

First Corinthians 11:2

Paul has just finished talking about avoiding Pagan religious services.

Paul now begins a discussion that will go up through chapter 14 concerning Christian religious services.

It is worth noting that very little is actually known about first century Christian worship. Most people make assumptions and these assumptions are based in what they are currently familiar with. We do not know accurately:

1. The time or frequency of gatherings (we assume it was Sunday but history tends to say Saturdays until around 325 AD)
2. The places of gathering (we assume it was homes)
3. The kinds of gatherings (in these chapters we are going to see them meeting for meals, for prayer, for some kind of service. Were these the same gathering or separate?)
4. The leadership's role (We are used to a pastor leading the service. But these chapters are very different than a liturgical service with a bulletin)

These are the next three sections concerning church gatherings:

1. head coverings, praying, prophesying (11:2-16)
2. treatment of the poor at the Lord's supper (11:17-34)
3. the abuse of speaking in tongues in the assembly (12-14)

The tongues issue of chapter 12 begins with "now about" which indicates Paul was responding to a concern in one of their letters.

But the first two seem to be Paul's correction of practices that are unfamiliar with the churches "**traditions**"

These verses are difficult because:

1. the flow of logic is difficult
2. Uncertainty about culture, historical setting and customs which both Paul and the readers understand.
3. Uncertainty about church services and church systems of this time
4. Uncertainty about certain words that are very important in the text:
 - a. Head (3-5)
 - b. Having down the head (4)
 - c. Uncovered (5, 13)
 - d. Glory (7)
 - e. Authority over her head (10)
 - f. Because of the angels (10)
 - g. In the place of a shawl (15)
 - h. Such a custom (16)
 - i. "man" or "husband" and "woman" or "wife" translation

11:2

"holding to my teachings, just as I passed them on to you."

1. **"I passed them on"** is a translation for is **"paredoka"** which means "to deliver over, to pass on." It is often used to refer to a teacher passing on material which he had learned.
2. **"teaching"** is from the word **"paradosis"** and is a technical term in Judaism for the oral transmission of religious instruction. This word probably does not refer to doctrine but to worship practices.
3. This could be a reference to traditions that were practiced and socially acceptable expressions of unity, authority, and order for a community. In this case, a Christian community functioning in line with the acceptable social standards of their secular society.

"I praise you for remembering me in everything" is setting up 11:17, "In the following directives I have no praise for you. . ."

The problem with these words is there is not one example of praise for the Corinthians. They probably refer to a general reference to their general structure of their church system and church service. Some have thought these words to be sarcastic or a contrast to the covering issue Paul is about to address.

11:3-6 Part One

“Head” is used here both metaphorically (HEAD) and literally (head)

“But I want you to understand that
the HEAD of every man is Christ,
The man the HEAD of woman
God the HEAD of Christ.
Every man praying or prophesying having down/against the head
Every woman praying or prophesying uncovered as to the head.
For it is one and the same thing for her to be one who is shaved.
For if a woman will not be covered, let her also be shorn.
But if it is disgraceful for her to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.”

This is saying the man would shame his “HEAD” if he covered his head.
A woman is to have her head covered to honor her “HEAD”

“Uncovered” according to the LXX may refer to “loosed hair”. So to let her hair down in public was a disgrace. Hair styles were elaborate in Corinth.

There was some covering the woman was wearing which is literally called “a wraparound”

The traditional answer to this is woman were being insubordinate to their husbands because of their new-found freedom in Christ.

Thus, throughout these verses Paul is assumed to be telling woman to get back in line with social order.

The problem may be more refined and aimed at the “eschatological” woman addressed in Chapter 7 who were refusing their husbands.

These same woman were participating in worship with men because in the church they were seen as equal

First Corinthians 11:3-16

It appears that some of the liberated Christian woman of Corinth had decided that their new position in Christ allowed them to cast of social norms such as wearing head coverings. This would be typical of these woman who have already been addressed for being too holy for relations with their husbands.

Part One - First Corinthians 11:3-6

11:3

“The Head” of the body is understood in our modern world to be the center of our thinking and nervous system. The metaphorical use of “the head” in our modern language then refers to the control facility or the leader. This is not the case in the ancient world. They did not understand the nervous system so the phrase “the head” would not have meant the top position, the leader, or the one in charge. In the ancient world “head” was used to refer to the source of a river. The head was the beginning. In fact, **arche** (αρχη) or ‘beginning’ is used interchangeably with **kephale** (κεφαλη) or “head” in some MSS. An example is found in a passage about Zeus: “Zeus is the head, Zeus is the middle, in Zeus all is completed.”

Paul then is using “head” with the ancient understanding of “source” or “beginning” not the modern meaning as in the “Head of State.”

This verse is not talking about marriage for it says “every man” and not “husband” or “her man.” This is talking generally about men and women’s relations. Although, the words translated “man” and “woman” could be translated “husband” and “wife.”

Also, Paul is not only talking about married women but all women. This is clear since Paul does not talk about wives having their heads covered but then mentioning a different standard for single women.

Christ or **christos** (χρηριστος), “the anointed one” or Messiah, comes from God so it can be said “The head of Christ is God” or “The source of the Messiah is God.”

11:4

The men were not improperly wearing their hair, but the woman were. The men are used as an example to contrast the woman.

Man is created in the image of God. The face or head of a man is to reflect the glory of Christ. To cover the head of a man is to cover the part that is to reflect Christ.

In Roman religious culture the covering of a man’s head was the *capite velato*.

- A statue of Augustus found at Corinth shows the emperor with his head covered
- The “Altar of Peace” in Rome has a stone carving with similar images of men with their head covered during a religious ceremony.
- The social elite would often serve as priests at pagan altars and religious ceremonies.
- Thus, the head covering of pagan religious elite may have carried into the church by men who sought or possessed some “elite” position.
- The wearing of the head covering by men in the church would separate them from the body of believers and exalt them as special or elite or priestly.
- Paul’s point is that Christ is exalted in a worship service, not a priestly leader.
- If this was the purpose or not, the head covering would help reduce the noise of animals being sacrificed. Plutarch writes that the pagan priest would pull the cloth over his head to exclude the noise of the animal as it was sacrificed. This cloth, or *capite velato*, was often the upper folds of the toga

It appears the men were bringing pagan practice of exalting themselves as the religious elite or priests into the church community by wearing head covering.

Meanwhile the woman were breaking cultural stands for modesty by wearing their hair down.

11:5

Paul does not forbid the practice of woman prophesying and praying but instead gives directions on how to do it.

Corinthian women were praying and prophesying in public worship and Paul does not condemn it.

The very fact that Paul is allowing prayer and prophesying by woman in the church in this verse indicates that we need more information concerning 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

A Jewish woman would not appear outside the home with her head uncovered. The husband could divorce her for it.

Woman of Tarsus always had their faces covered in public.

Hair in Corinth in 55 AD:

- In the first century BC women in Rome wore their hair shorter.
- By the middle of the first century AD coins and sculptures show women’s hair was worn longer.
- The imperial family in Rome set the cultural trend for hair style.

- By the time of Pau's letter to the Corinthians braided hair gathered into a long loop and pulled up over the top of the head became the cultural standard, and, also, an emblem for modesty and chastity.
- Woman who uncovered their heads, wore their hair down where considered immodest and un-Roman or anti-social.

A woman with a shaved head was considered ugly by Jews.

A woman who committed adultery would be shaved and considered a prostitute.

Prostitutes would wear wigs to please their customers, and thus, would shave their heads to accommodate the wig.

Christianity is difficult enough to portray to the world without violating social standards and codes.

11:6

The verb phrase "does not cover her head" is present indicative middle and is used to express a general principle.

If she won't cover her head then cut off her hair.

When her hair is cut off it is a disgrace to her so if she wants to avoid disgrace, cover her head.

It is a disgrace not to cover her head and a disgrace to have her head shaved.

The Corinthian women understood the disgrace of having their heads shaved but they did not understand the shame of not covering their heads.

Part Two - First Corinthians 11:7-12

11:7

"**Ought**" means "one ought to, or one is obligated to." This word indicates it is the man's moral obligation.

What is being considered here is woman's relationship to man not woman's relationship to God.

The idea is that man was originally created as the image of God. Woman was created for man.

This is the focus.

This verse does not stress women's standing before God and so Genesis 1:26, 27 is not stressed.

1 Timothy 2:11-13

11:8

1. Woman from man
2. Woman for man

11:9

This verse begins **kai gar** (και γαρ) or "for even" or "yes, even"

11:10

"**For this reason**" or "Precisely for this reason" indicates this is the reason for the heads being covered. And that reason has just been stated:

1. Man reflects God.
2. Woman reflects man who is reflecting God.

"**authority**" is **exousia** (εξουσια) and means "the right, the authority" to perform. So the woman has the right to pray or prophecy when she is in the right position in God's and human social order.

If the woman is in rebellion she cannot pray or prophesy.

"In Oriental lands the veil is the power and the honour and dignity of the woman. With the veil on her head she can go anywhere in security and profound respect. She is not seen; it is a mark of thoroughly bad manners to observe a veiled woman in the street. She is alone. The rest of the people around are no-existent to her, as she is to them. She is supreme in the crowd . . . But without the veil the woman is a thing of nought, whom any one may insult . . . A woman's authority

and dignity vanish along with the all-covering veil that she discards. That is the Oriental view, which Paul learned at Tarsus.” (*The Land and the Book* by Thomson)

“**Angels**” were considered to be the keeps of universal order. The angels would consider something out of line and needed to be corrected if a woman was praying with her head uncovered. Paul again assumes his readers follow his logic. It seems that an uncovered woman was a shock to the culture of men and also the standards of angels.

One other suggestion is that woman should cover themselves in worship because the angels cover themselves as in Isaiah 6:2. Men are to stand face to face but woman like the angels should cover themselves.

1 Peter 3:7 mentions proper marriage relationship between husband and wife is necessary for prayers to be heard and answered:

“..so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

11:11

“**However**” is used as an adversative. It modifies the sense of the discussion to emphasize what is essential as this part of the discussion closes.

11:12

The first woman came from Adam.
All men since have come from woman.
Ultimately, everyone comes from the Lord.

The point of 11:11, 12 is that there are some guidelines distinguishing men and women in social order but these guidelines do not nullify the fact that men and woman depend on each other or find their “source” or “head” in each other.

11:11, 12 are saying do not make more of this than is intended because both men and woman are dependent on God.

Men cannot look down on woman or think they can live independent of woman

Part Three - First Corinthians 11:13-16

11:13-14

Paul asks two questions in conclusion:

1. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?
2. Does not the very nature of things 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?

The second question is to help answer the first question by providing a counter illustration.

By divine order and natural occurrences the man is left unveiled because that is what God wanted. Also, by divine order and natural occurrence a woman is naturally veiled because this is what God intended.

Notice Christianity stays in stride with what is natural and does not twist or suppress it.

The word “nature” from **physis** (φύσις) was understood to determine the proper way society would express itself.

11:16

“**Contentious**” or **philoneikos** (φιλονεικος) means someone who loves strife.

In Greek, Rome and Jewish culture men wore their hair short and women wore it long. The Catacombs show drawings of men with short hair. Cultures may change and there are exceptions (the Spartans and some philosophers) but they always return to short hair for men. Even the rock stars of the 70’s now have short hair.