

Lesson 15
1 Cor. 11:2-16

Some Modern Background For This Lesson:

There is a present controversy in the church related to the role of women. In not a few congregations women are participating in leading singing through such ruses as a praise teams, women are leading in prayer, and speaking in worship. Many in the feminist movement within the church would like to and indeed claim that they are not part of the radical feminist movement abroad in the land. While there is some truth to that statement, it is true only in the sense that, as a general rule, feminists within the church (both male and female) have the same goals within the church that radical feminists have in society making the church/society a matriarchy instead of a patriarchy. Church feminists may use less charged language, but not always. WITCH (Women's International Conspiracy out of Hell) characterizes marriage as a dehumanizing institution – legal whoredom for women. Strong language, you say. No member of the church, however radical, would ever use that language, you say. Robert Randolph, who spoke on the 1990 Freed-Hardeman University forum he and Lynn Mitchell argued for leadership roles for women in the church. The record of the debate is preserved in *Gender and Ministry*. Mr. Randolph accused preachers, elders, and other males of churches of Christ of rape. He based the statement on the account of the indifference of the Levites toward the rape of one of their women by a member of the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19:24). He implied that women in the church today are being raped in regard to their rights to roles of spiritual authority and, for the most part, the church is unconcerned because it is happening to women.

Of all of the passages that need to be studied on this issue, 1 Corinthians 11 is perhaps the most difficult. Most of the difficulties are from what we perceive and not from what the text says; thus, they are of our own making. We want to concentrate on what the words say. Words are the chief method of communication. If there is to be communication, a word must have the same meaning in the mind of the speaker and in the mind of the reader. Otherwise, communication is at best stymied and at worst non-existent.

Let's begin by suggesting that the thrust of this section is the hierarchy ordained by God and how that hierarchy affects role relationships. It is here that feminists most often choose to fight their battles because, according to them, hierarchical roles by their very nature are based on the concept of the superior ruling over the inferior. Patriarchy, they argue, assumes female inferiority. The truth, however, is that leadership is never based on intrinsic worth. When I practiced law I had a hard time convincing new (not always young) lawyers that their opinion was important and that I in fact often relied on it. I urged them to argue with me for their opinion since it was only through the clash of ideas that we could come to the right decision for our client. They didn't understand that a partner and an associate were just hierarchical roles related to firm structure and governance and that they had nothing to do with two lawyers working on a case. While I did reserve the right to do it my way if we failed to agree, not even

that was based on intrinsic worth; it was based on the fact that whichever opinion was followed, I was responsible for the result.

Keep in mind that Paul had just said that whatever was done was to be done to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31. He is about to say that all things should be done decently and in order. 1 Cor. 14:40. Headship and submission have nothing to do with intrinsic worth; rather, they have to do with the inherent nature of orderliness that God commands to his own glory.

This is in no way contrary to Gal. 3:28. However, the concept of equality before God in no way abolishes role distinctions. God is the author of both principles. It is wrong to take two scriptural principles, set one against the other, and then demand that we pick one. Unfortunately, the practice is becoming more widely used by those who demand that false choices be made between grace and law or faith and works. None of these issues is either/or; each of them is both/and.

Paul fully understands his people and approaches them as a seasoned teacher. He knows that they are still babes in their spiritual lives and need much corrective advice. But before he admonishes them, Paul praises them for their efforts to follow his teachings.

v. 2. I praise you because you remember me in all things, and you guard the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

a. “I praise you.” No other passage in this epistle has words of praise for the Corinthians (contrast vv. 17, 22), except for the introductory section in which Paul gives thanks to God for the grace extended to them (1:4-9). Immediately following this introduction, he reproves the readers for their factionalism in the church (1:10-12). Similarly, in the current chapter Paul praises the Corinthians for their remembrance of him and the traditions he had entrusted to them. But subsequent to these commendations, he instructs them in the proper conduct of men and women.

b. “Because you remember me in all things.” Why does Paul praise the Corinthians? Because they have remembered (the Greek verb has the perfect tense) and continue to remember him in all things. This means that numerous Christians in Corinth have fond memories of Paul and follow his instructions. But many of the Corinthians did not keep Paul’s teachings, as is evident from the succeeding context. For that reason, some translators prefer the temporal adverb *always* or its equivalent for the phrase *in all things*. With this translation, they eliminate possible disharmony between this verse (v. 2) and the rest of the chapter. In the Greek, however, Paul is consistent in writing the phrase *in all things* (he also used it in two preceding verses, 9:25 and 10:33). Because of Paul’s earlier usage, we hold to this translation.

c. “And you guard the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” The second part of verse 2 explains the phrase in question. “All things” are those apostolic teachings that Paul had

delivered to the Corinthians in earlier times; they are the traditions that the apostles had received and subsequently transmitted to others. For instance, Paul writes that he received information from the Lord and passed it on to the Corinthians (v. 23; 15:3; II Tim. 2:2).

At this juncture in the epistle, we have no definite indication that Paul is trying to answer a question which the Corinthians had raised in their letter. Chapter 11 does not have the formula “Now concerning the things you wrote about” that in both full and abbreviated form occurs elsewhere (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12). Probably the letter contained a question regarding Christian conduct in the multicultural society of Corinth. And Paul addresses that problem in the following verses (vv. 3-16).

v.3. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

a. *Construction.* After verse 2, Paul begins a subject he has not mentioned elsewhere. He teaches his readers about the relationships of Christ to man, man to woman, and God to Christ in a sequence of three clauses: Christ is the head of every man; the man is the head of a woman; God is the head of Christ. Note that Paul begins and ends with the word *Christ* and that the first and third clauses are balanced.

Some suggest that this order of authority is only cultural and temporary and is not applicable in our age today. This, of course, ignores the fact that Christ is subject to God and will be for eternity. 1 Cor. 15:15-58. When Christ received all authority in heaven and on earth, the Father was exempt. 1 Cor. 15:27-28. Additionally, the relationship between man and woman is placed between two unquestionable hierarchies – Christ is the head of every man and God is the head of Christ. This principle regulated woman’s participation so that Paul makes a clear distinction between when men and women may speak and how they must always recognize and show their respect for the principle.

b. *Meaning.* Of all the words that appear in this chapter, it seems that “head” should be the least controversial. True, “head” is used in two senses in this chapter, but both of those uses are commonly used. One use refers to the literal physical head; the other refers to leadership or authority. The same uses are true of the Greek word *kephale*. There was no controversy about its meaning in this passage until feminists began rewriting the text and attaching entirely new meanings to words. Greek lexicons consistently define *kephale* in 1 Cor. 11 as “authority,” “superior rank,” or “preeminence.” It was so understood by the “church fathers” for centuries. Feminists now insist that the lexicons and “church fathers” have been wrong and that *kephale* really means “source,” as in “headwater that is the source of a river.” “Superior rank,” they tell us, is only true of the English word. Isn’t it strange that Greek scholars would be so influenced by an English word that they would let it override their Greek scholarship! Even stranger is how the “church fathers” were so heavily influenced by an English word before there was such an English word. In all Greek literature feminists have managed to find only two instances where *kephale* might possibly have the meaning “source.” One writer examined 2,339 occurrences of *kephale* in Greek literature and failed to find a single instance

where the word meant “source,” including the two uses relied on by feminists. Another writer, himself a feminist, chided his female colleagues for attempting to build a doctrine in such a suspect manner. When commentators today attempt to justify the definition “source,” you should very carefully read any of his or her writings. Their credibility is suspect.

Clearly the passage teaches that Christ has authority over man, man over woman, and God over Christ. We emphasize again that this authority does not necessarily imply the superiority of one party and the inferiority of the other. Even though God has authority over Christ (see 15:24-28), Christ is not inferior to God the Father. In a similar manner, “the authority of man over woman does not imply the inferiority of woman or the superiority of men. On the contrary, just as Christ in his essence is equal to God the Father, so woman in her being and worth is equal to man.

The feminists make one final attempt to justify their doctrine by arguing that Paul is really discussing husbands and wives here and that the passage only applies to wives. This attempt takes a hard fall in verse 12 where Paul states that man has his birth through the woman (NASB). What sense does it make to say that husband has his birth through the wife? The foolishness of such a position appears with just a cursory examination.

v. 4. Every man who prays or prophesies with something on his head dishonors his head.

a. *Qualification.* Before we begin the explanation of this verse, we should realize that dress codes vary from culture to culture and from age to age. The city of Corinth had a mixed population of Greeks, Romans, Jews, and a number of people of other nationalities. When Paul discusses hairstyles and head coverings, we have to keep in mind that he was telling his readers to adopt Christian practices in a pagan world. Paul objected to blurring the genders but wanted the Corinthians to demonstrate visually the clear distinction between men and women.

b. *Interpretation.* The translation of this text is simple; its interpretation is not. For example, does the man pray and prophesy at home or in church, in private or in public? How do we explain the verb prophesy? What does “something on his head” mean? And, do the two occurrences of “head” mean the same thing or does the second instance refer to Christ (see v. 3)?

First, the praying and prophesying appear to take place in a public worship service. Why should Paul write about someone praying in the privacy of his home? And in respect to prophesying, in another context Paul says that the person who prophesies edifies the church (14:4). This verse, therefore, refers to public worship. Next, when Paul writes “every man who prays or prophesies,” he alludes to audible prayer uttered in a worship service. He links the verbs *pray* and *prophesy* with the particle *or*, and in a later chapter discloses that the gift of prophecy should be eagerly desired (14:1, 39). He leaves the impression that prayer is common, but prophecy occasional. But what is the meaning of the verb *to prophesy*? This word signifies

preaching, teaching, or explaining God's revelation. In effect, this is what Priscilla and Aquila did when they invited Apollos to their home to explain to him God's Word more accurately (Acts 18:26). Similarly, both Simeon and Anna the prophetess spent their time in the temple courts worshiping God with prayer and praise and explaining God's revelation in Jesus as the salvation and redemption of his people (Luke 2:25-38).

Third, what does "something on his head" mean? Paul literally says, "having [something] hanging down from the head." If he had written the word *something* which is supplied, the text would have been clearer. The supplied word is needed to understand Paul's phrase. The words that Paul uses occur in the writings of the Greek author Plutarch (b. A.D. 46 or 47 some forty miles from Corinth) and refer to something that is resting on the head. "Greek literature contemporary with the New Testament demonstrates that the phrase *kata kephale* can clearly mean 'on the head.'"

In their native land and in their colonies the Romans covered their heads during private and public devotions. Offering sacrifices, praying or prophesying, they would pull their toga forward over their heads. This devotional practice may have penetrated society in Corinth, which was a Roman colony. "So when Paul reminds Christian men to pray and prophesy with head uncovered, the recommendation fits the context of shunning the worship of idols." Paul wanted the Corinthians to separate themselves from pagan customs and be distinct in their Christian practice.

Last, does the second occurrence of "head" have the same meaning as the first (the physical head) or does it allude to Christ (the spiritual head)? Commentators are divided on this point. The preceding verse (v. 3) teaches that Christ is the head of man and the husband is the head of the wife. By extension, then, the man with a covered head dishonors Christ and the wife with an uncovered head dishonors her husband. However, if we take the second occurrence to refer to Christ, then the message of verse 7 seems to be redundant. The succeeding context, moreover, seems to indicate that the woman who prays or prophesies with an uncovered head dishonors not only her husband but also her own head. If this is so, a literal interpretation for verse 4 is not altogether out of place. We do well, therefore, to accept both the literal and figurative explanations.

Paul wishes to maintain a clear distinction between the sexes, so that no man and no woman will bring dishonor to the church. He does not want a man to cover his head at a public worship service, for that act reflects pagan practice and implicitly rejects the creation order. Correspondingly, he does not want a woman to come to the worship services without a head covering.

Vv. 5-6. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head. For she is one and the same as a woman whose head is shaved. 6. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off. But if it is disgraceful for a woman to

have her hair cut off or shaven, let her cover her head.

a. “But every woman who prays or prophesies.” This passage has been a centerpiece for those who promote women leadership in assembly worship. According to them Paul here assigns such roles to women in praying and preaching (prophesying). They take this position in spite of the fact that Paul absolutely and unconditionally forbids women to speak at all in such leadership roles when men are present. 1 Cor. 14:34-35. Is Paul (or the Holy Spirit) confused? Did Paul (or the Holy Spirit) forget what had been said in chapter 11 by the time he got to chapter 14?

The real problem lies not in what Paul says about women praying and prophesying, but in what we perceive him saying. Does Paul say that the women referenced in v. 5 are praying and prophesying with men present? A close reading discloses that he does not. Some suppose that Paul was speaking of an assembly where no male was present. Others suppose that Paul was himself “supposing” a hypothetical situation that he emphatically rejected later in the letter. Some suggest that Paul was speaking of a practice that existed at Corinth that he later condemned. One “suppose” may be about as good as another, as long as it does not contradict plain language in scripture. The principle that difficult passages are construed in light of plain passages applies. David Lipscomb was asked a question about this issue in 1 Cor. 14:34-45 when he was editor of the *Gospel Advocate*. He replied:

I do not know how to explain that language. I cannot write in simpler Words, plainer, or put it in a connection that would make it easier to be understood. “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak, but to be in subjection, as the law also says.” I cannot make that any plainer. . . . I do not know how to add a word that can make it clearer, more direct, or more forcible. One who can explain that away can explain away anything I can write, and one who will not regard that ought not to regard what I would say.

In that culture an uncovered head symbolized dominance while a covered head indicated submission. Paul postulates a situation that a man would never imagine – praying or prophesying with his head uncovered. It would be so shameful that no one would even imagine its happening. A woman should not venture to do what a man would not even imagine doing. The liberated woman of the day laid aside her covering and joined the male. Paul warned the Corinthian women that they must not behave in that manner.

R.C.H. Lenski, a noted commentator, says that Paul says what he says not because some man in Corinth is liable to do such a thing, but in order to bring out the contrast with the women. Two of the great grammars dealing with the Greek text explain the situation similarly. They say that Paul is making an argument in theory. In verse 5 he uses the instrumental dative which expresses the idea of means, mode, or manner by which something is accomplished. Thus the

phrase “praying or prophesying with her head uncovered” literally means “praying and prophesying by means of uncovering her head.” Paul’s instruction to cover their heads is tantamount to telling them to remain silent..

b. “With her head uncovered dishonors her head.” The interpretation of this verse depends on verse 3, where Paul says that the man is the head of woman, which in the family circle means that the husband is the wife’s head. If the Corinthian woman puts aside her head covering in public, she thereby renounces the subordination to her husband that God intended her to show. She appropriates to herself authority that belongs to her husband. When in the Corinthian church a woman goes against the structure of creation, she dishonors her husband.

In Paul’s day, a woman should cover her head. If she failed to do this, she dishonored not only her own head but also showed disrespect to her husband. She ought to have respected her husband by wearing a head covering in public. But, we ask, does she have to have her head covered when she neither prays nor prophesies? In the privacy of her home no; in public, yes.

c. “For she is one and the same as a woman whose head is shaved.” At first glance, this remark appears to be tactless and harsh. But we must consider these words in the cultural context of first-century Corinth. Paul explains himself in succeeding verses, where he notes that nature itself teaches that long hair is the glory of a woman (v. 15). For a woman to have her head shaved was and still is a mark of disgrace and humiliation. Whether Paul is thinking of the practice of humiliating an adulterous woman by cropping her hair is difficult to say. First century Roman author Dio Chrysostom mentions that, on the island of Cyprus, a woman who had committed adultery was shorn by the authorities to identify her as a prostitute. The message Paul conveys to the Corinthian women is that they should honor their husbands by observing the cultural standards of their day. Writes David W.J. Gill:

What Paul may be saying is that if women in the church will not wear a veil, then they will be seen as dishonoring their husbands which might affect their place in society. If the wife insists on being unveiled then she might as well wear a sign of humiliation by having her hair cut. If she does not wish to bring such shame to her husband, herself and her family then she should be veiled.

The principle was for the wife to honor her husband; the application of this principle was to wear a veil in public. To not wear a veil was a sign of rebellion on the part of a wife.

d. “For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off.” Paul presents a logical approach to the whole matter by saying that a wife who is unveiled in public is as much a shame to her husband as a shorn and shaven head is to herself.

e. “But if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or shaven, let her cover her head.” The emphasis in the last part of this verse is on the word *disgraceful*. Paul puts

the wife in the uncomfortable position of having to make a choice: if she wants to go without a veil in public, let her be shaved and consort with disreputable women; if she objects to being shorn and shaved, let her wear a veil and associate with respectable women. Notice that not the husband but the wife must make the decision. And the decision is a matter of her willingness to have a submissive relationship with her husband “by the ordinance of creation.”

Practical Considerations in 11:4-6

Cultural standards differ from country to country and change in the course of time. When we consider hairstyles and head coverings, the variations are especially striking. Hair can be either long or short, and in many cultures the covering of the head relates to religious observances (e.g., Judaism, Islam, and branches of Christianity).

In the Christian church, head coverings were considered a necessity in colder climates. During the Reformation, John Calvin and his colleagues wore skullcaps to ward off the cold. But would they wear these caps during a worship service or follow Paul’s prescription not to pray or prophesy with a covered head? Writes Calvin:

For we should not be so hide-bound by conscientious principles as to think a teacher is doing anything wrong in wearing a skull-cap on his head, when he is speaking to the people from the pulpit. But all that Paul is after is that it may be made clear that the man is in authority, and that the woman is in subjection to him, and that is done when the man uncovers his head in the sight of the congregation, even if he puts his skull-cap on again afterwards so as not to catch cold.

Two centuries later, in 1741, the German New Testament commentator John Albert Bengel had to face a different cultural development: What to think of wigs? He remarks that wigs are substitutes for hair that is too thin. “Therefore the head of a man is scarcely more dishonored by them, while he prays, than while he does not pray.” Yet Bengel was of the opinion that if he would be able to ask Paul, the apostle would persuade people not to wear wigs because they are “unbecoming to men, especially those who pray.”

During the first half of the twentieth century, women adhered to the custom of wearing hats in church. But in the second half of this century, those ladies who adorn their heads with hats in Christian churches are few indeed.

How do we apply Paul’s words on head coverings, or the lack of them, today? Is Paul reflecting cultural patterns of his day in the Corinthian church and elsewhere (v. 16), patterns which are no longer in vogue? And are cultural patterns that are subject to change actually indicators of basic and abiding principles?

Paul proclaims Christ’s gospel that sets people free from the Jewish civil and ceremonial

laws. He rejects the idea of asking Gentiles to adopt Jewish customs as a step in becoming Christians (Gal. 5:1-6). Similarly, Paul does not intend to tell believers everywhere throughout the centuries to adopt the customs he wants the Corinthian Christians to follow. What he does stress in this segment is that in the marriage relationship the wife honors and respects her husband and the husband loves and leads the wife. This is the basic principle that may be applied in diverse ways in the varying cultures throughout the world. The principle remains the same, even though its symbols and evidence vary.

b. Image and Glory – 11:7-12

The Gospels, especially that of Matthew, portray Jesus as a teacher who repeatedly appeals to the Old Testament and at times asks his audience whether they have read the Scriptures (see Matt. 12:3; Mark 2:25; Luke 6:3). He proves his teaching from God's Word.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul follows Jesus' example and bases his instruction on the Old Testament Scriptures. We would expect the Jewish Christians to be familiar with the content of the Old Testament, and that those Christians who came out of paganism would lack a firm grasp of the Scriptures. Paul, however, is the teacher who opens God's Word and takes his instruction from the first two chapters of Genesis in the next few verses.

7. For a man ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God. But the woman is the glory of man.

a. "For a man ought not to cover his head." The first word, the causal conjunction *for*, connotes that the entire present passage is an explanation of the preceding verses (vv. 5-6) that alludes to the creation account (Gen. 1:26-27; 2: 18-24). Paul writes a general principle that applies to prayer and prophesying when he says that a man ought not to cover his head. (This does not mean that a person may not protect himself against inclement weather and wear a hat or a cap). Paul calls attention to the key concept that man is God's image and glory.

b. "Because he is the image and glory of God." We only have the word *image*, but not "likeness," which we would have expected to find in an allusion to the first chapter of Genesis (v. 26; see also Gen. 5:1; 6:9). An *image* is the exact representation of someone or something: a statue of a famous leader, the head of a ruler on a coin, or a picture on a television screen. "Man in his authority relation to creation and to his wife, images the dominion of God over the creation and the headship of Christ over his church."

We would also expect Paul to state that both the woman and the man are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28); instead, with the word "glory" Paul provides not a parallel but a comparison. Man is the image and glory of God, while a woman is the glory of man but not the image of man. Paul has stated that God is the head of Christ, Christ the head of man, and man the head of woman (v. 3). Because of his teaching on man's headship, he is not now interested

in discussing Eve's being created in God's image.

The phrase *glory of God* can be interpreted subjectively, objectively, or both. Subjectively, God confers his glory on man; objectively, man renders glory to God. Likewise, subjectively, the husband loves and protects his wife and, objectively, the wife brings glory to her husband by being his helper (Gen. 2:18, 20).

c. "But the woman is the glory of man." The last part of verse 7 begins with the adversative *but* to set this clause off against the preceding sentence. The woman is the glory not of God but of man, that is, her husband. Created to assist her husband, she seeks to honor him by recognizing his headship. The word *glory* appears once more in this context when Paul appeals to nature and remarks that long hair is the woman's glory (v. 15). Why should the woman bring glory to her husband? Paul answers this question in the next two verses.

8. For man does not come from woman but woman from man. 9. Indeed, man was not created for the sake of the woman but woman for the sake of the man.

Paul supports his teaching with facts taken from the creation account (Gen. 2:18-24): God created both Adam and Eve. Adam did not create Eve. God first made Adam and then Eve. God made Eve out of Adam. God created Eve because of Adam.

As God simultaneously created animals male and female, so in one creative act he could have made Adam and Eve from the dust of the earth. But he did not do so. God first made Adam and then, declaring that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18), supplied him with a helper suitable to his needs. From one of Adam's ribs he fashioned Eve to be Adam's wife. God presented her to Adam, and Adam sang his wedding song:

This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." [Gen. 2:23]

Many people today seem to think that the creation of Adam and Eve is a story from the dawn of human history and has little, if any, present significance. However, at creation Adam was formed first, then Eve (I Tim. 2:13). God made this distinction for all times, and with it he reveals his design and purpose for the sexes. Although man and woman are equal before God and in Christ (Gal. 3:28), they have been given different roles. The husband takes primary responsibility in his headship, and the wife fulfills her role as helper. This relationship cannot be reversed, because the creation story teaches "a non-reversible orientation of the woman towards the man as the reference point for her life." The fact that Eve was created to assist Adam suggests that she is subject to him. When God created Eve as Adam's helper, he assigned to her a supportive and submissive role (Gen. 2:18). By appealing to the creation account, Paul is able to write that man was not created for woman but woman for man.

10. For this reason the woman ought to have authority on her head because of the angels.

a. “For this reason.” Paul continues his discourse, tightly connecting this verse to the preceding ones (w. 7-9). The conjunction *for* (v. 8) explains verse 7, and the word *indeed* (v. 9) shows that verse 9 gives additional support to verse 8. The conjunction in verse 10 serves to bind the verse to the larger argument.

b. “The woman ought to have authority on her head because of the angels.” The translation of this part of the text is problematic, as is evident from these representative versions:

“a sign of authority” (NIV)

“the sign of her authority” (REB)

“a sign of submission” (NAB)

“a covering over her head to show that she is under her husband’s authority (CNB) .

It is obvious that translators are forced to interpret the Greek text. The wording in the original is terse and obscure. When we try to clarify this passage, we must consider the preceding and the succeeding context. Thus far Paul has stated the principle that man is the head of woman just as Christ is the head of man and God the head of Christ. He has given directions on how men and women should conduct themselves while praying or prophesying. Paul has told women to cover their heads so they do not shame their “heads,” namely, their husbands. And he has defended his words by appealing to the creation account in the first two chapters of Genesis. Now Paul concludes this segment of his discussion by saying that “the woman ought to have authority on her head because of the angels.”

This verse has been the subject of study by numerous scholars, yet every writer has to admit that his or her explanation of the text displays weaknesses. In spite of all the suggestions that have been offered, the text remains enigmatic and fails to communicate. These are some of the proposed interpretations:

1. When a woman in public worship prays or prophesies, she displays the new freedom she has in Christ. The woman derives her authority from God, and with her headcovering she is able to demonstrate that power. The weakness of this suggestion is that a discussion on equality fits Galatians 3:28 but in the current passage Paul says nothing about freedom.

2. “A sign of authority.” Many translations have enhanced the reading by adding the phrase “sign of” or simply “veil.” Numerous commentators assert that the word *authority*

relates not to the authority of the woman but to that of her husband. The context speaks of the husband being the wife's head, and this interpretation leaves the impression that the term authority is equivalent to submission. In Greek, however, the term *exousia* never has an objective or a passive sense, that is, being under someone else's authority. It always has a subjective or an active sense relating to one's own authority. And last, with this interpretation the Greek preposition *epi*, which means "on," now has the meaning *over*. The husband has authority over his wife. Paul has said as much earlier (v. 3), but he is not saying this in verse 10.

3. The expression *authority* has been linked to the creation account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:26-28. This passage states that both male and female received the mandate to rule (have authority over) the fish, birds, and every living creature on this earth. This ingenious explanation makes the woman an active participant with man in exercising authority, but the text itself gives the explanation insufficient support.

4. While praying or prophesying in a worship service, a woman receives spiritual authority. Instead, she ought to accept the position assigned to her since creation, to recognize her husband as head. She is unable to pray in the Spirit when rebelling "against the order of creation hallowed by God's Spirit." Here is a plausible explanation that does justice to the concept *authority*. Nonetheless, this concept must relate to the last phrase in the text, "because of the angels."

5. Could it be that Paul with his rabbinical training is asking women to be covered with a veil because of the angels? With the evidence gleaned from Qumran, we know that an unveiled woman in a sacred assembly "is like a bodily defect which should be excluded." The reason for this exclusion is that holy angels who are present at worship services are offended by defects. This approach may shed some light on the reference to the angels, but it does nothing for interpreting the meaning of "authority."

All these suggestions are helpful in understanding aspects of the problems we encounter in verse 10, yet all show weaknesses. Scholars generally conclude that a satisfactory explanation is not available and, in all humility, confess that they really do not know what Paul intended to say in this verse.

c. "Because of the angels." This short verse has two causal expressions: the first one is translated "for this reason" and the second one "because." Some translators combine these two causal expressions with the word "and" or "also." Whether we supply a connection or follow the Greek word order, the fact remains that scholars simply do not know what the reference to angels means. In I Corinthians, the word "angels" occurs four times (4:9; 6:3; 11:10; 13:1). But a study of this word in the context of these passages fails to give us an idea what Paul has in mind. Interpreters must admit that, all the research aside, they have no acceptable explanation for this particular clause.

R.C.H. Lenski has the best discussion found on this verse. He writes:

Because these indisputable facts remain, all customs that truly symbolize these facts will meet approval on the part of all who bow fully to God, and all customs that contravene and deny this symbolism will meet with disapproval. **On this account the woman ought to have a power over her head on account of the angels.** In view of these unchangeable facts of creation a double obligation results when it comes to a custom like this and to the significance which it involves. One obligation rests upon the man, v. 7, and the other upon the woman. His head should be bare, hers covered. Paul uses the same verb regarding both the man and the woman, *ovfeilei*, “ought,” which expresses obligation and no more. He is not laying down an unalterable law that shall be in effect for the church of all ages and of all nations. While the facts of creation to which Paul goes back are in their very nature unalterable, they cannot be made an equally unalterable law regarding customs for the simple reason that customs vary endlessly for reasons that are not at all concerned with these facts. Only under certain circumstances an obligation may arise in which these facts play a part as was the case here at Corinth and among the Greeks. Established customs that beautifully symbolize these facts “ought” not to be changed arbitrarily but intelligently retained until, without prejudice to these facts, in due course, customs change of their own accord.

Why does Paul call the cover on the woman’s head an *evxousia*? The apparent difficulty, which is sometimes unduly stressed, lies in the fact that “right,” “authority” or “power” is ordinarily used in a subjective sense; here it would be the woman’s *own* power or authority. This, however, clashes with the context which evidently speaks about the covering on the woman’s head as being a symbol of *another’s*, namely, the man’s power and authority over her. We should, then, take the term in that sense. Whether we construe “a power over her head,” ... or specify the figure as a metonymy: “power” signifying “sign of power.”

Paul adds the final phrase, “on account of the angels,” as a matter that needs no elucidation whatever and as one that will be at once understood by the Corinthians. This fact is sufficient to dispose of a number of fanciful interpretations which have been given this simple phrase. The Analogy of Scripture decides the point that an unqualified mention of “the angels” refers to good angels. The simple manner in which this final phrase is added indicates that no new point is being introduced into the discussion. This brief mention of angels is thus involved in all that precedes. “On account of the angels” implies that God’s good angels are present when God’s people come together to pray and to prophesy. Paul’s view of God’s creation in general and of God’s people in particular always includes God’s good angels. So the phrase simply means that, when we worship, we must not offend them by an impropriety. Such an offense would occur if women prayed and prophesied with

uncovered heads and thereby displayed the fact that they had disregarded the station that has been assigned them by their creation. In regard to the nearness of the angels and their interest in us compare 4:9 where Paul speaks about the suffering apostles as being a spectacle also for the angels.

We thus reject the interpretation which refers this expression to evil angels who may be aroused to lasciviousness by seeing the uncovered hair of women at worship. Why should this arouse them any more than the uncovered hair of women when they are not at worship? Paul's phrase has no connection with Gen. 6:1-4; the interpretation of this passage which regards the sons of God as angels is unacceptable. . . . And some of these women were matrons and old women. . . .

11. However, in the Lord, woman is nothing apart from man, and man is nothing apart from woman. 12. For as the woman is from the man, even so is the man through the woman, and all things are from God.

a. *Structure.* These two verses balance two earlier verses (w. 8-9) and reveal an almost perfect parallelism, provided we view verse 10 as a parenthetical comment. Thus we see the crosswise structure in the subjects of verses 8 and 12.

Verse 8a, b For man does not come from woman but woman from man.

Verse 12a, b For as the woman is from the man, even so is the man through the woman.

Similarly, verses 9 and 11 show contrast, especially with the adversative *however*. They also have a crosswise structure.

Verse 9a, b Indeed, man was not created for the sake of the woman but woman for the sake of the man.

Verse 11 a, b However, . . . woman is nothing apart from man, and man is nothing apart from woman.

b. *Intention.* What is Paul trying to communicate with the literary structure of this passage? First, verse 8a contrasts verse 12b, while verses 8b and 12a correspond. Paul asserts that through natural birth man has his biological origin through a woman. Only Adam can say that God gave him life; all other men and women receive their life through birth. With this remark, Paul does not undermine the creation order. Indeed not, for in verse 12a he repeats what he says in 8b (woman is from man). With these two verses, he conveys the thought that in respect to natural birth men and women share equality.

Next, the content of verses 9a and 11b, strengthened by the adversative *however*, is a

forceful reminder of reality. And, verse 11 has a significant statement, “in the Lord.” Paul is saying, “Indeed, man was not created for the sake of the woman” (v. 9a), which is in accord with the creation order. “However,” he continues, “in the Lord, . . . man is nothing apart from woman” (v. 11b). This is a candid statement, to be sure! The second part is equally revealing: “Woman [was created] for the sake of the man” (v. 9b), which is followed by the rejoinder, “However, in the Lord, woman is nothing apart from man” (v. 11a).

Paul points out the interdependence of both the husband and the wife, who in the Lord wonderfully complement each other. Even though the husband is the head of his wife, he is dependent on her in numerous ways. In turn, a wife needs her husband just as much as he needs her. When death or divorce separates the couple, they experience a tearing apart of the fabric of marriage that bound them together. As long as the Lord grants them life, let husband and wife be bound in mutual love and service to one another.

Paul is not in the least diminishing the force of God’s creation order. He adds a second qualifying statement to these two verses: “and all things are from God.” He means to say that the husband has no advantage over the wife because Adam was created before Eve. In the Lord, both parties show reciprocity and complementary dependence and assistance, for all these things have been designed by God himself. Man and woman, everything that pertains to birth, relationships, and married life – all come from God.

Practical Considerations in 11:11-12

Christianity has been and remains a force that liberates women from oppression and servitude. In many other religions, women are owned from birth by their fathers and on marriage by their husbands. They lack freedom, are in bondage, and never acquire equality. Even in ancient Israel, a female was secondary to any male. In a particular line of the eighteen-petition prayer, a man renders thanks to God for making him neither a slave, a Gentile, nor a woman. Women were not considered worthy of studying the Scriptures and were denied an education.

The New Testament teaches especially the basic equality of the sexes. For instance, in both his Gospel and Acts, Luke mentions men and women in the same breath: Zachariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna, Ananias and Sapphira, Aquila and Priscilla. Paul states unequivocally that in Christ Jesus male and female are one (Gal. 3:28). He commends female workers in the cause of the gospel, among whom are Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, and Julia (Rom. 16:1-15).

The church has been blessed by the missionary endeavors of numerous women and sings their praises for extending Christ’s church. On the home front godly women are a quiet force to make the church strong and productive. A godly mother leads her little ones to Jesus and trains them in the fear of the Lord. Although women fill roles and functions that differ from those of men, both in the Christian home and in the church, they enjoy equality with men. Both depend

on each other (11:11), for both men and women realize that they in turn must depend on God for everything (11:12).

c. Man and Woman Again -- 11:13-16

A careful study of verses 13-15 discloses that Paul uses some phraseology that is identical to that of verses 4-7. These are the words that occur in both sections: *woman, uncovered, to pray, man, glory*. As the first two verses (vv. 2-3) form an introduction to this entire segment of the chapter, so verse 16 serves as a conclusion. In short, this segment is a beautifully constructed piece of literature that teaches an orderly development as Paul expounds the relationship of man and woman at worship.

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

a. *Command.* Paul now makes his concluding remarks and wants to involve his readers in thinking through the matter he has discussed. He tells them to look at the facts, use their minds, and judge for themselves. In another discourse, Paul said the same thing (see 10:15).

b. *Question.* With two rhetorical questions, Paul challenges his readers to respond. He expects a negative reply to the first one (v. 13) and a positive response to the second (vv. 14-15a). Following the sequence within the text, we now discuss the first query: "Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with uncovered head?" On the basis of Paul's earlier remark that a woman who prays or prophesies with an uncovered head dishonors her head (v. 5a), the reader immediately answers the question in the negative. Note that Paul omits the verb to prophesy in this question, for the emphasis here is not so much on function in the worship service as on manner.

Paul asks a question on propriety ("Is it proper?"). Attendance at and participation in a service dedicated to worshipping God requires proper decorum. When we worship the Lord, we approach God in his holiness. The angels covered their faces in God's presence and called to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa. 6:2-3). So Paul asks whether it is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered. She was expected to follow the cultural practices of that day, come to church in acceptable and appropriate dress, and participate in the worship service.

What does Paul mean with the expression *uncovered head*? It tells a woman that she ought to uphold her feminine honor and dignity in public by wearing a head covering. In his time and culture, women wore veils to be in marked distinction from men. God has created a distinct difference between men and women and he desires that his people mark this dissimilarity with appropriate dress. If a woman refuses to abide by these codes, she purposely negates the differentiation which God has designed.

In the next two verses (w. 14-15), Paul appeals to nature itself and demonstrates that the difference between male and female is based on regular natural order that originates in creation. In other words, Paul does not say that because Christian women are free in Jesus Christ they may abandon cultural mores. No, Paul wants them to live in harmony with the creation order and abide by the mores of their day. Is it proper for a Corinthian woman to worship God with an uncovered head? The answer is no.

14. Does not nature itself teach you that it is a disgrace to a man if he lets his hair grow long, 15. but if a woman lets her hair grow long, it is her glory? Because her long hair has been given to her as a covering.

a. “Does not nature itself teach you?” With the word “nature” Paul does not necessarily refer to the natural order that God has created. More than likely it is an appeal to “the way things are.” The NIV renders it “the nature of things.” This fits the context. Paul is appealing to custom as it symbolizes the distinction that God created between the sexes. He is not arguing that men must wear long hair and women short hair (whatever length those terms refer to) as if nature created some type of command or order. When Paul bases a relationship between man and women on the creative act of God in this chapter he says so plainly.

b. “[Does not nature teach] that it is a disgrace to a man if he lets his hair grow long?” Paul poses a rhetorical question that demands a positive reply. In the cultural context in which Paul moved, long hair was a disgrace for a man but glory for a woman. Jewish men cut their hair. Occasionally they permitted their hair to grow for a stipulated period because they had made a vow (see Acts 18:18; 21:24), but afterward they shortened it.

From coins, statues, and paintings that depict men in the Greco-Roman world of the first century, we know that men trimmed their hair. A few centuries earlier, the Spartans on the Peloponnesian peninsula wore long hair -- a fact duly noted by Greek authors, who comment that in Greece men usually cut their hair while women let it grow. In Paul’s day, the Corinthians followed the cultural trends of the Greeks and Romans and had their hair cropped. To have long hair, except for religious purposes or periods of mourning, was shameful to them.

c. “But if a woman lets her hair grow long, it is her glory.” The cultural contrast concerning hair lies in the words *disgrace* for men and *glory* for women. In this part of the text, Paul balances a negative expression with a positive.

The counterpart of the rhetorical question that expects an affirmative answer concerns the woman. Paul already has stated that it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off (v. 6). Now he gives the positive evaluation and asserts that long hair is a woman’s glory. He wisely omits details regarding length of hair and hairstyles, for these are often subject to fads and fashions and involve personal choices. The cultural pattern in Israel, for example, was that a

woman would not unloose her hair in public. Any woman who appeared in public with loose hair identified herself as a prostitute. It is not surprising, therefore, that Simon the Pharisee was horrified when a prostitute entered his home and wiped Jesus' feet with her hair (Luke 7:36-50).

But Paul is not talking about bound or loose hair; he states the objective fact that a woman's long hair is beautiful. Long hair is her husband's joy.

d. "Because her long hair has been given to her as a covering." The last part of verse 15, due to its brevity, presents problems for correctly understanding the text. What is the meaning of the words *as* and *covering*?

If we take the Greek in the order in which Paul presents it, this causal clause serves as a supportive answer to the preceding rhetorical question. Paul states the reason for a woman's long hair: it has been given to her as a covering. For the passive verb "has been given" we supply the subject God, who as Creator endows women with a natural covering. However, a difficulty in this clause lies in the Greek word *anti*, which some translate "as." *Anti* can signify "instead of." This interpretation says that one thing is replaced by another, namely, long hair replaces a veil or a covering. The clause, then, is translated "Her long hair is given her instead of a veil." *Anti* also can indicate that one thing is equivalent to another. Then it means "for, as" (e.g., "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" [Matt. 5:38]). Because of the entire context of Paul's discussion on proper decorum, scholars prefer this second reading.

But in verses 5b and 6, which are the counterpart of verse 15b, Paul tells the Corinthian women to cover their heads in public. He implies that they use a head covering in the form of a scarf or a veil. If the women refuse to do so, they renounce the authority of their husbands and repudiate the divine principle of headship (v. 3). The word *covering* in the last clause of verse 15 alludes to an article of clothing, that is, something made out of cloth.

The second clause of verse 15 summarizes, as a general statement, Paul's contention that the Corinthians should exhibit the creational differences of the sexes in their dress code. Not men but women have long hair that serves as a covering. Women show this created difference with the hair that nature has provided. Paul urges the Corinthian women to wear a head covering in addition to long hair as a symbol of honoring their husbands and showing submission to them.

In today's culture, the presence of a hat does not signify subordination of a wife to her spouse. And Paul is not asking a woman to wear a headpiece or to put up her hair. Rather, he wants a woman to be distinctively feminine in respect to hair and dress and thus fulfill the role that God has intended since creation. He wants her to be submissive to her husband in her femininity. "The unique beauty of a woman is gloriously manifest in the distinctive femininity portrayed by her hair and her attendance to feminine customs."

16. But if anyone is inclined to be contentious, we do not have such a custom, nor do the churches of God.

This is the conclusion to Paul's discussion on women's proper conduct. In a discourse on matters that affect personal predilections, a speaker or writer can expect to receive reaction from his audience or readers. Paul indicates as much with a conditional sentence that states a simple fact. Yes, there are people who wish to assert their individual rights. They probably use their slogan, "All things are permissible" (6:12; 10:23), and clamor for personal freedom. Even though Paul promotes Christian liberty, he teaches obedience to God's ordinances and precepts. He desires that all things be done decently and in order.

a. "But if anyone is inclined to be contentious." By using the term *anyone*, Paul speaks in generalities. He addresses neither the men, the women, nor a group of people. If *anyone*, even with good intentions, wants to argue about this matter, he will not receive a hearing from Paul. He has no time for someone whose mind is set on debating an issue for the sake of argument. The term that Paul has chosen to describe this person is "one who loves to argue." This person could be either a woman who asserts herself with respect to accepted norms and wants to be free or a man who comes to her defense to debate Paul. We are not given any details in this summary statement.

b. "We do not have such a custom, nor do the churches of God." Paul refuses to be challenged on his teachings that are based on the Old Testament Scriptures. He knows that the rest of the apostles support him, and therefore he confidently writes the personal pronoun *we*. This is not the so-called editorial *we*, but an inclusive pronoun that embraces other leaders in the churches.

What does the word *custom* connote in this setting? Calvin was of the opinion that Paul objected to the habit of arguing and disputing everything. Among Jewish and Gentile Christians, such conduct may have been evident especially in regard to matters of personal conduct. However, the passage itself conveys the sense that Paul has in mind the cultural practice of that day: that women wear head coverings during public worship services. He is saying that he, his fellow apostles, and the rest of the churches abide by the rule of being properly attired at worship. In brief, Paul appeals to the witness of the entire Christian church. Quite often in his writings he refers to all the churches. He brings the unity of the church to bear on the issue at hand. And he states implicitly that the contentious person, standing alone in this dispute, will have to face the whole church.