

“Glory or Shame?” (1 Corinthians 11:2-16)

When Lori and I were first married, we made a trip around the western part of the United States. During that season in our lives, we were driving a wood-paneled station wagon that was called by one man “the ugliest car on the road.” We preferred to affectionately call it the “Woody.” While this car was certainly no European sports car, it did have some “get-up-and-go.” On one of our excursions, we were visiting a relative in a small God-forsaken town in eastern WA. This town is both flat and desolate. I peeled away from that town traveling 60 mph on a straight-away rural road. Lori, the navigator, was keeping an eye on the map and predicting how many miles it would be until the hairpin turn we would need to make. Now this was before Magellan would audibly tell you the approaching turn would be in 500 feet. Since we didn’t know exactly how far it would be before the turn would appear, I was lulled into complacency. I looked over at Lori, as I always do, and told her to pass me my fictitious Italian racing gloves. Suddenly, Lori said, “I think this is the turn.” By the time she said it, my 60 mph Woody was on the verge of sailing past. Without thinking, I instinctually cranked the steering wheel as hard and as fast as I could to the right. Needless to say, after a beautiful 360 degree turn the dust settled to find us inches from a stop sign, backwards, and off the road. Thank goodness for the flatlands!

The church in Corinth had a problem with speed; they were reluctant to ever apply the brakes and slow down. In my journey out of that flat desolate town, I was driving aggressively, making good time, and the last thing I was thinking about was braking. That is, until I lost control and drove off the road. The lesson is obvious: Forward progress is fine, but we must drive carefully and know when to accelerate and when to apply the brakes.

In 1 Cor 11-14, Paul begins a new section in his letter that will force us to drive discerningly and be prepared to break. In these four chapters, Paul’s concern is *how* God’s people conduct themselves in a church worship setting.¹ Paul will discuss three primary issues: gender distinction (11:2-16), the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34), and spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40).² In Paul’s first section, 1 Cor 11:2-16, we will consider the roles of men and women in the church.³ In this passage, Paul will say, “*Honor your head.*” Paul shares three principles in these verses that will guide us in understanding a woman’s role in the church.⁴ The first principle is...

1. Honor your head for the sake of biblical teaching (11:2-6). In these five verses, Paul is going to discuss the importance of honoring your spiritual head. Paul begins this passage with a very surprising verse. He writes, “**Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered⁵ them to you**” (11:2). It is tempting to think that Paul is being sarcastic with the Corinthians (cf. 4:8).⁶ After all, how could his praise really be sincere? The church has been disobedient to many of Paul’s “traditions” or “teachings.”⁷ In fact, in 11:17, 22 Paul adamantly states that he will not praise them! Therefore, it is likely that Paul begins on an encouraging note to placate his readers so that they will be receptive to critical advice (cf. 1:4-9).⁸ Obviously, there is wisdom in this approach. Speaking some positive words to a person that you are in conflict with before addressing your concerns is always wise. It may result in the person(s) hearing what you have to say.

Before we get too far into the text, I need to state upfront that I have agonized over the issue of women in ministry for 17 years. In my library I have a dozen books by evangelical authors who differ radically from one another on their view of women in ministry. Professors at my alma matre and other highly respected seminaries hold widely differing views on the role of women in the church and even on women’s ordination. There is even a difference in opinion among leaders of this church. Thus, I suggest that this is one area of doctrine where all of us could use a large dose of humility and caution.⁹ Anyone who speaks with strong dogmatism on this topic is actually demonstrating his or her ignorance. With that said, buckle your seatbelts; we’re going in where angels fear to tread.

In 11:3-6, Paul introduces the principle of headship and the appropriate response. In 11:3 Paul writes, **“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man,¹⁰ and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”¹¹** Paul introduces the basic premise that everyone has a “head.” The word “head” is difficult to interpret because it can have three possible meanings: (1) prominence, (2) authority, or (3) source. The same ambiguity is true in English when we talk about the head/top of a mountain, the head/leader of a company, or the head/source of a river. In most cases where “head” does not mean a particular body part, the word carries the nuance of prominence.¹² Thus, Paul seems to mean that just as Christ as the Son acknowledges the preeminence of the Father¹³ and men acknowledge the preeminence of Christ over them, so women acknowledge the preeminence of men in the male-female relationship (or at least the husband-wife relationship).¹⁴ But prominence in a relationship does not imply superiority or inferiority; certainly it does not carry that meaning in the relationship between the Father and the Son, and it should not mean that between men and women in the church.¹⁵

While Jesus was on earth, He modeled sacrificial servant leadership (see Mark 10:42-45). He always put His father first and did His will. Even though He was fully God and equal to the Father, He chose of His own accord to grant the Father prominence. Likewise, men are called to submit to Christ and put Him first in every area. This means living sacrificially for the good of others. In a similar vein, the head of a woman is man. Evidently, Paul refers to any woman who is in a dependent relationship to a man, such as a wife to a husband or a daughter to a father. Paul probably did not mean every woman universally since he said the male is the head of woman, or a woman, but not *the* woman. He was evidently not talking about every relationship involving men and women, for example the relationship between men and women in the workplace.¹⁶ Paul is saying that as a wife, daughter, or church member, ladies ought to honor their spiritual head: husband (Eph 5:22-33), father (Eph 6:1-3), or elders (1 Tim 2:9-3:7).

Paul now applies the spiritual principle of headship in 11:4-6 in the context of praying and prophesying in public worship.¹⁷ Paul writes, **“Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off;¹⁸ but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.”¹⁹** Paul says in the first-century Corinthian setting that men should not have their heads covered, and women should have their heads covered. The reason that men should not have their heads covered was in the world of Corinth this was often associated with idolatry.²⁰ Men who did not cover their heads in this culture honored Christ as preeminent. In Corinth, women were called to cover their heads with a scarf or shawl.²¹ This was not a stylish hat or inconspicuous doily, but a shawl that covered her entire head and concealed her hair.²² This demonstrated their respect for their husbands and to church leadership.²³

To refuse²⁴ to wear such a shawl was “disgraceful.”²⁵ For a woman to have her head uncovered in mixed company could catch the eyes of men; as it were, she was offering innuendoes of attraction, which in a worship setting could easily distract some from true worship. Can that happen today? Most certainly, for just as in the ancient world, so today women can dress provocatively. But worship is not the time to dwell on male-female attractiveness; worship is the time to focus on God and His Word.²⁶ Thus, women have a responsibility before both God and men to dress modestly and not attract unnecessary attention to themselves. Practically speaking, this responsibility is to be shared in the family unit. A husband needs to inform his wife if her attire is immodest. A wife needs to seek her husband’s opinion. Any father worth his salt should be able to tell his daughter to go back in and change her clothes. A godly daughter should want to dress in such a way that her father is pleased. (I know I’m being idealistic.) Older women in the church should help younger women dress with modesty and discretion (Titus 2:3-5). Women need to be reminded to dress with respect at all times, but especially when they come to worship the Lord.

Now, men, I can't let you off the hook either. We are responsible to vigilantly guard our minds during worship and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). We all attend church to worship God not to eyeball the opposite sex. Therefore, we all need to do our part and seek to honor one another.

The question that begs to be answered is: Must a Christian woman cover her head in church meetings today?²⁷ I do not believe this is how Paul would have us understand this passage.²⁸ What is normative and what is cultural?²⁹ Well, when women go out in public today in Olympia without wearing a head covering, is that a sign of rebellion against their husbands? Hardly, except for the strictest Muslims. I suggest that the head covering is merely cultural, while honor and submission is the normative principle.³⁰ To be obedient to Paul's words Christian women should not dress in a way that blurs the distinction between male and female. After all, the situation is quite different, at least in the West. For a woman to wear a head covering would seem to be a distinctively humiliating experience. Many women—even biblically submissive wives—resist the notion precisely because they feel awkward and self-conscious. But the head covering in Paul's day was intended only to display the woman's subordination, not her humiliation.

Today, ironically, to require a head covering for women in the worship service would be tantamount to asking them to shave their heads! The effect, therefore, would be just the opposite of what Paul intended. Thus, in attempting to fulfill the spirit of the apostle's instruction, not just his words, some suitable substitute symbol needs to be found.³¹ Furthermore, pastoral experience has revealed that the presence of head coverings results in confusion for visitors and those unfamiliar with the meaning of the symbol. This violates the principle that the church should not do things seemingly strange to unbelievers who may be present in the worship service (14:23).

One important point I want to make from the three verses is that men and women were equally free to pray and prophesy when the church gathered.³² The meaning of the term "prophecy" is debated. Yet, as we're going to see in chapter 14, "prophecy" is for the edification of the church (14:4, 5, 23-24) and is very close to what we would call teaching or preaching today. It is reflecting or illuminating the Word of God. It could take the form of a word of instruction, refutation, reproof, admonition, or comfort for others (13:9; 14:1, 3-5, 24, 31, 39). Women in the early church who had the gift of prophecy were free to exercise it. They were also permitted to pray in public meetings. Paul gives ladies great freedom, but he does not permit women to be elders who exercise authoritative teaching gifts during the corporate worship service (1 Tim 2:9-3:7).³³ Moreover, they were to *honor their head*. Paul is not trying to repress women and to restrain their expression of spiritual gifts, but to impress upon them the need for project modesty and virtue in their dress.³⁴

[Ladies must honor their head for the sake of biblical teaching. Now Paul provides a second argument...]

2. Honor your head for the sake of creation (11:7-12). Paul explains further why he wants women to wear head coverings and why the men should not wear them. In 11:7-9, Paul briefly summarizes God's creativity at work in His purposes for men and women: **"For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake."** Spiritual headship has been true since God created the world. And the Genesis creation narratives show that both man and woman equally bear the image and the glory of God (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2). But in Genesis 2 when God created Eve, He took her from Adam's rib. So Paul says woman was created from the man and for the man. In other words, woman completes man. As the help and strength man needs, woman helps him be all that God desires. Husbands, I'm sure you can agree with these words. (I certainly know wives can.) Thus, woman reflects the glory of man when she submits to God's order.

But what does “glory” mean here? To begin with, as many scholars are recognizing today, ancient culture was an “honor–shame” culture. That is, people normally protected the honor of their family and the family name and would not knowingly bring dishonor and shame to it. That this concept may lie in the background here is clear from the references to “dishonor” or “disgrace” in 11:4-6. By going unveiled, a woman was bringing shame on herself and her reputation, as well as on that of her family. By contrast, Paul seems to imply in 11:7 that a woman should be bringing honor and glory to herself and her family, and especially to her husband and any other men in her life (e.g., her father, her sons).³⁵ Ladies, is this your goal? God’s Word for you today is: *Honor your head*.

In 11:10, Paul comes to one of the most mysterious verses in the entire Bible: **“Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”** This verse is considered one of the most difficult verses in the entire Bible. So I propose my understanding with great humility. First, Paul is summing up his argument with the use of the word “therefore.” Second, the words “a symbol of” are in italics in the NASB. This means that these words are not in the Greek text. The NASB is suggesting that the head covering is what women ought to wear on their heads. However, my understanding of the “authority on her head” is to allow the term “authority” to have its usual meaning of “having the freedom or right to choose.”³⁶ The meaning in this case would be that the woman has authority over her head (man) to do as she pleases. She can choose to submit or not. If the ladies continue to disregard Paul’s words to cover their heads, they will suffer the consequences. It is also possible that Paul meant that women have freedom to decide how they will pray and prophesy within the constraint that Paul had imposed, namely, with heads covered.³⁷

The final phrase, “because of the angels” is a mystery to all interpreters. Yet, it would seem that Paul is referring to good angels who observe worship services.³⁸ Perhaps Paul is encouraging women to worship with that same submissive humility as those angelic ministers.³⁹ Since angels are the guardians of God’s created order it would seem disgraceful for them to observe women behaving badly.⁴⁰ The bottom line is again: *Honor your head*.

Now, in 11:11-12 there’s a wonderful strong emphasis on the mutuality of men and women in marriage in the church. Paul is still arguing from the creation order, and from the beginning it was clear that there was mutual interdependence. Paul writes, **“However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.”** The phrase “in the Lord” in 11:11 clearly envisions Christian marriage and life in the body of Christ. And this mutual dependence of man and woman speaks of full equality in personhood (1 Pet 3:7). We can’t get along without each other. We are mutually dependent on each other.⁴¹ We complement one another. Paul is concerned to promote love between the sexes. Neither man nor woman because of their different positions or advantages should consider themselves better, or treat the other with contempt or condescension. Paul says in 11:12 that this mutual dependence of the man and the woman is grounded in creation. The first woman, Eve, was originally created from the man. But from that point on every single man is birthed by a mother. He says their inter-dependence is also grounded in the Lord himself. All things are from God, which gives us another reason for humility in the relationships between believing men and women.

Up to now, Paul seems to suggest an inferiority of women to men, partly on the basis of the story of the creation of woman from man in Genesis 2. But in these verses he backtracks to remind us that ever since the creation of Eve the order has been reversed (i.e., men are now born from women). Thus, when all is said and done, there is an ontological equality between men and women. Neither of them is independent of the other; both need each other. So Paul is insistent even here that as we stand before our Creator and our Redeemer, “there is neither...male nor female” (Gal 3:28). This, I believe, is part of Paul’s struggle in this section. He does not want anything he writes to be interpreted to mean that “in the Lord” women are inferior to men. We all come from God, and all of us equally belong to God through his Son, Jesus.

[In addition to honoring your head for the sake of creation, Paul’s third argument is...]

3. Honor your head for the sake of pattern of nature (11:13-15). In these verses, Paul appeals to what is natural or typical in Corinth. In 11:13 Paul writes, **“Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?”** This is the key verse in this entire section because here Paul clearly emphasizes the single point of his passage: Women should stop praying with their heads uncovered. The reason that 11:13 bears this out is that Paul has oscillated back and forth between men and women in 11:4-15. In 11:13 he breaks this pattern and focuses solely on women. This is a literary device that biblical writers use to bring home their point. Furthermore, this verse contains the only imperative besides 11:6 where the point is that a woman should cover herself.

Paul’s point is this: In the culture of Corinth, it was not proper for a woman to act as a spokesman for people with God by praying publicly with her head uncovered. To do so would be tantamount to claiming the position of a man in God’s order. The apostle did not think it wise for Christian women to exercise their liberty in a way that would go against socially accepted behavior even though they were personally submissive. Today what is socially accepted is different, but her attitude is still crucial.⁴²

Paul continues his argument in 11:14-15: **“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?”⁴³ For her hair is given to her for a covering.”⁴⁴** Paul does not mean “nature” in the sense of “the natural world” or “Mother Nature.” Obviously, Paul cannot mean that in the world of animals all males have short hair and all females have long hair. All we need to do is to think of the male lion, a common biblical animal, with a bush mane. There is, moreover, evidence that for first-century men to have long hair was considered a sign of effeminacy and perhaps even homosexuality—something that Paul in Romans 1 considers contrary to nature. By “nature” Paul evidently meant how his culture felt about what was natural.⁴⁵

Paul again uses “glory” here when he claims that the long hair of a woman “is her glory” (11:15). Is he using the word in the same sense as 11:7? Probably not. In the earlier verse I suggested that “glory” relates to the honor–shame culture of the ancient Near East. Here, by contrast, this word refers to the beauty of women’s long hair. Because long hair can make a woman look so attractive and beautiful, Paul feels comfortable using this fact as a secondary argument for why women need a covering on their heads.⁴⁶

[Paul now moves from his argument from nature to his fourth and final argument...]

4. Honor your head for the sake of apostolic authority (11:16). In Paul’s final argument, he again appeals to apostolic authority: **“But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.”** If any of his readers still did not feel inclined to accept Paul’s reasoning, he informed them that the other churches followed what he had just explained.⁴⁷ Some women were evidently discarding their head covering in public worship. Interestingly, Paul brings up the idea of “practice” (i.e., custom) again in the last verse of our section (11:16). These two verses (11:2, 16) serve as brackets to frame Paul’s entire discussion.⁴⁸ The issue is obedience to what Paul has said from beginning to end. Will the ladies of the church at Corinth obey biblical instruction? Will Christian ladies today be obedient to carry out God’s desire for orderly and honorable worship?

As we conclude this challenging passage I’d like to offer a few closing challenges:

Wife, please consider your relationship with your husband. If you are acting in a way that undermines your husband, then you should rethink what you are doing. He is not necessarily more capable or better than you, but he is the head, the prominent one in your relationship. Most of the world will see your relationship in that light. Thus, you demean yourself if you bring dishonor to him.

Husband, please support your wife in her ministry. My wife has supported me in our ministry since we were first married. She worked to put me through seminary, she has maintained our home and yard so that I could study, and she has sacrificed time as a couple for my continuing education. Apart from Lori, I would not be who I am today. Yet, I am continually asking her: How can I support you in your ministries? When our kids are grown, I can see playing a more active role in supporting Lori in her ministry.

Church, please reevaluate your view of women in ministry. Why do you hold the views that you do? Have you thoroughly studied what the Scriptures say on women in ministry, or are you basing your conclusions on what you have always assumed was correct or are comfortable with? I challenge you to prayerfully think through some of these issues and interact with people over what role women should play in the local church.

This has been an agonizing sermon for me. Yet, I have attempted to rightly handle God's Word to the best of my ability. One day, I will stand before Jesus Christ and give an account for my teaching and pastoral ministry (Heb 13:17). On that day, I may find that my view on women in ministry was flawed. My hope is that Jesus will say, "My son, you studied the Scriptures and tried to be faithful, but you overstepped My bounds." If I hear those words, naturally I will repent with anguish. However, I must tell you that I would rather hear those words than hear Jesus say, "My son, you adopted a very restrictive view of women in ministry. Consequently, you prevented many of my gifted daughters from serving Me." Ouch! That would be devastating!

Obviously, my hope and prayer is that when I do stand before Christ, He will say, "My son, you found the biblical balance by upholding biblical spiritual leadership and yet releasing my women to serve. I am pleased with how you have honored Me and My people."

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Scripture Reference

1 Corinthians 11:2-16
1 Corinthians 14:33-38
Galatians 3:28
1 Timothy 2:8-15
Ephesians 5:22-33
Colossians 3:18-19
1 Peter 3:1-7

Study Questions

1. Have I obeyed the “traditions” (i.e., teachings) of God’s Word (11:2)? Would the Lord affirm my obedience? Has my church obeyed the teachings of the Word? What would the Lord say of my church? How can I be more obedient to the Scriptures? How can I help my church to be more biblically obedient?
2. How is Jesus Christ an example of submission and servanthood (11:3)? Read Mark 10:42-45 where Jesus explains the nature of servant leadership. What might servant leadership look like in my church? How can I be a more Christlike servant in the church and in my area of ministry?
3. Why are most churches uncomfortable with women serving in public ministries during the Sunday morning worship service? If God permits submissive women to pray and prophesy (11:5), is it appropriate to restrict women from participating in these acts of service? How can churches be sensitive to those that believe women should not take part in various public ministries, yet also allow women to serve where the Bible grants them the freedom to participate?
4. *Women*: Am I functioning in my church in a way that honors my husband and my church leadership? How do I demonstrate a submissive spirit? In what ways has this brought me contentment and joy? *Men*: Do I exhibit respect for women in my church? Do I look for ways to encourage women in their ministries? Do I speak highly of women, or have I been guilty of verbally tearing them down because I see them as inferior to men?
5. Generally speaking, what strengths do women bring to worship and ministry in the church? What potential weaknesses are relevant? Generally speaking, what strengths do men bring to worship and ministry in the church? What weaknesses are applicable? Why do men and women need to serve together in the church? How does this benefit everyone involved?

Notes

¹ The word *ekklesia* (“church”) appears 13 times in 1 Cor 11-14.

² Only the final section (1 Cor 12-14) is introduced with the “now about” phrase that suggests a direct reply to an item in the letter from Corinth.

³ This passage is composed of three major units. In the first (11:2-6) and third (11:13-15) units Paul presented reasons for proper decorum in public worship. In the second unit (11:7-12) he discussed male-female functional distinctives within the framework of essential equality as a part of God’s created order. An opening statement (11:2) and concluding exhortation (11:16) round out the passage.

⁴ More than 60% of U.S. church attendees at a typical worship service are women. Church Leaders Intelligence Report 09.05.07 from Foster Letter 4/10/07.

⁵ There is a Greek wordplay between “traditions” (*paradosis*) and “delivered” (*paradidomi*), which are both forms of *paradidomi*. Paul was not the originator, but simply a link in the chain of revelation. The term “traditions” was used of Christian truths being passed from one person to another (11:23; 15:3). Dr. Bob Utley, “1-2 Corinthians”: <http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/pdf/VOL06.pdf>, 129.

⁶ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 228 fn. 1.

⁷ The NIV translates the word *paradoxeis* (“traditions”) as “teachings.” This is a more helpful rendering in light of the negative connotations of traditions in our culture. Furthermore, Roman Catholics use this verse as a biblical proof-text for Scripture and church traditions being equal in authority. However, in this context, it refers to apostolic truth, either spoken or written (cf. 2 Thess 3:6-10). Interestingly, much of the information about Jesus was passed orally from individual to individual until it was written down some 30 to 70 years after His death.

⁸ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 260; see also Conzlemann 182; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 500. Garland calls this a *captatio benevolentiae* meaning “the capturing of the audience’s good will.” David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 513.

⁹ Blomberg writes, “This passage is probably the most complex, controversial, and opaque of any text of comparable length in the New Testament. A survey of the history of interpretation reveals how many different exegetical options there are for a myriad of questions and should inspire a fair measure of tentativeness on the part of the interpreter.” Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 214.

¹⁰ Or “the husband is the head of his wife.” The same Greek words translated “man” and “woman” can mean, as determined by context, “husband” and “wife” respectively. Such an approach is followed by NRSV, NAB, TEV, and NLT (with some variations).

¹¹ “The rationale for placing Christ’s relationship to God last is most likely to draw attention to it as an analogy for the relationship between men, women, and their heads (the same sequence in v. 12).” Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 209.

¹² The least likely option is “source.”

¹³ The Son does nothing of His own initiative but brings glory to the Father (John 5:18-33; 8:38, 49-50; 10:25; 17:1, 24-26). As there is no inequality in the Trinity, there is no inequality between roles of men and women. In Ephesians, Paul calls Christ the head (*kephale*) of the church, which is his body (1:22). This means that Jesus is the leader of the church. He has the right to set the ultimate direction of that relationship. Yet when Jesus was here on earth carrying out His redemptive ministry, He was always in submission to His heavenly Father and did that which pleased His Father, even though He has always been equal to the Father as deity. In the same way, the woman is submissive to the man even though in Christ she has full equality with the man.

¹⁴ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming). Thistleton presents a lengthy collation of the debate concerning the meaning of “head” (*kephale*). There are three basic views: (1) Head as source of authority; (2) origin – as in the “head” of a river; (3) an expression of preeminence, being foremost. Thistleton favors the third while recognizing with Collins that “Paul deliberately uses a *polymorphous concept*, through a word that has *multiple meanings*.” Garland also agrees with Verbrugge and Thistleton. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 515-16.

¹⁵ Think about all the examples of submission mentioned in Scripture: citizens subject to civil authorities, employees to employers, church members to the elders, children to their parents, the church to Christ, wives to their husbands, and Christians to one another. And in no case is inferiority even hinted at. These examples should suffice to show us that women are equal to men in God’s eyes—in dignity, worth, and spiritual usefulness (Gal 3:28).

¹⁶ Thomas L. Constable: *Notes on 1 Corinthians*: 2005 edition: <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/1corinthians.pdf>, 109.

¹⁷ Blomberg provides several arguments that convincingly demonstrate that a public worship service is under consideration. “(1) It follows verse 2, which with verse 17 ties 11:3–16 closely together with verses 18–34. (2) While prophecy could be given to an individual, the detailed concern for one’s outward appearance does not fit private contexts, in which such customs were irrelevant. (3) The analogies with Jewish and Greco-Roman religious behavior all involve public worship. (4) Paul regularly conceives of the exercise of the spiritual gifts as in the church (see esp. chaps. 12–14). (5) Even in Christian circles, women would probably not have had much occasion to minister to men in “one-on-one” settings, given the misleading impressions such encounters could create. (6) The presence of angels concerned about gender-specific behavior (v. 10) makes best sense when seen as analogous to Jewish beliefs about their role in public worship. (7) Verse 16 refers to the practice of other “churches,” which favors a reference to the gathered assembly.” Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 219.

¹⁸ In Jewish law, a woman proved guilty of adultery had her hair cut off (Num 5:11-31).

¹⁹ Today it is not shameful for a woman to have short hair, but it was in Paul’s day. There are many short hairstyles that no one regards as disgraceful. However, in Paul’s culture short hair for a woman represented rebellion, and people considered it shameful. Paul used the common reaction to women’s short hair in his day to urge his female readers to wear a head-covering. His point was that since it was shameful for a woman to have short hair it was also shameful for her to have her head uncovered when she prayed or prophesied.

²⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 517.

²¹ Less likely, Paul may have meant that she had short hair that did not cover her head as completely as long hair. Third, he may have meant that she had let her hair down rather than leaving it piled up on her head. It was customary for women to wear their hair up when they went out in public.

²² F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971), 104.

²³ Except for temple prostitutes and high-class courtesans of wealthy Corinthian men, women tended to wear their hair long, and out in public they wore a scarf or a shawl-like covering over their head. Mistresses or temple prostitutes might shave their heads or wear their hair close-cropped, without any covering at all. Across Jewish and Greek and Roman cultures, the head-covering was a symbol of sexual purity. And for a married woman, it was a symbol of her loyalty to her husband, of her acceptance of his leadership in the relationship. It would be like the wedding bands that a man and a woman wear today. So for a Christian woman in the church to appear in public without that covering, let alone to pray or to share the Word in worship, was both culturally offensive and from Paul’s perspective, confusing to nonbelievers who were trying to understand what this new community of faith stood for in terms of values and relationships.

²⁴ There is no scholarly consensus on why the women refused the head coverings.

²⁵ The disgrace Paul mentions that could result if these public conventions were ignored would be (1) a distraction or confusion for other people in worship, (2) the dishonoring of the uncovered woman’s husband in his role as spiritual leader, (3) an undermining of the spiritual authority of the elders in the church, and (4) a disappointment to the Lord, who established this timeless principle of headship, and who was reading the hearts of the rebellious men or women who refused to conform.

²⁶ Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians.”

²⁷ The head covering is only applicable when a woman prays or prophesies. See Daniel B. Wallace, “What is the Head Covering in 1 Cor 11:2-16 and Does it Apply to Us Today?”: http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1202.

²⁸ There are excellent scholars that believe women should wear head covering in worship service today. See Bruce K. Waltke, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978): 46-57; and S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. “1 Corinthians,” in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. Edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), 1247-48. Yet, Fee makes the following comments: “Although various Christian groups have fostered the practice of some sort of head covering for women in the assembled church, the difficulties with the practice are obvious. For Paul the issue was directly tied to a cultural shame that scarcely prevails in most cultures today. Furthermore, we simply do not know what the practice was that they were abusing. Thus literal ‘obedience’ to the text is often merely symbolic. Unfortunately, the symbol that tends to be reinforced is the subordination of women, which is hardly Paul’s point. Furthermore, it would seem that in cultures where women’s heads are seldom covered, the enforcement of such in the church turns Paul’s point on its head.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 512.

²⁹ Paul was either telling the Corinthians to wear headcoverings as a sign of God-ordained male-female role distinctives or he was telling them to wear the proper cultural symbol of God-ordained male-female role distinctives.

In this second option Paul was telling the Corinthians not to abandon the culturally accepted symbol of male-female role distinctives.

³⁰ It amazes me that some believers relegate the discussion of head coverings for men and women to a cultural issue, while at the same time, demanding Paul's limits on women in church as a principle for all ages. It is this lack of consistency that causes so much trouble in interpretation. The best brief discussion of this complicated emotional issue is found in Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 61-77.

³¹ Kenneth T. Wilson, "Should Women Wear Headcoverings?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148.592 (Oct 1991): 460.

³² I will deal with 1 Cor 14:33-38 later in this series. For now, it should be noted that commentators are almost unanimously agreed that Paul is not silencing all speech by women in the church. Schreiner explains, "First Corinthians 14:33b-36 is best understood not to forbid *all* speaking by women in public, but only their speaking in the course of the congregation's judging prophecies (cf. 14:29-33a). Understood in this way, it does not contradict 11:5. It simply prohibits an abuse (women speaking up and judging prophecies in church) that Paul wanted to prevent in the church at Corinth." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity* (1 Corinthians 11:2-16)": http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2820.

³³ Blomberg writes, "But chapters 12-14 will also make it clear that Paul views prophecy as a spiritual gift, and gifts are not the same as offices. So to say that Paul permits, and perhaps even encourages women to preach—in ways, of course, appropriate to their cultures—does not settle the vexed question of whether they should be elders or overseers. One's exegesis of 1 Timothy (esp. 2:8-15) should be more relevant to that problem. But given Paul's greater interest in gifts than in offices, our point here stands: gifted women must be given abundant opportunity, however formally or informally, to preach God's word to his people as he calls and leads them." Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 219.

I personally believe a woman could legitimately fill any position on staff other than preaching pastor. They can legitimately sit on any committee, and even serve as chairperson of that committee. I believe they can fill any area of service with the exception of elder. The question of women teaching an adult class of both men and women often comes up. Frankly, I think the restrictions on women teaching are for the church at worship, not necessarily for all of its meetings. To my knowledge there was nothing quite like Sunday school or small groups in the Apostolic Church, so we cannot know for certain how Paul would have handled such a question. It would seem that elders are free to permit women to teach under their authority, and I am comfortable with that. If a woman's teaching is challenged by a man in the class, I would expect the elders to resolve the matter so as not to force her into a position of final authority.

³⁴ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 522.

³⁵ Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*.

³⁶ See Thiselton 840; Garland 525; Constable.

³⁷ This final view is proposed by Constable,

³⁸ See Isa 6:1-4; Luke 2:14; 1 Cor 4:9; Eph 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:21; Rev 5:11-12; 7:11-12.

³⁹ There may also be something to the suggestion that these Corinthian women and some of the men as well, may have been exalting themselves to the position of angels (cf. 7:1; 13:1). Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 522.

⁴⁰ Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* 233.

⁴¹ If you are married, you need your husband or wife. Your spouse is necessary for you to be a well-rounded person.

⁴² Garland insightfully points out how Paul oscillates in this section with parallel statements about men and about women (11:4/11:5; 11:7a/11:7b; 11:7/11:10; 11:11a/11:11b; 11:12a/11:12b; 11:14b/11:15; I believe we can also add phrases in 11:8 and 11:9). But there is one verse that stands out without a parallel—v.13: "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" As Garland, 507, suggests, "This interruption highlights the crux of the whole argument ... women are praying to God uncovered." Regardless of Paul's specific statements in these verses, this is the situation that is uppermost in his mind, and this is the situation he is dealing with.

⁴³ "No word for veil or head covering occurs in vv. 3-14 (see the note on *authority* in v. 10). That the hair is regarded by Paul as a *covering* in v. 15 is not necessarily an argument that the hair is the same as the head covering that he is describing in the earlier verses (esp. v. 10). Throughout this unit of material, Paul points out the *similarities* of long hair with a head covering. But his doing so seems to suggest that the two are not to be identified with each other. Precisely because they are similar they do not appear to be identical (cf. vv.5, 6, 7, 10, 13). If head covering = long hair, then what does v. 6 mean ("For if a woman will not cover her head, she should cut off her hair")? This suggests that the covering is not the same as the hair itself. See NET Study Notes.

⁴⁴ Furthermore, women's hair naturally grows longer than men's hair. Paul reasoned from this fact that God intended for women to have more head-covering than men. People generally regard the reverse of what is natural as dishonorable. In the man's case this would be long hair and in the woman's case short hair. "Glory" means "honor." This is a very general observation. The fact that some acceptable men's hair styles are longer than some women's does not mean these styles are perversions of the natural order. Men are usually taller than women, but this does not mean that a short man or a tall woman is dishonorable.

Constable, "1 Corinthians," 118.

⁴⁵ Most of the 14 uses of *phusis* in the NT deal with the realm of "nature," yet Paul is referring to a human custom that no one in his day questioned. Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*.

⁴⁶ Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*.

⁴⁷ This is one of four similar statements in this epistle that served to inform the Corinthians that they were out of step with the other churches in their conduct (cf. 3:18; 8:2; 14:37).

⁴⁸ Scholars call this an *inclusio* (i.e., a literary framing device in which the same word or phrase stands at the beginning and end of a section).