

This is my, hopefully faithful, historical and biblical argument for the practice of women wearing head coverings in corporate worship. It is not my attempt to go against the grain of things, or to try and do something *new*, or to make people uncomfortable. What will be laid out before you truly are my convictions regarding what the word of God says.

The topic of head coverings is not just mentioned in the Bible, but I believe it is defended. There are 16 verses given on the topic of head coverings. The main text that I will be discussing is 1Corinthians 11:1-16. Daniel Wallace said that the doctrine of head coverings is "... in some respects, the easiest to defend exegetically and the hardest to swallow practically."<sup>1</sup> What might make this practice uneasy for some is because when a woman wears a head covering "it forces," says Jeremy Gardiner, "everyone in church to think about the topic, and some just aren't ready to or don't wish to."<sup>2</sup> Now, while I want to be patient and gentle with people, my ultimate allegiance is not with people, but to the word of God. If the word of God teaches this, and I believe it clearly does, then I am to submit myself to the word of God, at whatever the cost(s). Lastly, we all have our presuppositions. They are impossible to avoid and not bring to the text. I hope that the presuppositions that are brought to this study is that the word of God is final and the supreme authority in life, over emotions and affections, or over what we think we believe. It is important not accept any old argument against this doctrine simply because you do not want this doctrine to be true. With that said, may God be praised and His word be rightly divided.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Wallace, *What is the Head Covering in 1Cor. 11:2-16 and Does it Apply to Us Today*, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://bible.org/article/what-head-covering-1-cor-112-16-and-does-it-apply-us-today>.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Gardiner, *Head Covering: A Forgotten Christian Practice for Modern Times* (Edmonton, AB, 2016), 2.

## The History

R.C. Sproul Jr., in speaking about the practice of head coverings and why it's not practiced in churches anymore said, "I do know this, that until fifty years ago, every woman in every church covered her head ... What has happened in the last fifty years? We've had a feminist movement."<sup>3</sup> I do believe that the church has drunk the Kool-Aid in some sense regarding the world's definitions of the roles and relationships between male and female. Just look at the radical and rampant push for egalitarianism within "conservative" Christian churches. Certainly, some more than others, and there are some who are more liberal than others. But, the wave of feminism has crashed up against the doors of the church and to some extent the waters have seeped in.

The practice of head coverings is **not** a *new doctrine*. In fact, it has been the majority view and practice of the church from the beginning.

## The Early Church

- Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD)<sup>4</sup>
- Hippolytus (170-236 AD)<sup>5</sup>
- Tertullian (185-225 AD)<sup>6</sup>
- John Chrysostom (347-407 AD)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R.C. Sproul Jr., *Should Christians Only Sing Psalms in Local Churches*, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghgMzXprp4M>.

<sup>4</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Instructor," in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 207-296.

<sup>5</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, "Canons of the Church of Alexandria," in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, vol. 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 257-258.

<sup>6</sup> Tertullian, "On the Veiling of Virgins," in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 4, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 27-37.

<sup>7</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homily XXVI," *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church (Oxford; London: John Henry Parker; J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1839), 348-368.

- Jerome (347-420 AD): Speaks of it as an “apostolic command”<sup>8</sup>
- Augustine (354-430 AD): Also said that “the Apostle commands women”<sup>9</sup>

### The Middle Ages – The Twentieth Century

- Church Councils – Autun, Angers, Auxere, Synod of Rome<sup>10</sup>
- Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD)<sup>11</sup>
- William Tyndale (1494-1536 AD)<sup>12</sup>
- Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD)<sup>13</sup>
- John Knox (1514-1572 AD)<sup>14</sup>
- John Gill (1697-1771)<sup>15</sup>
- C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892 AD)<sup>16</sup>
- D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)<sup>17</sup>

Head coverings were practiced in “virtually all churches,” says Gardiner, “up until the beginning of the twentieth century. This date is interesting because this coincides with the first wave of *feminism*.”<sup>18</sup> The massive drop in the practice of head coverings in the church is found in the 1960s and 70s. There were even organizations during this time that actively sought to

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<sup>8</sup> Jerome, “The Letters of St. Jerome: LETTER CXLVII,” in *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley, vol. 6, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), 289–295.

<sup>9</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “Letters of St. Augustin: LETTER CCXLV” in *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. G. Cunningham, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 587-588.

<sup>10</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary of the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. Fr. Fabian R. Larcher, Beth Mortensen, and Daniel Keating, (Green Bay, WI, Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2018).

<sup>12</sup> William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treaties and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scripture*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge, University Press, 1848), 219, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://archive.org/details/doctrinaltreatis00tynduoft/page/n299/mode/2up>.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Marriage,” accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.covenanter.org/subjects-1/2015/6/29/headcoverings>.

<sup>14</sup> John Knox, “The First Blast, to Awake Women Degenerate,” *The Works of John Knox*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: J. Thin, 1854), 377, 392–393.

<sup>15</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, vol. 2, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 681–687.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Satan Departing, Angels Ministering*, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/satan-departing-angels-ministering/#flipbook/>. Also see Charles Spurgeon, “Angelic Protection in Appointed Ways,” *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 265.

<sup>17</sup> David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible, Vol. 1: God the Father, God the Son*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 110.

<sup>18</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 15.

infiltrate the church and eliminate the church of this practice. The National Organization for Women (NOW) is a feminist organization founded by Betty Friedan. Gardiner records that in 1968 they “rallied their troops to have a ‘*national unveiling*.’” Here is what they said:

Because the wearing of a head covering by women at religious services is a symbol of subjection with many churches, NOW recommends that all chapters undertake an effort to have all women participate in a “national unveiling” by sending their head coverings to the task force chairman. At the spring meeting of the task force of women and religion, these veils will be publicly burned to protest the second-class status of women in all churches.<sup>19</sup>

Also, in the 1960s *The New York Times* published an article showing how “feminism was largely responsible,” records Gardiner, “for shutting down the industry of millinery (manufacturing of hats and headwear).”<sup>20</sup> They said, “But as the beehive hairdo gained popularity in the 1960s and the feminist movement made it acceptable for women to leave their hats at home, the industry faded.”<sup>21</sup> In a recent *Renewing Your Mind* podcast, R.C. Sproul said, “It does disturb me, that the ... tradition of the woman covering her head in America did not pass away until we saw a cultural revolt against the authority of the husband over the wife, not just in the home, or in the church, but in the whole of culture.”<sup>22</sup> We must not let our worship be governed by the culture in any way at any time. God’s word and God’s word alone governs, shapes, forms, and informs how we are to worship.

### **Apostolic Tradition**

I now want to move into our text, 1Corinthians 11:1-16. I want to begin in verse 1 and systematically and exegetically work our way through every verse. Every verse will be dealt with and explained in its proper context.

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<sup>19</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 16.

<sup>21</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> R. C. Sproul, “To Cover or Not to Cover,” *Renewing Your Mind with R. C. Sproul*, August 27, 2021, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/to-cover-or-not-to-cover/id110916650?i=1000533363428>.

Verse 1, *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”* Paul is an Apostle. He had just finished His defense to his apostleship to the church at Corinth in chapter 9, and fully justifies his position in 2Corinthians 11. But Paul is an example of the Christian life. He tells the church to imitate him, just as he imitates Christ. And, we, likewise, should follow and look like Christians. The same holds true for us. People should follow us in as much as we set the example of how Christians are to talk, walk, act, and think. Even imitate our worship as it is in accordance with the word of God. Your church is to be an example to follow in what is true and right biblical worship.

Verse 2, *“Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.”* First, Paul is going into a section of “traditions” or practices that he has handed down to the church for them to observe. This major section begins in chapter 11:1 and ends in chapter 14:40. This main section is broken up into three(four) smaller sections. They are:

- Head coverings (11:1-16)
- The Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)
- The Exercise of Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)
- An argument could be made that the gospel/resurrection could fit into this entire section we well (15:1-58).

This section of text is all within the context of corporate worship (cf. 11:4, 5, 18, 33; 12:12, 13; 14:23, 26, 34). And, Paul “praises” (v.2) the church at Corinth for remembering him and keeping the traditions that he has handed down to them. Paul then moves on to remind them and correct them about particular traditions that he has handed down. Later, Paul will say that he “does not praise” (v. 17) them for how they have practiced the Lord’s Supper and Spiritual gifts. The first part in this section is to remind and inform (vv. 11:2-16), and the second section (“praise not,” vv. 11:17-14:40) is to rebuke and correct. The Corinthian church obviously practiced head

coverings because Paul praised them that they “kept” or “held firmly” to it. What the church lacked was understanding, or they needed clarity as to why they practiced it. It is even possible that Paul was not only adding clarification, but also correcting a small group who were against the practice (cf. 11:16).

I now want to look at the term “traditions” in verse 2. In the Greek text the term is *παραδοσις* (*paradosis*). This term is translated traditions, teachings, ordinances, directions, and commandments. The leading Greek Lexicon, *Bauer-Danker-Arnt-Gringrich* (BDAG) defines this term as: 1) handing over someone to authorities, 2) the content of instruction that has been handed down. And, within the context of 1Cor. 11:2 BDAG defines it as *of individual teaching*. Paul at times distinguished his teaching from the Lord’s teaching (cf. 1Cor. 7:6, 10).

Nevertheless, that does not mean that Paul’s writings are any less authoritative. All Scripture is God-breathed (cf. 2Tim 3:16), and Paul’s words are equally authoritative as the words of Christ, because Christ gave him that authority (1Cor. 7:40, 11:23; 1Thess. 4:8; 2Pet. 3:15-16).

The term *παραδοσις* is used 13 times in the New Testament. For the most part it is used in terms of the traditions of men. But, three times it is used as authoritative apostolic traditions. We are not to be governed by the traditions of men, in doing so we make void the word of God. But Apostolic tradition has been given by Christ to the Apostles and has been handed down to the church to be practiced throughout the ages. The term is found in:

1. Mt. 15:2 – Tradition of men
2. Mt. 15:3 – Tradition of men
3. Mt. 15:6 – Tradition of men
4. Mk. 7:3 – Tradition of men
5. Mk. 7:5 – Tradition of men
6. Mk. 7:8 – Tradition of men
7. Mk. 7:9 – Tradition of men
8. Mk. 7:13 – Tradition of men
9. 1Cor. 11:2 – *Apostolic Tradition*
10. Gal. 1:4 – Tradition of men

11. Col. 2:8 – Tradition of men
12. 2Thess. 2:15 – *Apostolic Tradition*
13. 2Thess. 3:6 – *Apostolic Tradition*

Here are the three texts that deal with Apostolic traditions:

- 1Cor. 11:2 – “*Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things **and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you**” (cf. 1Cor. 11:23: Lord’s Supper)*
- 2Thess. 2:15 – “*Therefore, brethren, stand fast and **hold the traditions** which you **were taught**, whether by word or our epistle.*
- 2Thess. 3:6 – “*But we **command you**, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and **not according to the tradition** which he **received from us.**”*

It is clear that there were traditions handed down by the Apostles whether by word or epistle that was to be practiced by the churches. This was even a matter of fellowship (cf. 2Thess. 3:6). And, given the reality that we lack nothing in regards to God’s revelation for His people, all of these Apostolic traditions have been perfectly persevered for us in God’s word. The teaching that Paul is about to instruct the church at Corinth in, regarding head coverings, is that he wants them to know.

1. What the symbol means
2. Why the churches practice it
3. What it communicates when we ignore his instructions

### **Authority**

There is great meaning in symbols and great significance in the meaning, purpose, and function of symbols. This is especially true in Christian liturgies. Symbols are given as gifts to God’s people. They are powerful and great. Think of the cross, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and in our study, head coverings. Head coverings symbolize something truly great.

What is symbolized, or better put, what is *communicated* when men worship with *uncovered* heads and women worship with *covered* heads? In Verse 3, Paul writes, “*But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is man, and the head*

*of Christ is God.*” Men and women are both created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). God has created men and women equal in value and dignity. And, they both need each other (cf. 1Cor. 11:11). And, while they are created with equal value and dignity, that does not mean that men and women were not created with different roles, authority, and functions. They most certainly were/are and the Scripture makes this point very clear.

The same holds true with God, Christ, and with Christ and the church, which is our supreme example,. This equal, yet distinctive reality is clearly seen in the incarnation of the Son of God. Jesus Christ, who is Son of God and Son of man. Or, as we confess, “Jesus Christ is very God and very man.” In His incarnation and while He walked this earth, Christ submitted Himself to the Father. It is important to remember that the Son fully and perfectly submits to the Father *in time and space* because His will is fully and perfectly one with the Father *from all eternity*.

When Paul uses the term “Christ,” he is referring to the incarnate and anointed one. The church, likewise, although are one in Christ, co-heirs with Christ, loved equally by the Father, and is the body of Christ, nevertheless, the body still has a head. The church submits to Christ who is the head of the church.

In verse 3, Paul shows that there is a line, a hierarchy, or a taxis of authority: God – Christ (the Anointed and Incarnate One) – Man – Woman.<sup>23</sup> Understand and know that different roles do not mean different value. Value comes from *being (essence)* not roles. Christ, the God-man, is no less valuable than the Father because they share the same essence. The Holy Spirit is no less valuable than the Son because they share the same essence, even though He said he

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<sup>23</sup> The taxis of authority is clear in Paul’s usage of identifiable terms, God (*theos*), Christ (*christos*), man (*anēr*), and woman (*gunē*). The order is simple: God, incarnate Christ, male, and female. Had the Apostle Paul wanted to put all of humanity under Christ he would have used the term ἀνθρώπινος (*anthropinos*), or ἄνθρωπος (*anthropos*). These two words speak of the human race/human beings. Now there is no dispute that Christ is head over all of humanity, but that is not the argument that Paul is making, therefore a moot point. Paul is clearly drawing a line of authority from God to woman.



would not speak of Himself, but would glorify the Son. Different roles or functions do not determine greater or lesser value. For example, a police officer has authority over you. A boss has authority over you. A parent has authority over their children. But, the police officer, the boss, and the parent do not hold greater value just because they hold a position of authority. Jesus said it like this, “The Master is not greater than his servant” (Jn. 15:12). We cannot dismiss or get upset at authority especially when God ordains it. We cannot be afraid of authority, or sin by seeking to subvert authority given by God.

Therefore, Paul begins and lays the foundational reason for head coverings. His foundational reason is grounded in the *Creation Order*: God (the Supreme Being and source of all things) – Christ (the God-man, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation) – Man (created in the image of God and the glory of God) – Woman (created in the image of God and the glory of man). This means that the woman submits to the man, just as the man submits to Christ (the God-man), just as Christ (the God-man) submitted to the Father.

Verses 4-6, *“Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.”*

These are truly fascinating and difficult verses. Much debate has gone into these verses. What is Paul saying here? Remember that Paul, has just laid out his main argument from the Creation Order. He then proceeds to give us an explanation, or an interpretive principle for head coverings taken from the taxis rooted in creation. He gives a negative explanation (vv. 4-6) and a positive explanation (vv. 7-10). I want to first look at the negative.

Paul says that it is a shame and dishonor to Christ for the man to pray and prophesy with his head covered. He also says that it is a shame and dishonor to man for the woman to pray and prophesy with her head uncovered. Following the chain, the ultimate dishonor and shame when men and women practice this wrongly is that they bring dishonor and shame upon God, their Creator, Sustainer, Provider, and Redeemer. Why is it a shame and dishonor for a man to have his head covered? And, why is it a shame for a woman to have her head uncovered? Simply put, because it actually means *something*! That is, the practice of men and women to have uncovered and covered heads symbolizes and silently proclaims a glorious truth. They are saying that they are submitting themselves to the God of heaven and earth, and are submitting themselves to His will and His ways. They are saying that their ultimate love and devotion is to God and not the world. And, the meaning of that symbol is an important reality that needs to be followed and practiced.

I want to go down an important side trail for a moment before we wrap up verses 4-6. And, that is the idea of *praying and prophesying*. What does Paul mean by this? 1) It is clear that both men and women are to do it. 2) It is clear that Paul is in the context of corporate worship. 3) Paul is not talking about the charismata, because praying is not a sign gift. 4) Prophesying does not just mean foretelling divine revelation. It can be much broader and simply speak of any form of the proclamation of the word of God, i.e. praying the word of God, reading the word of God, proclaiming the word of God, and singing the word of God (cf. 1Chronc. 25:1-3; 1Sam. 10:5). Here are the words of John Gill on this particular text, look at what he had to say in regards to Paul's usage of praying and prophesying:

This is to be understood of praying and prophesying *in public*, and not in private; and *not to be restrained* to the person that is the mouth of the congregation to God in prayer, or who preaches to the people in the name of God; but to be applied to *every individual person* that attends public worship, that joins in prayer with the minister, and hears the word preached

by him, which is meant by prophesying; for not foretelling future events is here meant, but explaining the word of God, the prophecies of the Old Testament, or any part of Scripture, unless singing of psalms should rather be designed.<sup>24</sup>

What I believe Paul is doing when he speaks of praying and prophesying is describing all of what takes place in corporate worship by way of a synecdoche. This is a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole. And, we see this elsewhere in Scripture. For example, when James says, “*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*” Is that all there is to it? In order to practice true religion before God is to just visit orphans and widows, and keep away from the world? If we just do that is everything ok? We don’t have to go to church. We don’t have to read our Bibles. We don’t have to pray. Just visit widows and orphans and keep yourself from worldly stuff. Is that what James means? Of course not. What James is doing is using a synecdoche. He is using two very important aspects of religion to sum up the whole. And, this is what Paul is doing. These two elements, praying and prophesying (proclamation of the word of God), are exactly what takes place in the corporate worship setting in prayer, reading of the Scriptures, the singing of the word of God, the proclamation of the word of God, and the administration of the sacraments. Praying and prophesying sum up the chief elements of what is to be done in corporate worship.

So, to sum up verses 4-6, Paul is saying that when a woman does not cover her head in corporate worship, and thus recognize and proclaim God’s ordained authority, it is shameful to her *as if* she had been publicly shamed by having her head shaved. Paul is not giving the option of either wear a head covering or shave your head and everything will be ok. No, it is to show the

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<sup>24</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, vol. 2, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 683 (italics mine).

importance and severity of what happens when a woman does not wear a head covering. Paul is using very strong, possibly even hyperbolic type language to strengthen and emphasize his point.

Verses 7-10a, “*For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*” Paul then moves to somewhat of a more positive explanation, or interpretative principle. Paul says why women must have a symbol of authority on their head is because of the authority established at the beginning of creation itself. Again, God (the Head and source of all things) – Christ (the eternal Son of God, the eternal image of God who became flesh and dwelt among us) – Man (Adam: who is said to be a son of God, Lk. 3:38) – Woman (Eve: who was taken out of man). Following Paul’s line of thinking in verses 7-10a, Gardiner asks four key questions and gives their answers.<sup>25</sup> This is important when putting Paul’s argument in its proper context.

- Q. Where do we find man being created in the image of God?
  - a. Genesis 1
- Q. Where do we find woman being created from man, or being “the glory of man”?
  - a. Genesis 2
- Q. Where do we find that the woman was created from man, not the other way around?
  - a. Genesis 2
- Q. Where do we find sin entering into the world?
  - a. Genesis 3

Paul’s foundational argument is not only based in creation, but God’s perfect creation, prior to the Fall, sin, death, and misery. “Headship and authority,” writes Gardiner, “is God’s original intent. It is not a post-Fall disaster but a pre-Fall masterpiece.”<sup>26</sup> Headship and authority does not come post-Fall. But what is an effect of the Fall is the struggle women will have to submit

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<sup>25</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 27.

themselves to their husband’s authority (cf. Gen. 3:16), and men will be tempted to be tyrants over their wives. The curse brings forth a disruption and distortion of God’s good created order, and the urge and desire that comes from the Fall to walk in that disorder must be fought against at all cost.

There are also other indicators of Adam’s headship over Eve before the Fall. 1) God said that He was going to have/create a *helper* comparable/suitable *for the man*. 2) Adam *named* Eve. 3) Although both sinned, it was God who went to Adam. And, it was Adam who bore the responsibility. 4) Adam not only had headship over Eve, but Adam was head of the entire human race. Here is a chart that might help clarify some of the things going on in this section of Paul’s argument.<sup>27</sup>

<b>Men (uncovered)</b>	<b>Women (covered)</b>
Man is the head of woman (1Cor. 11:3)	Woman submit to the proper male authority in their lives as head (1Cor. 11:3)
Man was created directly by God from the dust and is the “glory of God” (1Cor. 11:7-8)	Woman was created by God from man’s rib and is the “glory of man” (1Cor. 7-8)
Man was not created for the woman’s sake (1Cor. 11:9)	Woman was created for the man’s sake (1Cor. 11:9)

God uses symbols. God uses the lamb, the unleavened bread, Baptism (water), the Lord’s Supper (bread and wine), the temple, marriage, the fig tree, etc. God also uses people as symbols.

Ezekiel had to lay on his side for 390 days. Isaiah had to walk naked and barefoot for 3 years. And, Hosea had to marry a prostitute. Every symbol used by God is significant and important,

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<sup>27</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 28.

and they point us to a greater reality. Also, the symbol cannot be changed. The change of the symbol changes what God was using it to point to. The symbols of praying and prophesying with uncovered and covered heads symbolize God's ordained and created authority: God – Christ – Man – Woman. It ultimately points and proclaims our submission to Christ as the head of our body, and to God as sovereign over our lives.

### **The Angels**

In verse 10, there is a very interesting phrase, and becomes another reason why Paul commands the practice of head coverings in corporate worship, "*because of the angels.*" Martyn Lloyd-Jones said:

A woman should have her head covered to show that she is under the authority of the man; in addition to that, Paul says, she should be covered because of the presence of angels. In other words, the Scripture teaches that when Christian's meet together, and when they gather together in prayer, then the angels of God are present, and the women are to be covered when they take part in public prayer because of the presence of the angels. It is a tremendous and remarkable thing. Let us bear it in mind.<sup>28</sup>

Verse 10, "*For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.*" Regardless of one's interpretation, misunderstanding, or confusion, the Apostle gives that one of the reasons why women are to wear a head covering is because of the angels. Notice the phrasing, "***For this reason ... because of the angels.***" Gardiner writes, "We don't seek to understand what this verse means so that if we do 'get it' it will become evidence for head coverings. Rather, because *it is a reason*, we therefore seek to understand it."<sup>29</sup>

The Bible is clear that there are two groups of angels. What we might call "good angels" and "bad angels." There is the heavenly host that are in the very presence of God and His messengers, and there are the fallen angels, or what we call demons that do the bidding of the

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<sup>28</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *God the Father, God the Son*, 110.

<sup>29</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 32.

prince of darkness. The question is, is this verse speaking of both groups (good and bad) or, speaking of a particular group? In the Greek text the article “the” is given before the word angels, *δια τους ἀγγέλους* (because of the angels). This phrase is pointing to a particular group.

There are many interpretations as to who this group is. Augustine, Peter Lombard, Aquinas, Gritus, and Estius identify “the angels” as the holy angels who as hosts of heaven participate in the worship of the church. Augustine argues that Paul’s allusion to the covering of the head here “is pleasing to the holy angels” on account of the purity and propriety of the heavenly realm.<sup>30</sup> The next step to understanding this verse is, if Paul tells us we need to practice this “because of the angels,” we have to figure out why. Why practice this because of them? I have heard several interpretations. There is only one I believe that does true justice and adds great weight to Paul’s argument and that is women are to cover their heads *because it is for the benefit of the angels*.

The case has been made that the purpose of head coverings is to provide a visual symbol of God’s created order to the gathered church. Now, if angels are *a reason* why we are to obey this command, then it presupposes that they must be watching us in worship. Therefore, I understand this practice, being for the benefit of the angels, to display and rightly symbolize the created order to all, both visible and invisible. Paul would write in Ephesians 3:10, “...*that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*.” Scripture elsewhere teaches that angels with outstretched necks long and desire to look and see the glory of God in salvation, the gospel working in man’s lives, the outworking of it in their lives, and in their worship. 1Peter 1:10-12 says:

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<sup>30</sup> Augustine of Hippo, “On the Trinity,” in *St. Augustin: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur West Haddan, vol. 3, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 159.

***Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.***

From their (the angels) perspective they see a fallen, but redeemed race who is worshiping and displaying the glory of God in a proper context. The gospel is foreign to them. They had no Savior come to them. God did not come in the form of angels to redeem them. So, to see all of this must be an amazing and glorious thing to behold. In the proper context of right worship, they see equals, male and female, worshiping God in spirit and in truth. They also see the design of the Created Order of authority displayed, symbolized by uncovered and covered heads. There is no usurping of roles and authority that came by way of the Fall. They see no usurping of roles and authority that they witnessed when Satan and his followers, who were in the very presence of God, rebel. Instead, there is the rightful submission of God, Christ, man, and woman being put on display. And, if this interpretation is correct, think of what they are seeing and thinking when we gather for worship. How do our churches look if we are disobeying this command?

I want to end this verse with this. Regardless of the interpretation, Paul clearly used the angels *as a reason* as to why we should practice head coverings in worship. A child can speculate and theorize all day long as to why their father commanded them to do something. The fact still remains that the child is still responsible and must do the command regardless of whether they fully understand it or not.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 38-39.



## **Nature**

John Murray, who was a respected professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, theologian, and author wrote, “Long hair is an indicator from ‘nature’ of the differentiation between men and women, and so the head covering *required* is in line with what ‘nature’ teaches.”<sup>32</sup>

Verses 13-15, “*Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.*” In these verses the Apostle Paul appeals to nature, that is, what is plain and evident in nature itself. Paul appeals to a person’s sense of what is right and what is wrong, based upon what nature itself teaches us about male and female by way of hair length.

Paul begins by asking a rhetorical question in verse 13, “*Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*” Right now, stop reading and answer that question before you proceed. How did you answer Paul’s question? Was your answer, “Oh yeah, it’s completely proper. There is nothing improper about it.” Is that the conclusion Paul wants you to come to by raising this question? No. The answer is clearly, “No, it is not proper that a woman pray with her head uncovered.” Ok, therefore, what is proper? Answer: that a woman visibly proclaims that she joyfully accepts God’s authority structure in her life by praying to God with her head covered.

When Paul begins this section by saying, “*Judge among yourselves,*” he is not giving the church the option as to whether or not they want to practice head coverings. As if to say, “Judge

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<sup>32</sup> John Murray, *Head Coverings and Decorum in Worship: A Letter to Mr. V. Connors*, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.headcoveringmovement.com/articles/head-coverings-and-decorum-in-worship-a-letter-by-john-murray>.

for yourself and if you judge that it is ok then do it, if not, don't do it." That's nonsense. What he is doing is setting up his nature argument. He is calling his readers to think critically and to think rightly. This is not the only time that Paul uses this phrase. Hopefully, another text will give a better sense of what Paul is saying when he says, "*Judge among yourselves.*"

In 1Corinthians 10:15-16 Paul writes, "*I speak as to wise men; **judge for yourselves** what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*" In the section of 1Corinthians 10:16-21 you have:

- The cup of blessings is the blood of Christ and a participation in Christ (cf. 1Cor. 10:16)
- The bread we break is the body of Christ and a participation in Christ (cf. 1Cor. 10:16)
- The sacrifice to demons and drinking the cup of demons is fellowship with and a participation in demons (cf. 1Cor. 10:20-21)

In 1Corinthinas 10, Paul is not giving the church the option of being allowed to partake with one or the other. He is saying, "Be wise. Use your minds. Think with me. Judge righteously and correctly. Judge the matter and evidence for yourself." The answer is implied. The right judgment is to partake and fellowship with Christ. Likewise, "*Judge among yourselves,*" is it proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered? No, just as nature itself teaches.

Now, what does nature teach us? First, I want to begin with the term "nature." The word is φυσικς (phusis). BDAG defines this term as *the regular or established order of things*. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines φυσικς in 1Cor. 11:14 as "the only passage in which Paul has φυσικς in the nominative and absolute. Here, of course, 'nature' is personified as the teacher of men...it simply represents the general order of nature and its only task is to remind us of what is seemly and becoming." So, the usage and point are to teach and to show

what we already know. That is, what is intrinsic. Again, Paul is referring to the Created Order, nature, and not to some cultural opinion or cultural option.<sup>33</sup>

The question that has to be answered now is, “Why does Paul move to hair length to support his argument for head coverings?” Paul compares and makes parallels between what is to be shown at specific times (corporate worship) and what is to be shown all the time (everyday). Paul says that we know it is right for women to pray covered since nature has already shown that it is fitting by giving women a natural covering of hair. There is a command for an artificial covering at specific times (corporate worship) and this is in line with what she already possesses (all the time). In the same way, it is right for men to pray uncovered because nature has determined that men keep their hair short, so that it does not become a covering. Just as in nature, hair is to be distinguished among sexes: men short hair and women long hair, so too they are to be distinguished in corporate worship with covered and uncovered heads.

I want to briefly look at the words covered, uncovered, and covering. There is usually the objection that the hair *is* the covering because Paul says “*her hair is given to her for a covering.*” So, the argument is there is no need for an artificial covering because long hair equals covering that is commanded by Paul. But that is not what the words “covered” and “covering” mean in verses 4-14.

- In verses 5 & 13:
  - *Uncovered*: ακατακαλυπτος – not covered with clothing; exposed
- In verses 6 & 7
  - *Not covered*: (ου) κατακαλύπτω – to be or become overlaid or covered as if with a veil
  - Be covered:                   ,,                   ,,
  - Not covered:               ,,                   ,,

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<sup>33</sup> It is important to point out that Paul never, not once, appeals to culture. Regardless if women of that time wore head coverings or not, it is simply not a part of his argument. The burden of proof is to show from the text where Paul appeals to culture as an argument for the practice of head coverings without reading it into the text. Exegetically, it cannot be done. See R. C. Sproul, “Principle and Custom,” *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: 2016), 120-122.

- In verse 15
  - *Covering*: περιβολαιον – that which can be wrapped around, a cloak, a wrap, a robe.

So, in the context of a woman's long hair, her hair is her glory and can be wrapped around. This is distinguished between men who are not to have hair that they can wrap around. Now a question can be raised, "What is the significance of long hair and a head covering?" Again, it is what is being symbolized. A woman's long hair is her natural covering, her glory. It is a sign of her glory as an image bearer of God. A woman's hair displays who she is as God created her.

And, this is where the head covering is given great meaning. 1Peter 3:3-6 (cf. 1Tim 2:9-10) says:

*Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*

What a woman does when she covers her glory is that she puts the sign of submission on, not only to her earthly head, but also to her ultimate head who is Christ. Covering her glory becomes the sign of gentleness, reverence, and respect. And, not only do the people of God recognize this, so does the world, and so do the angels.<sup>34</sup> The angels recognize this as women who are honoring the supremacy of Christ, even over their very lives. It really is breathtakingly beautiful. It is not a sign of shame put on by a tyrant, nor a yoke of bondage. But it is a sign of joyful submission that highly honors God. For a woman to cover (artificial covering) her glory (her hair) she is following the example of Christ, who is the glory of God the Father, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied Himself by coming, tabernacling, and covering His glory (cf. Is. 53:2; Jn. 1:12) by taking upon Himself the form of a servant and being found in the

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<sup>34</sup> Even the seraphim cover themselves in the very presence and glory of God (cf. Is. 6:2).

likeness of man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death of the cross (cf. Phil. 2:5-8).

<b>Gender</b>	<b>How one is to appear when praying and prophesying <u>vv. 4-5</u></b>	<b>How one is to appear in everyday life <u>vv. 14-15</u></b>	<b>What happens if someone disregards these gender distinctions <u>vv. 4-5; vv. 14-15</u></b>
Men	<u>Uncovered</u> Nothing artificial on their head	<u>Uncovered</u> By their hair kept short	Dishonor
Women	<u>Covered</u> Something artificial that covers their head	<u>Covered</u> By their hair kept long	Dishonor

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### **Universal Church Practice**

I am coming to the end of the section of this text that deals with head coverings. The last verse of this section is Verse 16, “*But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.*” Mary A. Kassian who taught Women’s Studies and is a Distinguished Professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote, “Paul taught all the churches this custom and he expected them to follow it. In this final statement [v.16] he cuts off all further argument by appealing to universal Christian usage.”<sup>36</sup> Verse 16, shows that there were obviously people in the Corinthian church who had a problem with the command to practice head coverings in corporate worship. But Paul tells the church that if “these people”

<sup>35</sup> Gardiner, *Head Covering*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Wheaton, IL: 1990), 100.

want to be contentious then they stand alone. *Every church* held to the practice of head coverings.

Now, some might think that the above statement is a bold claim to say that *all* churches practiced head coverings when he just said in verse 16 that “*we have no such practice/custom.*” But the question that has to be answered is, “No such practice of *what?*” Its closes antecedent is what defines the practice that Paul is referring to. We see what Paul is talking about by looking at the preceding verses, that is, verses 13-16.

Verse 13, “*Judge for yourselves,*” as we have already seen, is the beginning of a new section, and a brand new argument. This section is Paul’s argument from nature. And, the question that is clearly in view of this section is, “*Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*” He then proceeds to make his argument dealing with the length of men and women’s hair. But what is important to point out is that the closes antecedent in the text is the “practice” of praying and prophesying *uncovered* in verse 13. The “practice” of head coverings is found three verses previous in verse 10. So, what is the “contentious” person advocating? They are advocating for women to pray with their heads uncovered.

So, what does Paul mean when he says, “*...we have no such practice nor do any of the churches of God?*”? No such practice of what? They have no such practice of women praying with their heads uncovered. And, not only in Corinth, but also in every other church of God as well. Paul’s statement here eliminates any type of local, or cultural custom that was only for the church at Corinth. Churches that were in Jerusalem, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, etc., all had and consisted of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but they were Christians, and they all practiced head coverings in corporate worship. R.C. Sproul made this fascinating statement, he said, “The wearing of fabric head coverings in worship was universally the practice of Christian

women until the twentieth century. What happened? Did we suddenly find some biblical truth to which the saints for thousands of years were blind? Or, were our biblical views of women gradually eroded by the modern feminist movement that has infiltrated the Church of Jesus Christ?”<sup>37</sup>

### **Christian Liberty**

I want to very briefly speak on the idea of Christian liberty. That is, decisions that Christians have a right to make on any given particular issue that is not commanded by God.<sup>38</sup> Some might think that this practice is an infringement upon a Christian woman’s liberty, or even a Christian man’s liberty. I want to look quickly back at the text. First, Paul does make it very clear when he is addressing a Christian’s liberty to do or not do something (cf. Rom. 14:1-15:13; 1Cor. 10:23-33). But, in verse 10, Paul says that a woman “*ought to have a symbol of authority on her head.*” This word “*ought*” (ὀφείλω) has the sense of *to be or become bound by obligation*. It does not carry the idea or connotation of choice. This term is used elsewhere in this sense in Ephesians 5:28, “*So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.*” And, 1John 4:11, “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*” It would be silly to read these two verses and see the obligation of the “*ought*” and say that it is an infringement of one’s Christian liberty for them to have to love their wife or to love the brethren. And, just as we *ought* to love our spouses, and *ought* to love fellow believers in Christ, we *ought* to practice head coverings in corporate worship. This practice, given by the Apostle Paul, is an apostolic, prescriptive command given to be observed and applied throughout all ages.

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted by Jeremy Gardiner in *Head Covering*, p. 51 and attributed to Greg Price’s article “Head Coverings in Scripture.”

<sup>38</sup> This idea and the addressing of Christian liberty fit seamlessly within the context of Paul’s address of the conscience in 1Corinthians 8-10.

## Summary

My summary will be brief. I am not going to deal with the common objections to head coverings in this paper. What I wanted to do was provided a faithful, contextual, and consistent exegesis of 1Corinthians 11:1-16. And, I wanted to show that this practice was not cultural, local, or given only for the first century church. It has been shown and argued that head coverings are a Christian practice that is to take place in corporate worship and that it is rooted in:

1. Apostolic Tradition
2. The Creation Order
3. Angels
4. Nature
5. Universal Church Practice
6. Conscience

May God be praised as we seek to conform our lives to His word and seek to worship Him as He has commanded us in spirit and in truth. To God alone be the glory.