

Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

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Introduction

C. F. D. Moule wrote that the problems raised by 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 “still await a really convincing explanation.”¹ G. B. Caird added, “It can hardly be said that the passage has yet surrendered its secret.”² W. Meeks regarded it as “one of the most obscure passages in the Pauline letters.”³

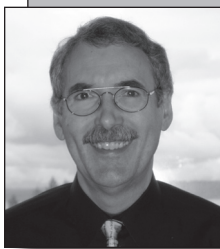
The Central Problem

First Corinthians 11 repeatedly identifies problems regarding men’s and women’s “head coverings” as disgraceful, improper, and degrading (vv. 4, 5, 6, 13, 14) and morally what one “ought not” to do (vv. 7, 10). Nevertheless, interpretations typically identify the “head covering” as something that was not generally regarded as disgraceful or a symbol of immorality in Hellenistic and Roman culture. Most interpretations have not taken into account two crucial cultural conventions regarding head coverings. First, it was generally regarded as disgraceful for men to wear long effeminate hair. Effeminate hair was commonly ridiculed as disgraceful because of its association with homosexuality. Second, in Hellenistic, Roman, and Jewish cultures, for centuries preceding and following the time of Paul, virtually all of the portraiture, sculpture, and other graphic evidence depicts respectable women’s hair done up, not let down loose.⁴ Most of the relatively few cases of hair let down loose depict disgraceful revelries. Recognizing these two cultural backgrounds is the key to understanding the various puzzling expressions in the passage.

Men’s Disgraceful Head Covering

What head covering would have been disgraceful for men in Corinth, a Greek city and a Roman colony? The pulling of a toga over one’s head in Roman religious contexts was a sign of piety, not disgrace. Jewish priests wore turbans in obedience to the Law with no disgrace. There is, however, abundant evidence in the Greek, Roman, and Jewish literature of Paul’s day that it was disgraceful for men to wear long effeminate hair, whether hanging down or done up like a woman’s hair. Long hair fits Paul’s expression in verse 4, literally “hanging down from the head,” and Paul confirms in verse 14, “If a man has long hair, it is degrading to him.”

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The extent of moral indignation over effeminate hairstyles by men is abundantly documented with more than one hundred references to effeminate hair in classical antiquity cited by Herter, the greatest number of these coming from around Paul’s time.⁵ The following citations give a good feel for the shame associated with men wearing long hair:

- Pseudo-Phocylides (30 B.C.–A.D. 40) 210–14 advised, “Long hair is not fit for men.”⁶
- Philo’s *The Special Laws* (A.D. 39) III. 37–42 states, “A much graver . . . evil . . . has ramped its way into the cities, . . . the disease of effemination. . . . Mark how conspicuously they braid and adorn the hair of their heads. . . . [The Law] ordains that the man-woman who debases the sterling coin of nature should perish. . . . [These are] grievous vices of unmanliness and effeminacy . . . licentiousness and effeminacy.”⁷
- The Stoic Musonius Rufus (A.D. 66) called hair “a covering by nature” and objected to men “cutting the hair . . . to appear as women and to be seen as womanish, something that should be avoided at all cost.”⁸
- Josephus’s *The Jewish War* (A.D. 70) 4, 561–63 states, “[They] unscrupulously indulged in effeminate practices, plaiting their hair.”⁹
- Plutarch’s *Moralia* (A.D. 80) 785E calls a man having his hair curled “disgraceful.”¹⁰
- The whole first chapter of Book III of *Arrian’s Discourses of Epictetus* describes Epictetus (A.D. 90) rebuking a young student from Corinth with effeminately dressed hair as “a dreadful spectacle . . . against your nature . . . half-man and half-woman . . . Dress your locks . . . God forbid!”¹¹
- Dio Chrysostom (A.D. 100) 33, 52 states, “In violation of nature’s laws . . . the wretched culprits commit their heinous deeds all unobserved; yet . . . style of haircut . . . reveal[s] their true character. . . .”¹² Thirty-five, 11 states, “Long hair must not by any means be taken as a mark of virtue.”¹³
- Juvenal’s *Satire II* (A.D. 116) 93–96 depicts “secret torchlight orgies” for “none but males: One prolongs his eyebrows . . . another drinks out of an obscenely shaped glass, and ties up his long locks in a gilded net.”¹⁴

These and many other such references¹⁵ near the time of Paul show that long effeminate hair on men was considered degrading, disgraceful, and contrary to the norms of Greek, Roman, and Jewish culture. The most common word to describe long effeminate hair is the very word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 11:14: “degrading” (*atimia*). The major reason long hair was degrading for men was its association with effeminate homosexuality. There are many examples of young men with long hair engaged in homosexual acts depicted on Grecian pottery. Since the evidence is

overwhelming that Greek and Roman men in Paul's day typically wore short hair, long hair stood out in its association with effeminate homosexuality.

Paul describes homosexual activity as "degrading" (*atimia*), against "nature" (*physis*), and "disgraceful" (*aschēmosynēn*) in Romans 1:26–27. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 11:14 states, "Does not nature (*physis*) teach you that, if a man has long hair, it is degrading (*atimia*) to him?" Verse 4 identifies as "shameful" (*kataischynei*) a man with [hair] "hanging down from his head." Thus, not only did Paul in this passage specifically denounce long hair on men as degrading, but he also described it using each of the three terms he later chose to denounce homosexual acts in Romans 1:26–27.

Women's Disgraceful Head Covering

What head covering was disgraceful for women? Virtually all depictions of Greek women, not only in formal portraits and busts, but also in the vase paintings and other depictions of daily life, show respectable women with their hair done up on their heads, not hanging loose. There is virtually no evidence that veiling was a custom or that the lack of a shawl in daily life or in worship was generally regarded as disgraceful. The interpretation that Paul was requiring a veil or shawl to avoid disgrace does not fit what we know of Greek culture. Women in Greek culture typically participated in worship without a veil or shawl. In light of this, it seems highly improbable that Paul would expect the Corinthians to judge for themselves (v. 13) that it is disgraceful for a woman to pray without a veil or shawl. There is, however, abundant evidence that it was disgraceful for women in that culture to let their hair down loose. This symbolized undisciplined sexuality.¹⁶ In the Dionysiac cult, whose influence was pervasive in Corinth,¹⁷ including the presence of a prominent temple, it was customary for women to let down their hair to "prophesy" and engage in all sorts of sexual debauchery.¹⁸ Understood in light of this background, the argument of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 flows smoothly.

Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

Paul states in verse 2, "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you."¹⁹ This introduction, in contrast to "I do not commend you" in verse 17, implies a real commendation. If the Corinthians' head coverings were a breach of the traditions Paul had taught them earlier, he would not commend them in this way. This wording indicates that Paul had not earlier instructed the Corinthians regarding head coverings on worship leaders. In light of Paul's extensive ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:1–18), however, surely this matter would have come up if all the churches followed such a custom. This explains why verse 16 states, "The churches of God have no such custom."

The function of verse 3 is to put head coverings in the context of source relationships, highlighting the respect each person owes to his or her source. Paul's theology in Christ is relational: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head [meaning source] of every man, and the man is the head [source] of woman,

and God is the head [source] of Christ." The lack of an article with "woman," which could have suggested "his wife," the article with "man," suggesting "Adam," and the statements that man is the source of woman in verses 8 and 12 support the translation "man" and "woman."

The majority view in recent scholarship has shifted to understand "head" in this passage to mean "source" rather than "authority," including many who argue that Paul believed men should have authority over women in social relationships.²⁰ There are fourteen primary reasons to interpret head as referring to "source" rather than "authority" in this passage:

1. In spite of a strong tendency to translate Hebrew words literally, "head" was rarely used in the Septuagint (LXX) to translate the Hebrew word "head" when it meant "superior rank."²¹

2. None of the following Greek lexicons lists even one example of "head" that implies authority: Liddell Scott Jones (LSJ), Renhan,²² Moulton and Milligan, Friedrich Preisigke, Pierre Chantraine, and S. C. Woodhouse. In contrast, "source" is an established metaphorical meaning of "head," e.g., LSJ 945. Citations from Paul's time include Philo, *The Preliminary Studies* 61, "of all the members of the clan here described Esau is the progenitor, the head of the whole creature."²³ *On Rewards and Punishments* 125 states, "the virtuous one, whether single man or people, will be the head of the human race and all the others like the limbs of a body which draw their life from the forces in the head."²⁴ *The Books of Adam and Eve* 19.3 calls "lust the head of every sin."²⁵ Artemidorus Daldiani explained the symbolism of "head" in dreams: "the head is the source of life and light for the whole body" and "the head resembles parents in that it is the cause of one's living."²⁶ *T. Reuben* 2.2 states, "For seven spirits are established against mankind, and they are the sources [literally 'heads'] of the deeds of youth."²⁷ Orphic fragment 21a states, "Zeus is the head, Zeus the middle, and from Zeus all things are completed."²⁸ The fact that some manuscripts of this well-attested saying substitute "first cause"²⁹ for "head" and that a scholium identifies it "as [the] producing cause" (*hos poiētikon aition*)³⁰ adds to its contextual evidence that "head" here means "source."

3. Paul referred repeatedly to Christ as head in the sense of source of life or nourishment: Colossians 1:18 (in apposition to "the beginning"), 2:19; Ephesians 4:15–16, 5:23 (in apposition to "savior" as source of nourishment).

4. The items listed in verse 3 are not listed in a descending or ascending order of authority, but they are listed chronologically: Christ, the creative source of man; the man, the source from which God took woman; God, the source of Christ in the incarnation.

5. Verses 7–9 and 12 explicitly address source relationships and the respect, not shame (vv. 4–5), owed to one's source.

6. The ensuing passage says nothing about man's authority, but affirms woman's authority to pray and prophesy in verse 5, her authority over her own head in verse 10, and her equal standing with man in verses 11–12.

7. Verses 11–12, which Paul introduces as his central concern, repudiate a hierarchy of man over woman.

8. All attempts at interpreting each of these references to “head” as “authority over” end up with three quite different authority relationships. In contrast, “source” indicates from whence each came: man came from the creative work of Christ, woman came from man, and Christ came from God. The article before “head” only in the first clause points to the special sense in which Christ is the source of every man through his creative work.

9. There appears to be no evidence that praying with the head covered by a prayer garment symbolized subordination in the religious circles of Corinth. To the contrary, by Roman custom, leaders with high social class covered their heads.

10. This passage is about disgraceful head-covering practices in prayer and prophecy, not hierarchical roles. To get to the root of these disgraceful practices, Paul lays a foundation for showing proper respect to one’s source.

11. “Source” fits better than “authority” in “the head of every man is [present tense] Christ.” Both Tertullian in *ad. Marcion* 5.8.1 and Cyril of Alexandria in *De recta fide ad Arcadium et Marinam* 5:6E understood “head” here to connote source.

12. “Source” fits better than “authority” in “the head of woman is the man.” If “head” meant “authority,” it could be concluded that the wife should *not* pray or prophesy in public, *contra* verse 5.

13. “Source” fits better than “authority” in “the head of Christ is God,” since hierarchical interpretations typically embrace the subordinationist heresy³¹ and conflict with Paul’s affirmations of Christ being “over every power and authority” (e.g., Eph. 1:20–22, Phil. 3:21, and Col. 2:9–10) and of Christ’s ontological equality with God the Father (e.g., Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:6–11; Col. 1:15–20, 2:9; Titus 2:13). Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Theophylact emphasize the misuse of this text by Arians and others. Chrysostom wrote, “had Paul meant to speak of rule and subjection . . . he would not have brought forward the instance of a wife, as free, as equal in honor.”³²

14. “Source” is perfectly suited to understand verse 3 as setting the theological stage for Paul’s ensuing arguments. The man-woman relationship (3b) is bracketed by Christ’s role in creation (3a) and in redemption (3c).

Verse 4: “*Every man who prays or prophesies* [literally:] *‘having down from his head’ disgraces his head.*” The preposition *kata* with a genitive of place means “down from” (LSJ 882 A.I, Bauer Arndt Gingrich [BAG] 406 I.a, lit. “hanging down from the head”). It was not shameful in Greek, Roman, or Jewish culture for a man to drape a garment over his head. This *capite velato* custom symbolized religious devotion and piety. The Hebrew Scriptures and later Jewish custom approved head-covering garments for men in worship. Consequently, to prohibit them would have complicated Paul’s relationships with synagogues. It also would have contradicted Paul’s principle of becoming all things to all people, his principle of freedom in Christ, and his principle of the oneness of male and female in Christ. “Having down from his head” more naturally refers to long effeminate hair. Accordingly, Chrysostom

(c. 344–407), *In Homiliae in epistulam i ad Corinthios* (*On the First Epistle to the Corinthians*) 26.4, states, “But with regard to the man, it is no longer about covering but about wearing long hair, that he so forms his discourse.”³³ In verses 5–6, Paul mentions hair four times using the words “shaved” and “shorn,” and verse 14 explains that long hair is degrading to men.

In the Dionysiac cult, men wore long hair to symbolize homosexuality or to present themselves as women, and women let their hair down or even shaved it.³⁴ The Roman historian Livy (59 B.C. –A.D. 17) writes that in Dionysiac initiation rites “there were

more lustful practices among men with one another than among women.”³⁵

Paul opposed such homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 6:11, stating, “such were some of you.” First Corinthians 10:7–8 warns against “pagan revelry” and “sexual immorality” that, like the practices in seventeen passages in 1 Cor-

inthians (5:1–2, 9–10; 6:9; 8:10; 9:1, 19; 10:7–8, 21, 25–28; 11:4–9, 13–14, 21–22; 12:2; 14:2–4, 5–17, 23, 26–33), reflect the Dionysiac cult. Unlike a garment covering, effeminate hair was shameful to “every man,” Greek, Jewish, and Roman.


Why did Paul use the vague expression “over the head”? Paul probably wanted to avoid speaking directly of such disgraceful things, as Ephesians 5:12 explains. The Corinthians were aware of the homosexual associations of men wearing long effeminate hair and would understand this euphemism, like those in 1 Corinthians 5:1 and 7:1.

Verse 5 notes, “*And*³⁶ *every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered* [with her hair hanging down loose] *dishonors her head.*” Since prayer and prophecy imply a public church setting in verse 4, the same naturally applies to verse 5. Furthermore, Paul encouraged all believers to participate vocally in public worship in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and in prophecy in 14:1–5, 31, 39. Prophecy is a public act, and only public prophecy could be disgraceful or require regulated head adornment. Nor would such regulations make sense for private prayer. It is a striking affirmation of women’s equal standing with men in church leadership that Paul simply assumes that “every woman,” like “every man,” could prophesy and pray in public.

Many versions insert “veil,” even though it never occurs in this passage in Greek and suggests a later Arabic custom contrary to Greek convention. Nothing in this chapter indicates that the “covering” is a garment. A wealth of pictorial and literary evidence contradicts the notion that social convention required women to cover their heads with a garment.

It was, however, disgraceful in Greek, Roman, and Jewish culture at that time for a woman to let her hair down in public. Respectable women in Roman and Greek cultures wore their hair up in public. Macarius Aegyptius’ (“Magnus” † A.D. c. 390) *homiliae spirituales* 12.18 states that hair fulfills the covering of verse 5, as does Ambrose, *Duties of the Clergy*, 1.46.232.

There are twelve key advantages of the hair-let-down over the garment-on-the-head interpretation:



In the Dionysiac cult, men wore long hair to symbolize homosexuality or to present themselves as women, and women let their hair down or even shaved it.

1. Long hair is identified “as a covering” in verse 15.
2. The only occurrence in the Septuagint (LXX) of the Greek word used in verse 5 for “uncovered” (*akatakalyptos*) (Lev. 13:45) refers to hair let down.
3. Social convention in Corinth required a woman to wear her hair done up over her head in public, but it was contrary to Hellenistic custom to pray in public with a garment over one’s head.
4. Demanding a garment cover would not fit Paul’s message of freedom in Christ from Jewish law, his usual strong opposition to legalism, or his principle of becoming all things to all people (1 Cor. 10:33).
5. Loosed hair fits the cultural influence and specific practice of the Dionysiac cult, which explains why women in Corinth might have let their hair down.
6. Women letting their hair down fits the profligate Corinthian ideas about marriage and sex expressed in 1 Corinthians 5–7.
7. The hair-let-down interpretation consistently identifies references in this passage to head coverings for both men and women as referring to long hair.
8. It ties in more directly with Paul’s introduction in verse 3, which lays a foundation for respect to one’s source.
9. Loosed hair explains much more naturally the expressions about hair in verses 5–6.
10. It explains verse 13, “Judge for yourselves,” since Paul knew the Corinthians would agree that loosed hair is shameful.
11. It would be inconsistent for Paul to demand that women follow a Jewish head-covering custom but prohibit men from following a Jewish head-covering custom.
12. The descriptions of hair in verses 14–15, 1 Timothy 2:9, and 1 Peter 3:3 imply that there was no general church custom that women wear head-covering shawls.

Paul’s explanation in verse 5, “*She is one and the same as the shorn woman*,” fits best with shame related to hair. The article in “the shorn woman” implies a recognized class of woman, probably the accused adulteress whose disgrace paralleled the symbolism of loose hair, since by it a woman places on herself the accusation of adultery. This allusion perfectly fits the “bitter water” ordeal of letting down the hair of a suspected adulteress (Num. 5:11–31) and, if she is convicted, of cutting off her hair. The entire tractate *Sota* of the Tosefta, Mishna, Babylonian Talmud, and Jerusalem Talmud is devoted to this issue. This custom is paralleled in non-Jewish customs cited by Tacitus (A.D. 98), *Germania*, 19; Aristophanes 3, 204–07; and Dio Chrysostom (A.D. 100), *Discourses*, 64.2–3. Accordingly, verse 6 adds, “*For if a woman will not cover herself [affirming her marital bond], then she should cut off her hair*.” This is a Greek first-class conditional clause, the specific form ideally suited to use when one “*assumes* the condition to be a reality.”³⁷ The use of this grammatical construction indicates that this uncovering was actually happening in Corinth, and Paul endorses the customary shearing of the convicted adulteress. Paul concludes, “*But if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should cover her head [with her hair]*.” Sim-

ilarly, a woman found innocent of the bitter water ordeal had her hair done up again. Paul contrasts the two alternatives by using the aorist imperative, “let her be shaved,” matching the punctiliar punishment of the woman found guilty of unfaithfulness, but the present imperative to state his ongoing command to cover her head [with her hair]. The hair-let-down interpretation perfectly fits this custom and explains the word Paul chose in verses 5 and 13 for “uncovered.” Philo, *The Special Laws*, III.60, cites Numbers 5:18, using the identical expression in 1 Corinthians 11:5 (*akatakalyptō tē kephalē*;³⁸ Numbers 5:18 [LXX] uses *apokalypsei tēn kephalēn*).


Verses 7–10 recapitulate verses 4–6, adding theological justification why men (7–9) and women (10) ought not to wear hairstyles that repudiate marriage. “Ought” (7, 10) normally carries moral overtones and perfectly fits issues of Christian marital and sexual morality. Paul apparently realized, after implying moral obligation, that he had not yet given any reason besides disgrace against men wearing effeminate hair and women letting their hair down, so he inserted an explanatory digression, as he often does in his letters.

Paul’s first theological argument is in verse 7, “*For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God*.” Paul reminds these men that bearing the image of God obliges them to accept themselves as God made them and to bring glory to God, not disgrace.

The normal associations of “the image of God” imply that man should not wear effeminate hair. The image of God entails moral responsibility, but effeminate hair symbolizes rejection of God’s moral standards. The image of God entails creativity, and procreation expresses that creativity. Effeminate hair undermines procreation by blurring the distinction between the sexes and by symbolizing homosexuality. In Genesis 1:26–27, being in God’s image entails humanity *as male and female*. Consequently, Paul’s “image of God” reference implies the distinction between man and woman made by God in creation. Effeminate hair challenges all of this by breaching the distinction between the sexes.

This differentiation between the sexes need not imply a difference in essential humanness. The image of God is in both man and woman (Gen. 1:27), and Paul’s agreement with this is implied by his arguments in 1 Corinthians 7:1–16 and 11:11–12 against a hierarchical distinction between man and woman. Paul’s omission of “image and” regarding women in verse 7b shows a conscious choice not to draw a distinction between man and woman regarding their standing in the image of God. Furthermore, there is no article with “image” in the phrase regarding men, which could have suggested exclusivity. Paul explicitly affirms that all believers are “being renewed in the image of their Creator” (Col. 3:10–11).

Paul adds that man is the glory of God, for man is the capstone of God’s creative work, displaying the glory of God’s creativity. Man should bring glory to the Creator by living in such a way



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that God rejoices over him. Effeminate hair, however, repudiates the purpose of the Creator and so brings disgrace on man and God, his head/source.

The end of verse 7, “*and*” ³⁹ *the woman is the glory of man*,”⁴⁰ affirms that woman, not another man, is the glory of man. The glory of someone is the person or thing in which he glories or exults, as Adam does over Eve in Genesis 2:23. Woman is depicted in Genesis as the crowning glory of creation made specifically to be man’s partner. The history of art shows that most men regard woman as the fairest of God’s creation. Paul’s appeal to woman as the glory of man affirms woman as the proper sexual partner of man. This exposes the error of effeminate hair, for, in symbolizing homosexuality, it repudiates woman as man’s sexual mate. Consequently, Paul’s central argument against effeminate hair is that woman, not another man, is the glory of man. Paul is affirming heterosexual marriage.

Verses 8–9 state, “*For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man.*”⁴¹ Verse 8 develops Paul’s introduction in verse 3 that man was the source from which God made woman. Woman is the glory of man, for she came from him. It is because she corresponds to him, having come from him, that she can be his mate. God’s central purpose in creating woman from man (Gen. 2:20) was to create a partner “for the sake of man,” to fulfill man’s need for an intimate sexual partner (Gen. 2:24). Effeminate display depicts a man taking the role of woman, typically presenting himself as a sexual mate for other men. This opposes God’s creation of woman to be man’s mate. The archetypal relationship of Adam to Eve is the antithesis of homosexual relationships. This affirmation of heterosexual marriage at the climax of Paul’s argument confirms that the root of Paul’s disapproval of effeminate hair is its homosexual association.

Verse 10, “*On account of this*,” probably has dual reference, as do both the other cases where Paul repeats “on account of.”⁴³ With it, Paul reapplies the preceding reasons why man should not wear effeminate hair in verses 7–9 as reasons why women should not let their hair down in public worship. Each of these specific affirmations is a good reason for a wife to show respect to her husband: man is the image and glory of God (7b), woman is the glory of man (7c), woman’s source was from man (8), and

woman was created to fulfill man (9). “On account of” also anticipates Paul’s final reason at the end of this verse: “on account of the angels.”

Verse 10’s “*the woman ought*” does not imply external compulsion, but moral obligation, just as does verse 7’s “man ought.” In light of this moral duty, it is probably best to translate “*to have authority*” as “to exercise authority.” All 103 occurrences of “authority” in the New Testament refer to authority held in someone’s own hand. All nine in 1 Corinthians mean “to have power of one’s own.” Many Bible versions mistranslate this word “sign or symbol of [man’s] authority” (e.g., NRSV, NIV), “veil” (e.g., RSV), “covering,” “subjection,” or “submission.” The expression “to have authority” never elsewhere carries any of these meanings. Verse 10 must affirm woman’s authority since verse 11 immediately qualifies woman’s authority, “Nevertheless, woman is not set apart from man.” Several versions, including the KJV, NEB, REB, CEV, Phillips, and LB, apparently assuming that verse 10 must affirm man’s authority over woman, reverse Paul’s logic in verse 11 by first qualifying man’s authority!

“To have authority” in this context implies “exercise control over,” just as it does in 1 Corinthians 7:37, “having under control,” and 1 Corinthians 9:12, “made use of this right.” Paul’s point is that a woman ought to exercise control “*over her head*” by wearing her hair up.

“*On account of the angels*” almost certainly refers to good angels, not human messengers or bad angels. There is no other instance in Paul’s writings where “angel” means “human messenger” or clearly refers indirectly to God. There is hardly any similarity between verse 10 and Jewish myths about bad angels. Paul refers to angels in 1 Corinthians more than in any of his other epistles. The obvious reason for this appeal is that angels are present, observing the church (1 Tim. 5:21; Eph. 3:10; Rev. 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) and should not be offended. Angels report to God what they see (e.g., Matt. 18:10; Luke 15:10; Philo, *On Dreams* 1, 140–41; *Jub.* 4:6; *1 Enoch* 99:3). In worship, the new age has broken into the present age. This anticipates the new emphasis in verses 11–12 on the equality of women and men in Christ.

The first word of verse 11, “*However*,” “break[s] off a discussion and emphasize[s] what is important” (Bauer Arndt Gingrich Danker [BAGD], 826). “However” relates Paul’s conclusion to his earlier comments, but does so by introducing a new perspective, emphasizing something essential that is established in Christ: “*woman is not set apart from*⁴⁴ *man, nor man set apart from woman in the Lord.*” The absence of articles indicates that men and women in general are in view. Common English equivalents of this word for “set apart from” (*chōris*) in Paul’s letters are “separated from” and “without.” “Independent” (e.g., NRSV, NIV) is not listed as a meaning of this word for relations between persons in either of the major lexicons, LSJ and BAGD. While interdependence is true biologically (cf. v. 12), it is not something that applies distinctively “in the Lord.” If interdependence is all the verse teaches, “in the Lord” has no purpose.

The meaning “set apart from,” or a conceptually parallel expression such as “different,” “distinct,” or “separate from,” fits

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in all but four of Paul's sixteen uses of this word, and it fits this context perfectly. It implies non-differentiation between woman and man viewed in Christ. This translation implies that there is no distinction in status or separation of privilege between male and female. The new creation in Christ and the unity of man and woman in Christ (Gal. 3:28) support this straightforward reading of Paul's words.

This fundamental principle that in the Lord man and woman are not separate does not mean that men and women are identical, as Paul's affirmation of the creation of woman to fulfill man makes clear. There are God-ordained differences between man and woman, each complementing the other. Nevertheless, neither sex has inherently greater authority or special privilege. Both have equal rights and standing. Neither is excluded by gender from any ministry, including public prophecy. Paul clearly does not want his specific instructions regarding the "head covering" issue raised by the Corinthian church to be used to support any subordination of woman to man in Christ.

Sadly, many interpreters of verse 11 ignore the concluding words "in the Lord," but end stress is given to "in the *experience* of faith in Christ." This phrase closely parallels "there is no male and female in Christ Jesus" in Galatians 3:28. The equality of man and woman in Christ undergirds 1 Corinthians 7's specification of exactly the same conditions, opportunities, rights, and obligations for the woman as for the man in marriage, divorce, sex, and spiritual life. Paul's affirmations of women leading in prayer and prophecy and exercising authority over their own heads in verses 5–10 point to the essential oneness of man and woman. In Christ, there is no distinction between man and woman that would grant men special privilege or standing over women.

Verse 12 states, "For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman." Here, Paul highlights the counterbalancing facts of man as woman's source and woman as man's source to indicate the equality of the sexes. Paul is the first writer known to argue this. Paul's immediately following statement in verse 12 makes it clear that God has ordained the equality of man and woman: "But all of this comes from God." Verse 12a, "For just as woman came from man," unmistakably refers back to verse 8, "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man." The equal standing of man and woman is incompatible with a subordinationist reading of verse 8. Verses 11–12 raise five crucial points that undermine any argument for a hierarchy of man over woman:

1. There is such a fundamental unity between man and woman "in the Lord" that in Christ man and woman are "not separate" from each other (v. 11).
2. Man as the "source" of woman referred to in verses 3 and 8 is merely the instrumental source. God is the ultimate and determinative source (v. 12) who equalizes their standing in Christ.
3. As Lenski observed about the structure of verse 12, "Even as . . . so also' makes plain this equality . . . neither sex has an advantage."⁴⁵


4. The birth of every man through woman (v. 12) balances Adam's creation prior to Eve's.

5. Paul implies in verse 12 the *need* that man has for woman and vice versa.

Paul's return in verses 13–16 to the issues of wild hair with no contrasting conjunction implies that his comments about the equality of man and woman are consistent with his restrictions on wild hair. This confirms the error of reading male authority into his earlier statements.

Paul's invitation in verse 13, "*Judge within yourselves*," shows that Paul is confident the Corinthian church will agree that this is shameful. Paul emphasizes the Corinthians' own judgment by

placing "in you yourselves" at the beginning of the sentence. "In you yourselves" implies an internal judgment, not something imposed on them. The non-rhetorical form of the question ("Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?") shows that



Both men and women may pray and prophesy in church, but should do so in a way that does not undermine marriage.

Paul trusts the Corinthians to answer correctly. "To pray to God" in this verse substitutes for "prays or prophesies" in verses 4 and 5, suggesting that "prayer and prophecy" may similarly be representative categories. Surely, Paul would have objected to any kind of leadership in church worship, such as teaching, done with a hairstyle that symbolized rejection of either marriage or fidelity in marriage. "To God" implies that the offense was not just social, but an offense to God.

Verses 14–15 state, "*Does not the very nature of things teach you that, if a man has long hair, it is degrading to him, but, if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her long hair is given to her as a covering.*" Every one of the eight occurrences of this conjunction (*oude*) that mean "not even" in Paul's letters (Rom. 3:10; 1 Cor. 4:3, 5:1, 14:21, 15:13, 16:1; Gal. 6:13) ties into what precedes in the text. Consequently, this conjunction naturally associates verses 14–15 with Paul's prior argument and with verse 13 in particular. Thus, verse 15's identification of long hair as a covering supports identifying long hair with the "coverings" of verse 13 and earlier.

It is clear that verses 14–15 pose a two-part rhetorical question, not two statements.⁴⁶ The assumed answer to both of these rhetorical questions is "Yes."

Since men's hair, too, if left to nature, will grow, what does Paul mean by "Does not even nature itself teach you . . ."? Paul's single instance in this passage of the noun "nature" apparently carries the meaning BAGD gives for verse 14, "the regular or established order of things." This meaning is related to the Stoic idea that Nature is the origin and guarantor of culture. Nature as "natural expectation within the culture"⁴⁷ fits the context perfectly. What nature teaches, namely "dishonor" and "glory," are clearly cultural categories, not categories that could be deduced solely from the natural world. The cultural background is summarized in Plutarch's *Roman Questions* 267B, "In Greece . . . men cut their hair short; women let it grow."⁴⁸ This custom accentuates nature's differentiation between man and woman. Men who wear long effeminate hair blur nature's differentiation between the sexes.

Paul's grammatical construction here, "if" plus the present subjunctive, is the normal construction for a third-class condition, one that "denotes that which under certain circumstances is expected from an existing general or concrete standpoint in the present" (Blass Debrunner Funk, sec. 371, p. 188). This suggests that men having long hair was an existing problem in Corinth, just as women letting their hair down was an existing problem in Corinth.

"Her long hair is given to her as a covering" is the first reference in this entire passage to an article of clothing ("covering, wrap, cloak" or "an article of apparel" BAGD, 800). The word *anti* can mean "instead of" (indicating replacement) or "as" (indicating equivalence). In either case, the long hair is viewed as the covering. This implies that Paul did not require women to wear any item of clothing on top of their modestly-done-up hair. After all, why would Paul, just before the end of his argument, state that woman has been given long hair as a covering if his point all along were to require a garment head covering?⁴⁹ The only way to make it clear that this statement is compatible with a demand for a garment head-covering would be to interpret the word *anti* as "as well as." This, however, is not a legitimate translation. Standard Greek lexicons do not include "as well as" as a possible meaning of *anti*.

Verse 16 states, "But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God." This implies that the men wearing effeminate hair and the women letting their hair down were introducing a contentious custom⁵⁰ not accepted in the churches. Paul's wording implies the novelty of these errors and makes it clear that he has not been advocating an established church custom such as "veiled women" interpretations hold. After all, why would verse 16 state, "neither we nor the churches of God have any such custom," if Paul's aim was to demand adherence to a veiling custom in all the churches? Versions that change "no such custom" to "no other custom" (e.g., RSV, NIV) introduce a meaning for which no support is given by any standard Greek lexicon such as BAGD or LSJ. They apparently do this to make Paul's conclusion fit their interpretation of the passage as advocating a custom that women be veiled, but to do this they have twisted this word to mean the opposite of its meaning in Greek! Paul concludes by identifying his viewpoint with the churches of God, using the same conjunction (*oude*) he typically uses to join two ideas together to make a single point: "we the churches" have no such custom as is practiced by men wearing effeminate hair and women letting their hair down.

Conclusion

The structural logic of this passage makes perfect sense and all its vocabulary can be understood within its normal range of meaning once the "head coverings" are understood as wild hair, as explained in verses 14–15. Men's effeminate hair symbolized homosexuality, and women's hair let down loose symbolized sexual freedom. Consequently, Paul prohibited those leading in worship from either practice. Men ought to respect both Christ, their source in creation, and woman, their source in birth, by not

displaying effeminate hair. Women ought to exercise control over their heads by wearing their hair up in public worship to symbolize fidelity in marriage and respect to man, their source in creation. The climax of the passage affirms that in Christ women and men are not separate. This implies their equal standing and privilege. Consequently, both men and women may pray and prophesy in church, but should do so in a way that does not undermine marriage.

How should believers apply this passage today? The reason Paul objects to men in church leadership wearing effeminate hairstyles is its association with homosexuality and its repudiation of the Biblical distinction between man and woman. Manly long hairstyles today do not carry that association and message, so this passage should not be used to object to manly long hair today. Similarly, the majority of women today wear their hair down, and this practice is not associated with repudiation of sexual fidelity in marriage, so it would be a misuse of this passage to object to women wearing their hair down today. This passage could be properly applied today, however, against leaders in worship adopting any custom that symbolizes homosexuality or that undermines fidelity in marriage by being sexually suggestive. The message is, "Don't use your freedom in Christ as an excuse to dress immodestly. In demeanor and word keep it clean!" Furthermore, men and women should show respect to each other, honoring the opposite sex as their source. As Paul stresses in the climax of this passage, believers must affirm the equal rights and privileges of women and men in the Lord. Women as well as men may lead in public Christian worship. Since in the Lord woman and man are not separate, women who are gifted and called by God ought to be welcomed into ministry just as men are.

Endnotes

1. C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1961), 65.
2. George B. Caird, "Paul and Women's Liberty," *BJRL* 54 (1972), 278.
3. Wayne A. Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York, N.Y.: Norton/Scribners, 1972), 38.
4. E.g., Douglas R. Edwards, "Dress and Ornamentation," *ABD* 2:237.
5. H. Herter, "Effeminatus," *RAC* 2, 620–50.
6. P. W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides with Introduction and Commentary*, SVTP 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 81–83.
7. F. H. Colson, trans., *Philo*, 10 vols. (LCL, 1988) 7:498–501. See, similarly, Philo's *The Special Laws* 1.325, *The Contemplative Life* 59–62, and *On Abraham* 133–36.
8. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," *CBQ* 42 (1980), 487.
9. H. St. J. Thackeray, trans., *Josephus*, 9 vols. (LCL, 1979), 3:166–67.
10. Harold North Fowler, trans., *Plutarch's Moralia*, Volume X (LCL, 1969), 10:90–91.
11. W. A. Oldfather, trans., *Epictetus: The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, The Manual, and Fragments*, 2 vols. (LCL, 1966), 2:15–21.
12. J. W. Cohoon and H. Lamar Crosby, trans., *Dio Chrysostom*, 5 vols. (LCL, 1979), 3:320–23.
13. Cohoon and Crosby, *Dio Chrysostom*, 3:401.

14. G. G. Ramsay, trans., *Juvenal and Persius* (LCL, 1979), 25.
15. E.g., *Arrian's Discourses of Epictetus*, 3.22.10–11; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19.30; Cicero, *In Catilinam*, 2.22–23; Dionysius of Halicarnassus 7.9.4; Strabo, *Geography*, 10.3.8; Horace, *Epodes*, 11:28; Seneca, *Epistles*, 95.24; Seneca, *Oedipus*, 416–21; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 261f; Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart*, 3; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.19.1; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, xii.524f–25a; Diogenes Laertius 8.47.
16. Cf. C. R. Hallpike, “Social Hair,” *Man* n.s. 4 (1969), 256–64.
17. E.g., Pausanias, *Corinth*, 7.5–6.
18. E.g., Euripides, *Bacchae*, 695; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 45.47–48; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 249E–F; Livy 39.15.9. Cf. the citations from the primary literature by Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SP (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 397–401.
19. The literal translations of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 in italics throughout this article are by the author. This one matches the NRSV, as do many of the following translations.
20. E.g., Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 379–82; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York, N.Y.: Harper, 1968), 249; Stephan Bedale, “The Meaning of *kephalē* in the Pauline Epistles,” *JTS* 5 (1954), 211–15.
21. Cf. Philip Barton Payne’s “Response” in Alvera Mickelsen, ed., *Women, Authority & the Bible* (Westmont, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986), 118–32.
22. R. Renehan, *Greek Lexicographical Notes: A Critical Supplement to the Greek-English Lexicon of Liddell-Scott-Jones*, Hypomnemata 45 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 120.
23. Colson, *Philo*, 4:489.
24. Colson, *Philo*, 8:389, which explains “head” as “the source of spiritual life.”
25. *APOT* 2:146. Mss. A and B. Ms. C has “root and beginning/first cause.” Charlesworth translates it “origin” in *OTP* 2:279.
26. Robert J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Park Ridge, N.J.: Noyes, 1975), 16–17, 34, cf. 175–76; from *Oneirocritica*, 1.2, 35, cf. 3.66.
27. Charlesworth, *OTP*, 782. Manuscripts A^a and S have “head” singular.
28. Otto Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta* (Berlin: Weidman, 1963), 2:201.
29. C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 248; cf. *TDNT* 3:676.
30. In Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 3.9.2; cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in I Corinthians 11:3,” *Interpretation* 47 (1993), 54, 57.
31. Cf. the detailed analysis by Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Westmont, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002) and his *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006).
32. John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of Saint John Chrysostom on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. Talbot W. Chambers, ed. Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. XII (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956, reprint from London: F.

and J. Rivington, 1854), 150–51; cf. *PG* 61. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in I Corinthians 11:3” *Int* 47 (1993), 56–57, misleadingly cites as Chrysostom’s comments statements that are Chrysostom’s citation of the heretics’ interpretation, which Chrysostom emphatically opposes.

33. He continues, “Every man praying or prophesying, having any thing on his head, dishonoreth his head.’ He said not, ‘covered,’ but ‘having any thing on his head,’ signifying that even though he pray with the head bare, yet if he have long hair, he is like to one covered. ‘For the hair,’ saith he, ‘is given for a covering.’” Chambers, trans. *The Homilies of Chrysostom on Corinthians*, 152.

34. Plutarch, *Moralia*, 266 C–E; Euripides, *Bacchae*, 695; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 45.47–48; Athenaeus 12.525; Lucian, *Dea Syria*, 6; Livy 39.13.12; Ovid, *Aeneid*, 6.384ff.

35. Evan T. Sage, *Livy Books XXXVIII–XXXIX* (LCL, 1936), 11:255.

36. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:3, 6; 15:35; 2 Cor. 6:15–16; A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1934), 1183–84.

37. Robertson, *Grammar*, 1007; cf. BDF sec. 471 (1), sec. 472.

38. Colson, *Philo*, 7:512–13.

39. Any attempt to interpret verse 7 as containing both halves of an “on the one hand . . . on the other hand” adversative construction must postulate radical ellipsis unparalleled in Paul and is structurally, exegetically, and theologically dubious.

40. If “man” had an article or were modified by “her,” this would have supported translating: “The wife is the glory of her husband.” Since it does not, “woman” and “man” are the more natural reading.

41. It would contradict the theology of Ephesians 5:25–33 to interpret this as meaning that a man should not care for his wife. Rather, this clause is included to complete the structural parallelism with verse 8 and to introduce Paul’s conclusion to his explanation of “woman is the glory of man.”

42. To read subordination into “woman was made for man” is to introduce something that is foreign to the Genesis account and to the rest of this passage, that does not fit the problem of effeminate hair, and that conflicts with verses 11–12.

43. 1 Thess. 3:6–7, 2 Tim. 2:8–10.

44. Cf. Josef Kürzinger, “Frau und Mann nach 1 Kor 11,11f.,” *BZ* 22 (1978), 270–75; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2–16 Once Again,” *CBQ* 50 (1988), 273; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroad, 1983), 229.

45. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book, 1935), 453.

46. Taking this as a statement would entail treating verses 5–9 as an interpolation, for which there is no manuscript evidence, or a quotation from Paul’s opponents, which the text does not support.

47. In contrast, Paul uses “nature” literally to describe homosexual acts as “against nature” and “abandoning natural relations.” Those performing these “indecent acts” received “in themselves the due penalty for their perversion” (Rom. 1:26–27, NIV).

48. Frank Cole Babbitt, trans., *Plutarch’s Moralia*, 16 vols. (LCL, 1972), 4:26–27.

49. Christopher Mount, “1 Corinthians 11:3–16: Spirit Possession and Authority in a Non-Pauline Interpolation,” *JBL* 124 (2005), 333, regarding verses 4–5 to be about shawls, states, “11:15 seems to contradict 11:4–5. Is a woman’s hair her covering, or does a woman’s hair need to be covered?”

50. The custom is not contentiousness as a habit, since that would not fit the meaning of “custom.”

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