

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

First Corinthians 11:2-16 has long presented biblical scholars with a considerable challenge. Exegetical decisions must be made at every turn, and one can quickly become discouraged in attempting to understand the intent of the passage. In light of the problems associated with this text and the plethora of commentaries on the passage, one wonders if anything new under the sun can be offered. Thus, in this paper, I make no attempt to come to a novel or even fully confident conclusion. I do hope, however, to expose the various issues involved in the text, present the more tenable conclusions that have been drawn by others, and offer my opinion as to which exegetical decisions have greater support than others. In doing so, I seek to inform the reader of the great distance that lies between today's reader and the Apostle Paul, as much as I seek to convince him or her of my conclusions. Although much discussion will occur regarding the translation of the text, the NIV will serve as the reference version for this analysis.

■ **11:2** ²*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings [or traditions], just as I passed them on to you.*

The difficulties with this passage begin in its first verse, as the praise Paul gives does not seem to be warranted by the surrounding text. In fact, from 1:10 to 15:58 it is hard to find anything in which Paul was pleased with in the church at Corinth. One must wonder then if Paul is seeking to capture the good will of his audience before continuing on in the correction of their head treatments.¹ Some, like Shreiner and Fee, suggest that this verse is not exclusively tied to the present pericope, but rather is Paul's overall commendation of the Corinthians' worship practices despite the failings outlined in chs. 11-14.² Such could be the case, but in that Paul begins the ensuing passage with the words, "In the following

¹ Keith A. Burton, "I Corinthians 11 and 14: How Does a Woman Prophesy and Keep Silence at the Same Time?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10 (Spring-Autumn 1999), 273.

² Thomas R. Shreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1991), 125. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* in *New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 500.

directives, I have no praise for you,” (v. 17) it would appear more natural to assume that Paul’s praise is related solely to the issue at hand. This might mean that Paul sees the majority as adhering to the traditions he handed down regarding head coverings (or “loosed hair”, as will be discussed), but that some in the church who had abandoned his teaching needed to be addressed.

■ **11:3** *³Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

Paul doesn’t address the contentious minority by first identifying the problem at hand, but rather by providing a theological underpinning for the exhortation that follows.³ Just what this underpinning is, however, is contingent upon one’s understanding of various text-related elements. The first of these elements has to do with the meaning of three words in the text. These words are ἀνὴρ (man), γυναικός (woman), and κεφαλή (head). ἀνὴρ and γυναικός can be translated generically as man and woman, respectively, but they may also be translated more specifically as husband and wife—with context being the determining factor. Considering the use of the more generic term for ‘man’ (ἄνδρος) to describe man’s (or mankind’s) relationship with God (v. 3a), some believe that it is warranted to translate ἀνὴρ and γυναικός as husband and wife.⁴ This choice, however, does not appear consistent with Paul’s entire argument. In v. 12 the ἀνὴρ is said to “come through” the woman. If ἀνὴρ is understood as husband and γυναικός as wife, this verse would be nonsensical. Furthermore, Paul’s argument that “nature” provides a covering of hair for women (see v. 14) certainly could not be isolated to women who are married. For this reason, it would appear more reasonable to translate γυναικός and ἀνὴρ generically as woman and man, just as is done in the NIV.

³ There are those like Ince, Padgett, and Shoemaker who do not see v. 3 (and at least vv. 4-7, if not vv. 4-10) as a statement of Paul’s theological stance but rather a review of the perspective held by the Corinthians, which Paul will refute in vv. 11-12. Although the position has some advantages, the text gives no strong clues that the reader should read them to be anything but Paul’s words, or that the Corinthians would have recognized them as their own.

⁴ See NAB, CEV, NLT, MSG, NRSV.

The third word that requires discussion is κεφαλή (head). This word has historically been translated metaphorically with a meaning of “authority over,” or something with a similar connotation.⁵ Beginning with Bedale,⁶ however, there are those who have argued that κεφαλή does not imply “authority over” and is better translated as “source.” In response to such an assertion, Grudem completed a study of 2,336 uses of κεφαλή to see if “source” was a more valid translation than “authority over.” His research found no unambiguous uses of κεφαλή as “source” at or near the time of the New Testament, while there were a considerable number of unambiguous uses of the term as “authority over.”⁷ Further, he found no instances in which the meaning “authority over” did not fit when κεφαλή called for a metaphoric translation. Grudem’s original arguments, as well as his later response to critics,⁸ are so strong that it forced one egalitarian scholar to suggest that the word means “source” simply because Paul chose to imbue it with that meaning in this passage even though such a meaning was outside of its semantic range.⁹ One can only imagine if this scholar employed this type of exegesis throughout Scripture, what the results would be!

Concern regarding the meaning of κεφαλή clearly stems from a fear of this passage suggesting a hierarchical relationship between men and women, but substituting “source” for “authority over” hardly dismisses the possibility that the relationship is hierarchical. As Gwen Ince, a self-defined egalitarian, states, “Irrespective of how one interprets κεφαλή in the spectrum from ‘dominant head’ to ‘source’, it is only a matter of degree in regard to the understanding of determinative subordinating relationships

⁵ Ruth Tucker, in her response to the Mickelsens’ claim that “authority over” is a modern English connotation of “head”, provides evidence that those from Clement to Calvin consistently took κεφαλή to mean “authority over”.

⁶ Stephen Bedale, “The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1954), 211-215. Since Bedale published his work, there have been countless others who have argued Bedale’s case including Fee, Bruce, Bilezikian, and the Mickelsens.

⁷ Wayne Grudem, “Does *Kephale* (“Head”) Mean “Source” or “Authority” in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (Spring 1985), 38-59.

⁸ Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephale* (“Head”): A Response to Recent Studies,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 425-468.

⁹ Khiok-Khng Yeo, “Differentiation and Mutuality of Male-Female Relations in 1Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Biblical Research* 43 (1998), 16.

conveyed.”¹⁰ If one takes κεφαλή to mean “authority over,” however, it must be emphatically stated that it does not follow that the passage deems women innately inferior to men. To come to such a conclusion would not only violate what is taught elsewhere in the New Testament, but would also require Christ to be inferior to God in the third phrase of this verse. At the most, Paul’s statement that men have “authority over” women suggests a *difference* in function and not a *superior* function or worth.¹¹

This last point leads one to examine a second element of this verse, which is the relationship of each its three phrases to one another. Many have argued that the formula “Christ over man, man over woman, and God over Christ” suggests that Paul is setting as his theological premise the idea that men have authority over women. This conclusion must not be arrived at prematurely for the simple reason that the order of the phrases is not what one would expect if Paul was stressing the authority of man over woman. Far more expected would be the order of “God over Christ, man over woman, and God over Christ.”¹² One plausible reason for Paul’s choice of order is that before stating that women were under the authority of men, Paul wanted men to know that in their treatment of women, they must be under the authority of Christ. Then, to insure that men in no way thought women to be of inferior status because of their difference in function, Paul ends his premise by reminding them of the ontological equality of the Father and the Son, despite the indicated difference in function.¹³

In consideration of both this verse’s terminology and structure, it would appear that the most supportable conclusion is that Paul, by writing what he did, established as his theological premise for the

¹⁰ Gwen Ince, “Judge for Yourselves: Teasing Out Some Knots in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Australian Biblical Review* 48 (2000), 65.

¹¹ The idea that the sexes can have different roles, yet be of equal value, is supported by the very relationship of the Father and the Son; for in no way is God superior to the Son even though Christ humbled himself and became obedient to the Father (Php 2:8), even so as to be made perfect (Heb 5:8). Additional support for the idea that a difference in function (in any arena) does not require a difference in worth can be found in 12:12-30. There Paul makes clear that although God has gifted believers differently, all should be considered “indispensable” (v. 22).

¹² In fact, one of Gilbert Bilezikian’s arguments for concluding that this verse does not teach the authority of man over woman is precisely that the order is not as it should be. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman’s Place in Church and Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 38-139.

¹³ Thomas R. Shreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1991), 130.

issue at hand the idea that women are in some way under the authority of men. To come to another conclusion would require that a new meaning be given to κεφαλή, that Paul's words be attributed to the Corinthians not himself,¹⁴ that the verses' three-fold structure be understood in ways foreign to even the earliest church fathers,¹⁵ or that the pericope itself be regarded as a non-Pauline interpolation.¹⁶ While all have been attempted so as to support a more egalitarian conclusion, all seem less tenable than what might be considered the traditional or conservative conclusion.

■ **11:4-6** ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. ⁶If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. [Marginal reading: ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. ⁵And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair on her head dishonors her head—she is just like one of the “shorn women.” ⁶If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is disgraceful for a woman to have hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again.]

These verses present various issues over which there is considerable debate, but one element of the passage on which there is at least general agreement is the idea that Paul is affirming that both men and women can pray and prophesy in a public setting. In order to avoid any inconsistency between this affirmation and the teaching of 1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:12, some like Schreiner argue that the setting Paul addresses in this chapter is that of informal Christian gatherings, while those of the other passages are designated community worship times.¹⁷ This conclusion, however, is not based on any textual evidence within this passage or any other teaching in the New Testament that creates separate rules of decorum for informal and formal Christian gatherings.

¹⁴ Gwen Ince, “Judge for Yourselves: Teasing Out Some Knots in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Australian Biblical Review* 48 (2000), 70.

¹⁵ Ruth Tucker, “Response to What Does Kephale mean in the New Testament,” *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 111-117.

¹⁶ William O. Walker, Jr., “The Vocabulary of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16: Pauline or non-Pauline?” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (Fall 1989), 82.

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem, “Prophecy—Yes, But Teaching—No: Paul’s Consistent Advocacy of Women’s Participation Without Governing Authority,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Society* 30 (1987), 11-23.

The first question that must be answered in regards to vv. 4-5 is what is meant for a man or woman to have his or her head covered. As is suggested by the marginal NIV reading, there is some debate as to whether the passage is speaking of an external, material head covering, or whether it is speaking of hair style (long or short, loosened or put up). This debate stems from the ambiguity of the Greek. In v. 4, *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* literally reads “having down the head” with no reference to what shouldn’t go down the head; while in v. 5, the word *ἀκατακαλύπτω* can be translated “uncovered” or “long, loosened hair” (i.e., not bound up on top of her head).¹⁸ Considering that the idiom “having down the head” is not commonly used to describe long hair, and that the most common use of *ἀκατακαλύπτω* is “uncovered,” it seems reasonable to lean towards the idea that Paul is referring to some sort of material head covering.¹⁹ One might ask then, just how were men disgraced when wearing a head covering, and how were women disgraced if they uncovered their heads? The only indication is a description of pagan worship in which women are said to be wearing head coverings and the men are not.²⁰ Whether this is sufficient evidence to support “head covering” is uncertain, but when considering a later argument regarding vv. 14-15, it appears that we must conclude that head covering is indeed the most supported reading. Regardless of one’s position on the issue, Paul’s analogy concerning the shame associated with shaving a woman’s head makes it certain that the practice being addressed was considered dishonorable to Paul.²¹

This now brings us to consider whose head is being dishonored by the inappropriate head covering? Is it the literal head of the one committing the prohibitive action, or is it the metaphoric head of v. 3? Arguments for the former are: 1) the fact that vv. 14-15 clearly identify the one who did the act as being disgraced; 2) that elsewhere the word “head” is used to refer to one’s self (Acts 18:6); and 3) if a person

¹⁸ Alan G Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984), 70-71.

¹⁹ So Fee, Bruce, and Shreiner.

²⁰ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (April 1988), 267.

²¹ A woman with shortened or shaved head like that of males was seen as a female slave (often used for sex), a prostitute, a lesbian, or a cultic heretic. Khiok-Khng Yeo, “Differentiation and Mutuality of Male-Female Relations in 1Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Biblical Research* 43 (1998), 11. Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 169-173.

commits an act which is deemed disgraceful, there is every reason to believe that shame will fall upon the person doing the act.²² Arguments that support the contention that it is the metaphorical head that is dishonored are: 1) the proposition that vv. 4-6 are predicated on the fundamental thesis of v. 3; 2) the idea that a reflexive pronoun could have been used if Paul wanted to infer that the person was only disgracing oneself; and 3) the fact that in v. 7 Paul says woman is the glory of man, which suggests that woman is to honor someone besides herself.²³ Considering the honor/shame society of the day, there is no reason to believe that Paul could not have intended to mean both. For if any woman shamed herself by acting disgraceful she would undoubtedly shame the household to which she was related.

Taking a step back from the word studies completed above, one can readily see that these three verses are set up to address women more than men,²⁴ and thereby infer that the problem in the church at Corinth was not that men were wearing head coverings, but that women were uncovering their heads as men did. Thus, it can be concluded that Paul is not principally concerned with men acting effeminate,²⁵ but rather with women who are seeking to show themselves functionally equal to men in ways that transcend the right to pray and prophesy. The purpose for which they were doing this is not certain, but one particularly viable option is suggested. Based on 4:9-13, it would appear as if the Corinthians had a somewhat overrealized eschatology, in which the “already” considerably outweighed the “not yet.”²⁶ If some women reasoned that they had already arrived in the Spirit, they may have been convinced that a

²² Thomas R. Shreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity,” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1991), 131.

²³ Ibid, 131.

²⁴ Notice emphasis placed on women in vv. 7-8 for which there is no counterpart regarding men. Furthermore, see discussion on v. 13.

²⁵ Murphy-O’Connor argues that the passage is directed to men at least as much as it is to women, but this can hardly be the case; not only because vv. 8-10 focus exclusively on the man without any counterpart, but also because v. 13 asks the Corinthians to judge the action of women only. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (April 1988), 266.

²⁶ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* in *New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 498.

functional distinction no longer existed between men and women. Such is the argument today of those with an egalitarian position, albeit they would not consider their eschatology to be over-realized.

■ **11:7** *⁷A man ought not to cover his head, [marginal reading: A man ought not to have long hair] since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.*

This verse represents one of the most enigmatic in the passage—not because the translation of any individual words creates any new difficulties, but rather because the words Paul does use raise a number of questions as to what Paul meant by what he wrote. For example, there can be no certainty as to why Paul chose to call men the image of God and not women, since Gen 1:27 gives every indication that God created mankind in his image and that mankind is made up of both male and female. One solution could be that in trying to explain the contrast between men and women, Paul did not want to say that women were made in the image of man, but rather wanted to focus on what he saw as a difference in glory associated with each.

This then begs the question of why men are considered to be the glory of God, and women the glory of men. Verse 7 cannot be saying that men are to give glory to God and not to praise women, while women are only to give glory to men and not to God.²⁷ It may say, however, that just as God's purposes and greatest glory evidently required the creation of man (otherwise He would not have created man), so too man's purposes and greatest glory evidently required the creation of woman (Gen 2:18). The implication would be that men and women should not then behave in ways that betray those for whom their existence brings glory. For Paul, this apparently meant the Corinthians should treat their literal head as was fitting for their gender in the culture.

A third question is why did Paul specifically tell men to treat their heads in a certain manner, but gave no specific instructions to women? Some might argue that this is because Paul had no intention of telling women what to do with their heads, but that conclusion is inconsistent with v. 5 and v. 13. It is

²⁷ Thomas R. Shreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1991), 516.

more likely that Paul assumed the reader would use the context to conclude that a woman should cover her head because she is the glory of man.

■ **11:8-9** ⁸*For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*

While there may be some ambiguity in regards to just how man is the image and glory of God and woman is the glory of man, Paul grounds his statement not in the prevailing cultural practices of the day, but in creation order, wherein woman came from man, and was made for man. This means that Paul's argument rests on acultural grounds and cannot be fully dismissed as simply addressing a temporary issue. This is not to say that Paul requires that men and women maintain the prescribed head treatments throughout all history (in that specific head coverings do not carry the same cultural messages as in the past), but it does mean that Paul believes that even before the fall men and women were designed to maintain and express their distinctive functions.²⁸

■ **11:10** ¹⁰*For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.*

Verse 10 begins with the words "For this reason" (διὰ τοῦτο). While this phrase can be used to point backward or forward, it would appear that this statement is concluding what Paul has just written.²⁹ But just what is Paul's conclusion? Many throughout the years have said that Paul is reinforcing the fact that women should treat their physical heads in certain ways, so as to honor their metaphoric head. This may be the case, but the conclusion cannot be arrived at quite so easily. One must recognize that the Greek literally reads, "the woman ought to have authority on her head" (διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς). There is no mention of "sign," or more specifically of a head covering. These ideas have been interpreted into the text.

²⁸ Not only was Christ functionally subject to God while on earth, according to 15:27-28 this subjection occurs both presently and into eternity.

²⁹ Verses 11-12 indicate that v. 10 is the conclusion of Paul's previous statement, as they provide a qualifier of that conclusion and not a new argument.

A weakness of this interpretation is that it is investing in the word ἐξουσιά meaning that is not found elsewhere in the New Testament—not only because the word is never used to mean “sign of authority”, but also because there is no evidence that ἐξουσιά is ever taken in the passive sense.³⁰ On the other hand, if this passage were to be interpreted to mean that woman has been invested with authority to do what she pleases with her own literal head, Paul’s previous line of argument would be contradictory. One possible alternative would be to take the middle ground, wherein the verse is interpreted in a way that keeps the active sense of ἐξουσιά (authority) but that calls on a woman to treat her head in the proper way. In other words, the verse might be translated, “a woman ought to exercise control in treating her head properly.” The advantage of this alternative would be that it calls the woman to take the prescribed action and does not call for the man to enforce it. This would be consistent with other teaching regarding husbands and wives (Eph 5:21-33; 3:18-19), wherein each spouse is directly addressed, and not asked to police the action of the other.

Equally difficult in this verse is Paul’s insertion of “because of the angels.” Countless attempts have been made to interpret these words, but some of the most common are: 1) the angels referred to are lustful angels (see Gen 6:2) and women should thus wear head coverings so as not to tempt them;³¹ 2) the word “angels” can be translated “messengers,” and since women messengers would sometimes carry Paul’s letters, they should be given authority not to follow the cultural customs of Corinth;³² and 3) angels were believed to be present at gatherings of God’s people, and thus proper decorum should be emphasized.³³ The latter seems the most likely as it is the only option which Paul provides support for elsewhere (1 Cor 4:17, 1 Tim 3:16, 5:21).

³⁰ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* in *New International Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 519.

³¹ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 171. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* in *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 189.

³² Alan G. Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984), 81.

³³ F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* in *New Century Bible Series* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott Ltd., 1971), 106.

■ **11:11-12** ¹¹*In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.* ¹²*For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.*

There is almost universal agreement that these two verses stress the equality of men and women. The question is: what kind of equality is being described? Is Paul fully supporting an egalitarian viewpoint of men and women, or is he simply ensuring that while men and women are functionally different they are both indispensable in the purposes of God, and thus of equal value in his economy? Based on the stream of interpretation that has been formed in this paper thus far, the latter is the only possible choice if one is not to let these verses speak in contradiction to one another. In other words, if Paul is indeed stressing some functional difference between men and women that is based in the order of creation and a resultant headship, why then would he make a statement to the opposite effect? Those who hold to other streams of interpretation must either consider the opening verses as Paul's rehearsal of errant Corinthian thinking (see note 4), or consider vv. 11-12 as simply a continuation of what they see as a fully egalitarian argument in verses 3-10. Whatever the case, one must conclude that Paul was in no way questioning the worth of women in this passage.

What is particularly surprising about this verse is the fact that women are addressed first. If Paul was seeking to keep men from abusing their functional position of authority, why did he not begin by telling men that they are not independent of women? To do so would have certainly been more pointed. One answer may be that some Corinthian women—in their fervor to attain a spirituality that is unbounded by sexual identity—had begun to think of themselves as having no real need for men in their worship of God. That is, to say they may have ceased to see worship as a community activity in which all members played an interdependent part. This hypothesis might seem unlikely considering the dominant male culture of the time, but if true may give further reason as to why Paul felt the need to address the issue of head coverings.

■ **11:13** ¹³*Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*

Paul is nearing the end of his discussion regarding the manner in which women prepare their head during times of corporate prayer and prophesy. In doing so he asks the Corinthians themselves to consider the question of whether it is right for a woman to have her head covered, or have loosened hair.³⁴ In asking this question, without asking a corresponding question regarding men, Paul is making it abundantly clear that it is the behavior of at least a minority group of women of which he is concerned. This is not to say that Paul does not give any instruction in the passage that is applicable to men, only that at this time it was the women who were misbehaving and not the men.

■ **11:14-15** ¹⁴*Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.*

In vv. 4-5, Paul appealed to the idea of disgrace so as to discourage men and women from a certain treatment of their literal heads. At first glance, these verses would suggest that Paul's concern is in regard to hairstyle and not head coverings, but a closer look might suggest otherwise. If Paul was referring to hair in v. 5, he was concerned about it being loosened, not that it was cut.³⁵ Yet here he says a woman's long hair is her glory without mentioning the idea of it being "put up." Taking this into account, one ought to conclude that Paul is indeed talking about head coverings and not hairstyle, and thereby let these verses act as an analogy. This analogy could be understood like this: In that history has shown that men have typically worn short hair and women long hair, it is evident that God desires that men and women give outward expression of the distinctive role he has given to each of the sexes. Therefore, in the Corinthian culture women ought to wear head coverings in order to exhibit their distinctive role relative to man, while men should not wear head coverings in expression of their distinctive nature relative to God.

³⁴ Although the NIV provides no marginal reading for this verse, the word for "uncovered" (*ἀκατακάλυπτον*) is the same as used in v. 5, and can be translated "loosened hair".

³⁵ When Paul talked of a the disgrace of a woman's hair being cut in vv. 4-5 he only spoke of it by way of analogy.

■ **11:16** ¹⁶*If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice--nor do the churches of God.*

After appealing to the Corinthian minority based on headship, creation order, and prevailing cultural practice, Paul ends his discussion of the topic by telling those who have strayed from his teaching on this matter that what he has called them to is already practiced by the church at large. Appealing to conformity with the universal church is not uncommon for Paul as we see him do the same in 7:17 and 14:33,³⁶ and suggests that Paul was not above using either the fear of isolation or the incentive of conformity to encourage proper behavior. As with vv. 8-9, this verse indicates that Paul's teaching is not strictly bound to Corinth.

As set forth at the onset, this exegetical analysis reveals the difficulties inherent with the present passage. One author has even gone so far as to say, "If all the possible permutations and combinations of points of view that may be taken were tested, many millions of interpretations would be produced."³⁷ If, however, one takes the stream of interpretation developed in this exegesis, it could be concluded that:

- 1) a functional hierarchy between men and women continues to exist in the present age,
- 2) this hierarchy ought to be acknowledged by men and women acting in ways that are culturally appropriate for their gender,
- 3) this hierarchy speaks only of functional differences and in no way speaks of a difference in kingdom worth or value,
- 4) since God has created the difference between men and women, these differences should be universally honored in all ages.

In coming to this conclusion, I do not attempt to define how function differs between men and women because the passage itself does not specifically seek to do so. Furthermore, I do not believe Scripture as a

³⁶ Furthermore, Paul commends Timothy based on the fact that Timothy's teaching is consistent with the universal church (4:17), and he encourages the Corinthians' collection by comparing them to the Galatians (16:1).

³⁷ Gwen Ince, "Judge for Yourselves: Teasing Out Some Knots in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Australian Biblical Review* 48 (2000), 63.

whole provides a well-defined and expansive explanation of God-ordained differences in gender function. In drawing my “equal value, different function” conclusion, I do so because an honest grappling of Scripture allows me to do nothing less, and not because I have figured out fully what different function infers. One might say then that any certainty as to my theological conclusion on the matter as derived from I Corinthians 11:2-16 (and other passages) is to a large measure mitigated by my corresponding lack of certainty as to its application! In other words, while I believe it important the church maintains a perspective that recognizes equal value and different function, I also believe there must be great humility and sensitivity in understanding what that might look like in this or any age, particularly in light of clear abuses of male authority both presently and historically. Nonetheless the difficulty in grappling with the latter issue of application should not cause the church to throw the baby away with the bath water by doing away with the “equal value and different function” theology indicated in the passage studied. Rather its men and women should fall on their knees and ask what “head coverings” are appropriate today that express both the equal worth of the genders and yet also their distinctive and complementary function.

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