

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Behavior in Worship

1. What men and women should or should not wear on their heads
2. Proper conduct during the Lord's Supper
3. And the use and abuse of Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 [11:1] *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

[2] *Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and **maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.*** [3] *But I want you to understand that the **head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*** [4] *Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered **dishonors his head,*** [5] *but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered **dishonors her head,** since it is the same **as if her head were shaven.*** [6] *For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.* [7] *For a man ought **not to cover his head,** since **he is the image and glory of God,** but woman **is the glory of man.*** [8] *For man was not made from woman, **but woman from man.*** [9] *Neither was man created for woman, **but woman for man.*** [10] *That is why a wife ought to have **a symbol of authority on her head,** because of the angels.* [11] *Nevertheless, **in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;*** [12] *for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. **And all things are from God.*** [13] *Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered?* [14] *Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, [15] but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.* [16] ***If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.***

Alrighty then...

This is considered one of the most difficult passages to understand in all of scripture.

Before we get started:

Scripture was written as the divine revelation of God to His people. The primary reason for this revelation is the salvation of mankind. All other instruction is important but secondary to the message of the gospel.

God's whole word is truth. His truth begins with the knowledge of our condition of sin and His gift of grace in Jesus Christ. Once saved we work to know and serve God in the fullness of His instruction which is the Bible.

This instruction can never be understood prior to regeneration. It is impossible to begin to know God's word and desires for our life until He becomes our Savior and subsequent Lord.

Many Christians stop as soon as they get their fire insurance. They like the good and easy things that God gives but continue to raise their own thoughts above God and His word of truth. Reasoning that if God says something I don't want to hear or don't like... then it must not be true or applicable to me or my current station in life.

There are some difficult things in scripture. If they were easy, why would we need saving? Why would we need power from God to accomplish and obey?

And seriously... do we really want a God... a Savior the meets our personal requirements? That we can fully understand and be in full natural agreement with at all times? This would negate the need for saving. It would negate the need for regeneration, justification and sanctification. If effect... no need for Jesus.

Here we go...

1 Corinthians 11 - Concerning Women

A. Instruction concerning women in the worship service.

1. (1) A call to follow the example of Paul.

[11:1] Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

The principle of headship.

*[2] Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and **maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.** [3] But I want you to understand that the **head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.***

The **traditions** Paul **delivered** to the Corinthian Christians were simply the teachings and practices of the apostles, received from Jesus. Paul was not talking about ceremonies and rituals, but about basic teaching and doctrine.

*the **head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.***

With these words, Paul sets a foundation for his teaching in the rest of the chapter. Paul makes it clear that God has established principles of order, authority, and accountability.

In its full sense, **head** has the idea of *headship* and *authority*. It means to have the appropriate responsibility to lead, and the matching accountability. It is right and appropriate to submit to someone who is our **head**.

Paul describes three “headship” relationships:

Jesus is **head of every man**; man is the **head of woman**, and **God** (the Father) is **head of Christ**. Because Paul connects the three relationships, the principles of headship are the same among them.

Woman in the Church generally have two options in their attitude towards Biblical headship.

They imitate the kind of attitude men have towards Christ: showing a rebelliousness that must be won over.

Or, **women can imitate the kind of attitude Christ displayed towards God the Father: loving submission to Him as an equal.**

The idea of headship and authority is important to God.

In His great plan for the ages, one great thing God looks for from man is *voluntary submission*. **This is what Jesus showed in His life over and over again**, and this is exactly what God looks for from *both* men and women, though it will be expressed in different ways.

being under authority does not necessarily equal inferiority.

Jesus was totally under the authority of God the Father

John 5:19 [19] *So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.***

John 8:28 [28] *So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, **and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.***

and yet He is equally God

John 1:1 [1] *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

John 8:58 [58] *Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”*

John 10:30 [30] *I and the Father are one.”*

When God calls women in the church to recognize the headship of men, it is not because women are unequal or inferior, but because there is a God-ordained order of authority to be respected.

Why?

Because God reveals Himself to mankind in every possible way.

Is it unrealistic to think that the Sovereign Creator would seek to show His nature and essence in every part of all Creation?

One day all of our questions will be answered concerning these kinds of issues. In the mean time we must seek to understand and obey as best we can.

Genesis 2:5-25 *When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, [6] and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—[7] then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. [8] And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. [9] And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

[10] A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. [11] The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. [12] And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. [13] The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. [14] And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

[15] The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

[18] Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” [19] Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. [20] The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. [21] So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. [22] And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. [23] Then the man said,

*“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”*

[24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. [25] And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

The Fall

A complete reversal of God’s ordained authority takes place

Instead of God being in charge, with the man, helped by the woman, ruling creation for him, a complete reversal takes place.

Satan, in the form of a serpent, approaches the woman who draws the man with her into rebellion against the Creator.

This does not imply that the woman is somehow more susceptible to temptation than the man.

It does indicate however, that God’s plan for the man and woman is to have the man, not the woman, **assume ultimate responsibility for the couple, extending leadership and protection to his female counterpart.**

Thus the man, by his absence, or at least acquiescence, shares in the woman’s culpability; and she, by failing to consult with her God given protector and provider, fails to respect the divine pattern of marriage. **In the end, it is the man,** not the woman, who is primarily held responsible for the rebellious act, though the consequences of the Fall extend to the man and the woman alike.

Woman: Child bearing, pain. Relationship with her husband, loving harmony replaced with a pattern of struggle for control over her husband, who responds by asserting his authority-often in an ungodly manner by either passively forcing her into action or actively dominating her.

Man: Will have trouble henceforth subduing the earth. He must extract the fruit of the land from the thorns and thistles and eat his bread by the sweat of his brow. In the end, both the man and the woman... will die.

What does this mean for us today?

Paul is saying that God created men and women differently.

God created men and women with different purposes in mind.

God's order and manner of creation are significant.

When God's plan for man and woman is perverted, we get a big mess.

Many of us have experienced this mess in one way or another.

Being married 31 years I can safely say that this mess is always a challenge and that no one is perfect. But we keep picking ourselves up and getting back at seeking and serving our God.

	Error of Passivity	Biblical Ideal	Error of Aggressiveness
Husband	Wimp	Loving Humble Headship	Tyrant
Wife	Doormat	Joyful Intelligent Submission	Usurper

The bottom line is that we are sinners. Born into sin while also choosing to sin.

When God lifts the veil of deception from our eyes and reveals Himself to us, we can begin to see clearly that our ways are sinful and His ways are Holy.

When we accept His gift of grace and are saved from our sin to spend eternity with Him, we are on a new path that **voluntarily submits our life**, in every way to God.

Life with God is a life of submission. To think that a man or a woman has a "better deal" with God concerning this order of authority seems like very small thinking in comparison to aligning ourselves with our Creator and His will.

If you struggle with all of this... welcome to the club. Our sinful hearts, although forgiven... still want to rebel.

The strongest evidence that a person is saved by Christ is their desire to know and worship God. If we are always arguing about what God asks of us... we need to ask ourselves why? Usually it's because we have an idol that is keeping us from fully serving the one who saved us.

We're afraid we're going to lose something... we think we won't get what we want. END.

3. (4-6) The application of the principle of headship among the Corinthian Christians.

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.

a. **Dishonors his head . . . dishonors her head:** Because of this order of authority, it is inappropriate for men to pray under a head covering, and inappropriate for women to pray without a head covering.

b. The idea of a *head covering* was important in this (and many other) ancient cultures. To wear the head covering (or, *veil* in some translations), was a public symbol of being under the authority and protection of another.

i. "It was a *custom*, both among the Greeks and Romans, and among the Jews an express *law*, that no woman should be seen abroad without a *veil*. This was, and is, a common custom through all the east, and none but public prostitutes go without veils." (Clarke)

ii. Even as today, among some, to wear a hat or some other kind of head covering is a picture of humility and modesty, so the head covering had an important cultural meaning among the ancient Corinthians.

iii. "The use of the word 'veil,' . . . is an unfortunate one since it tends to call to mind the full veil of contemporary Moslem cultures, which covers everything but the eyes. This is unknown in antiquity, at least from the evidence of paintings and sculpture." (Fee)

So, for a man **praying or prophesying, having his head covered** was for the man to say, "I am not in authority here. I am under the authority of others." Because God has established that *the head of woman is man* (1 Corinthians 11:3), it would be dishonoring to Jesus (**his head**) for a man to say this with the wearing of a head covering.

i. "Nothing in this is a further rule to Christians, than it is the duty of ministers, in praying and preaching, to use postures and habits that are not naturally, nor according to the custom of the place where they live, uncomely and irreverent, and ill looked upon." (Poole)

On the same principle, for a woman **who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered** is saying, "I am not under authority here." And because God has established that *the head of woman is man* (1 Corinthians 11:3), it would be dishonoring to men (**her head**) for a woman to say this with the refusal to wear a head covering.

i. Under these words of Paul, women are free to pray or prophesy, when they demonstrate that they are under the authority of the male leadership of the church.

That is one and the same as if her head was shaved: If a woman refuses to demonstrate being under authority, she may as well be shaved of her hair (**let her also be shorn**). In some ancient cultures, the shaving of a woman's head was the punishment given to an adulteress.

Having a woman's head shorn or shaved meant different things in different cultures; in Jewish law, it was the mark of adultery (Numbers 5:11-31). In the Greek world, it could be the mark of a prostitute or lesbian.

f. Among the Corinthian Christians, there were probably certain "spiritual" women who declared that since Jesus, they did need not demonstrate with a hairstyle or head covering that they were under anyone's authority. In essence, Paul says to these women: "If you are going to forsake your head covering, go all the way and shave your head, and identify yourself with the women of the world, in all their shame."

4. (7-10) Why is it important to respect the principle of headship in the church?

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.

a. The reason first stated is found in 1 Corinthians 11:3: *the head of woman is man*. God has established an order of authority, the principle of male headship, both in the church (1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2) and the home (Ephesians 5:23).

b. 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. A second reason is found in the order of creation: God created Adam first, and gave Him responsibility over Eve.

i. Since one reason for male headship is the order and manner in which God created man and woman - something which was present before the fall - this passage makes it clear that before and after the fall, God has ordained there be a difference in the roles between genders, even in the church. Difference in gender roles (in the church and in the home) are not the result of the fall, and are not erased by our new life in Jesus.

ii. Trapp on **woman is the glory of the man**: "Either because he may glory in her, if she be good; or because she is to honour him, and give glory to him." Clarke also observes: "As the man is, among the creatures, the representative of the glory and perfections of God, so that the fear of him and dread of him are in every beast of the field . . . so the woman is, in the house and family, the representative of the power and authority of the man." Poole adds: "*But the woman is the glory of the man*, created for the honour of the man, and for his help and assistance, and originally made out of man, so as man may glory of her, as Adam did of Eve, Gen. ii. 23, *This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.*"

iii. **Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man**: Simply put, Adam was created for Eve, but Eve was created for Adam – and this principle applies to every "Adam" and every "Eve" through history. Genesis 2:18 declares God's intention in creating Eve: *I will make him a helper comparable to him*. Eve was created to be a helper to Adam, meaning that Adam was "head" over Eve, and she was called to share and help *his* vision and agenda. Genesis 2:22 says, *He brought her to the man*. Adam was not brought to Eve, Eve was brought to Adam – her head. It is an idea offensive to the spirit of our age, but the Bible in this passage clearly teaches that (in the church and in the home) man was not made for the benefit of woman, but woman for the benefit of man. "*For the man*, signifies to serve and help the man." (Poole)

c. Because of the angels: A third reason God has established male headship in the church is the presence of **angels** in corporate worship.

i. Angels are present at any assembly of Christians for worship and note any departure from reverent order; and apparently, angels are offended by any violation of propriety.

ii. Passages such as this remind us that our struggle is bigger than ourselves. God has eternal things to teach the universe through us (Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Corinthians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:12).

iii. John Stott, commenting on Ephesians 3, explains the broader idea: "It is as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and the church members in every land are the actors. God himself has written the play, and he directs and produces it. Act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold. But who are the audience? They are the cosmic intelligences, *the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.*" (Stott)

iv. "And so it teaches us, that the good angels, who are ministering spirits for the good of God's elect, at all times have a special ministration, or at least are more particularly present, in the assemblies of people for religious worship, observing the persons, carriage, and demeanour; the sense of which ought to awe all persons attending those services, from any incident and unworthy behaviour." (Poole)

d. Significantly, none of these reasons are culture-dependent. The order and manner of creation and the presence of angels do not depend on culture. We cannot say, "Paul said this just because of the thinking of the Corinthian culture or the place of women in that culture." The principles are eternal, but the *out-working* of the principles may differ according to culture.

e. In this, we see God has established a clear chain of authority in both the home and in the church, and in those spheres, God has ordained that men are the "head" - that is, that they have the place of authority and responsibility.

- i. Our culture, having rejected the idea in a difference in *role* between men and women, now rejects the idea of *any difference* between men and women! The driving trends in our culture point towards men who are more like women, and women who are more like men - and styles, clothes, perfumes, and all the rest are pushing this thought.
- ii. The Bible is just as specific: there is no *general* submission of women unto men commanded in society; only in the spheres of the home and in the church. God has not commanded in His word that men have exclusive authority in the areas of politics, business, education, and so on.
- iii. It also does not mean that every woman in the church is under the authority of every man - ridiculous! Instead it means that those who lead the church - pastors and ruling elders - must be men, and women must respect their authority.
- iv. The failure of men to lead in the home and in the church, and to lead in the way Jesus would lead, has been a chief cause of the rejection of male authority - and is inexcusable.
- v. Some feel this recognition and submission to authority is an unbearable burden; that it means, "I have to say that I'm inferior, I'm nothing, and I have to recognize this other person as being superior." Not at all! Inferiority or superiority has nothing to do with it! Remember the relationship between God the Father and God the Son - they are completely equal in their being, but have different roles when it comes to authority.
- vi. Some may say that the church cannot work, or cannot work well, unless we get along with the times and put women into positions of spiritual and doctrinal authority in the church. From the standpoint of what works in our culture, they may be right. But how can such a church say they are led by the word of God?
- f. The issues of headship and submission should be seen in their broader context - not just as a struggle between men and women, but as a struggle with the issue of authority in general. Since the 1960's, there has been a massive change in the way we see and accept authority.
 - i. Citizens do not have the same respect for government's authority, students do not have the same respect for teacher's authority, women do not have the same respect for men's authority, children do not have the same respect for parent's authority, employees do not have the same respect for their employer's authority, people do not have the same respect for the police's authority, and Christians no longer have the same respect for church authority.
 - ii. It's important to ask: have the changes been good? Do we feel safer? Are we more confident in our culture? Have television and other entertainment gotten better or worse? In fact, our society is presently in, and rushing towards, complete anarchy - the state where no authority is accepted, and the only thing that matters is what I want to do.
 - iii. It is fair to describe our present moral state as one of anarchy. There is no moral authority in our culture. When it comes to morality, the only thing that matters is what one wants to do. And in a civil sense, many neighborhoods in our nation are given over to anarchy. Do you think that government's authority is accepted in gang-infested portions of our inner city? The only thing that matters is what one wants to do.
 - iv. We must see the broader attack on authority as a direct Satanic strategy to destroy our society and millions of individual lives. The devil is accomplishing this with two main attacks: first, the *corruption* of authority; second, the *rejection* of authority.
 - v. This idea of authority and submission to authority are so important to God that they are part of His very being. The First Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Father*; the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is called the *Son*. Inherent in those titles is a relationship of authority and submission to authority. The Father exercises authority over the Son, and the Son submits to the Father's authority - and this is in the very nature and being of God! Our failure to exercise Biblical authority, and our failure to submit to Biblical authority, isn't just wrong and sad - it sins against the very nature of God. Remember 1 Samuel 15:23: *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.*

5. (11-12) Headship in light of the interdependence of men and women.

Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.

a. **Nevertheless:** On top of all Paul has said about male headship in the church, it would be wrong to consider headship as the *only* dynamic at work between men and women in the church. They must also remember **neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man**. Men and women need each other, so there is no place for a “lording over” of the men over the women.

i. “Even after he has stressed the subordination of women, Paul goes on to stress even more directly the essential partnership of man and woman. Neither can live without the other. If there is subordination, it is in order that the partnership may be more fruitful and lovely for both.” (Barclay)

b. Though Paul has recognized the order of creation, and related it to the principle of male headship in the church, he is also careful to remember **even so man also comes through woman**. There is a critical interdependence which must be recognized, within the framework of male headship in the church and in the home.

i. “But on the other side, since the creation of the first man, all men are by the woman, who conceives them in her womb, suckles them at her breasts, is concerned in their education while children, and dandled upon her knees; the man therefore hath no reason to despise and too much to trample upon the woman.” (Poole)

ii. Therefore, the man, or men, who rule in the church or in the home without love, without recognizing the important and vital place God has given women, is not doing God’s will.

iii. “A man who can only rule by stamping his foot had better remain single. But a man who knows how to govern his house by the love of the Lord, through sacrificial submission to the Lord, is the man who is going to make a perfect husband. The woman who cannot submit to an authority like that had better remain single.” (Redpath)

iv. G. Campbell Morgan recalls the story of the older Christian woman who had never married, explaining “I never met a man who could master me.” She had the right idea.

6. (13-16) Appealing to experience, nature, common sense, and apostolic authority.

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. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God.

a. **Judge among yourselves:** Paul appeals to something the Corinthian Christians should be able to figure out on their own.

b. **Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?** Here, Paul speaks to those Christians who come from a Jewish environment. In the Jewish community, even *men* would cover their heads while praying. It was therefore inconceivable for **a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered**. Their own experience taught them that women should observe the custom of the head covering when the church meets.

c. **Does not even nature itself teach:** In both Jewish and Greek cultures, short hair was common for men. Therefore it was **a dishonor** for a man to wear long hair, because it was considered feminine.

i. From as long as we have known, women have generally worn their hair longer than men. In some cultures and at some times, men have worn their hair longer than others, but no matter how long men have worn their hair, women have always worn their hair longer.

ii. Based on this verse, many people have thought that it is a sin for a man to wear long hair – or, at least hair that is considered long by the culture. But long hair in itself can be no sin; after all, Paul apparently had long hair for a time in Corinth as a part of a vow (Acts 18:18). But, the vow would not have meant anything if long hair was the norm; that’s what Paul is getting at!

iii. While it is true that it is wrong for a man to take the appearance of a woman (Deuteronomy 22:5), longer hair on a man is not necessarily an indication of this. It is far better for most preachers to be concerned about the length of their sermons instead of the length of people’s hair!

d. **Her hair is given to her for a covering:** Because women wear their hair longer than men, Paul thinks of this longer hair as “nature’s veil. So, if nature has given women long hair as a covering, that in itself points to their need to be covered (according to the ancient Corinthian custom).

e. **If anyone seem to be contentious, we have no such custom:** In this appeal to apostolic authority, Paul is telling the Corinthian Christians to not be **contentious** – especially because the other **churches of God** have adopted their custom according to God’s truth.

B. Instruction concerning observance of the Lord’s Supper.

John Piper raises some common questions:

How does verse 2 relate to verses 3-16?

What does Paul mean by the word *head* in verse 3?

What is the custom regarding the “adornment of women” in this passage?

How is the woman “the glory” of man in verse 7?

What does Paul mean when he says that woman is to have authority on her head in verse 10?

What does he mean by “because of the angels”?

What does the word “nature” mean in verse 14?

While there will be some unanswered questions, the bulk of this passage is understandable and applicable to our culture today.

*[2] Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and **maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.***

This is likely an introductory statement for chapters 11-14

Remember that this is a long letter that took some time for Paul to write. Chapter and verse numbers came much later.

And Paul has a habit of commending his readers from time to time. Not everything has run amuck in the kingdom and Paul is acknowledging the good things as well as the bad.

One of the perplexing questions in this passage is this:

What custom regarding adornment is referred to here?

The two most probable suggestions are

1. The custom Paul recommends is for women to wear shawls.

2. Paul objects to long, loose hair that falls down the back; he wants women to follow the usual custom of piling their hair up on top of their heads.

We’re not talking about full veiling like in Islam

In Numbers 5:18, a woman suspected of adultery had to unbind her hair and wear it loosely.

Respectable women in Paul's time did not appear in public with their hair long and flowing down their backs. They wore their hair piled up on their heads in a bun. Paul wants the Corinthian women to adhere to this custom.

The custom here is a head covering of some kind, probably a shawl.

The major point seems pretty clear. Women are to adorn themselves in a certain way. The precise head covering that Paul has in mind is no longer clear. What is more important is... why does Paul want them to do this?

This is probably the most critical question... What is meant by the word "head" in verse 3?

The common interpretation of the word is authority.

[3] But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

Paul uses the trinity as the example for authority in all of his writings.

God the Father, the Son and the Spirit. All Equal in essence, differing in role and function.

Some would say that if they are all equal, there should be no authoritative structure. But this is false.

Piper says

Some say that to make God the head over Christ is to fall into the christological heresy of making Christ subordinate to God. But this would only be a heresy if one asserted that there was an ontological difference (a difference in nature or being) between Father and Son. The point is **not** that the Son is essentially inferior to the Father. Rather, the Son **willingly submits Himself** to the Father's authority. The difference between the members of the Trinity is a functional one, not an essential one.

1 Corinthians 15:28 *[28] When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.*

Paul did not see subjection of the Son to the Father as heretical

because the Son was not essentially inferior to the Father. Instead, Jesus subjects Himself voluntarily to the Father's authority.

The Son has a different function or role from the Father, not an inferior being or essence.

This point is often missed by evangelical feminists.

They would say that a difference in function necessarily involves a difference in essence;

i.e., if men are in authority over women, then women must be inferior.

The relationship between Christ and the Father shows us that this reasoning is flawed.

One can possess a different function and still be equal in essence and worth. Women are equal to men in essence and in being; there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function or role in church and home.

Such differences do not logically imply inequality or inferiority, just as Christ's subjection to the Father does not imply His inferiority.

And some would argue that Paul is speaking "culturally" and not doctrinally. Within this context (and the context of all of Paul's writings on this issue) we see great consistency.

God sent the Son into the world John 3:17: This shows subordination.

Something we need to understand here:

God's ways are not our ways. Our finite minds will not fully understand everything. We have a lust for knowledge. (Adam and Eve) (Gossip) (The power of knowing more) There is so much knowledge that God does not (for His divine reasons) choose to reveal to us.

We will find much difficulty in our Christian walk if we continue to force our thinking above that of God. This does not mean that we do not question or even disagree with God at times. This is natural. But at the end of the day, our trust must rest in Him for who He is and what He has done... even when we don't understand.

*[4] Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered **dishonors his head**, [5] but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered **dishonors her head**, since it is the same **as if her head were shaven**. [6] For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.*

Paul says Christ is the authority over men, and that men are the authority over women, it follows that no man should wear a head covering when he prays and prophesies, while a woman should.

Paul objects to men wearing head coverings in verse 4 because such adornment would be disgraceful. Why? Because that is what women wore (11:5-6), and thus a man who wore such a head covering would be shamefully depicting himself as a woman.

And, if women do not wear head coverings, their failure to be adorned properly would be shameful (11:5) because they would be dressing like men.

That the shame involved is due to appearing like a man is confirmed by Paul's explanation in 11:5b-6. A woman's failure to wear a head covering is the same as having her hair cut short or shaved. Every woman in the culture of that day would have been ashamed of appearing in public with her head shaved or her hair cut short, because then she would have looked like a man.

Paul says (11:15) a woman's long hair is "her glory" and that a man with long hair brings shame on himself. So, we can conclude that Paul wants women to wear head coverings while praying and prophesying because to do otherwise would be to confuse the sexes and give the shameful impression that women are behaving like men or vice versa.

On whom or what is the man or woman bringing shame if he or she is not adorned properly?

In verse 4, Paul says that the man who has a head covering "dishonors his head." In verse 5 he says that the woman without a head covering "dishonors her head."

What does he mean by the word head in these verses?

He means authority in 11:3,

It refers to one's physical head in verses 4 (first use), 5 (first use), 7, and 10.

Two interpretations are possible in our context, and they are not necessarily incompatible.

On the one hand, to disgrace one's head may mean that one disgraces oneself.

On the other hand, dishonoring the head in verses 4 and 5 may refer to the head described above in verse 3. Thus, a man who wears a head covering brings dishonor on his head, Christ. The woman who fails to wear a head covering brings dishonor on her head, man.

Paul might have intended both senses here. They are not mutually exclusive.

A woman who does not wear a head covering both disgraces herself and brings dishonor on her authority, who is man.

A man who wears a head covering dishonors himself and his authority, Jesus Christ. If one does not conform to the role God intended, one brings dishonor on oneself and on one's authority.

A child who rebels against a parent brings grief on himself and his parents (Proverbs 10:1; 17:25).

Side Note: **Paul allows women to pray and prophesy in public assembly**, according to 11:5.

Some scholars have thought that women's prayer and prophecy were permitted only in private, since Paul says women should keep silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34).

But the praying and prophesying were probably in the public assembly for the following reasons:

1. these chapters describe public worship. The upcoming topics focus on the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) and spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40), and these relate to public worship.
2. Prophecy was given to edify the community when gathered (1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 29-33a); it was not a private gift to be exercised alone.
3. Even if the meetings were in a home, such meetings would have been considered public assemblies, since many churches met in houses (cf. Romans 16:5; Philemon 2).
4. First Corinthians 14:33b-36 doesn't forbid all speaking by women in public, but only their speaking in the course of the congregation's judging prophecies (cf. 14:29-33a). Understood in this way, it does not contradict 11:5. It simply prohibits an abuse (women speaking up and judging prophecies in church) that Paul wanted to prevent in the church at Corinth.

Paul does not forbid women to participate in public worship, yet he does insist that in their participation they should show a demeanor that is humble and submissive to male leadership.

*[7] For a man ought **not to cover his head**, since **he is the image and glory of God**, but **woman is the glory of man**. [8] For man was not made from woman, **but woman from man**. [9] Neither was man created for woman, **but woman for man**. [10] That is why a wife ought to have **a symbol of authority on her head**, because of the angels.*

Paul is not denying that women are created in God's image, for he is referring to the creation accounts here and was well aware that Genesis teaches that both men and women are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). The focus here is on the word glory, which is used in both parts of the sentence.

What does Paul mean when he says that man is the glory of God, while woman is the glory of man?

Paul is giving us a review of Genesis 2.

But how do we know that woman was created to bring honor to man? Paul proves this in 11:8-9.

Woman was created to bring honor to man because

1. The source of woman is man
2. Woman was created because of man, i.e., in order help him in his tasks.

Paul's point is that one should always honor and respect the source from which one came. And woman honors man by wearing a head covering, thereby showing that man is the head, i.e., the authority.

In verse 10, Paul also gives a new reason for wearing the coverings: "because of the angels." What does he mean?

We don't know for sure. The best solution is probably that the angels are good angels who assist in worship and desire to see the order of creation maintained.

*[11] Nevertheless, **in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman**; [12] for as woman was made from man, so man is now **born of woman**. **And all things are from God**.*

Verses 11-12 Show that Paul utterly rejects the notion that women are inferior or lesser human beings.

Sad to say, some traditionalists have treated women in this way. Mutuality (Mutual character, quality, or activity). is also part of the relationship between men and women.

Women are created in the image of God, and men have no greater worth because of their God-given responsibility to lead.

*[13] Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? [14] Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, [15] but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. [16] **If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.***

What is the conclusion of this text?

What does given by nature mean?

Nature teaches that “if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him,” while “if a woman has long hair, it is her glory.”

What is the meaning of the word nature here?

Paul is referring to the natural and instinctive sense of right and wrong that God has planted in us, especially with respect to sexuality.

This sense of what is appropriate or fitting has been implanted in human beings from creation.

Romans 1:26-27 says that Women and men involved in a homosexual relationship have exchanged the natural function of sexuality for what is contrary to nature, i.e., they have violated the God-given created order and natural instinct, and therefore are engaging in sexual relations with others of the same sex.

John Piper again...

Nature teaches, then, that the natural instincts and psychological perceptions of masculinity and femininity are manifested in particular cultural situations. Thus, a male instinctively and naturally shrinks away from doing anything that his culture labels as feminine. So, too, females have a natural inclination to dress like women rather than men.

Paul’s point, then, is that how men and women wear their hair is a significant indication of whether they are abiding by the created order. Of course, what constitutes long hair is often debated-what is appropriately masculine or feminine in hairstyle may vary widely from culture to culture.

Verses 13-15 show that the wearing of a head covering by a woman is in accord with the God-given sense that women and men are different. For a woman to dress like a man is inappropriate because it violates the distinction God has ordained between the sexes.

And, according to Paul, if a woman prophesies in church without wearing the symbol of being under male authority-i.e., if she prophesies while dressed like a man-she is in effect negating the distinction between men and women that God has ordained from creation.

In verse 16, Paul concludes his argument by saying, “But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” Now, some have said that Paul actually rejects the wearing of head coverings by women with these words because the Greek literally says “we have no such practice” (toiautēn sunētheian), and thus they conclude that the practice of wearing head coverings is renounced here by Paul. But such an understanding is surely wrong. Paul in this verse is addressing the contentious, who, the previous context makes clear, do not want to wear a head covering. The practice of certain Corinthian women who refuse to wear a head covering is what Paul refers to when he says “we have no such practice.” Thus, he says to the contentious that both the apostolic circle (“we”) and the rest of the churches adhere to the custom of head coverings. The instructions Paul has given reflect his own view of the matter and the practice of the other churches. Those who see this advice as limited only to the Corinthian situation have failed to take this verse seriously enough. Paul perceives his instructions here as binding for all churches in the Greco-Roman world. Indeed, the other churches already adhere to the practice Paul recommends here. Such a universal word at

the conclusion of the text is a strong indication that the principle that underlies this passage cannot simply be dismissed as cultural.

What does this mean for us today?

Paul is saying that God created men and women differently.

God created men and women with different purposes in mind.

God's order and manner of creation are significant.

The significance of this text for the twentieth century must be examined briefly. Am I suggesting that women return to wearing coverings or veils? No.³⁰ We must distinguish between the fundamental principle that underlies a text and the application of that principle in a specific culture. The fundamental principle is that the sexes, although equal, are also different. God has ordained that men have the responsibility to lead, while women have a complementary and supportive role. More specifically, if women pray and prophesy in church, they should do so under the authority of male headship. Now, in the first century, failure to wear a covering sent a signal to the congregation that a woman was rejecting the authority of male leadership. Paul was concerned about head coverings only because of the message they sent to people in that culture.

Today, except in certain religious groups, if a woman fails to wear a head covering while praying or prophesying, no one thinks she is in rebellion. Lack of head coverings sends no message at all in our culture. Nevertheless, that does not mean that this text does not apply to our culture. The principle still stands that women should pray and prophesy in a manner that makes it clear that they submit to male leadership. Clearly the attitude and the demeanor with which a woman prays and prophesies will be one indication of whether she is humble and submissive. The principle enunciated here should be applied in a variety of ways given the diversity of the human situation.

Moreover, both men and women today should dress so that they do not look like the opposite sex. Confusion of the sexes is contrary to the God-given sense that the sexes are distinct. For example, it would be wrong for a twentieth-century American male to wear a dress in public. It would violate his masculinity. Everything within a man would cry out against doing this because it would violate his appropriate sense of what it means to be a man. The point is not that women should not wear jeans or pants, but that in every culture there are certain kinds of adornment which become culturally acceptable norms of dress for men and women.

Finally, we should note that there is a connection forged in this passage between femininity and the proper submission of women to men. The women in Corinth, by prophesying without a head covering, were sending a signal that they were no longer submitting to male authority. Paul sees this problem as severe because the arrogation of male leadership roles by women ultimately dissolves the distinction between men and women. Thus, this text speaks volumes to our culture today, because one of the problems with women taking full leadership is that it inevitably involves a collapsing of the distinctions between the sexes. It is hardly surprising, as the example of the Evangelical Woman's Caucus demonstrates, that one of the next steps is to accept lesbianism.³¹ Paul rightly saw, as he shows in this text, that there is a direct link between women appropriating leadership and the loss of femininity. It is no accident that Paul addresses the issues of feminine adornment and submission to male leadership in the same passage. In conclusion, we should affirm the participation of women in prayer and prophecy in

the church. Their contribution should not be slighted or ignored. Nevertheless, women should participate in these activities with hearts that are submissive to male leadership, and they should dress so that they retain their femininity.