians 8:6)

It is because of him that we have been brought into being as new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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Can this make sense of the word “head” in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?

By praying “having [something] down (his) head” (*kata kephalēs echōn*), a Christian man appeared to be acting so as not to respect Christ, his source of spiritual nourishment now that he is a “new creation in Christ Jesus”. (This does not, of course, mean that only a man, not a woman, has their source in Jesus. But in the context, such a man is not respecting his source.) A woman who prays without her veil, or without her hair done up respectably, appears to be asserting independence from her husband, instead of recognising that a woman has her source in a man (as in Genesis 2, where the woman was created from the man as he needed a companion that was human like himself and unlike the animals).

The true Christian position (“in the Lord”) is to recognise that each needs the other, man needs woman (that is why she was created because it was not good that the man should be alone, and she therefore needs to recognise this, not act independently).

But translating *kephalē* as source is rather a deduced meaning and seems only partly to fit. Another possibility therefore comes from the word head in the sense of “top”, the one who is above another in height or esteem, the one who is pre-eminent. That usage would fit the passages in Ephesians and Colossians as regards Christ. How, then, about a man or a husband? Outstanding over a woman? Pre-eminent over a wife?

Is that then any different from saying head means chief, or boss or ruler?

That does not seem to be the way Paul uses the word when we examine what it means in practice. Paul does not say: the man rules and therefore he prays and prophesies and the woman remains silent. The activity in the ecclesia is described in identical terms: “Any man who prays or prophesies..., any woman who prays or prophesies ...” (1 Corinthians 11:4,5).

The passage is not about one ruling over the other, but each working together: “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman” (verse 11). However, therefore, “head” is translated,

the passage is not saying that the man should rule the woman, but stressing their equality in service.⁴⁹

So what about “sign of authority” (1 Corinthians 11:10). To say this means her husband’s authority is an added interpretation as we explained on pages 33 and 89.

There is no word for man’s authority here, no word for veil either. The only use of the word for authority in this chapter is the woman’s authority, not the man’s. The authority is the *woman’s* authority, either her authority to pray and prophesy in the meeting, or her authority to choose how she conducts herself in the message she conveys by how she dresses.

So too when the husband is described as the head in Ephesians. What is the practical outcome? It is not that he makes the decisions, or has the “final decision” if the couple disagree, or that he is in charge of the money. No, he acts to look after her. He serves her not himself, just as they are both told to do: “submit to one another”.

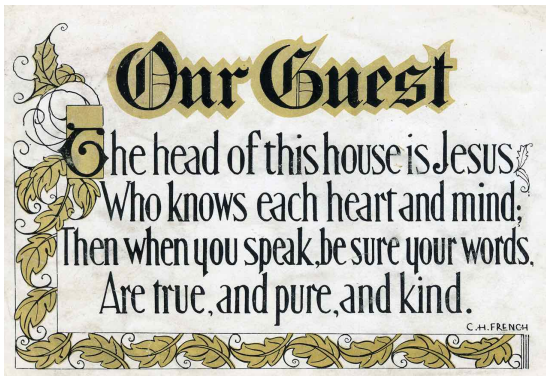
Christ has been given “all authority (*exousia*) in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18), but this is not expressed in the word “head”. The word for authority (*exousia*) is used of Jesus. He taught “as one who had authority” (Matthew 7:29); he gave his disciples “power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases” (Luke 9:1); God has given Jesus “authority to execute judgment” (John 5:27); but no such word is used of the man over the woman, except in 1 Corinthians 7:4, where the verb (*exousiazein*) is used of the wife having authority over the husband and vice-versa. The idea, therefore, that male headship is a matter of ruling, whether in the world, in marriage or in the ecclesia, is a misunderstanding; but it cannot be genuinely maintained from the teaching of Paul or of Jesus. Husbands and wives in Christian understanding work by “agreement” (1 Corinthians 7:5), by mutual submission, not by one ruling the other.

An account of the various writers, the points they make, and some conclusions can be found in *A Meta-Study of the Debate over the Meaning of “Head” (Kephālē) in Paul’s Writings* by Alan F. Johnson in *Priscilla Papers*, Vol. 20, No 4, Autumn 2006. He gives a variety

⁴⁹ Hence Philip B. Payne heads the chapter on 1 Corinthians 11 in his book: “The Equal Standing of Woman and Man in Christ”, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, pages 189-198 (Zondervan, 2009)

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of conclusions considering that *kephalē* (head) may mean either “authority over” or “source” depending on context, that the word can have different meanings even within the same context. He considers that the metaphorical sense of *kephalē* (head) stems from “the anatomical relation of the head to the body as its most ‘prominent,’ ‘respected,’ ‘preeminent,’ or ‘illustrious’ part”, but the meaning can only be deduced by the usage within each context; in Ephesians 5 the word “head” is given new meaning: not rule over the wife but self-giving service to the wife; it is Paul who gives it this meaning, and the meaning cannot therefore be decided by looking up the usage in external literature.⁵⁰



Sticker put inside Ian’s Bible given to him in 1954 by his aunt and uncle, Gwladys and John Ward (Sydney, Australia, and Thanet, Kent).

⁵⁰ Anyone who wishes to follow some of the debate about the meaning of *kephalē* “head”, could try looking at the following:

The case for *kephalē* = “source” is argued by Richard Cervin: *Does Kephale mean “Source” or “Authority Over” in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal* in *Trinity Journal*, Vol. 10, NS, No 1 (Spring 1989), and the case against by Wayne Grudem: *The meaning of Kephale (“Head”): A Response to Recent Studies* in *Trinity Journal*, Vol. 11, NS, No 1 (Spring 1990). See also Wayne Grudem *The Meaning of κεφαλή (“Head”): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged*, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44:1 (March 2001) pages 25-65, available at www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/kephale.pdf. Arguments that “head” in the sense of “chief” or “ruler” or “leader” is not the Greek New Testament meaning are given in detail in *Speaking of Women – Interpreting Paul*, by Andrew Perriman (Apollos, IVP, 1998) pages 13-33) and *Abusing Scripture – The Consequences of Misreading the Bible* by Manfred T. Brauch (IVP Academic, 2009), pages 133-146. Philip B. Payne presents an extensive argument for *kephalē* as source in *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, pages 117-139.

17 | “The head of every man is Christ...”

... the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

... between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject.
(4th century BC, Aristotle, *Politics* 1254b)

Of all the creatures that have life and reason,
We women are the most unhappy kind:
First we must throw our money to the wind
To buy a husband; and what's worse, we have to
Accept him as the master of our body.
Then comes the question that decides our lives:
Is the master good or bad?

(5th century BC, Medea's address to the Chorus of
Corinthian Women, Euripides, *Medea*, lines 230-235)

When Jesus and Paul preached, they spoke in a fallen society to which they brought the message of salvation, a message which transformed all human relationships.

They worked in a world where women were 'second class citizens', with fewer rights than men (religious or civil), and the results of their teaching and attitudes were to raise women to a standard never before equalled, and rarely since.

The same applied to other measures of discrimination.

Slaves were not second class citizens; they were not citizens at all. Gentiles, from a Jewish perspective, were of no account to God. But the New Covenant included and embraced all three disadvantaged sections, so that Paul could write to the Galatians:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,
there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ
Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

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And to the Colossians:

you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:9-11)

This sounds fine as an ideal. But how is it applied in practice?

When Paul wrote to the churches, he had to interact with the society that already existed. Slavery was an established system; the economy was based on it. Paul acted in the only way possible for his time: he accepted its existence but modified it, not only diminishing the harshness that could exist but asking, in effect, that masters should accept an equality before God: they too had a master in heaven.

... knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with him.

(Ephesians 6:9)

Paul's teaching on marriage in 1 Corinthians

Paul did the same as regards marriage. Men were in charge of women. Under Roman law (extended throughout the Empire in Paul's time) women had certain rights, but basically were ruled by male guardians: fathers when young, then husbands. The man was head of the wife. This could lead to abuse: "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely." So, what did Paul do? He did the same with marriage as with slavery. He modified the prevailing attitude so as to bring Christlike behaviour into the picture.

In 1 Corinthians 11 he starts with the husband, and reminds him that he is not independent. As a believer, he looks to Christ, and so takes the Messiah's standards as his. Having put the husband under the constraints imposed on him by the love of Christ, he reminds the wife that she likewise is not independent. She has to look to her husband. But it is a husband who now has a new, Christlike outlook. And if husband and wife both don't like the idea of not being independent, Paul reminds them that Jesus is not independent either: "The head of Christ is God".

In the ecclesia in Corinth both the wife and the husband are able to take an active part in the meetings of the ecclesia. The wife can prophesy and pray, just as can her husband. This is the practical working out of their new freedom in Christ, but from a worldly point

of view this might be seen as insubordination on the wife's part. Paul reminds them that they each, in the way they behave, need to be seen to be showing respect. She has to take care in her demeanour, as does he, in relation to customs of dress and propriety.

Though describing the head of the wife as the husband, Paul is keen not to encourage the husband to rule over his wife. Hence he modifies the concept when he says:

Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

(1 Corinthians 11:11-12)

The important phrase "in the Lord" is going back to God's original intention in creation as seen in Genesis where the woman is to be a helper suitable for the man – an equal partner, not someone to rule over him, nor to be ruled over.

Paul's teaching on marriage in Ephesians

In Ephesians we can see Paul using the same procedure we have outlined above.

The husband is head of the wife, and Paul modifies it in two ways.

The section starts with mutual submission:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

(Ephesians 5:21)

He then teaches that wives are to be submissive to husbands, using the term "head" again. If this were all Paul said, we might conclude that he endorses the common view (as that of Aristotle) that men rule their wives and the wives have to do as they are told. That's what a boss, a chief, the head of an organisation does.

Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife ...

But when we read on, we find that Paul has again turned the position round by qualifying what he means by head:

For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

(Ephesians 5:22-24)

The husband is head "as Christ is the head of the church". Christ's way shows the kind of head he should be, and Paul specifies this in the next few verses. He is a servant-leader, who gives himself for

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others. Christ nourishes and cherishes the church and that is how a husband is to love his wife.

This means that the husband must serve his wife in every way possible, from helping in the house, to encouraging high spiritual standards in the family. He will encourage his wife and children to understand the Gospel and to put it into practice.

No one disagrees with this. It is clearly expressed. But people frequently draw a further conclusion that in marriage the husband must always take the lead. He should make all the decisions (well, all the decisions that matter), and his wife submits to his leadership.

As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:24)

Implications of Paul's Teaching

The Internet abounds with evangelical sites which assert that God's plan for marriage and society and the church is this: the husband rules (in a positive, spiritual manner); the wife plays a secondary place, helps him, and submits to his leadership.

This is an easy deduction to draw from Ephesians 5:21-33, especially as Jesus, as head of the church, is leader not only as a servant but as guide and moral teacher.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. (Ephesians 5:25-28)

But is it correct to make such a deduction? Other considerations lead us to think that there is much more to be said. And these do not arise out of humanism or modern ideas of equality but from the Bible teaching itself.

Does the Bible teach that men should always lead in society, in marriage, in the church?

We suggest not.

“Be subject to one another”

Consider Ephesians where Paul describes Christian behaviour. His instructions refer to all brothers and sisters. Jesus is an example

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and pattern to us all, not just to husbands. We are all called to develop and promote spiritual understanding:

And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

(Ephesians 5:2)

... walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

(Ephesians 5:8-10)

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

(Ephesians 5:17-21)

This is written to both brothers and sisters (“saints” Ephesians 1:1). There is mutual spiritual encouragement, “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”, and mutual submission within the ecclesia, “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”. This does not suggest that it is a one-way process: men teach and lead, women listen and learn.

Nor is it the case with marriage:

For the wife does not rule (*exousiazein*)⁵¹ over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule (*exousiazein*) over his own body, but the wife does.

Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control.

(1 Corinthians 7:4-5)

Although this clearly refers to having sex, it also refers to prayer, and, importantly, to “agreement”. The couple discuss their plans together: it is not a matter of either telling the other what to do.

Paul also discusses the position of believers married to unbelievers.

⁵¹ *Exousiazein* to rule, to have authority, is the verbal form of the noun *exousia* in the phrase “the woman ought to have authority on/over her head” (1 Corinthians 11:10).

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... the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband.

Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband?

Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife?

(1 Corinthians 7:14, 16)

Does this mean that a believing wife married to an unbelieving husband can only ask him questions if she wishes to know something, or can she speak up, explain, and teach what is involved in following Jesus? Can she do that only until she persuades him to be baptised, but after that she can teach him no more on the grounds that wives have to submit to their husbands in everything and may not teach a man (1 Timothy 2:11-12)?

Submissive behaviour and active participation

Peter does the same as Paul, calling on everybody to be submissive:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.

(1 Peter 2:13)

He then moves on to slaves, then to wives, then to husbands.

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behaviour. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives, bestowing honour on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7-8)

Women are “the weaker sex” in muscular strength, and are therefore more prone to being physically abused by unChristlike husbands than vice-versa. They were also weaker in ancient times from a legal point of view as they were at the mercy of the men who owned them by law. There is no suggestion in the Bible that women in general are morally or spiritually weaker, though worldly thinking and church tradition often thought so.

In 1 Peter 3:1-2 the aim is to win the unbelieving husband and to do this by being a submissive wife. Submissive does not mean doing what one is told and never having any personal input – though this could be concluded by looking at these passages in isolation. It means putting the interests of another before one's own. The wife hopes to

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

win over her husband by her behaviour, so that he will become a believer. The same hope exists in 1 Corinthians 7:14-16. She will be the prime contact, and not only will he (hopefully) see what a considerate wife he has now that she has become a believer, but he will learn what Christianity is about by what she says to him. This is only common sense. To suggest that she says nothing about her faith because she is submissive would not be a sensible conclusion. Nor would it be sensible to assume that she can encourage him to follow Christ until he submits to Christ in baptism and thereafter she is allowed no more spiritual input into the marriage. By submitting to her husband, the wife seeks his highest good, spiritually as well as materially. Especially spiritually, so this requires positive input in Christian understanding and activity too. The more spiritual understanding she can develop in herself and encourage in her husband, the better the marriage will be. Both husband and wife should put the maximum possible spiritual input into their marriage and family: again, "...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Paul refers to "one flesh" in Ephesians 5:31. If we go back to Genesis, it is partnership that is planned by God. Both are put in charge (Genesis 1:28), and the point about Eve being created from man's side is that she is a human being like himself. She was created for partnership because "it is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). The man and woman are to complement each other. No domination of one over the other is taught or implied, despite the ingenuity with which this is sometimes inserted into the account.

Genesis 3:16 ("... he shall rule over you") is often quoted as the grounds for a husband to rule his wife, and is misapplied as though it were an instruction rather than a prediction, along with deductions that Eve's mistake was to rule over Adam. But it is a deduction, not the direct teaching of the text, and one that is not made elsewhere in the Bible. To justify dominating behaviour on the basis of things going wrong is like saying that the sinful consequences of disobedience to God are what God desires! We should do as Jesus did and consider what God wanted "from the beginning" (Matthew 19:4), and take our practice from that.

It is the failure to treat women according in this manner which has led to men dominating women and husbands dominating wives.

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Paul spoke to a culture with this attitude. Let us not seek to use Paul's improvement of the situation to try to clamp down on the women whom Paul and Jesus set free. It is easy to misuse the Bible to make it say things not intended for us – like slave owners did to justify slavery until recently, like Augustine and many church leaders over the centuries have done to restrict the position of women, like white racists have done towards people of different skin colour. Such interpretations tell us more about the people who make them than anything to do with Bible teaching.

In the modern world, boys and girls receive the same education – or are supposed to according to good educational practice. Discrimination against girls was often widespread in the past, if unofficial, but this has largely been corrected. Girls are encouraged to use their minds, skills and voices, as are boys. This is the reality of the situation in modern culture, and sensible and sensitive applications of the principle of mutual submission, mutual service in Christ, is the key to happy relationships.

Practical Application

Let us consider practical issues in two areas: Marriage, and the Ecclesia.

(1) Marriage

Which is a better way to proceed? By partnership, or by male leadership?

It is sometimes suggested that the latter is better, because someone is needed to make decisions, or at least, a final decision. Perhaps some couples feel happy with this. The idea could be drawn from Numbers 30 where husbands can overrule a wife's vow, but there is no suggestion of this in the New Testament. It is not what Paul means when he talks about the head of the wife is the husband. Husbands are never encouraged to *rule* their wives; they are instructed to love and serve them. Therefore mutual agreement is needed whether on minor or major issues. In some areas the husband may have more experience or a greater understanding; the wife may have in others. There needs to be discussion and prayer over matters on which they disagree. If a husband takes any decision against the wishes of his wife, he is not being head according to the New

Testament descriptions. He also thereby fails to recognise Christ as his head, for Christ's teaching is to be applied: "... in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

In Christian teaching husband is head of the wife *only* and *importantly* in the sense that Christ is towards the church. He is not head in any dominating, worldly sense. "Be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ."

(2) The Ecclesia

In 1 Corinthians 11 the husband is not to dishonour his head, Christ, and the wife is not not to dishonour her head, her husband. As far as ecclesial activity is concerned, both husband and wife pray and prophesy. No restriction is placed on these activities either for male or female.

We observe the same in 1 Corinthians 14. Paul addresses the brothers and sisters, and encourages them all to take an active, speaking, part in the meetings:

What then, brethren [*adelphoi* = brothers and sisters⁵²]?

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

The activities need to be done in an orderly manner, which means speaking in intelligible language, and speaking one at a time. The restrictive verses in 34-35 can be explained in several ways, but need to be seen in the context of the rest of 1 Corinthians 14. Where speaking is unhelpful (speaking in a 'tongue' with no one to interpret, verse 28), disruptive (as when several prophets speak at the same time, verse 30) or women chattering or interrupting with questions (by one interpretation of verses 34-35) they are told to keep silent. In this, they need to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). It is disruptive behaviour which is disallowed. Both

⁵² See NIV footnote: "1 Corinthians 1:10 The Greek word for *brothers and sisters (adelphoi)* refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God's family; also in verses 11 and 26; and in 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 6:8; 7:24, 29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1, 6, 50, 58; 16:15, 20." We provide a detailed explanation of why and where this translation of *adelphoi* is correct in Chapter 6 of *All One in Christ Jesus*, pages 45-53.

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men and women are encouraged by Paul to speak to edify the brothers and sisters:

... you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. (1 Corinthians 14:31)

Paul's aim, in the ecclesia as in marriage, is partnership. Attempts to silence sisters in the ecclesia on the basis that only brothers should rule or speak or make decisions are based on a selective reading of the Bible. They fail to read the ancient context adequately and substitute standards of the secular world instead of biblical ones.

The New Testament several times lists ecclesial activities, as in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and Romans 12. These activities are not defined in terms of male or female. We are "the body of Christ and individually members of it", and "if one member is honoured, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:27, 26).

Being head is a position of service, and service is submission to others. As Jesus' example shows, there is nothing passive about submission:

"... let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. ... I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:26-27)

Submission, acting as a slave, is personally chosen as part of following Christ. It comes from the heart; it is not something that can be imposed on anyone by others.

May we follow Christ's example in all our relationships.

18 | Divine Headship or Divine Service?

There are two ways of interpreting 1 Corinthians 11.

In the left hand column is the traditional interpretation. In the right hand column is, we suggest, a better understanding of biblical teaching.

Divine Headship Interpretation	Divine Service Interpretation
<p>Paul's order in 1 Corinthians 11:2 is <i>re-arranged</i>. Authority is chosen as the main point: God Christ Man Woman <i>Explanation:</i> Man is made to serve and honour God – therefore he is in charge in life and the ecclesia. Women are made to support and serve men – therefore they have different but complementary roles: Women are <i>not</i> inferior, they are equal but different. Or, according to some interpretations they <i>are</i> inferior. But “in the Lord” Man is not without woman, nor woman without man. And all is from God.</p>	<p>Paul's order in 1 Corinthians 11:2 is <i>preserved</i>. Service is chosen as the main point: The husband to Christ The wife to her husband Jesus to God <i>Explanation:</i> Man is made to serve and honour God – therefore he restrains his independence. A wife is made to support and cooperate with her husband – therefore the wife restrains her independence. Christ likewise – restrains his independence – “not my will but yours”. But “in the Lord” Man is not without woman, nor woman without man And all is from God.</p>

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<p>They cooperate together, but there is male/female distinction in ecclesial practice.</p> <p><i>Therefore:</i> Men lead, Women obey. Men speak in the ecclesia. Women submit to men and keep silent – contrary to the praying and prophesying indicated in 1 Corinthians 11 and in 1 Corinthians 14:3-5. 1 Corinthians 14:34 is removed from context and interpreted in an absolute sense as a generalised ban. This distinction is shown by brothers going bareheaded and speaking, sisters wearing head coverings and keeping silent.</p>	<p>They cooperate together, using “our different gifts according to the grace given to each of us” (Romans 12:6).</p> <p><i>Therefore:</i> No male/female distinction in ecclesial practice: Both speak in the ecclesia. Both pray and prophesy as indicated in 1 Corinthians 11, contrary to the silence indicated in 1 Corinthians 14:34. 1 Corinthians 14:34 is interpreted in context as referring to chattering or disruptive questions. Brothers and sisters both speak and pray, acting respectfully in dress and behaviour, according to what is generally recognised as modest.</p>
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Obviously, there is scope for further variety of interpretation, and no interpretation is without its problems. We favour the Divine Service interpretation as it seems to us to match better with the whole teaching of Jesus and Paul. But if the Divine Headship rearrangement is favoured, this does not of itself indicate any incompatibility with both brothers and sisters praying and prophesying in the assembly, providing the head is honoured appropriately. There is no reason to deduce from 1 Corinthians 11 that men should pray and prophesy and women should keep silent. Paul’s instruction in Romans 15 are:

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself ... May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

19 | Methods of Interpretation

Interpreting the Bible about Slavery

When slavery was widespread in the world and the vicious trade triangle between Europe, Africa, and America was bringing in great profits, the Bible was quoted by both slave owners and abolitionists to argue for or against slavery.

The verses selected, and the emphasis placed on these, tell as much about the people quoting them. As someone once said, “Tell me what you find in the Bible and I will tell you the kind of person you are.”

Supporters of slavery defended it by the Bible:

... Jesus Christ recognized this institution as one that was lawful among men, and regulated its relative duties... I affirm then, first (and no man denies) that Jesus Christ has not abolished slavery by a prohibitory command; and second, I affirm, he has introduced no new moral principle which can work its destruction... (*A Scriptural View of Slavery*, Rev Thomas Stringfellow, 1856)

To which it was replied:

His short ministry of only three years, shut him up to the necessity of dealing in first principles, leaving the future to develop and apply them to all phases of the after life of man, and these first principles are at all points at enmity with American slavery. (Abram Pryne, *Ought American slavery to be perpetuated? A debate between Rev. W. G. Brownlow and Rev. A. Pryne, Held at Philadelphia, September 1858*)

The principles in the Bible, when thought out and put into practice should work the destruction of slavery. What are these?

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

(Matthew 7:12)

Love your neighbour as yourself. (Mark 12:31)

Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10)

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You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings. (1 Corinthians 7:23)

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:21)

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

With these moral teachings in mind there is no *logical* place for a system where followers of Christ own other people and control what they do. Yet the Bible still says:

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ... (Ephesians 6:5)

How do we explain that? By looking at the context of the ancient world⁵³ and by observing what else is said in Scripture. When the economy was entirely based on slavery, to attempt to abolish it would have been impracticable, and the spread of the Christian Gospel would have been crushed immediately had there been any call to abolish the system. Instead, its horrors were mitigated by seeking to regulate how slaves were treated in Christian households. So, Paul wrote:

Masters, do the same to them [“rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men”, verse 7], and forbear threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him. (Ephesians 6:9)

⁵³ Before we sit in too much condemnation on behaviours in the past, there is an uncomfortable modern relevance. Slavery still exists, though in a different style. The Bible consistently opposes oppression and the doing of evil to others. It is the task of those with the power to do so to bring about the changes needed, just as Paul called on masters to change their behaviour. We too need to consider whether we are part of the problem or part of the solution. Do we buy cheap goods made by the unfairly paid labour of others? Do we enjoy chocolate that is grown by child labour in Africa? Do we use electronics assembled under conditions of semi-slavery? Unwittingly, we probably have done all three. The challenge to carry out Christian values continue to confront us:

Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. (Ephesians 5:8-12 NIV)

And this is all follows from “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

Interpreting the Bible about Men and Women

Can the same be said about how we understand what the Bible says about men and women? Is the saying true on this area also: “Tell me what you find in the Bible and I will tell you the kind of person you are”?

Answering for ourselves, and not for others, here is our context and background.

We were both school teachers. During our careers, it was important to treat all pupils equally. We also worked with male and female colleagues on a similar basis. Whether they were good at teaching or at administration, did not depend on gender.

Ecclesially, we have for decades been involved in ecclesial life and in Christadelphian conferences and gatherings where both men and women have spoken, presided, and prayed. We have enjoyed the abilities and talents of both brothers and sisters. Each individual has his or her own valuable contribution to make.

So, are we biased? Yes, in that we favour from long personal experience in everyday life and in ecclesial life the valued involvement of male and female. On this subject we were once told we were “purbblind”. We had to look the word up. Definitions include “wholly blind; partly blind; lacking in vision, insight, or understanding; obtuse.” Mmm!

There are varied interpretations of Scripture on many subjects.

As regards brothers and sisters in ecclesial service, it can be observed how texts are selected and how inferences are then drawn.

Selections for silence for women

Here is how selection is made to silence sisters.

(1) Women are to be under the authority of men/husbands who are their head, and to wear a head covering to show this.

the head of the woman is the man (1 Corinthians 11:3)

a woman should have a covering over her head to show that she is under her husband’s authority (1 Cor.11: 10, GNB)

(2) Women are to be silent, which is what obeying their husbands involves.

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not

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permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (1 Corinthians 14:34-35)

(3) Women are not to teach men or exercise authority over them.

I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. (1 Timothy 2:12-14)

(4) Adam was supposed to teach Eve, since he was formed first.

Eve disobeyed his authority, so God's law was declared:

thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 3:16).

(5) Authority should always be male, in society and in the ecclesia.

(That a male is intended is deduced from "husband of one wife".)

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2)

Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife

(1 Timothy 3:12)

(6) Only men should teach.

A bishop then must be ... apt to teach (1 Timothy 3:2)
the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses,
the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to
teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2, KJV)

(6) Only men should pray in the ecclesia.

I will therefore that men pray every where (1 Timothy 2:8)

Conclusion from this selection of texts: Women are to keep silent in all meetings and wear a head covering to show their obedience to the men. This may seem tough, and sisters may well feel frustrated that they are not permitted to use their abilities to serve God in the same way as brothers, but it is what God ordained in the Garden of Eden and is endorsed throughout the Bible and therefore must be followed.

Apparent Strong Points

Looks logical.

Looks biblical.

It has been standard interpretation by male-orientated Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Weak points?

Removes texts from their original context.

Ignores what is taught elsewhere.

Generalises from the particular to the general.

Relies on inference rather than plain teaching.

It has been standard interpretation by male-orientated Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Selections for joint service by men and women

Here is how selection is made to advocate joint service by men and women.

(1) Women and men have the same spoken activity at ecclesial meetings: both pray, both prophesy (speak to the ecclesia).

Any man who prays or prophesies... any woman who prays or prophesies (1 Corinthians 11:4-5)

(2) Men and women both are encouraged to speak words of edification at ecclesial meetings

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. ... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church. I would like *every one of you* to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. (1 Corinthians 14:1-5, NIV, our italics)

(3) They are to speak in an orderly manner, one at a time. If not, they are told to be silent.

What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, *each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.* Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God. (1 Corinthians 14:26-28, our italics)

(4) Brothers and sisters differ in their ability and understanding, but not along gender lines. Each should contribute his or her talents fully.

Therefore, I urge you, *brothers and sisters*, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

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I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. . . . We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

(Romans 12:1, 3-8, our italics)

(5) Teaching should be done by suitable people, male or female

the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to *reliable people* who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Timothy 2:2, NIV, our italics)

and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to *faithful people* who will be able to teach others as well. (2 Timothy 2:2, NRSV, our italics)

(6) All should learn from what happened in the Garden of Eden

I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3)

(7) The creation details in Genesis chapter 1 make no differentiation in activity for men and women. Both are created in God's image. Both are given the same things to do: to fill the earth, and subdue it; to rule over the natural world.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:26-28, NIV)

(8) The creation details in Genesis chapter 2 make no differentiation in activity for men and women. Both are given the same things to do: to work the garden and take care of it.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. . . . The Lord God said, "It is

not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper⁵⁴ suitable for him.”
(Genesis 2:15,18, NIV)

(9) Rulership of man over woman was predicted as the bad consequences of disobedience to God. Jesus directs us back to God’s original intention.

Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.
(Matthew 19:8, NIV)

(10) In Christ we are all, male and female, a new creation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! or (NIV footnote): if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

(11) We should learn lessons from the Garden of Eden, but they concern doing what is right, male and female submitting to each other and therefore working together do God’s work.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise.... Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.
(Ephesians 5:15-21)

(12) Restrictions were placed on both male and female when bad behaviour was involved: domineering, violence, drunkenness, disruptive conduct, but that does not justify assigning for all time good positive Christian service to brothers rather than to sisters. The criterion is that people in leading positions should be of good character.

a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way.

(1 Timothy 3:2-4)

Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering

⁵⁴ Helper is the word *ezer* in Hebrew. It does not imply a subordinate or inferior helper and is often used of God himself helping Israel.

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over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.

(1 Peter 5:2-3)

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling. (1 Timothy 2:8)

I do not allow a woman to be a teacher, nor must she domineer over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12, NEB)

Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good... (Titus 2:3)

(13) The society of the first century was male dominated, so it is not surprising that elders and deacons were predominantly male. That Phoebe was a deacon, however, and obviously approved by Paul, indicates that the lists in 1 Timothy and Titus should not be assumed as prescribing maleness as the criterion.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. (Romans 16:1, NIV)

(14) Context needs to be adequately considered before principles are deduced and then applied to us today.

The women-restrictive passages all indicate a background different from ours. New situations require new solutions. The Bible was relevant to the situation in which it was set. But we should not apply instructions addressed to one situation to apply to another. Ecclesial support, for example, was not be given to widows unless they were over 60 (1 Timothy 5:9). Do we therefore refuse to help if a woman is under sixty or not a widow? An accusation against an elder should not be considered unless there are two nor three witnesses. (1 Timothy 5:20) If an elder were accused of child-abuse, should we ignore it on those grounds? Should an arranging brother only be appointed if married (“a bishop must... the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2)?

Conclusion: The general teaching of Scripture is that men and women should cooperate together in service to God and to one another. The New Testament does not divide ecclesial service into separate male and female functions in the ecclesia..

Apparent Strong Points?

Relies on a wide range of Scripture

Looks logical

Looks biblical

Weak points?

We've used a variety of translations to make the point intended. We have relied on understanding *adelphoi* to mean "brothers and sisters" not "brothers" when Paul addresses believers. Relies to some degree on inference.

Inference

"Inference" is drawing a conclusion on the basis of evidence and reasoning. It should be observed that everyone uses inference. Caution is required, however, in applying human reasoning since our reasoning can be faulty. We should take care not to read prior ideas into passages of Scripture. We should also beware of drawing conclusions where little direct evidence exists.

Common sense, wisdom, sensitivity

Wisdom is valued in the Bible. So is concern for how our actions and comments impact on other people. We need to draw sensible conclusions, based on widely-accepted principles, sensitively applied:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

(Matthew 7:12, NIV)

Resolution?

The apparently conflicting positions can be resolved provide the restrictive verses are seen in a specific context.

We suggest 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 refers to husbands and wives, not to men and women in general. The message is that both dress modestly (in accordance with how this is perceived in the culture of the time). When they speak in the ecclesia, they need to act with respect to one another, remembering that each is intended to act in a God-honouring way and were created for this purpose.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 should be seen within the overall teaching of 1 Corinthians 14 where both men and women speak acceptably. What is not acceptable is disruptive behaviour, speaking on top of one another or chattering, or asking questions which interrupt the meeting and would be better to be asked at home. The suggestion that questions need to be answered indicates that we are dealing with women/wives who are not properly taught or educated (as was frequently the case in the ancient world). The silence refers to such

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specific contexts, not to properly informed talks and prayers by those women who are competent.

1 Timothy specifically says that the instructions are given to set things right until Paul can come and sort out what is going on (1 Timothy 3:14-15). There are many problems, including men quarrelling at prayer, behaving with violence and drunkenness, people (men and women) teaching who don't know what they are talking about (6:3-6), women who (like Eve) have been deceived and need to be taught properly who are teaching and domineering over men. It is reasonable that in such circumstances, orders should be given to stop this behaviour. But once the position is corrected, and those who have had a poor understanding of Christian behaviour and teaching have been taught properly, then it is entirely appropriate that both men and women should teach, speak, pray and serve, using "different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us", as Paul says in Romans 12:6 and in 2 Timothy 2:2: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

If, therefore, we pay proper regard to the context which can be deduced for each of these divinely inspired letters, we can proceed without arguing that men and women have different functions in the ecclesia.

Ephesians 5 refers specifically to how husbands and wives should be subject to one another. To say that the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church modifies the behaviour of both husband and wife. But whatever meaning is ascribed to the word "head" does not give any reason for the one who is not the head to be silent. Otherwise, no men would speak in the ecclesia for "the head of every man is Christ". What it means is that suitably supportive action is taken by the one who is not head. Provided, therefore, husbands and wives work in agreement, they should each be encouraging to the other to give spiritual support in every way in which each is capable.

Direct Bible Teaching

It should be noted, please, that this conclusion is *not* based on feminism, humanism, or worldly thinking. It arises from a careful reading of the texts in their context.

20 | A Critical Analysis of Symbolic Interpretations

Below are examples from various Christadelphian writers or speakers of their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11. We have quoted only a short extract from each, and have not indicated the sources, as we are concerned only in looking at the actual content. If anyone would like details of the sources we will be happy to provide them. It may well be that the writers have subsequently changed their understanding, as we have done when presented with new evidence or what seems like a better interpretation.⁵⁵ However, these views are in public, and comments based on these kinds of interpretations continue to be reproduced and circulated, so it is worth doing a brief analysis.

These comments by us should in no way be construed as a personal attack on anyone: we are seeking to make a fair, biblical analysis.

As indicated after each, we consider that the following extracts make assumptions which are not supported by Bible teaching. After each extract we list the assumptions (in bold type) and add our comments in brackets.

We are aware that we have selected extracts, and the articles from which these are taken obviously give further explanation of the writer's reasoning. We hope, however, that we have not distorted what is written by taking these extracts. The extracts are in approximate chronological order.

We do not like critiquing the work of other writers, but we believe it is necessary to analyse carefully what they say, and we invite others to critique us in return.

⁵⁵ See, for example, "Hats, Hair and Holiness", by Reg Carr (MP3 of talk, 2019).

EXTRACT (A) Date (c. 1970?)

As with much of the symbolism of the Law of Moses, the reason *why* the priests were required to cover their heads is not explained within the Law itself. Elsewhere in Scripture, however, the head covering is identified with humiliation, servitude and wretchedness of spirit (e.g. 2 Sam. 15:30; Esther 6:12; Jer. 14:3,4). In Christ Jesus, man attains in measure to the creative design – in “the image and glory of God” (11:7). In the new creation, although still blighted by sin, he is no longer a slave to sin (Rom. 6:5-7). This new status for man makes it inappropriate for him to cover his head – a token of servitude to sin and the Law. It is for this reason that man in Christ is forbidden to cover his head in worship...

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“is not explained within the Law itself”.** (Yes it is. Exodus 28:2-4 & 28:40 say “you shall make them for glory and beauty”.)

(2) **“Elsewhere in Scripture, however, the head covering is identified with humiliation, servitude and wretchedness of spirit.”** (Going barefoot and covering the head can be a sign of sadness, as in the passages quoted. But, as with the priests, the opposite can apply: wearing a crown is a sign of approval, the opposite to humiliation and wretchedness, e.g. Zechariah 3:1-5. In Ezekiel 24:23 wearing a turban is the opposite to mourning. It is only sometimes true, therefore, that wearing something on the head is a sign of wretchedness.)

(3) **“In Christ Jesus, man attains in measure to the creative design – in ‘the image and glory of God’ (11:7)”.** (According to 1 Corinthians 11 this is part of creation, not the new creation in Christ Jesus. Man does not “attain” to the image and glory of God: man *is* the image and glory of God.)

(4) **“In the new creation, although still blighted by sin, he is no longer a slave to sin (Rom. 6:5-7). This new status for man makes it inappropriate for him to cover his head – a token of servitude to sin and the Law.”** (This assumes that Romans 6:5-7 is referring only to brothers, not sisters. But Paul says: “Do you not know that *all of us* who have been baptized into Christ Jesus ... so that ... we too might walk in newness of life.” “All” and “we” refer to both brothers and sisters.)

(5) **“a token of servitude to sin and the Law”.** (Nowhere does the Bible suggest this explanation for wearing a head covering.)

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

(6) **“It is for this reason that man in Christ is forbidden to cover his head in worship”**. (This is not the reason given in 1 Corinthians 11 – see verse 7).

EXTRACT (B) Date 1974

The principles involved are stated quite simply, by putting in order certain relationships:

Man is the head of the woman.

Christ is the head of the man.

God is the head of Christ.

This is the divine order and no amount of argument can possibly alter it.

Assumption in this passage is:

“This is the divine order” (Why then has the writer re-arranged it? The divinely inspired order given in 1 Corinthians 11 is “the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”)

EXTRACT (C) Date 1979

The same divine principle is illustrated by the ordinance about the covering of a priest’s hair while officiating in the tabernacle precincts. Those who had been anointed and consecrated to the service of God represented all Israel (Exod. 28:30, 38) when they offered the ordained sacrifices. They were commanded to wear linen caps (Exod. 29:8) into which their long hair was tucked (Lev. 21:10) when they served before the Lord in “the congregation (ecclesia) in the wilderness” and later in the Land. By covering their hair they signified the superiority of the One in whose Presence they worshipped, even though the Lord was there represented by His appointed Angel. As soon as they finished their service, the linen cap was removed along with the other special garments (Lev. 6:11; Ezek. 42:4).

As we are now the “holy priesthood” in God’s house (1 Pet. 2:5), our representatives (the sisters) ought also to have their hair completely covered whenever we meet “in the ecclesia” for worship.

Assumptions made in this passage are:

(1) **“into which their long hair was tucked (Lev.21:10)”** Where does it say this? Leviticus 21:10 says: “he shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes” (KJV) or “must not allow his hair to become

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unkempt or tear his clothes” (NIV), or “shall not let the hair of his head hang loose, nor rend his clothes” (RSV).

(2) **“By covering their hair they signified the superiority of the One in whose Presence they worshipped”** (Where does the Bible state this as the reason? The caps are part of the clothing in which the priests are to be dressed (Exodus 29:9 – “Thus shall you ordain Aaron and his sons”), but no explanation is given or mentioned that “they signified the superiority of the One in whose Presence they worshipped.”)

(3) **“our representatives (the sisters)”** (Where does the Bible say that the sisters are our representatives before God?)

EXTRACT (D) Date 1980

... the man who recognises Christ to be his head and who sees in his own head a symbol of Christ, removes his covering when praying or prophesying so that in symbol Christ is uncovered and exalted in the church, while the woman, knowing “the head of the woman is the man” and who sees in her own head a symbol of the man, covers that symbol while praying or prophesying that he be not exalted to rival Christ in the church. Verse 7 restates the principle: “For a man ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man.”

... the symbolism is in two parts and, therefore, for it to be complete both parts must be observed – in the man that Christ may be exalted and in the woman that the man may be covered. The woman’s covering, then, is not a symbol of servitude to men but of her freedom in Christ! Any rebellion on the part of the woman against wearing a suitable covering is in fact to accomplish the opposite of that intended – to *remove* her freedom in Christ.

Assumptions made in this passage are:

(1) The man **“sees in his own head the symbol of Christ”**. (Where does the text say this?)

(2) **“... removes his covering”**. (The text says nothing about *removing* any covering.)

(3) **“so that in symbol Christ is uncovered and exalted in the church”**. (Nothing in the text has been said about any symbol, nor about Christ being uncovered, nor about Christ being exalted in the

church. There is indeed some metaphor in 1 Corinthians 11, and perhaps even a pun on the word “head”, but to use the word “symbol” is adding more than is written.)

(4) **“who sees in her own head a symbol of the man”**. (Again, the text does not say this. It says “the head of the woman *is* the man” (verse 3) and “woman *is* the glory of man” (verse 7).)

(5) **“that he be not exalted to rival Christ in the church”**. (Where does the text say or even imply anything about the man *rivalling* Christ in the church. What it says is that “any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered *dishonours* his head”).)

(6) **“in the woman that the man may be covered”**. (A strange reversal of the text which says that the man should not be covered! The assumption here is that the woman represents sinful mankind, and therefore should be covered up.)

(7) **“not a symbol of servitude to men but of her freedom in Christ”**. (Where does the text say or imply this? She is to be covered because by *not* being covered she “dishonours her head” – which presumably means her husband or perhaps her own self – “it is the same as if she were shaven”).)

(8) **“Any rebellion on the part of the woman”**. (Note the heavy pressure put on anyone who finds these assumptions unconvincing. It is assumed that anyone who disagrees with this interpretation does not do so out of a genuine regard for the teaching of Scripture but from a desire to rebel against it. No allowance, here, is made for any alternative view, no matter how genuinely and spiritually it is held.)

EXTRACT (E) Date 1989

The woman’s head represented the man, so the action of these sisters dishonoured the brothers in the ecclesia....

Assumptions made in this passage are:

(1) **“The woman’s head represented the man”**. (This is the same as assumption (4) above. Again, the text does not say this. It says “the head of the woman *is* the man” (verse 3) and “woman *is* the glory of man” (verse 7).)

(2) **“the action of these sisters dishonoured the brothers in the ecclesia”**. (Note the switch to the plural, although the text is always singular. Thus the assumption is inserted that all sisters are subject to all brothers.)

EXTRACT (F) Date 1989

Perhaps the root cause of this problem (and others in the ecclesial world) is a lack of appreciation of Scripture teaching on God manifestation. As has already been considered, the opening verses of this section teach that each brother in the ecclesia should be a manifestation of Christ. Since Christ perfectly manifested his Father (John 14:8-11), and man was created in God's image, each brother should be an individual manifestation of the divine glory (v.7). Because it is God's purpose to manifest this glory throughout the earth (Num. 14:22), it is fitting that the manifestation of it within the ecclesia should be uncovered. By contrast, each sister in the ecclesia manifests the glory of man, and that glory should be covered. Thus the man who covers his head and the woman who uncovers hers are declaring in symbol that they oppose the divine purpose to manifest his glory and change these vile bodies to make them like his glorious body.

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“lack of appreciation of Scripture teaching on God manifestation”**. (It is implied that those who disagree with this interpretation do so not on genuine grounds but because they lack appreciation of Scripture teaching.)

(2) **“each brother in the ecclesia should be a manifestation of Christ”**. (The text simply says that man *is* the “image and glory of God”. It does not say anything about “should be”. The reference is to creation and to the woman's creation from man, and therefore in this context she should respect him, not act in a manner which dishonours the man/husband. If by “manifestation” it is meant that each brother shows the nature of Christ in how he behaves, the same applies to sisters, and sisters in Christ, like brothers, are in the process of being changed into a new nature (2 Corinthians 3:18-19):

And we all [male and female], with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.)

(3) **“Because it is God's purpose to manifest this glory throughout the earth (Num. 14:22), it is fitting that the manifestation of it within the ecclesia should be uncovered”**. (The text has not said anything about God's glory being uncovered. This is

an assumed interpretation. Verse 7 does not explain why, because man is the image and glory of God, he should not cover his head. It is legitimate to suggest an interpretation, and the idea that the man must not cover his head because he does not wish to cover God's glory is one possible suggestion: but it is only a suggestion; the text does not say it. It is also an assumption to connect the use of the word "glory" in 1 Corinthians with the use of "glory" in Numbers.)

(4) **"each sister in the ecclesia manifests the glory of man, and that glory should be covered"**. (The text does not say anything about "manifesting" the glory of man; nor does it say that the glory of man should be covered. These are deductions which can be suggested, but they are deductions and *only* deductions. The phrase "the glory of man" suggests that the writer understands "man" in the sense of "human", but to indicate "human" the word *anthrōpos* would more likely have been used, not *anēr*.)

(5) **"are declaring in symbol that they oppose the divine purpose"**. (Note once more the heavy pressure put on anyone who dares to disagree with this interpretation. No one, to our knowledge, who considers 1 Corinthians 11 should be understood differently, has any wish to oppose the divine purpose. On the contrary, the reason for opposing this type of interpretation is that it seems to many to be contrary to the general and widespread teaching in the Bible as a whole.)

EXTRACT (G) 1990

In verse 3 Paul gave the simple reasons for a man's head being left uncovered and the woman's being covered. He now expands the principles involved. Verse 7 takes us to Psalm 8, which is the Divine commentary on the Creation record of Genesis 1:26-28. In wondering at God's grace in elevating man to the highest position in creation the psalmist records that man was "crowned" (v. 5). But with what? There is no account in Genesis of Adam being given any kind of head covering, whether a circle of gold or the turban of the high priest. But this is precisely the point the Apostle Paul is making. Man does not need any kind of head covering because God "crowned him with *glory and honour*". ... There is a hierarchy in the heavens beginning with the Lord God and descending through the angels who are able to come close to man on the earth. ... the angels ... radiate God's glory. Since man is only just below them he

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catches this glory and reflects it. In this situation it would be folly indeed for the man to cover his head since he would be putting a barrier between himself and the Divine glory which the Lord intended to be his crown. ...

A man should not cover his head, because he is the “glory of God” ... By contrast, a woman who does *not* cover her head is dishonouring her head (the man) by allowing human glory symbolised by her hair to compete with God’s glory being reflected from him. ...

... To be in Christ both must put away the natural self through baptism, and the woman through the head covering as well.

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“Verse 7 takes us to Psalm 8”**. (Both mention the word “glory” but there is no other reason to think that Psalm 8 is in the apostle’s mind.)

(2) **“Man does not need any kind of head covering because God “crowned him with *glory and honour*”.”** (This assumption arises from a misunderstanding of the word “man” in Psalm 8. It does not mean “man” (masculine alone) but “mankind”, “men and women”. It used to be normal in English to use “man” in this sense of “mankind” and comparison with Genesis 1:26 confirms this: both have dominion; both men and women are crowned with glory and honour:

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

(Genesis 1:27, KJV)

...what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honour.

Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet.

(Psalm 8:4-6)

Modern translations make it clear that both male and female are crowned with glory and honour:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals [literally *ben adam*] that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet. (NRSV)

Psalms 8 is given a second application in Hebrews. It points out that in fact all things are not in subjection to mankind, presumably meaning in harmonious subjection as will be the case in the Kingdom. But one human being *has* fulfilled the original intention: the man Jesus. Jesus has been “crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9). The application of this verse to Jesus as being the only member of the human race to fulfil the ideal does not justify restricting it to a masculine meaning in Psalm 8. This psalm, therefore, if used in connection with head covering, suggests that head covering is inappropriate for either sex, which again points to a local meaning for 1 Corinthians 11 in first century society.)

(3) **“Since man is only just below them [the angels] he catches this glory and reflects it.”** (An oddly literal assumption. It is metaphorical language to say that man has been “crowned with glory and honour”. It means that God has given mankind supreme place in this world’s creation. Glory is not something which is “caught”.)

(4) **“it would be folly indeed for the man to cover his head”.** (A strange statement, since the priests were told to cover their heads, and for the specific reason of looking impressive:

“And for Aaron’s sons you shall make coats and girdle and caps; you shall make them for glory and beauty”

(Exodus 28:40)

There is no contradiction between this and 1 Corinthians 11 if local practice is involved. If it were a universal divine principle that men should not pray to God with heads covered, why the practice in the tabernacle and temple? The explanation sometimes suggested is that it was only in the coming of Jesus that men were enabled to be the glory of God. This does not resolve the problem between Psalm 8 as interpreted above and Exodus 28:40, and suggests in any case an over-literal application.)

(5) **“human glory ... to compete with God’s glory”.** (It is an assumption that there is a contrast in 1 Corinthians 11 between human glory and God’s glory, as if human glory were bad. Should we not

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rather see the usage of glory in this passage as always favourable? It is given by God as something good and desirable for which we should give Him our thanks.)

(6) **“human glory symbolised by her hair to compete with God’s glory”** (The text says “If a woman has long hair it is a glory to her”. It is an assumption to say that the explanation of the covering is that her hair represents human glory or that it competes with God’s glory, especially as the text continues to say that her long hair is given to her [by God] as a covering.)

(7) **“put away the natural self through baptism, and the woman through the head covering as well”**. (Baptism is a once-and-for-all act in which we receive forgiveness for our sins. There is no suggestion in 1 Corinthians that head covering is anything to do with putting away a woman’s natural self. If anything it is the reverse: it is the way by which she expresses her natural self in relation to her husband. But lying behind this comment is a long tradition which blames all women for the sin of Eve and whereas men in Christ are apparently free from the sin of Adam, women in Christ are considered still guilty.)⁵⁶

EXTRACT (H) Date 1990s

It must be noted that the wearing of a hat by women is not symbolic of their servitude to men just because they are males, but represents the covering of our sin by the blood of Christ. ... The woman is wearing the hat on behalf of the whole church, to demonstrate our collective appreciation of the covering work of Christ.

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“servitude to men just because they are males”**. (Where does 1 Corinthians 11 suggest *servitude* to men?)

(2) **“represents the covering of our sin by the blood of Christ”**. (Where does 1 Corinthians 11 suggest this?)

(3) **“wearing the hat”**. (It is assumed that a modern hat can be considered a covering in accordance with the New Testament rather than the contrary to it.)

⁵⁶ Our book *All One in Christ Jesus* explores the background to this manner of thinking. See Chapter 29 “Attitudes to Women in Post-New Testament Times”, pages 241-254.

EXTRACT (I) Date 1995

Note the progression. The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. The verse teaches an order of rank by means of representation. Christ represents God, man represents Christ and therefore his head is uncovered to reveal the glory of Christ. The woman represents mankind and consequently she covers her head to conceal the glory of mankind.

The living parable has nothing to do with the subjection or the humiliation of the woman. It teaches that every time the ecclesia assembles for worship, the men recognize, by means of the woman's head covering, that their "glory" must be concealed. And the woman, by covering her head, teaches this all-important lesson that the flesh must be covered.

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **"The verse teaches an order of rank by means of representation"** (Where does the Bible say that each represents something other than itself?)

(2) **"man represents Christ"** (Where does the Bible say that the man represents Christ? If the argument is that an image – such as the image of Caesar on a coin represents Caesar, then should it not be that the man represents God – since he is "the image of God?")

(3) **"The woman represents mankind"** (Where does the Bible say this? 1 Corinthians 11 does not say that woman is an image of man but is the glory of man)

(4) **"she covers her head to conceal the glory of mankind"** (Where does it say that she should conceal the glory of mankind?)

(5) **"living parable"** (Where does the Bible suggest this is any sort of parable?)

(6) **"And the woman, by covering her head, teaches this all-important lesson that the flesh must be covered."** (Where does the Bible say that?)

EXTRACT (J) Date 1997

Head-coverings are necessary for sisters at least within the context of the breaking of bread in order to portray the salvation of the bride of Christ. This is particularly appropriate within the memorial feast because this is a type of the **marriage supper** of the lamb, and in this type the brethren represent Christ, while

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the sisters represent the bride. Within this setting, their head-covering shows that the bride has been saved from sin by her husband. Accordingly, brethren do not wear a head-covering, because Christ was sinless.

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“Head-coverings are necessary for sisters”** (The passage does not say sisters in general but “any woman who prays or prophesies”.)

(2) **“at least within the context of the breaking of bread”** (Although the Breaking of Bread is mentioned before and after the section on head covering, there is no suggestion in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 that this passage is talking about the Breaking of Bread. It refers to meetings where brothers and sisters pray and prophesy; there is no reference to a meal, which the Breaking of Bread was in the New Testament.)

(3) **“brethren represent Christ, while the sisters represent the bride”** (Where does the Bible teach this? The church, consisting of brothers and sisters together, are the body of Christ, and in Ephesians husbands are told to care for their wives following the example of how Jesus cares for the church, his body. In this analogy, the church is described as the wife/bride of Christ, but it is not divided up into two groups, one group representing Christ, and the other the bride.)

(4) **“their head-covering shows that the bride has been saved from sin by her husband”** (This follows on from the analogy presented in this paragraph, so is presumably intended to mean that by wearing a head covering sisters acknowledge the salvation the church has received from its Saviour, Jesus. But is there any reason to suppose from 1 Corinthians 11 that this is what head covering meant?)

(5) **“Accordingly, brethren do not wear a head-covering, because Christ was sinless.”** (Likewise, is there any reason to suppose from 1 Corinthians 11 that not wearing a head covering was a way of proclaiming that Christ was sinless?)

EXTRACT (K) Date 2001

... by divine arrangement, the relationship between man and woman in Christ is modelled on the one between Christ and the ecclesia (Ephesians 5:32). By this arrangement, sisters symbolise the ecclesia, and brethren symbolise Christ. When the sisters wear a head covering, the ecclesia as a whole (brethren and sisters) acknowledge that they are in need of a covering, and that covering has been provided by the sacrifice of Christ.

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“by divine arrangement ... is modelled...”** (Paul actually says: “I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church”)

(2) **“sisters symbolise the ecclesia, and brethren symbolise Christ”** (Where does the text say this?)

(3) **“When the sisters wear a head covering, the ecclesia as a whole (brethren and sisters) acknowledge that they are in need of a covering”** (Where does any text say this?)

(4) **“acknowledge that they are in need of a covering”** (Where does the Bible say that “the ecclesia ... are in need of a covering”)

(5) **“that covering has been provided by the sacrifice of Christ”** (Why, then, are we still in need of a covering? “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”, Romans 8:1)

EXTRACT (L) Date 2001

The relationship between Christ and the ecclesia was echoed in the dealings between man and woman, for just as Christ is the head of man [footnote = mankind] in the ecclesia, so man is head of woman in the family and in society. Man is the head of woman: first, because Adam was made in “the image and glory of God”, whereas woman in being made from man is *his* (i.e., man’s glory (verse 7; Genesis 1:27; 2:23); secondly, this was emphasised to Eve after she and Adam sinned: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and *he shall rule over you*” (Genesis 3:16).

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“Christ is the head of man”** (Note that “man” is understood at this point to mean “mankind” – possible, but only one of several possibilities.)

(2) **“Adam was made in “the image and glory of God”, whereas woman...”** (Is it justified to insert, before the quote, the word “in”? Does 1 Corinthians 11:7 say *in* “the image and glory of God” or *is* “the image and glory of God”?)

(3) **“whereas woman in being made from man is *his* (i.e., man’s glory)”** Does either Genesis 1:27 or 2:23 say that **“Adam was made in “the image and glory of God”**, whereas woman in being made from man is *his* (i.e., man’s glory). Is not Genesis 1:27 saying that both men and women are in God’s image?)

(4) **“woman in being made from man is *his* (i.e., man’s glory)”** (Note how in verse 7 man and woman are considered here as generic, i.e. it is taken to refer men in general and women in general, rather than the more specific interpretation that a wife is a husband’s glory.)

EXTRACT (M) c.2001

EVERY WOMAN WHO PRAYS OR PROPHESES: It has been argued that this phrase shows approval of women leading the congregation in worship. While women speaking in tongues (mentioned in 1 Cor 14) was a specialized (and temporary) issue, there is no other warrant in this phrase for sisters usurping in any way the prerogative and responsibility of men in public worship. To argue that since women “prophesied” in Corinth, when the Holy Spirit gifts abounded, therefore women should be allowed to proclaim the gospel in public worship today – when no such Holy Spirit gifts are available – does not follow. In fact, there is evidence very much in the opposite direction, even in the first century. Paul wrote: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (1 Ti 2:11,12) ... and “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says” (1 Co 14:34).

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“evidence very much in the opposite direction”** (It is assumed that passages can be mixed together out of their original context to produce a clear result.)

(2) **“sisters usurping”** (The reference to 1 Timothy 2 draws a general inference that a problem in Ephesus where sisters who need to learn and are behaving badly can be applied universally in different contexts.)

(3) **“To argue that since women “prophesied” in Corinth, when the Holy Spirit gifts abounded, therefore women should be allowed to proclaim the gospel in public worship today – when no such Holy Spirit gifts are available – does not follow.”** (If speaking by both male and female was acceptable to God in the first century, why is it assumed not to be so now?)

(4) **“the prerogative and responsibility of men in public worship”** (Where does the New Testament state this?)

EXTRACT (N) Date 2004

Already, before the Fall the headship of the male was made clear. It was clear from the order of creation, from the fact that God’s command was given to the man, and from the order of God’s interrogation and punishments. But it is also made clear that generic man – mankind – exists in two forms, male and female, and that the two are equal in that sense and stand before God as one: complementary, and equally in need of each other – incomplete when they are alone. So there is simultaneously an equality (“neither male nor female”) and a differentiation, a principle of headship. We might say as has indeed been said by Chistadelphians before), the man and woman are equal with respect to salvation, and have the same *status* in that sense – but they have a different *role* within that plan of salvation, a different *function*. In the typology of Christ and the ecclesia (which is what it is really all about) they represent something different.

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“It was clear”** (Is it clear? Where is “headship” stated before the fall, or is this a deduction inserted into Genesis?)

(2) **“It was clear from the order of creation”** (Does Genesis 1 show anything about headship of man over woman? Or are both made in the image of God and given the same job to do (Genesis 1:28)? Does Genesis 2 suggest that the man has a different job, or does it say that he needs a suitable human companion to do the same job – to tend the garden)?

(3) **“man and woman are equal with respect to salvation, and have the same *status* in that sense – but they have a different *role* within that plan of salvation, a different *function*.”** (Where does the New Testament mention the word

“role”? In 1 Corinthians 11 they do the same as regards their ecclesial activity: pray and prophesy).

(4) **“In the typology of Christ and the ecclesia (which is what it is really all about) they represent something different.”** (Where does the Bible say that they “represent something different”? Do Ephesians 5 or 1 Corinthians 11 justify this conclusion? Is typology (a method of making comparisons) “what it is really all about”?⁵⁷)

EXTRACT (O) 2011

If they worship with head uncovered they dishonour God’s ordained order by displaying their own glory (their hair), and dishonour the role of men. ... By worshipping without a head covering a woman in effect rejects God’s appointed sequence of authority in the household of God.”

Assumptions in this passage are:

(1) **“they dishonour God’s ordained order”?** (It says “her head”, not “ordained order”).

(2) **“displaying their own glory (their hair)”** (Where does it say anything about “displaying” their glory?)

(3) **“dishonour the role of men”?** (It says “dishonours her head” i.e. husband; nothing about “role of men”.)

(4) **“God’s appointed sequence of authority”** (The sequence is generally *rearranged* to make it: God, Christ, Man, Woman, but this is deduced and not the sequence actually given in Corinthians 11.)

(5) **“in the household of God”?** (Where does 1 Corinthians 11 mention the “household of God”? We are not being pedantic. There is a long chain of inserted interpretations here.)

⁵⁷ For a detailed analysis of the claims made about Genesis, please see Chapter 20 “Arguments for Subordination in Genesis” in *All One in Christ Jesus*.

EXTRACT (P) Date 2019

The man is representative of Christ to the ecclesia. ...

Sinful man is now represented ecclesially by the sisters because the men are supposed to represent Christ in what they do. We don't, but that's what they are supposed to do.

And the sisters represent the ecclesia as a whole, both men and women, in need. That's a principle that runs through.

Assumptions in this passage are:

- (1) **“The man is representative of Christ to the ecclesia.”**
(Where does the New Testament anywhere specify this?)
- (2) **“Sinful man is now represented ecclesially by the sisters”**
(Where does the New Testament specify this?)
- (3) **“the sisters represent the ecclesia as a whole, both men and women, in need.”** (Where does the New Testament specify this?)
- (4) **“That’s a principle that runs through [the Bible.]”** (Where is such a principle stated?)

EXTRACT (Q) Date 2019

When we are at the table of the Lord (the very next subject in 1 Corinthians 11) we are there not to celebrate humanity (which is symbolised by the head of the woman) but to celebrate Christ (this is why the man's head—which symbolises Christ—is left uncovered).

If the headcovering is to 'repress' something, it is to repress man(kind) as a whole and to expose or glorify Christ, not to repress femaleness as distinct from maleness. Headcoverings make sense in the symbolic world of what heads represent—and in that symbolic world we seek to cover up mankind and glorify Christ. The covering of the woman's head represents the ordering of creation and the fact that salvation comes not by man but by Christ.

Assumptions in this passage are:

- (1) **“humanity (which is symbolised by the head of the woman)”** (Where does the text say that the woman's head *symbolises* humanity?)
- (2) **“this is why the man's head—which symbolises Christ—is left uncovered”** (Where does the text say that the man's head *symbolises* Christ?)

(3) **“If the headcovering is to ‘repress’ something, it is to repress man(kind) as a whole”** (Note the addition of the suffix “kind” to make the word into “mankind”. But the word is *anēr* (man or husband). If mankind had been intended, the word to use would more likely have been *anthrōpos*.)

(4) **“Headcoverings make sense in the symbolic world of what heads represent”** (The usual meaning of head covering for women in the ancient world was to hide the woman from the view of non-family members and thereby to conceal her beauty from all but her husband. Thus it indicated her married status. It was not symbolic but actual.)

(5) **“The covering of the woman’s head represents ... the fact that salvation comes not by man but by Christ.”** (Where does anywhere in the Bible state this about covering of the woman’s head?)

Note on the word “role”

The quotations given above from Christadelphian writers are in approximate chronological sequence.

It is noticeable that the word “role” has begun to be used, particularly in the more recent writings. The word “role” is never used in the Bible. It is imported from the world of theatre and from modern sociology, and has been used extensively in America by those who argue for restrictions on women’s activity. It lends an air of seeming respectability to discrimination: women are spiritually equal, but have different roles from those of men. It is not a biblical concept. It gives an impression that we are playing a part on a stage rather than working in service to our Lord and to one another. We would do well to avoid using the word in our discussions.

21 | What is the Biblical Meaning of Offence?

Discussion over many years indicates a range of reasons which sisters give for wearing head coverings.

Some believe that by so doing they are fulfilling 1 Corinthians 11. Others consider that hats are merely decorative, and wear them because they like dressing up in “Sunday best” when they come to the meeting. Some feel uncomfortable at “dressing up”, so choose to wear a scarf or beret to conform to what is expected of them.

Others would prefer not to put on any head covering, but are pressurised into doing so because of the trouble some brothers and sisters are known to make when they see a sister without a hat. Often a degree of ‘spiritual blackmail’ is exerted, implying that sisters who do not wear some form of head covering are deliberately dishonouring Christ and jeopardising their place in the Kingdom.

Others wear a head covering because those who favour wearing hats claim they are “offended” by any sister who does not. Followers of Jesus should not take offence:

Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is ... never selfish, not quick to take offence. (1 Corinthians 13:4, NEB)

“Offence”, however, in the usual biblical sense means “driving someone away from Christ”. It does not mean “being upset because someone has a different understanding of Bible teaching”.

Woe unto the world because of offences... if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee...
(Matthew 18:7-8, KJV)

Woe to the world for temptations to sin. ... if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it from you...
(Matthew 18:7-8, RSV)

For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to drink flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything

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whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

(Romans 14:20-21, KJV)

Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make others fall by what he eats; it is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble.

(Romans 14:20-21, RSV)

These verses are sometimes quoted to argue that if people disagree about head coverings, then something should be worn so that no one is offended.

The idea, however, that when principles are at stake, we should simply give way for the sake of peace is not well-founded on Scripture. The teachings of the prophets, of Jesus and Paul, caused much “offence” in the modern sense of making people feel annoyed. It did not, though, make them abandon true faith, though it challenged that which was untrue.

The situation about eating meats was serious, for there was a danger that some believers would be driven from their faith altogether. It is difficult to find a modern equivalent to eating meats offered to idols. Perhaps the nearest would be of a reformed alcoholic being taken back on to drink by a brother or sister who liked to drink but who was not aware how easily the reformed alcoholic could slip back down a slippery slope. A sister not wearing a head covering can not genuinely be considered to be causing offence in the usual biblical meaning.

If some feel upset at a sister not wearing a hat, it is worth observing that it would be better to be upset at the manner in which hats for many years in our Christadelphian community have often been a reversal of the teaching in 1 Corinthians 11. When a sister buys a hat, does she buy one in which she thinks she will look attractive, or one to conceal her from being seen? Strangely, little concern seems to be shown about this reversal and often little attempt was made in the past to avoid wearing fashionable hats.

The pressure exerted by some ecclesias who specify that sisters should wear “head coverings” reinforces the misapplication as hats are always considered acceptably to fit this description. This pressure also fails to take account of the genuine feeling by many that this

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

method of interpreting 1 Corinthians 11 is inconsistent with our normal Christadelphian approach to first century customs and looks more like the man-made rules for which Jesus criticised the Pharisees.

Offence in the biblical sense of driving people away has several times been caused by those who insist on head coverings. We are not aware of anyone being driven away by those who believe that the wearing of hats is unbiblical.

Since, however, strong feelings can be aroused on this subject, there are, we suggest, two appropriate responses;

(1) Encourage sisters to act on conscience

Those who consider it right to wear a hat, should not be pressurised to refrain; those who think a plain scarf is more appropriate should not be told to wear a proper hat; those who think the correct application is nothing to do with modern head decoration should have their consciences respected and should not be pressurised.

Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin. (James 4:17, NRSV)

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. (Romans 14:5)

(2) Exercise Mutual Forbearance for the Sake of Unity

No practice on this subject will please everybody. Accommodation of a variety of practice, mutual respect and restraint are required from all of us.

I beg you to ... lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, *forbearing one another in love*, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Cenchreae – Eastern Harbour of Corinth



The foundations of the buildings at the harbour of Cenchreae are now underwater. This bay would be familiar to Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, and Phoebe, it being the main departure point for the sea route to Ephesus and on to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18). Phoebe was a deacon here in the ecclesia at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1), and Paul commended her to the believers in Rome. It is generally believed that Paul sent her as the carrier of the letter.

22 | Formal and Informal?

Decently and in Order

Sometimes a distinction is made between formal and informal occasions. If a situation is considered informal, like a home Bible Class or a Saturday evening ecclesial social, then hats are frequently not worn and casual clothing is thought acceptable. But in many places a Sunday Morning or a Breaking of Bread or a Devotional Meeting is considered formal, and hats are expected, along with fine clothes: dresses for sisters and suits and ties⁵⁸ for brothers.

Is there any such distinction made in the New Testament? As far as we can see there is not, neither on day of the week nor on the type of meeting. According to the customs of the times, many sisters might be veiled. A problem only arose when sisters were publicly praying or prophesying. Public speaking by women was not customary amongst the Jews, nor even amongst the pagan Gentiles, but appears to have been acceptable to Paul and the ecclesias as part of the sisters' new freedom in Christ. Paul encouraged all believers ("brethren" = "brothers and sisters") to prophesy, but in an orderly manner:

So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order.
(1 Corinthians 14:39-40, RSV)

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

(1 Corinthians 14:39-40, 2011 NIV)

This text is sometimes quoted to defend formal meetings and formal dress. In its context Paul is correcting the abuses described – the general disorder with several people speaking at once (verses 31-33), sisters perhaps chattering or calling out questions (verse 35), and at the Breaking of Bread some getting drunk, and others arriving late (possibly slaves who couldn't get away in time) and finding that all the food had been eaten (1 Corinthians 11:21).

⁵⁸ Ties are a fashion item begun by Croatian soldiers wearing neck ties in the 1600s. The practice was taken up in France and then spread to Britain. The term cravat shows the Croatian origin.

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To behave decently and in order is compatible both with formal and informal occasions, and this verse does not therefore give any suggestion that one form of ecclesial gathering differs from another in acceptability to God.

The New Testament does not commend fine clothing as desirable for believers. James 2:2-3 suggests that people attended meetings in a variety of clothing: rich, shabby, and presumably, therefore, in between.

If, however, sisters can only pray acceptably to God when wearing veils, then this applies all the time. But if the veils were not to make the sisters acceptable to God but expected in the social fabric of the first century, it does not matter at all today, and whether a meeting is considered formal or informal has no real bearing on the issue from a New Testament perspective.

Variety – and inconsistencies

It is worth being aware of how much variety there is in the Christadelphian community, both on the question of formality, and the question of head coverings.

Some meetings are very formal, especially on Sundays at the Breaking of Bread. This is inclined to be more so where there is a large number gathered, since microphones may need to be used so that all can hear, and with a large gathering it is often easier to organise everything in a formal manner, including the passing round of the bread and the wine.

Many ecclesias are comparatively small. In some of these the brothers and sisters sit in formal rows; in some they sit round in a circle, or two circles, depending on numbers.

These may easily be less formal.

As regards the wearing of head coverings, there is much variety.

In some meetings, head coverings are required for all baptised women, whether at the Breaking of Bread, the evening lecture, mid-week Bible Class, Devotional Meetings or Saturday fraternals. This sometimes extends to Bible classes at home, and to public addresses held elsewhere than the meeting room, at which prayers are said; but sometimes (out of a desire not to seem odd to non-Christadelphian visitors) head coverings are not worn at special addresses.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

In other ecclesias, the wearing of head coverings is a matter of personal choice. Some sisters wear hats or scarves at the Breaking of Bread, but not on other occasions, even though the activities are similar: hymns and prayers.

There is even more variety at events such as Bible schools and weekend gatherings. All meetings at these involve prayer, but often no head coverings are worn, except perhaps at the Breaking of Bread. We, speaking personally, have always felt uncomfortable at this situation. If it is acceptable to pray and sing hymns and have fellowship all through the weekend, without head coverings or any unusual style of dress, why a sudden change when it comes to fellowship at the Breaking of Bread? Are we more in the presence of Jesus and God? Does 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 refer to the Breaking of Bread anyway, when it talks about praying and prophesying? The Breaking of Bread in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 seems to have been a full-scale meal, and the praying and prophesying was perhaps at a separate ecclesial activity. Both, however, could be described as full-ecclesial occasions: “when you come together” (1 Corinthians 11:17-18), “the whole church assembles” (1 Corinthians 14:23).

Then there is the question of location. At one Christadelphian gathering hats seem to be required if a session takes place in the main hall, but when subsidiary sessions (still with prayer) take place in side rooms, head coverings are not worn.

These anomalies suggest that the modern practice owes little to actual biblical teaching; more to a mixture of social conventions which have grown up among us – “tradition of the elders” as Mark 7:3 describes. Added to that has been pressure to wear certain types of formal clothing, suits and ties for the men, skirts, tights and hats for the women.

For a community which takes “Back to the Bible” as a prime slogan, we seem to be rather muddled on issues of this type.

Bible teaching, we suggest, favours the wearing of normal clothing (according to culture), not showy or expensive attire, and as long as meetings take place with care and consideration and reverence, there is no biblical difference recognised as to whether meetings are formal or informal. It is the spirit in which they are conducted and our inner hearts and thoughts which matter.

Ephesus from where Paul wrote to the Corinthians



One of the main gateways at Ephesus into the market place, a sight that would have been very familiar to the apostle Paul. He sailed to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila from Cenchreae, then left them here and went on to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18-19).

23 | Questions and Answers?

Below are questions which might well be asked of us, along with suggested answers.

Why do you think 1 Corinthians 11 refers to husbands and wives?

Because 1 Corinthians 11 verse 5 speaks of “her head”. If it were saying that all the men in the ecclesia are heads of all the women, would it not have said “her heads”? And as the ESV footnote says (see page 5) “the Greek word *gunē* is translated *wife* in verses that deal with wearing a veil, a sign of being married in first-century culture”. In Ephesians 5 Paul teaches that the head of the wife is the husband, not that men are the heads of all women.

But verse 12 says “man is now born of woman”. A husband can’t be born from his wife!

The passage starts with reference to husband and wife. It moves back to Genesis to show that mutual cooperation was God’s intention, not independence. And the need for both male and female to cooperate is shown by fact that although Eve was made from Adam, now it is biologically the other way round. Therefore husbands and wives should work together, not assert independence by the husband praying like an elite Roman or by the wife acting like a disreputable woman according to cultural understandings of the first century.

Why are you not happy with the divine hierarchy explanation?

Because it re-arranges the order given, because it universalises from texts which, we believe, refer to husband and wife, and because it seems to place all women under all men. It places men between women and Jesus in a manner which seems to contradict the direct relationship women (and men) elsewhere have with Jesus and with God.

Why do you think that a cultural explanation is valid?

Because of what is known about the meaning of veils in the ancient world. 1 Corinthians 11:6 refers to cultural understanding and expectations: "... if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven". Likewise, the disapproval of long hair on men assumes a different cultural setting from elsewhere in the Bible where long hair on men receives approval. The same applies in Leviticus where the men are forbidden to "cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beards" (Leviticus 19:27). That had significance in relation to pagan religion, but it does not stop brothers today from having a haircut or from shaving their beards. In both Leviticus and 1 Corinthians 11, the impression and meaning given in the society of the day had to be taken into account.

Why don't you simply accept that a man shouldn't cover his head because he is the image and glory of God and a woman is not?

It's not as simple as that. In Genesis 1 both men and women are *in* the image of God. Isaiah 43:6-7 says both were created for God's glory. Elsewhere in the New Testament, it is Jesus who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:15), and we all, men and women under the New Covenant, are being transformed into his image (2 Corinthians 3:18).

If taken within the specific context of 1 Corinthians 11, a husband who prays ought to act as the image of God that he and his wife were created to be, giving glory to the one and only true God. And in the specific context also, the wife should dress as a respectable married woman thereby giving glory to her husband. But it is incorrect to universalise the statement in 1 Corinthians (addressed to specific issues in Corinth) that a husband is "the image and glory of God" and "woman is the glory of man" (= "the wife is a husband's glory") to the exaltation of men and the demotion of women. That does not fit with other and clearer statements in the Bible. Everyone agrees that 1 Corinthians 2-16 is a difficult passage, so to found a major doctrinal and ecclesial position on this passage is not wise.

Are you not picking and choosing?

“Picking and choosing” means selecting texts and translations to suit a preferred result.

Yes, we *are* picking and choosing. Everyone has to pick and choose, especially in a passage like 1 Corinthians 11 where there are so many varied possibilities. We have tried, however, to pick and choose in a way which make sense of a difficult passage and is also in full accordance with the rest of the teaching of the Bible.

Are you not attacking the inspiration of the Bible by saying that there may be quotations from people at Corinth?

There obviously are quotations from Corinth, sometimes specifically stated (e.g. 2 Corinthians 10:10), and many times hinted at. It’s not attacking inspiration to attempt to understand the background and context; it would be irresponsible not to.

Are you not just clouding the issue by suggesting alternative translations?

We hope not. A comparison of current translations shows that there is no *one* agreed translation, most obviously on whether *gunē* should be translated woman or wife, and *anēr* as man, or husband or mankind. It is possible to make a case for each possibility, but no one can claim certainty. In fact, what clouds the issue is claiming certainty on uncertain translation – and then seeking to assert ecclesial practice on one interpretation!

Since there is uncertainty, shouldn’t we play safe and continue with women wearing head coverings?

We don’t attempt to “play safe” on other issues, and since many different and uncertain explanations are given for a sister to wear a head covering “playing safe” is not a good explanation for a community which seeks to go by Bible principles. More appropriate is what Paul says in Romans 14:

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for

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ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

(Romans 14:5-13)

Are you not just stirring up strife between brethren by writing as you do?

We hope not. Our aim is to encourage forbearance and understanding, respecting and supporting the consciences both of those who believe head covering should be a literal practice and those who believe Scriptural principles should be applied on this issue in a non-literal way.

If praying and prophesying was "in the spirit" (1 Corinthians 14:14-16) is it still applicable today?

If speaking, preaching and praying could only be done "in the spirit" as described by Paul with regard to the Corinthians in the first century, presumably no one (neither male nor female) would be able to speak, preach or pray today. If God by His Spirit approved of both male and female speaking in the ecclesia in the first century, why should that not still be the case today?

Why do you not accept the view that Paul made himself clear in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 that women shouldn't speak anyway?

Because throughout 1 Corinthians 14 Paul encourages both men and women to speak in an orderly manner. We give a range of possible explanations of these verses in *All One in Christ Jesus* (sorry to keep referring to our book). The only interpretation which doesn't fit with the context of 1 Corinthians 14, with Paul's teaching in general, and with Bible teaching as a whole is the traditional one that women should be silent in all meetings!

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. (1 Corinthians 14:39, NIV)

24 | Questions for Group Discussion

(1) Why were fashionable hats not considered contrary to the letter and spirit of 1 Corinthians 11?

(2) Is the emphasis put on “covering” by hats, berets or scarves, compatible with the freedom so strongly endorsed in Christ? (“You observe days, and months, and seasons and years!” “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 4:10, 5:1; Colossians 2:16-23)

(3) A sister commented: “If I am asked to wear a head covering or a veil, then I am being put back behind the veil which Paul says is removed in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 3:12-18; see also Hebrews 10:19-22, Mark 15:38.) Is she correct?

(4) Is there any reason to suppose that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is referring to a Breaking of Bread meeting, i.e. a meal in New Testament times? Or is it referring to a different, more public, type of meeting as described in 1 Corinthians 14 – if this distinction can be made?

(5) Is there any reason to suppose that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is referring to *all* sisters in attendance as distinct from those publicly praying or prophesying?

(6) Since 1 Corinthians 11 approves of both men and women speaking in prayer and prophecy in ecclesial meetings, why are women today not encouraged to read the Bible and to pray out loud like the men? (Some explanation needs to be given of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 compatible with 1 Corinthians 11.⁵⁹)

(7) Is there biblical support for dressing up to come to meetings (hats, suits, ties, jackets), or is the practice an intrusion of worldly standards?

(8) Does the attitude that all sisters are subject to all brothers find support in the New Testament?

⁵⁹ See, for example, the explanation suggested by Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, pages 409-418.

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(9) Why is the section on length of hair completely ignored? Most sisters wear short hair. According to 1 Corinthians 11:15, long hair is given her by God as a covering. If the answer is that length of hair was a cultural custom, why not say the same about head covering?

(10) If we are to go by nature (1 Corinthians 11:14) why is it acceptable for men to go clean-shaven rather than growing beards?

In these days when mankind is struggling to attain its manhood, the beard asserts its right to appear in all its fulness upon “the human face divine.” It is the symbol of manly thought and action, uncontrolled by human imbecility....

(Dr Thomas, *Herald*, 1851, reprinted in *The Christadelphian*, September 1892, page 323)

(11) “Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind. ... each of us shall give account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:5, 14:12)

Is it consistent with life in Christ under the New Covenant for sisters who, along with their husbands, regard hats/head coverings as unbiblical to be compelled to wear a head covering by long-standing practice or ecclesial resolutions?

(12) Many sisters have felt bullied or spiritually blackmailed by individuals and by ecclesias which refuse to allow the exercise of personal conscience. Is head covering more important than principles such as those expressed in: “I beg you to ... lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3)?

(13) If we favour head covering for sisters, why do we not follow literally other New Testament practices like anointing with oil (James 5:14), or foot washing (John 13:14-15, 1 Timothy 5:10), or brothers greeting one another with a kiss (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20) all of which are given as instructions?

(14) Is there any biblical justification for asserting that sisters represent human sin and therefore should be covered up?

(15) How much do we accept inference rather than clear teaching when looking at the subject of head covering?

25 | In A Nutshell

We were once asked to put our arguments in a nutshell. It is difficult to read the kind of involved analysis in this book, so we offer our short version on the following three pages. We follow this with a similarly condensed précis of our book *All One in Christ Jesus – Bible Teaching on the Work of Men and Women in Christ’s Service*.

Writers can’t win! If a short statement is produced, people can say: “That’s too short and doesn’t cover the issue adequately”. If a detailed exposition is offered, people can say: “That’s too long and complicated”.

Most issues in life are complicated, so we have tried to produce both long and short versions! The précis on head coverings is titled “Veils, Hats and Wedding Rings”, and on ecclesia work of brothers and sisters, “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone’.”

“Veils, Hats and Wedding Rings”

Reasons why sisters should be encouraged to make up their own minds about whether to cover their heads or not

- Christianity is basically about attitude, not ritual.

The Apostle Paul said:

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2:16-17)

Christianity is not about observing things like this, but about one’s heart and one’s behaviour.

- As Christadelphians there are only two rituals which we follow, and these because we read direct instructions in the reported words of Jesus: Baptism and Breaking of Bread.

Even with these, it is the spirit in which they are done which makes them valid.

- Other practices are commanded elsewhere: anointing with oil, raising hands in prayer, greeting one another with a kiss, foot washing, fasting, laying on of hands.

Why do we not put these into practice? None would be difficult to do. Our usual answer is that these were part of the practices of the era of the first century AD. We practise the spirit of them, but not the literal detail.

Therefore we pray for those who are ill but we don’t anoint them with oil; we pray reverently, but most of us don’t raise our hands in prayer; we greet one another either with a handshake or a kiss; and we appoint people by ecclesial elections or by accepting volunteers.

- In the case of Baptism and Breaking of Bread, we seek to return to the first century practice because we believe the essential meaning is closely involved with the first-century manner of doing these.

We decline to accept later developments, so we practise believer’s baptism by immersion, and we don’t regard the bread and the wine as transubstantiated into Jesus’ body and blood. Nor do we have clergy who preside at the Breaking of Bread.

- Why then do we adopt a different approach to head covering?
- Hats and scarves are not a New Testament practice.
- Veils to show modesty probably were. But veils are not worn today, and hats no longer show modesty.
- In fact, hats are intended as part of dressing up – they are chosen to enhance the wearer’s appearance, the opposite to veils in New Testament times.
- The meaning of veils varied in the ancient world.
Sometimes they indicated virginity (as with Isaac’s future wife), hiding her from her fiancé’s sight. Sometimes they indicated marriage, obscuring a wife’s beauty from all but her husband.
- Hats do not have either meaning today. The wearing of hats in meetings today is part of a church tradition from the 1800s and early 1900s, but not Bible teaching.
- Scarves are reminiscent of Muslim hijabs.
- If we insist on a custom which in the world is seen as part of dressing up (as for a wedding or a high-class social occasion), we risk bringing disrespect on our assemblies by apparently putting great stress on worldly externals!

But what about ... ?

- 1 Corinthians 11:5 “... any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours her head .”

This is not talking about hats but about veils (RSV) or about hair styles (NIV margin). It refers to the women who spoke in public, praying or prophesying. According to the understanding of the 1st century, by not dressing in what was deemed respectable clothing, they appeared to be dishonouring their husbands.

- The wearing of specific clothes is a cultural matter.
“That the question should be raised as a question of propriety in the East in Paul’s day is not to be wondered at considering the extreme seclusion of the female sex in the social custom of those countries.”

Robert Roberts (*The Christadelphian*, April 1895, page 140)

- As with other practices, the way to apply it is to observe the spirit, which is that sisters should behave respectfully when addressing the meeting or when offering prayer.

A modern equivalent (apart from wearing modest clothing) is for a woman to wear her wedding ring. The true spirit of 1 Corinthians 11, however, lies not in external clothing but in keeping one's marriage together.

- The wearing of hats is not Bible teaching. Sisters should be able to wear or not wear hats according to conscience.

“Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”
(James 4:17)

Those who see it is a biblical instruction should follow their consciences and wear a hat or head covering; those who feel it is not biblical, should likewise be able to do what they feel is right. Both should understand and respect the differing understanding of the other.

“The question of women being covered or uncovered in the exercises of worship is not of very great importance....” “... it does not matter much one way or the other.”

Robert Roberts (*The Christadelphian*, as above)

- Forbearance (i.e. tolerance with respect) should always be pursued:

I ... beg you lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

“And the LORD God said,
‘It is not good that the man should be alone’.”

**Reasons why sisters should be encouraged to offer the same
service as brothers in ecclesial activities**

- Believers are “all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Divisions of gender, race or status should no longer count within the Christian community.
- Women, like men, have a range of God-given talents and abilities, all of which should be offered to Christ in service.
- Jesus brought a new freedom and status to women.
- Jesus encouraged women to learn, unlike teachers in the pagan and Jewish worlds (Luke 10:39-42).
- Jesus used women to spread his message (John 4:27-42, Mark 15:40-41, Luke 23:55).
- On the day of Pentecost both men and women were empowered to preach the Gospel (Acts 2:15-18).
- Paul listed the activities of the church in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:11-16. These lists are not divided into male and female activities, but “according to the grace that is given to us” (Romans 12:6).
- Paul addressed his main letters to *all* members of the church, calling them *adelphoi* “brothers and sisters”.
- Paul approved of sisters praying and prophesying in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:5-13).
- Paul expressed the wish that *all* should prophesy, which involved addressing the assembly with edifying words (1 Corinthians 14:3-5). Note NRSV and revised GNB which avoid the mistakenly masculine impression conveyed by older translations.

“Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. ... those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation ... those who prophesy build up the church... Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.”
(NRSV)

- Paul encouraged believers to “teach and admonish one another in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16).
- Paul showed this in practice, regarding the women with whom he worked as colleagues (Philippians 4:2-3, Romans 16:3,12).
- History and church tradition since New Testament times show an anti-women approach based on pagan thinking, mistaken medical understanding and a selectively anti-women reading of the New Testament.
- Christadelphians rejected church tradition when our community began last century. We rejected the clergy/laity distinction, but kept the male/female one.
- It demeans sisters to discourage them from using their God-given abilities (Matthew 7:12).
- Those who prepare addresses benefit others and benefit personally. This applies to both brothers and sisters.
- Sisters can see things from a different point of view. We are all the losers if we cannot benefit from their wisdom, knowledge, learning, insight and experience.
- Now that women are well-educated, capably employed in all sections of society, there is positive harm in refusing to make proper use of their talents in ecclesial activity.
- If we are to be faithful to the teaching of the Bible and to the talents with which God has entrusted us, we should encourage sisters to speak, write, read, pray, teach, and take part in decision-making – just as we do brothers.
- God said: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). It was not; it is not.

But what about ... ?

- 1 Corinthians 14:34 “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak ...”

The context suggests that this refers to disruptive behaviour by some women, not to the capable behaviour of those sisters who offered prayer and prophesied (chapter 11:2-16) edifying the church by their words (14:3-5, 24, 26), of whom Paul approved.

- 1 Timothy 2:12 “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”

The context suggests that it is addressed to specific problems in Ephesus (1 Timothy 3:14-15). It does not, therefore, refer to Christian service by sisters who are capable of teaching the message properly – such as Priscilla who (along with her husband Aquila) taught Apollos (Acts 18:26).

Paul’s final words on teaching are:

... what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people [i.e. men and women, not men alone] who will be able to teach others as well.

(2 Timothy 2:2, NRSV).

Sisters and brothers should work together equally in Christ to offer their varied gifts for use in God’s service.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:3-8, NIV)

In Perspective



This carved stone has been placed on the “judgment seat” or “tribunal” in Corinth where Gallio is thought to have delivered his judgment, c. 51 AD. It contains in Greek and English the text of 2 Corinthian 4:17:

“For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

26 | Conclusions

In view of the large number of difficulties in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 it is unwise to be dogmatic about its meaning. The variety of suggestions as to how to unravel the various problems of translation and interpretation indicates that no one knows with any certainty. This should not give us undue cause for concern for there are a number of other obscure sections in Paul's letters. Other instances in 1 Corinthians are his reference to virgins in 1 Corinthians 7:25-28, and to baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29. Presumably all these references were understood by those for whom they were intended. It is not surprising that readers in a different context cannot always understand what was originally meant. The Bible itself recognises the difficulty in some of Paul's writings:

... our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

What, then, do we do? The answer is to rely on basic, clearly established principles. Dr Thomas in *Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come* printed a number of recommendations (sent in by a brother) on how to understand the Bible. Amongst these were the following:

The truth in relation to any doctrine must be established by those passages which speak of it in positive and unequivocal language, and those texts belonging to the same subject but which only admit of inferential testimony, no inference should be drawn from them at variance with the truths already established by positive texts.

No doctrine should be predicated upon *mere* inference, neither upon one isolated text of Scripture. Any true doctrine will be found interspersed throughout the whole Bible.

(*Herald* 1859, page 179)

1 Corinthians 11 *is* "one isolated text of Scripture" and *every* explanation of it inevitably relies on inference. If we had been intended by God to have clear directives on how we should dress, we could reasonably expect these to be explained for us in other parts of

Head Covering in Bible times and the Application Today

the Bible. Instead, we are guided away from ritualistic observances so beloved of the Pharisees and we are given principles. In this case they are that care must be taken not to give impressions of immorality or disrespect for marriage, and that sensitivity must be exercised regarding social custom where disregarding such may damage the preaching of the Gospel. These points are clear in themselves – and it is these which we need to know and practise.

Not a New Problem

In 1895 the question was discussed by Robert Roberts in *The Christadelphian*. It is interesting to note that he treated the matter entirely as a social issue:

That the question should be raised as a question of propriety in the East in Paul's day is not to be wondered at considering the extreme seclusion of the female sex in the social customs of those countries.

Robert Roberts was writing at a time when hats were worn almost universally in Britain. In the social climate of Victorian Britain Robert Roberts considered, as would most of his contemporaries,⁶⁰ that “the absence of covering seems to indicate a boldness and lightness of character” and he therefore advised that for this reason sisters should cover their heads. Since his day there has been a complete change in society's understanding of what is acceptable and proper in public. No one today considers the lack of a hat indicates “a boldness and lightness of character”, a description which would be more appropriate to some of the dressier fashions sometimes seen at meetings. Now that the situation is so different, it is no longer appropriate to express a preference in favour of hats. Indeed, the stress on dressing up for meetings, and the wearing of head coverings at occasions like public addresses when hats would not normally be thought appropriate by the general public, is likely to give to visitors a misleading impression about the Gospel. The biblical evidence does not support the practice, and we are unlikely to appear committed to

⁶⁰ “A well-dressed female who appeared out of doors without her hat, or indoors without a cap (if she was old enough to wear one), was assumed to be emotionally distracted, mentally disturbed or of loose morals.” Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, page 177, commenting on 19th century Britain.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

the Gospel if we insist on doing something which to most people seems strange.

Robert Roberts considered it a matter of social custom, not a theological issue. It is reasonable to agree with him when he said, “The question of women being covered or uncovered in the exercises of worship is not of very great importance....” He concluded, “...it does not matter much one way or the other”.

(The Christadelphian, April 1895, page 140)

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What does the Bible say about the work of brothers and sisters in the ecclesia?

This book begins with Jewish and New Testament background, the teaching and actions of Jesus, and then the rest of the New Testament. The book proceeds to examine the Old Testament, historical understandings, Christadelphian attitudes to women, and the variety of current practice. After considering the various positions presented on the subject, it suggests what the position should be today.

After a detailed examination of all the relevant Biblical passages, it is concluded that both brothers and sisters should participate in all aspects of ecclesial work if we are to be loyal to the spirit and teaching of the Bible. The criterion is reliability and faithfulness, not whether male or female.

Available as a printed book, 360 pages, £10 (including postage), or free as a PDF document.

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