

The following paper is presented as part of the Church of God Doctrine and Polity series and addresses Women in Church Leadership. For the purpose of comparison, the author has attempted to address the topic from a theological perspective with scripture references pertinent to both sides of the issue. Neither paper (part 2 to be published later), from either perspective, is intended to be regarded as a position paper by the International Executive Committee or the denomination.

THE DOCTRINE & POLITY COMMITTEE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

by
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Headship and Women in Leadership: Part I 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Introduction

A consistent response to the question whether women should be involved in church leadership today refers to the concept of headship in the Scriptures. If a husband is the head of wife and home, then how can women be allowed to “trump” male headship and lead “over” them in the church? John Piper, a Reformed Baptist pastor and theologian, has pressed this issue in response to what he regards as “evangelical feminism.” From his reading of Scripture, a man is the head of the home; this provides the man with a training ground to become a leader in the church.¹ According to Piper, the “role distinction” between male and female must be located both at home and in the church. Women cannot lead in either setting (home or church) and therefore should not become pastors or elders.² It is the man who has been given the position of leading others; women are to submit to godly male leadership. According to this line of thinking, it is for this reason also that women should not be pastors or teachers over men.

With the claims of Piper and others, it is important that we enter an inquiry into their theology of headship and leadership. One way to engage this is by a study of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as it relates to the topic of headship. It will be obvious, however, that in the background of this passage is the creation narrative of Genesis 1-3 and some related issues on headship from Ephesians 5:21-33. Therefore, we will provide a separate study (“Headship and Women in Leadership: Part II”) to include a consideration of these texts. As with other passages we have considered, there are some significant challenges in understanding the meaning of these texts. One crucial disputed issue relates to the meaning of the word “head” (κεφαλή | *kephalē*) in Greek. We will begin with an examination of our text in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (NIV)

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered³ dishonors his head. But

¹ John Piper, “Should Women Become Pastors?” 29 February 2008.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-women-become-pastors>. (Retrieved 21 August 2019). Cf. also the standard text that supports Piper’s view: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*,

ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), especially his chapter, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined according to the Bible,” 31-59.

² Piper, “Should Women Become Pastors?” This is also the reasoning behind Vern S. Poythress’ argument in “The Church as Family: Why Male Leadership in the Family Requires Male Leadership in the Church,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, 241-42.

³ The marginal footnote for the NIV provides a possible alternative translation of “long hair” for “head covered” when it addresses men and “no covering of hair” for “head uncovered.” We will explore this further below.

every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

There are several factors that make this passage one of the most difficult to interpret in all of the New Testament. Paul offers a rather complicated reasoning process by arguing through analogies. These are comparisons from one set of relations to another (just as God is the “head” of Christ, man is the “head” of woman). Such analogies are especially difficult to interpret since they are, by definition, based on similarities and differences. If interpreters overemphasize similarities, they may minimize the differences. Such argumentation is not meant to be given as an exact one-to-one ratio, especially when the comparison is between the relations of the persons of the Trinity versus the relations of creatures, male and female. Moreover, there are some difficult interpretive issues as well as social-historical ones in this text. Gordon Fee has noted that there is plenty of material here to create interpretive problems, especially the uncertainty about the meaning of some key terms, such as, “head,” “hanging down the head,” “uncovered,” “glory,” “authority over her head,” “because of the angels,” “in the place of a shawl,” and “no such a custom.”⁴ Added to this difficulty with terminology is the uncertainty of the historical customs regarding head coverings or hair length in the general Greco-Roman world of the first century and in the Christian churches. Paul’s instructions assume some level of understanding that the recipients must have known but for which we are too distant.⁵ Before discerning what this text means for Christians today, we need to determine (as best we can) what this text meant to the first recipients. [As with previous papers, we will place the interpretations under “Side A” or “Side B” where feasible.]

1 Corinthians 11:2-6

There are three major sections to this passage (noted in the text above by the indentation of new paragraphs). The first section discusses the apparent problem in Corinth—men worshipping with heads covered (or long hair) and women worshipping with heads uncovered (or no covering for the hair). The key point of this paragraph is that worshipping in this manner creates *dishonor* or *shame*. If this is similar to other issues that Paul has addressed to this church, then we can ascertain that some men were actually worshipping with covered heads and some women were worshipping with uncovered heads. Paul attempts to argue from some type of analogy here: **“But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”** (1 Cor. 11:3). What can this mean?

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 492.

⁵ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 492. Thomas Schreiner calls this passage, “one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible.” See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, 124.

If we begin with the final statement in this clause (the head of Christ is God) we may have a better grasp of the analogy that Paul is using. Unless we think Paul is aiming at some sort of essential subordination of the Son of God to God the Father or even some type of “chain of command” hierarchy in the Trinity, this statement does not make sense if the word “head” here means “authority over.” Given Paul’s high Christology in which the Son of God *is* God, it is unlikely that this was Paul’s intention.⁶ Moreover, if we begin to interpret this passage with our preconceived notions concerning what the word “head” means in English today and then try to apply it onto Paul’s usage, we will distort both Paul’s intention and the way that the recipients heard it.⁷

The word “head” (κεφαλή | *kephalē*) seems straightforward enough in English—it refers to a literal head or it can be used figuratively as a “chief” or “first place in a line of things.”⁸ The literal meaning of the word “head” will arise in verses 4-7a and again in verse 13 when Paul speaks of the head being “covered” or “uncovered.” This literal way of reading “head” seems clear from the context. However, what might have been the meaning of this more figurative word here in verse 3, if not a literal head?⁹

There are two basic ways to translate this word *kephalē* in the figurative sense: one is “head = authority over” and another is “head = source or origin.” Because how we approach translating this word makes a significant difference in our interpretation of this passage, we will examine this term carefully.

SIDE A

First, a traditional way of understanding the word “head” in English is to associate it with the meaning of “authority over” or “leader” in charge of something.¹⁰ Wayne Grudem has led the way in attempting to establish this interpretation as better supported by the Greek literary evidence of the ancient world. Grudem suggests that this is precisely how the Corinthians in the ancient world would have understood Paul’s language—as “ruler” or someone who has “authority over” others. He has surveyed thousands of possible examples of the word *kephalē* in the ancient Greek world and concludes that there are 49 places where it means “authority over.” Hence, in his study the word “head” would have been understood by the Corinthians to mean precisely “authority over.” Further, Grudem argues that there is *no clear instance* in ancient Greek

⁶ Craig S. Keener suggests that it may be possible that Paul was referring to the incarnation here. See Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 33-34. Philip B. Payne contends that the threefold statement is chronological, that is, from the creation of “man,” the creation of “woman,” and then the incarnation. See Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 138-39.

⁷ When English speakers hear the word “head” they can rather naturally think of both the literal and figurative meanings, namely, the top of one’s body in which the brain is housed or the leader of something or some group. Would this have been what came to mind when the Corinthians read Paul’s word *kephalē*? Probably not—but we will have to deal with what the Greek term might have meant in the language of Paul’s day in order to provide a better response.

⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 501. Fee notes that the meaning of “head” as the Corinthians might have heard it is not “immediately clear” to English readers.

⁹ Craig Keener calls this switching between a figurative and literal meaning of head an argument from “wordplay,” which would have been effective as a strategy to win his readers to seeing things his way in ancient Corinth. See Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 32.

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, “Does *kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (Spring 1985): 38-59. Cf. also Grudem, “Appendix 1: The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 425-68.

where the word *kephalē* means “source” or “origin.”¹¹ Indeed, the claim that it can mean “source” lacks evidence that is convincing,¹² whereas evidence that it means “authority over” is “substantial.”¹³ Therefore, what would have been the most likely understanding of *kephalē* in the ears of the Corinthian recipients of Paul’s letter in the 50s AD? According to this traditional view, they would have heard it as “head” or “ruler” or a “person of superior authority or rank.”¹⁴

Yet at least one difficulty here is with interpreters missing the character of Paul’s analogy. An analogy is used in argumentation to compare one thing with another. This comparison recognizes that there are both similarities and differences. By using “head” in exactly the same way as Christ is the head of a man with a man is the head of a woman is to miss the dissimilarity between Christ and humans! Christ is divine—His headship demands submission on the part of humans. As Hollis Gause has noted, “The role of submission to the headship of Christ cannot be repeated in any creature-to-creature interrelatedness.”¹⁵

SIDE B

Second, another way of understanding “head” (*kephalē*) is as “source” or “origin.”¹⁶ Philip Payne has led the charge against the traditional understanding of *kephalē* as “authority over” and

¹¹ As cited by Richard S. Cervin, “Does Κεφαλή mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989): 85-112; also, supported by Schreiner, “Head Coverings,” 127.

¹² Wayne Grudem, “Appendix 1: The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 425.

¹³ Grudem, “Appendix 1: The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” in *Recovering Biblical manhood and Womanhood*, 426. It is important to note the some of the disagreement lies in the metaphorical uses of *kephalē* in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). Grudem notes that *kephalē* is used to translate the Hebrew word *ro’sh* (head) when it held the sense of “chief” or “ruler.” Other scholars (such as Keener, Fee, Richard Cervin, and Payne) recognize the limited times it is used to mean “chief,” but either suggest this language is used in a minority of occasions or that Grudem has applied it in situations that do not require it. Alan Padgett notes that the Hebrew *ro’sh* [שׂרָא] where it is translated by *kephalē* is undoubtedly the source of the Paul use of *kephalē* as “authority” or “dominion.” See Alan Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984): 79. J. A. Fitzmyer tends to agree with Grudem’s evidence with respect to the Septuagint. He says that of the 281 times that *ro’sh* (head) occurs, it is translated by the LXX as *kephalē* on only 14 occasions. If we add those occasions when *ro’sh* refers to someone at the top or prominent, the number of instances where *kephalē* is used is increased substantially. Hence, Fitzmyer says, Paul may have used *kephalē* to refer to a leader or someone who has authority over another. See J. A. Fitzmyer, “Another Look at κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11:3,” *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989):503-11; esp. 506-9. However, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor disputes some of this interpretation of the evidence. He notes that when *ro’sh* is used literally in Numbers as a physical head, it is always translated *kephalē*. When it is used of an authority figure, it is translated by *archōn* or *archēgos* (a more common Greek word for “ruler”). This type of avoidance of *kephalē* for translating “ruler” continues in 1 Samuel and Exodus and (perhaps) in Judges. Murphy-O’Connor concludes that the translators of the Septuagint were “well aware that the metaphorical meanings of *ro’sh* and *kephalē* did not overlap completely, and that *kephalē* was inappropriate to render *ro’sh* when this term connoted ‘authority.’” See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 492. Finally, consider the evidence provided regarding the Septuagint by Philip Payne, *Man and Woman*, 119-121, esp. fn. 10.

¹⁴ Grudem, “Appendix 1: The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 426.

¹⁵ R. Hollis Gause, “Does the New Testament Prohibit Women Leaders?” in *Women in Leadership: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Cleveland, TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, 2006), 84.

¹⁶ For a detailed listing of scholars who support the translation as “source,” see Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman*, 117, fn. 7. One of the first scholars to suggest this translation was S. Bedale, “The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1954): 211-15. Also, see Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen, “What Does *Kephalē* Mean in the New Testament,” in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986):

has found strong support in Greek literature for its translation as “source.”¹⁷ We have something of this meaning that remains in the English word “headwaters” as the place of origin or source of a river. Why would the Corinthians have heard *kephalē* as “source?” At least part of the answer lies in the Greek literature of the period contemporary with Paul (or slightly before and after). In secular usage, *kephalē* was not used to refer to a head of government or someone having authority over another.¹⁸ Instead, it was used by Philo as “source.” Philo was a Jewish philosopher writing in Greek about the first 50 years of the first century AD and therefore a near-contemporary with Paul. Galen, a medical writer in the second century AD, also used it as “source.”¹⁹

Yet how would an understanding of “head” meaning “source” fit into this context? Consider some of Paul’s other writings where Christ is referred to as *kephalē*: “**he is the head (*kephalē*) of the body, the church...**” (Col. 1:18). Christ is the *origin* or *source of life* for the body of Christ. He is “**the head, ... from whom the whole body grows**” (Eph. 4:15-16). Christ is the source of the body’s nourishment and growth. What if these do not mean “authority over” in terms of “head” but instead mean “source?”²⁰ In our current text (1 Cor. 11:2-6), how could this word be translated?

the source/origin (κεφαλή | *kephalē*) of every man is Christ
a source/origin (κεφαλή | *kephalē*) of a woman is the man
a source/origin (κεφαλή | *kephalē*) of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:3)²¹

The first clause speaks of creation in which Christ created the man; the second clause speaks of the creation of woman from the side of man so that the man is the source of woman’s life; the final clause speaks of the incarnation in which God is the “origin” of the Son of God entering

97-110. Richard Cervin argues that while the meaning of *kephalē* in terms of “source” in ancient literature is “rare,” he believes that it also cannot mean “authority.” Instead, he thinks it means “preeminence.” Richard S. Cervin, “Does Κεφαλή mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989): 112.

¹⁷ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 118-139, provides fifteen arguments for translating this word as “source.” In it he especially engages Grudem’s argument from the Septuagint (119, fn. 10) as well as downplays the meaning of the term as “authority” as “not a well-established meaning” (121). His reading of the evidence is quite strong and supported by more recent endeavors in this regard.

¹⁸ Only in the Septuagint does such connection of *kephalē* with “leader” occur and even this is rather rare. (See the extensive discussion on this in footnote 13 above). The debate here is rather significant because the Septuagint was essentially the “Bible” for the first-century Christian church. In this way, it could have influenced the understanding of the term both in Paul’s mind when he wrote it and in the hearers’ ears when they heard it.

¹⁹ For many other references in classical and Hellenistic Greek literature, see the discussion by Philip Payne, *Man and Woman*, 121-128. Cf. also Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen, “What Does *Kephalē* Mean in the New Testament,” in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 97-101. It may also be important to note that in our modern era we have a sense of the importance of the brain as the center of our cognition and physical movement. Even in that physical aspect of knowing the purpose for our brains, we see the head differently from the ancient world. This “reinforces” the metaphorical use of “head” as a leader. However, in ancient thought some writers thought the “heart” was the center of our human lives (Plato and Aristotle, for example). The matter was debated until Galen landed on the *liver* as the primary center of human thinking and movement. See Payne, *Man and Woman*, 122-23.

²⁰ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 128. Payne notes that of the 11 metaphorical uses of *kephalē* by Paul, “source makes good sense as the meaning of nine.” Moreover, no instance can unequivocally be determined to mean “authority over.” Payne, 128.

²¹ In Greek, only the first “source” (*kephalē*) has the article (“the”); the second and third clauses are anarthrous (which means they are without the article, “the”).

human flesh (Christ). “Paul’s understanding of the metaphor, therefore, and almost certainly the only one the Corinthians would have grasped, is ‘head’ as ‘source,’ especially ‘source of life.’”²² The *context* of this passage provides a clear example of the “source” meaning in verses 8 and 12: **“For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man...”** and **“For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman”** (1 Cor. 11:8; 12 NASB). As Gordon Fee concludes, “Thus Paul’s concern is not hierarchical (who has authority over whom), but relational (the unique relationships that are predicated on one’s being the source of the other’s existence).”²³

SIDE A

A final point on this verse is needed. If one interprets *kephalē* as “authority over,” then a type of hierarchy seems to pervade the whole passage. The only time when the word “authority” is actually used in this passage is in verse 10 where the woman **“ought to have authority [ἐξουσίαν | *exousian*] over her own head”** (1 Cor. 11:10 NIV). In other words, Paul clearly speaks of authority (or “right”) as it relates to what a woman wears on her head. Also, if some hierarchical authority between man and woman is to be understood from this passage, then it seems that a hierarchy would be cast over the relations of the Trinity as well.

Complementarians in the style of John Piper have a very different understanding of verse 3. They argue that since the word *kephalē* cannot definitively rule out the figurative meaning of head as “authority over,” it should be seen here as the most natural way to read Paul’s words. What Paul is saying in this more traditionalist way of reading the text is that “Christ is the authority over every man, man is the authority over woman, and God is the authority over Christ.”²⁴ Lest anyone think that such a statement supports some type of heretical subordinationism of Christ to God, Thomas Schreiner argues that in the Trinity itself there is an ordering of sorts—not of the *essence* of God, but of the *functions* among Father, Son, and Spirit. Hence, the “difference between the members of the Trinity is a functional one, not an essential one.”²⁵ Just because the Son voluntarily submits himself to the Father in terms of operations does not mean the Son is inferior to God in essence—only in function.

Schreiner notes further that in a way similar to this distinction between essence and function in the Trinity, complementarians argue that male and female are *equal in essence* as human beings who stand before God, but are *different in function* or *role*. If God the Father is “over” Christ in authority yet not superior in essence (that is, they are equally God), then a man can be “over” a woman in authority yet not superior in essence, only in functional roles. Schreiner

²² Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 503; 506-08.

²³ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 503.

²⁴ Schreiner, “Head Coverings,” 128. Rebecca Groothuis notes that ~~missing from~~ Schreiner’s proposed summary of verse 3 here is missing the idea that if Christ is the authority over every man (male) and then man is the authority over woman, then a two-tiered system in Christianity is set up—one for males relationship to Christ and another for females relationship to Christ (only through that of the male). Is not Christ an authority over woman as well? Or does the woman only experience the authority of Christ *through* male headship? It seems that if Paul intended it to be this way, then he has written contrary to his own witness and that of the New Testament. *All* believers are priests with a direct connection to God *through* Christ, not another human being. There is only one Mediator— Christ. If Schreiner is arguing for such a position (as it appears all complementarians are on this point), then he (they) must explain how this coincides with the witness of the New Testament. As Rebecca Merrill Groothuis has said that a male hierarchy of spiritual command violates “the status and identity every believer has in Christ.” See Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, “Equal in Being, Unequal in Role: Exploring the Logic of Women’s Subordination,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Robert W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 313.

²⁵ Schreiner, “Head Coverings,” 128.

concludes, “Women are equal to men in essence and in being; there is no ontological distinction, and yet they have a different function 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.”²⁶

The end result of this approach to the issue in 1 Corinthians 11:3-6 is that women are allowed to prophesy and pray in public, “but they must do so with a demeanor and attitude that supports male headship because in that culture wearing a head covering communicated a submissive demeanor and feminine adornment.”²⁷

SIDE B

How might those who hold a different interpretation respond to this traditionalist approach? There are several things to consider carefully here. *First*, a question: Is the depiction of essence in contrast to function actually appropriate to the Trinity? To be sure, there is a submission of Christ to the will of the Father (as the Gospel of John makes clear), but does this mean that there is a difference in the Trinity’s essential unity of will? Is there so neat a division in the Godhead between *what God is* and *what God does*?²⁸ Many evangelical complementarians argue that there is a difference *within the being of the Trinity* between God’s essence and the functional roles of the persons.²⁹ They assert that there is an “eternal functional subordination” of the Son to the Father. This means that *within* the eternal being (essence) of God is located a “permanent unilateral authority.”³⁰ To craft a division between God’s *being* and God’s *acting* by placing subordination *within* the divine essence of the Triune God (instead of within the incarnation) is to establish an openness for a distinction between God’s being and doing, God’s essence and function. It causes a permanent diminishment in the level of the Son’s equality with the Father *by nature*—something clearly reflected by complementarians in the differences they see between the *natures* of male and female.³¹ A key component of God’s holiness,

²⁶ Schreiner, “Head Coverings,” 128.

²⁷ Schreiner, “Head Coverings,” 132.

²⁸ Theology has described the Triune God as one in three and three in one—a mystery, to be sure. In an attempt to set limits about what we can properly say concerning that mystery, the Latin phrase “*Opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*,” is used. It means, “The works of the Trinity outside itself (to the outside) are indivisible.” It means that although one person may be the obvious “point” of an action, the other persons are also acting within that action. For example, the Son is the “point” person for the incarnation and redemption, but the Father and the Spirit are not left out of this event. They are there in the act of redemption. The same is true for creation: the Father is the “point” person for the creation of everything, but clearly the Scripture points to the activity of the Son and the Spirit in the creation of the world. Therefore, such a sharp distinction between essence and function in God may not be appropriate, theologically speaking.

²⁹ Kevin Giles, an Australian theologian, has noted how this evangelical approach began in the 1980s in response to feminism in society, but attempted to declare itself “orthodox” and even Nicene. He has published numerous books and articles to demonstrate the novelty of this approach and established rather definitively that it is not orthodox Christian belief. See Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and The Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002); also, Giles, “The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 334-352. Also, Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

³⁰ Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, “Equal in Being, Unequal in Role: Exploring the Logic of Women’s Subordination,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, 331.

³¹ For example, John Piper and Wayne Grudem argue that the key issue here is not about *roles*, but the “true meaning” and “underlying nature of manhood and womanhood.” See Piper and Grudem, “Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 60. In answer to the question, “Why do you regard the issue of male and female roles as so important?” Piper and Grudem respond, “We are concerned not merely with the behavioral roles of men and women but also with the underlying nature of manhood

as Colin Gunton has pointed out, is that God's being is entirely consistent with God's acting; indeed, there is an "integrity" between God's being and acting such that there is no division at all! Gunton labels this the "holiness" of God—when who God is (essence) is perfectly in line with how God acts.³²

The Son says that no one makes him lay down his life; he gives it voluntarily. The Son's obedience to the Father should not be seen as reflecting a difference in hierarchical rank *within the being* of the Trinity, but rather an agreement among Father, Son, and Spirit to the roles each would play in the revelation and execution of the Trinity's plan for creation and redemption. In the incarnation, the Son submits to the will of the Father—which, in reality, is precisely what was agreed upon together in "eternity past." To lay our own human understanding of submission and obedience over the life of the Trinity is a dangerous thing.³³ Yet to lay a mistaken view of "eternal subordination" in the Trinity over the relations of men and women is also a dangerous thing, with very practical consequences that result in creating permanent inferiority for females *by virtue of their nature*. The honored evangelical and Presbyterian theologian of the 1800s in North America, Charles Hodge, was a supporter of this style of "eternal subordination" of the Son. It was repudiated by his successor at Princeton, B. B. Warfield. However, it is noteworthy that Hodge's view of hierarchy within the Trinity may have had some impact in supporting his views concerning society's hierarchy, namely, that God placed men over women and whites over blacks. His strong support of slavery in the Old South shows us how an incorrect view of God can potentially distort one's view of social relations.³⁴

Second, even if such a depiction of essence and function in the Trinity were accurate, when it is applied in our sin-ridden world by human beings who distort even the most simple, honorable task with sin, is it reasonable to expect that humans will get it right? Will they always treat women who submit to their authority as God the Father would treat his Son? – Often, humans pervert authority into dominance. If man places himself over woman, the record of such dominion over the centuries of human history does not provide much hope.

Third, there is nowhere in the text that such an over/under authority scheme is spelled out. Therefore, we have to assume that it is being "read into" the text more than being drawn out from the text. Is there anything in these verses that states (as Schreiner believes) a woman's "demeanor and attitude" should be one of submission toward a male leader?

Fourth, nowhere in the ancient world is it clear that head coverings "communicated a submissive demeanor." While Wayne Grudem and Thomas Schreiner declare such ideas as statements of historical fact, the reality may be that such "historical facts" are anachronistic—probably taken from our time when we have seen Middle Eastern coverings and assumed that

and womanhood themselves" (60). Their claim here is that "patterns of unbiblical female leadership in the church" promotes confusion" over this true meaning of manhood and womanhood (60). We will attempt to respond to this broader concept of the nature of manhood and womanhood in Part 2.

³² Colin Gunton, *Act and Being: Toward a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 117.

³³ The warnings concerning this by Hollis Gause ring true. Christ is "Head" in "ways that are superior to the creature—any creature." How the divine Trinity relates in the community of Father, Son, and Spirit remains something of a mystery. However, there is something analogous to the way Christ loves the church and the way husbands and wives relate—if the "working relationship is a relationship based on their equality, not on the superiority of one over the other." See Gause, "Does the New Testament Prohibit Women Leaders?" 84-5.

³⁴ I am not suggesting that Hodge's view of hierarchy in the Trinity established his support for slavery, but that it did not call for a challenge to the sinful structures of society—especially when consideration of equal treatment for all is considered. See Giles, "The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 346, fn. 58.

the idea of submission to authority that they express now was what also occurred in the ancient world. There is no such “historical fact” in the ancient world.

Therefore, Side B asserts that this passage is not about authority of male over female, husband over wife. The current text says nothing about a man’s authority—period. Yet this is the common way that some interpreters approach the text when “head” is understood hierarchically as a power placement of “over/under.” For example, Wayne Grudem believes that “head coverings in the first century were a sign of relation to authority.”³⁵ However, there is no evidence for such a claim. As we shall see, how head coverings were worn by both male and female worshippers in the ancient world is a matter of great disparity throughout the Mediterranean world that depends on what era is under consideration and where it lays geographically.³⁶ Grudem’s presupposition that this passage is speaking of authority—in particular, the authority of a man over a woman—causes him to read into the passage precisely what is *not* there.

A Question of Head-Coverings or Hair: 1 Cor. 11:4-6³⁷

Leaving behind verse 3, we move to the apparent reason Paul was writing the Corinthians on this topic—men and women praying or prophesying in a dishonorable manner. As we shall see, the specific details of what this may mean (even whether it is an issue of long hair/short hair or veiled heads/unveiled heads) is a bit difficult to ascertain without some historical context (which we may never have in this life). Yet the key problem was that some men *and* women were worshipping in the congregation improperly.³⁸

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head (1 Cor. 11:4-6 NIV).

While it seems clear that something is happening related to the literal head of Corinthian worshippers, precisely what it is remains difficult to know for sure. How does a man praying “with his head covered” dishonor his head? The phrase “with his head covered” may have a slightly different translation: *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* | *kata kephalēs echōn* can mean “with having [something] on his head” or “having [long hair] coming down from the head.”³⁹ The latter translation may be possible, since *kata* usually means “down” with a verb of motion so it makes better sense to see this as something hanging downward from the head. To be sure, this could be a veil or covering, but verse 14 mentions “long hair” (*koma*) on a man specifically in this

³⁵ Grudem, “Does *kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature?” 56.

³⁶ Gordon Fee states that any evidence for this claim by Grudem would need much clearer demonstration for it to be valid.

³⁷ It should be noted here that the remaining sections do not fall easily into opposing sides like the previous one. However, because this material is germane to the whole argument of both, I have tried to offer various ways to interpret whatever is covering the head—for both men and women. In other words, both Side A and Side B use some of the exegetical principles and conclusions that I offer here, so rather than confusing them, I have offered the best hunches of scholars today regarding this section and the remaining ones.

³⁸ While Fee thinks that the focus of the problem was related to women, others see this as an issue with *both* men and women. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 491. Also, see Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” 483. This seems clearly to be an issue that both men and women were getting wrong. The express instructions to the “man” were not simply to serve as a debating foil in order to bring out more strongly the counterpart example for women.

³⁹ Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” 70.

context. Also, the word “veil” or “covering” (*kalymma*) does not occur anywhere in this passage. It is supplied by some translators or interpreters.

Philip Payne has argued extensively for viewing the entire passage as one focused on hair length and societal expectations of what long hair on men means as well as short hair on women. The difficulty in interpreting this phrase, “hanging down from the head” or “over the head,” is that Paul does not state *what* is hanging down or going over the head. While it could be assumed that it is some type of covering (such as a veil or even the edge of a cloak/toga pulled up over the head), this word is missing in the Greek and has been supplied in English by some translators in order to make sense of the sentence.⁴⁰ Payne notes that any argument that attempts to explain *what* is hanging down or over one’s head will require information from other parts of this passage and some cultural context. Clearly, we are not in the same cultural and historical setting as the Corinthians in the 50s AD. They must have known what Paul was talking about, but now twenty centuries later we need to inquire further what Paul might have meant with this phrase.

First, we must remember that Corinth was a Roman colony within a Greek territory. As a Greek city, it had been destroyed around 146 BC and was rebuilt by the Romans into a colony for the empire after 44 BC. In Paul’s day, both the people and the language would have been primarily Roman (Latin), but there were Greek influences all around. So, what would have been hanging down from a man’s head that would have been understood by all in that area as shameful—dishonoring or disgraceful? Here the customs of the ancient Greeks and Romans as well as those of Judaism in the first century AD are very important. Was it disgraceful for a man to pull a garment over his head in the context of worship? Jewish custom “approved head-covering garments for men leading in worship.”⁴¹ The Greco-Roman world also approved of showing one’s piety in worshipping the gods through covering one’s head with a toga’s edge (called *himation* in Greek or *capite velato* in Latin).⁴² Therefore, what could have been this thing hanging down or over the head? Payne notes that verse 14 gives us the clue: “**If a man has long hair** [κομᾶ | *koma*], **it is a disgrace to him.**” Thus, he sees the statement of verse 4 explained by verse 14.⁴³ Yet how could long hair be a disgrace in the first century? All of the cultural literature from Rome, Greece, and Judaism during the first century view long hair on men as a disgrace—especially if it is made to appear done up in a fashion similar to a woman’s hairstyle. Long hair on a male is “effeminate” in the view of the culture of Paul’s day.⁴⁴ Some connect long

⁴⁰ Technically, the problem in Greek lies in the fact that the word “head” is in the genitive case [κατὰ κεφαλῆς | *kata kephalēs*] as the object of the preposition, *kata*, where if we were expecting it to refer to a head covering it should have been accusative case [κατὰ κεφαλὴν | *kata kephalēn*] as the object of *kata*. Every time Paul uses *kata* with the genitive, it retains the idea of “motion” and has the sense of “against” or “down from.” It would be difficult at best for this expression as Paul wrote it to apply to something resting on top or over one’s head. He simply would have expressed it differently—with the accusative. To be sure, verse 7 says that a man “ought not to cover the head” [οὐκ κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν | *katakalyptesthai tēn kephalēn*], but that phrasing is nowhere present in verse 4. For details of this, see Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” 483-4.

⁴¹ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 142.

⁴² Payne, *Man and Woman*, 142.

⁴³ Contrary to this interpretation, Gordon Fee views this Greek idiom as “referring to an external cloth covering,” not hair. See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 507.

⁴⁴ A secular source named Pseudo-Phocylides (30 BC – 40 AD) advises parents not to allow long hair on their boys because of how some people may read them as effeminate and take advantage of them. Also, Philo (Jewish philosopher who is a near-contemporary with Paul) comments negatively on homosexuals who curl and dress up

hair on males directly with homosexuality, especially if the hairstyle was piled up on the head and decorated with objects usually worn in women's hair.⁴⁵ It is feasible to understand Paul's words here concerning shame related to the exchange of gender distinctions that are contrary to nature or custom—similar to the same terms used in Romans 1:26-27.⁴⁶

Whatever the specific nature of that which hangs down on or over the head of a man, Paul's point is clear: such a display brings shame to Christ. It “distracts attention from God or Christ in public worship by generating a discordant, semiotic clothing code or hairstyle code which inevitably draws attention to the self in a way which makes the person's head a source of shame for his or her own self-respect, the respect of the congregation, and the honor of the Lord who in public worship should be the central focus of thought and attention.”⁴⁷

In parallel fashion, Paul moves on to the case of women who cause shame in the congregation's worship setting. **“But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same thing as having her head shaved”** (1 Cor. 11:5). Given the interpretations presented regarding men in verse 4, what does the phrase “with her head uncovered” [ἀκατακαλύπτω τῆ κεφαλῇ | *akataklyptō tē kephalē*] mean here regarding women? First, we must remember that whatever the precise nature of the meaning here for “head uncovered,” we are encountering a significant cultural trend with the concepts of honor and shame. Woven into the fabric of society in the ancient world (especially in the Greco-Roman world of this time) was the principle that certain actions brought honor while others brought shame—both to oneself and to others connected with them. It is “dishonoring” to her head for a woman to have head uncovered while in worship. It is akin to having her head shaven. If this covering is a veil or a part of the cloak pulled over her head, then Paul is saying it is disgraceful to remove it.

However, it is also possible that this word for covering and uncovering as used of women here refers to long or short hair covering her head, in which “uncovered” can be translated as “unbound” or “loosened.”⁴⁸ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor argues that a head covering “was what kept the hair in order,” so that the uncovered head was the same as “disordered hair.”⁴⁹ This view seems supported by verse 15b: **“For long hair is given to her as a covering** [περιβολαίου | *peribolaion*].” Frequently, the word *peribolaion* is translated as “covering” or even “veil” here, but literally it is something that wraps around the head. In English we might even call it a “wrapper” for the hair. It could be that this wrap-around for hair was meant to operate as the way of arranging one's hair in braids or plaits. The opposite of this carefully organized hair that wraps neatly around the head would be disheveled hair that is unbound and loosened. Therefore, in this reading of the passage, “uncovered head” would refer to hair let down loosely—hair

their hair in a “provocative” manner (*Spec. Leg.* 3:36-38). See Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 485-6. Also, Payne, *Man and Woman*, 143.

⁴⁵ Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 486-7. While some Jews wore longer hair at this time (especially Nazarites with respect to their vow), the evidence seems to point to relatively short hair on Jewish men—something also in line with Greeks and Romans.

⁴⁶ Keener notes that some scholars see the Corinthians' actions as a “disregard for customary marks of gender identification.” Keener, *Paul, Women, & Wives*, 35. In this regard, note Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 510-11.

⁴⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 828.

⁴⁸ Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 488; also Payne, *Man and Woman*, chapter 9 (147-173).

⁴⁹ Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 488.

“unbound.”⁵⁰ A “covered head” would refer to hair that is “wrapped around” the head and kept (fastened?) in neat braids or plaited together in acceptable, modest forms.⁵¹ Why might a woman remove her head covering in worship and perhaps even loosen her hair? One possible answer lies in the fact that Paul had preached the coming of the new age to them (as is clear from his teaching both in 1 Corinthians and later in 2 Corinthians). While announcing the freedom in Christ that all believers possess, whether slave or free, male or female, it is possible that some of the women acted out their freedom through unbinding their hair and prophesying with “loose hair.” Richard Hays suggests that a report had reached Paul’s ears something like this: some women “acting in the freedom and power of the Spirit, have begun to remove their head coverings and loose their hair when they prophesy as a sign of their freedom in Christ.”⁵² The radical nature of the message of freedom in the Gospel of Christ that Paul preached had (perhaps) set off some people in Corinth into thinking that the eschaton had already come and therefore they needed to live without sexual differentiations or social customs, just as they would live in heaven (see 1 Cor. 4:8).

Why would disheveled, loosened hair flowing in the wind create shame for a woman and her head (source) in ancient Corinth? One possible answer is found in the pagan rituals of worship, especially for Dionysus (Bacchus). During the feasts of Bacchanalia for this god of wine, participants partied in the streets. Women would loosen their hair and appear “available” to the men walking by. This signaled their “sexual looseness and repudiation of marital commitment to sexual fidelity.”⁵³ In Corinth, statues and artwork of Dionysus rose prominently in the center of the city at the marketplace. “Matrons” for Bacchus performed rituals with “disheveled hair.”⁵⁴ In addition to such festivals, women who were prostitutes frequently went about town with their shawls or head-coverings down and their loosened hair gave a message to all that they were open for business. While it is not certain that this activity is why Paul spoke about the shame of a woman with her head uncovered, it may speak to the level of disgrace that a woman in worship would have let her hair down in such a way that others in the congregation might think she was acting like a prostitute. This would have been even more acute if the woman were married and the husband were sitting with her. What shame she would bring on her own head and that of her husband!⁵⁵ What a distraction for the entire church!

Why would women have done such a questionable act in a Christian worship setting? Women were allowed to pray and worship in many pagan religious settings. Some of these religious experiences opened the door for women to behave in an ecstatic manner (as with the cults of Cybele and Isis), loosening their hair and speaking ecstatically as they danced around. It seems possible that the freedom given to such women in the pagan world might have been simply transferred by Christian converts in Corinth so that when they prayed aloud or prophesied in the midst of the congregation, they expressed their freedom to worship in a manner that would have been understood to match those expressions in the religious world in

⁵⁰ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 150.

⁵¹ There are plenty of illustrations from the ancient world that show women with long hair that is carefully wrapped around the head. One also notes the fact that Paul has warned women against demonstrating their wealth and social status in Ephesus by wearing gold and pearls woven in their hair (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

⁵² Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 1997), 183.

⁵³ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 164.

⁵⁴ The Roman historian, Livy, records this. See Payne, *Man and Woman*, 162-3.

⁵⁵ I emphasize that this is conjecture on my part, but seems to make sense of the passage in relation to both loosened hair and uncovered heads, since either action would have raised eyebrows in almost any social setting in Corinth. See Payne, *Man and Woman*, 154, who cites R. Hays, *First Corinthians*, on this issue of appearing like a prostitute with loosened hair.

general. Again, this can only be speculation, but it could be seen to resolve some problems with understanding the text. Women in ancient Greece and Rome at the time of Paul wore their hair “done up” in order to show their respectability.⁵⁶ This may have been the “custom” or “practice” that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 11:16. To ignore the social custom while in the midst of worship would distract attention from Christ and instead pour contempt on a woman’s own head or on her husband.⁵⁷

While each culture had its own view as to whether or not a woman’s head should be covered in any given social setting, there was a consensus on loosened hair. It was a disgrace.⁵⁸ However, what is odd is that it was not disgraceful for a man to pray with head covered in Roman, Greek, or Jewish society. Yet Paul argues that such an action is shameful, just as shorn hair on a woman is shameful. This may only make sense *if* we understand the whole problem related to the length of hair that comes down around the head. In all three cultures, long hair on men was dishonorable. It seems that a woman’s unbound hair—wild or disheveled in appearance—was also dishonorable, even to the point of being equated with a woman caught in adultery having her hair shaved as punishment. Thus, the specific action that Paul may have been addressing had to do with the disgraceful attempts of men and women to portray messages to others in the congregation; such believers may have been thumbing their noses at acceptable cultural expressions of male/female and instead exalting their freedom to worship in whatever way they pleased outside of social conventions of normality. This passage is not about subordination of women to men or about some form of hierarchical authority, “which is hardly Paul’s point.”⁵⁹ Again, while the precise nature of the problem and Paul’s instructions about it

⁵⁶The evidence for this is overwhelming in portraits that have survived (usually from wall painting, especially from Pompeii) and sculptures of the heads of women. I recall walking through the Vatican Museum and entering a long, narrow room. On the one side were windows letting in beautiful sunshine while on the other side were an enormous number of female sculptures (mainly of the head and hair) on shelving three or four rows high. Some of them came from the century before Christ and many of them were contemporary with Paul. What struck me most was that I finally understood references to women’s hairstyles in 1 Timothy and 1 Peter where braiding and plaiting were clearly *the* method for women to demonstrate their respectability or status. Not even one of these hundreds of busts showed a woman from the ancient Greco-Roman world with unbound or loosened hair! For specific historical references in support of this issue, see Payne, *Man and Woman*, 160.

⁵⁷Gordon Fee notes that for Paul, “the issue was directly tied to a cultural shame that scarcely prevails in most cultures today.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 512.

⁵⁸Some commentators run roughshod over this historical point. Just because the Athenians in the 4th century BC required women to cover their heads and not go out in public without a man does not mean the Spartans required the same thing—or that Corinth operated similarly in the first century AD. Both time and geography caused differences of customs. They vary among the Greeks, Romans, and Jews in the centuries before and after Christ. There is no *one* way that covering the head was understood.

⁵⁹Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 512. The fact that we cannot know the *precise* nature of the issues involved in this passage means we cannot offer *literal obedience* to Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians. For example, women wearing head-coverings today during church worship based on this passage may have misunderstood the entire point—perhaps it was about hair length and gender distinctions, not head-coverings. Further, Paul argues so strongly from a *cultural standpoint* in the ancient world that we would need to be *in the first-century world* in order to understand and obey it literally. This is especially important for those who take subordination of a woman to a man as the point of this passage theologically. Nowhere does Paul state that clearly here and the *theological point* that we are to understand has to do with *relationships* of male/female and especially with Christ. How do we put that theological point into practice in the church worship setting? We do not do anything culturally that would show disregard for the distinctions between the genders that God has made (in other words, males do not try to dress or behave like females and females do not try to dress or behave like males). Further, we do not do anything culturally that would bring dishonor on our relationships with others and with Christ. We cannot be responsible for doing anything that would draw attention away from Christ during worship by sending inappropriate sexual or gender

may not be known, at the very least it has to do with respect for Christ and respect for the distinctions between male and female both because of cultural expectations and because of theological concerns. It is to these latter issues that we now turn.

Other Principles Concerning Men and Women **1 Corinthians 11:7-12**

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God (NIV).

We move now into the second section of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Paul's argument here continues the head/source idea and offers explanation from the creation of Adam and Eve that supports his point. A male should not cover his head—or if the issue is hair length, should not grow long hair that could be viewed as effeminate. Why? It is because the man is made by God and is the “image and glory” of God just as he is. While Paul does not explain what he means by picking up the Genesis 1:26 passage here,⁶⁰ it could simply mean this: Why should the man subvert God's intention for him in creation?⁶¹ If a man made himself up to look like a woman, he would then be in the “image” of a woman instead of the image of God. Yet the man is the “image and glory” of God. The word “glory” here refers to giving honor to God.⁶² A man should rejoice in his creation as a male and honor God in this.

The Greek text provides a clear contrast between the discussion of the man here (a man, “for his part”) and a woman (“for her part”).⁶³ While Paul speaks of the “image and glory” of man, he only speaks here of the “glory” of woman, which is man. Paul clearly knows Genesis 1:26, which speaks of *both* male and female as created “**according to the image and likeness of God,**” but he chooses only to use the word “glory” to describe a woman's relationship to the man. It is perhaps because he moves from the Genesis 1 narration of creation of the human to the Genesis 2 depiction of man being made from the dust of the ground and woman being created from his side. That seems to be where Paul intends to direct his argument: man originates from God and then woman originates from the man. As created by God, the man is to give honor to God by respecting his gender; as created *out of* the man by God, the woman is to give honor to the man by respecting her gender. Whatever the *specific actions* of the Corinthian men and women addressed in this head-covering or hair length discussion, the relationship of the woman giving honor to the man and the man giving honor to God is “jeopardized.”⁶⁴

“For this reason a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels” (1 Cor. 11:10 NIV). Here the phrase “to have authority over” could also be rendered “to

signals. Also, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 161.

⁶⁰ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 515.

⁶¹ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 176, n. 4.

⁶² Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 835; also, Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic,” 495, n. 54.

⁶³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 836, provides this translation for μέν ... δέ | *men ... de*, which means “one the one hand... on the other hand.”

⁶⁴ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 516. At this point, Fee rightly points out that interpreters have realized Paul does not finish the argument but moves on to explain his point further. It feels like the argument should say something like, “and so a woman's head should be covered when prophesying so that she will bring honor to her source, the man.” Yet that does not occur.

have control over” her own head.⁶⁵ How was she to do this? Perhaps by wrapping up her hair around her head so it was not loosened and unbound.⁶⁶ She is to exercise control over it, but if she wants to bring honor to Christ (and perhaps her husband), she needs to cover it (either with long, wrapped up hair or cloth covering). What the phrase “because of the angels” means is so difficult to ascertain and so far afield from the purpose of our study, that we can safely leave it without trying to explain it.

From here Paul moves to make one of the clearest statements about the equal status of men and women *in Christ*: “**Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman**” (1 Cor. 11:11 NIV). Paul begins with a rather unusual word in Greek: “nevertheless” [πλὴν | *plēn*] is not simply a word that calls for a change of thinking in the flow of his argument. Instead, it is a word that signals something new is coming in the argument.⁶⁷ It can mean “only, in any case.” It is used to “conclude a discussion and emphasize what is essential.”⁶⁸ In the Greek sentence, the phrase, “**in the Lord**” appears in the point of emphasis at the very *end*. This may be why in English the NIV translators decided to place it at the *front* of the sentence for emphasis. The word translated “independent”⁶⁹ by the NIV is χωρὶς | *chōris*. It is better translated by the phrases, “set apart from”⁷⁰ or “different from.”⁷¹ Paul is telling the Corinthians something like this: Here’s the point of the lesson that I’ve been driving toward: in the Lord, men and women are equal—just as Paul observed in Galatians 3:28—because the woman needed the man as her source (the “woman is from the man”) and the man needs the woman in order to be born (1 Cor. 11:8-9 and 11-12). There is mutual interdependence between man and woman.⁷² Therefore, Philip Payne suggests, “Paul’s key point is that the barriers between man and woman have been overcome in Christ.”⁷³ While there may be a need for the maintenance of the distinctiveness of the genders as created by God during our living between the present age and the age to come, there is no inferiority or subordination required from that distinctiveness.⁷⁴ There is equality in Christ. Supporters of Side B would conclude,

⁶⁵ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 182-3. Thiselton suggests, “keep control of their heads.” Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 839.

⁶⁶ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 183.

⁶⁷ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 194.

⁶⁸ Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” 72; also, Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 522, n. 39.

⁶⁹ Thiselton notes that the NRSV and NIV use “independent of” but that this is going beyond the meaning of the adverb χωρὶς | *chōris*. See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 841.

⁷⁰ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 189.

⁷¹ Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” 72.

⁷² This is the conclusion of *both sides* A and B. For example, Thomas R. Schreiner (Side A) states, “There is a profound interdependence and mutuality present in the male-female relationship, and neither sex can boast over the other because the sexes are interdependent.” However, Schreiner also submits that Paul is stating here a principle of equality of essence, difference in function. [Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 136.] On Side B, Gordon Fee states, “Paul’s intent therefore is not to put women in their place, as it were, but to maintain a cultural tradition that has the effect of serving as a gender distinctive, even while ‘in the Lord’ neither is independent of the other (1 Cor. 11:11).” Fee, “Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 160.

⁷³ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 193.

⁷⁴ Inherent in the discussion throughout 1 Corinthians is the theological problem that some Corinthians held a thoroughly realized eschatology. What this means is that some had felt that the new age had already come into the present age, thereby allowing Christians to live as if heaven had already come down to earth. We see Paul addressing this in 1 Corinthians 4:8-12 where he speaks rather sarcastically to those Corinthians who believe the kingdom of God has already arrived and they are living in it: “**Already you have all you want! Already you have**

“Paul clearly does not want his specific instructions regarding the ‘head covering’ issues raised by the Corinthian church to support any subordination of woman to man in Christ.”⁷⁵ Supporters of Side A would conclude, “The text before us makes it plain that Paul thought role distinctions and equality were not contradictory. People can be equal in essence and yet have different functions. The fairest way to read Paul is to let his own writings strike the balance. Verses 3-10 make it clear that he believed in role distinction; verses 11-12 show that he did not thereby believe women were inferior or less important. Those who focus only on verses 11-12 effectively shut out verses 3-10. It is a mistake to exclude either teaching; we must hold them together as Paul did.”⁷⁶

Clearly, both sides read the same passage with different lenses and understanding of the meaning of what Paul is saying.

1 Corinthians 11:13-16

“Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God” (1 Cor. 11:13-16 NIV).

The previous discussion melds nicely into this concluding section, which offers Paul’s summary about men and women in relation to hair. The key addition here, however, is the stress on the “nature of things” and the “practice” or “custom” of things among the cultures of the world and the churches of God.

The Corinthians are told to “come to a decision” among themselves regarding all of this that deals with head-coverings.⁷⁷ Paul begins with a rhetorical question: **“Does not the very nature of things”** (NIV) or “Does not even the very ordering of how things are”⁷⁸ teach you that long hair on a man is a disgrace and long hair on a woman is her glory? The idea of “nature of things” portrays the meaning behind the Greek words φύσις αὐτή | *physis autē*. Paul seems to press the Corinthians to see that the differences between short and long hair in relation to male and female distinctiveness of appearance is a natural way to understand the order of things in the world.⁷⁹ Even the non-Christian culture around the Corinthians would have understood that nature differentiates between male and female. Paul asks the Corinthians to consider carefully gender differentiation as it is expressed by hairstyles or head-coverings; whatever these styles and coverings may have been, they come to the Christians at Corinth through society’s “shared conventions and social norms.”⁸⁰

become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!” (1 Cor. 4:8 NIV). It seems strongly possible and indeed congruent with the problems in Corinth that men and women had decided to live in the present age *as if the full benefits of the age to come had already settled on them*. Paul has to instruct them that such a theological perspective held dangers as an over-realized eschatology. The future age still awaits us in its fullness, but it comes to us here *provisionally* in the present age in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Finding the balance by which we live in this present, evil age with the powers of the age to come is the key to living the Christian life—to being *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

⁷⁵ Payne, *Man and Woman*, 194.

⁷⁶ Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 136-37.

⁷⁷ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 843.

⁷⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 844; Payne, *Man and Woman*, 202.

⁷⁹ For a description of how Paul considers *physis* in ways similar to contemporary writers of the Greco-Roman world, see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 844-46. Also, Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 526, n. 11.

⁸⁰ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 846.

Paul concludes by an appeal to those who challenge this social norm. He describes such people as being “contentious”—or more literally, “loving victory” as if this were a competition [φιλόνηκος | *philoneikos*].⁸¹ Such people are “disposed to” (NRSV) causing strife through argumentation. This type of contentious spirit over the way men and women flaunt their freedom in worship to dress or wear their hair in manners inappropriate to their gender is not the way things are done in the churches that belong to God. The *custom* [συνήθειαν | *synētheian*] among the churches allows for the freedom of men *and* women to pray and prophesy out loud in the common worship setting, but it does not allow for men and women to blur gender differences in a way that disrupts worship.⁸²

As with earlier problems in Corinth (such as issues related to sexuality or eating meat offered to idols), Paul seems to say that not everything is helpful. “**I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything,’—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others**” (1 Cor. 10:23-24 NIV). Or in Paul’s response to this Corinthian slogan earlier in the letter, “**‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but I will not be mastered by anything**” (1 Cor. 6:12b NIV). As noted earlier, some Corinthians seem to have been overtaken by an eschatology that assumes the future age has fully come in the present; they have taken this view too far by suggesting there is no need for gender differentiation *in this age* because the future era—where we will be like the angels, neither marrying nor giving in marriage—has already arrived. In arguing against this view, Paul does three things:

- (1) he stresses the need to hold on to gender differences in this present age because the order of creation has not yet been fully done away with;
- (2) he emphasizes the equality of men and women before God (“in the Lord”) in this present age, even with their gender norms of culture (each may pray and prophesy when dressed in such a manner that does not draw attention to itself);
- (3) he establishes the principle that a woman has authority over her own head—that is, in the end, what she chooses to wear in worship is her decision—but she needs to know how that will affect herself and those related to her as well as the honor that is due to God in worship.

Concluding Summary Points

What have we come to understand about headship as related to women in leadership in this passage? *First*, the specific nature of what Paul was addressing may never be known to us. However, we do know that it had to do with shame/honor within the society and the congregation. Apparently, some men and women were doing something with their head coverings or hair length that gave inappropriate signals of a sexual nature or of a pagan religious nature that Paul felt it necessary to instruct them.

Second, it seems quite probable that the behavior that occurred during prayer and prophecy was distracting and dishonoring. Nonetheless, we must not miss the fact that Paul makes it clear he expects *both* men and women to pray and prophesy in the worship setting. In this passage, there seems to be no limitation or hierarchical ordering that dictates women are

⁸¹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 847. Readers will see the idea of “love” in the first five letters of the Greek word: *philo* (= love) and the idea of “victory” in the final letters: *neikos* (= victory, which might be better recognized by the shoe name, Nike).

⁸² Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 847.

required to submit to men in this worship setting. Indeed, *in the Lord*, men and women are *interdependent* and equal—but also must remain respectful of their created gender differences.

Third, the figurative use of “head” (κεφαλή | *kephalē*) in this passage **may** lean toward “source” or “origin,” precisely because it is so described in the context in vv. 8 and 10. Further, the evidence is strong in the ancient world that this word as a metaphor did not mean “leader”, “ruler”, or “someone who has authority over.” While it may be argued that Ephesians 5 uses “head” in a manner that may mean “authority over,” that passage addresses marriage, not leadership in the church. Here in this passage, we are dealing with men and women in general, especially in the context of the congregation’s worship of God.