
Covered by What? The Head Covering in 1 Corinthians 11

Peter Allison
2005, Revised 2011

The purpose of this short note is to provide an answer why the women in our family do not wear a veil during worship. It is not meant to be a formal exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11, but was written primarily to show why I do not find the pro-head covering arguments to be persuasive. As such, I have no desire to persuade anyone not to wear head coverings. I have only the greatest respect for those who do wear head coverings (or teach the wearing) in as much as it represents a commitment to follow scripture even when it is completely contrary to cultural norms.

This issue of head coverings belongs to a special subset of questions on which I would not argue that I am right. I have reasons why we do what we do; but at the same time I am not convinced my arguments are as airtight as I would prefer in order to form a strong conviction. Of course I have the same opinion of the arguments that I have encountered so far for the other positions. I am not absolutely convinced the pro-veil line of reasoning is wrong although I find it more complex and problematic than the arguments for hair as the covering. So we walk onward toward the celestial city, rejoicing with all the "veiled" heads that happen to be walking along with us.

The Text: 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

- (1) Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.
- (2) Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.
- (3) But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.
- (4) Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.
- (5) But every woman that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.
- (6) For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.
- (7) For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.
- (8) For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.
- (9) Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.
- (10) For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.
- (11) Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.
- (12) For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.
- (13) Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?
- (14) Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?

Covered by What?

- (15) But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.
(16) But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

The Greek Words for Covering

The different Greek expressions in this text that are translated “cover” or “uncover” are:

- (v4) “... κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων...” (kata kephalēs echōn) Prepositional phrase
(v5) “... ἀκατακαλύπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ...” (akatakaluptōi tēi kephalēi) Adjective describing head
(v6) “...οὐ κατακαλύπτεται...” (ou katakaluptetai) Present, Middle, 3rd Person Singular Indicative
“...κατακαλυπτέσθω...” (katakaluptesthō) Present, Middle, 3rd Person Singular Imperative
(v7) “... κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν...” (katakaluptesthai tēn kephalēn) Present Middle Infinitive
(v13) “... ἀκατακάλυπτον τῷ...” Adjective describing woman (Accusative Singular Feminine)
(v15) “...περιβολαίου...” Object of Preposition (Genitive Singular Neuter)

There are 3 Greek terms in this passage that are used to describe the veil and being clothed with a veil. They are all translated by the English word *cover* which, conveniently, can cover as a noun, a verb, or an adjective.

The term in verse 4 is κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων. With the genitive this prepositional phrase literally means, “having [something] down the head.” Although the text doesn’t specify what is “down the head”, this is a common expression for a veil in Greek literature. The Septuagint uses this expression in Esther 6:12 to describe Haman going to his house with his head covered after parading Mordecai through the streets. A similar expression (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς) is used in Mark 14:3 to describe the woman’s pouring the spikenard on Jesus’ head. Although she poured it on top of his head, it’s clear that the spikenard would have run down his head after being poured.

Verses 5-7 and 13 use a verbal or adjectival form of κάλυμμα (kalumma) which also means to cover with a veil, or in the case of an adjective, the state of being covered with a veil. Although the noun form is not used in this passage, it is used in 2 Corinthians 3:13-16 to describe the veil that covered Moses’ face, clearly a reference to a piece of fabric.

Verse 15 introduces a third term (ἀντὶ περιβολαίου - *anti peribolaïou*) that is only used one other place in the New Testament (Hebrews 1:12) where it refers to a garment. In this text it is used as the object of a preposition. BDAG defines *peribolaion* as “that which is thrown around: an article of apparel that covers much of the body; covering, wrap, cloak, robe.” According to Thayer the preposition *anti* means:

- 1) over against, opposite to, before
- 2) for, instead of, in place of (something)
 - 2a) instead of

Covered by What?

- 2b) for
- 2c) for that, because
- 2d) wherefore, for this cause

The Purpose of Head-coverings

The passage I hang my hat on, so to speak, is 1 Corinthians 11:15 where Paul explicitly states that a woman's long hair is her glory and is given to her for a covering. The exact opposite is true for a man. Verse 14 states that it is a shame for a man to have long hair.

In the first part of this chapter Paul is teaching that a distinction is to be made between men and women while they are praying and prophesying. A woman is to be covered (v 6). A man is not to be covered (v 7). In verse 14 Paul appeals to nature to demonstrate that establishing a contrast between men and women is not unusual, odd, or a new, hitherto unheard of idea, but rather something even nature does. Even nature teaches that while it is a shame for a man to have long hair, it is not a shame for a woman. In fact long hair is her glory. I don't think anyone does or would argue from the statements in verse 7 (men are to not to be covered) and verse 14 (it is a shame for men to have long hair) that Paul is therefore teaching that men have to be shaven and shorn. A much more workable and reasonable assumption is that men should have short hair rather than long hair. Unless one believes men ought to be shaven, verse 7, 14, and 15 taken together would seem to imply that a man with short hair is uncovered while a woman with long hair is covered. In other words it is the length of hair, not the presence or absence of hair, that constitutes being, or not being, covered.

From these two verses I understand Paul to be teaching, by an appeal to nature, that

- a) long hair = covering.
- b) short hair = uncovered
- c) While it is a shame for a man to be covered (i.e. have long hair), it is a woman's glory.

Since these verses are the clear verses, according to the Biblical principle of reasoning from the clear passages to the unclear passages, we should therefore reason from these clear verses to the more difficult ones at the beginning of the chapter.

If one now reads the first part of the chapter with this understanding in mind we learn that:

- a) Every man praying or prophesying with long hair (head covered) dishonors Christ. (v 4)
- b) Every woman who prays or prophesies with short hair (uncovered) dishonors her husband (or father if she is unmarried). (v 5)
- c) A woman praying or prophesying with short hair is morally equivalent to praying or prophesying with a shaved head. (v 5)
- d) It is a shame to have a shaved head. (This is a given) (v 6)
- e) Therefore women must have long hair. (v 6) This is an imperative.

It is from verses 5 & 6 that head-covering advocates argue that long hair can't be the covering Paul has in mind because if that were the case, these verses wouldn't make any sense. They argue that if

Covered by What?

covering is understood as “long hair”, the argument in verse 6 becomes a tautology or even nonsense¹. However, this is only the case if one is assuming that covered means “having hair” and uncovered means “no hair.” If we base our meaning of “uncovered” on verse 7, 14, & 15 and require being uncovered to mean the same thing when used of a woman as it does when used of a man, then we understand a woman not being covered to mean that she has short hair. With that understanding, I think these verses can be understood in a way that does make sense.

Let me use an analogy. Substitute “bikini” for “not covered”.

I think most would agree that it would not be a meaningless statement or a tautology to say that every woman who sunbathes in public in a bikini dishonors her husband, for that is one and the same as if she were naked. But if it is a shame for her to be naked in public, then let her be modestly dressed or covered. The argument can be logically modeled as follows:

Major Premise: Sunbathing in a string bikini is essentially equivalent to being naked.

Minor Premise: If it is a shame to be naked in public,

Conclusion: Then women should not sunbathe in public in a bikini. They should be covered.²

Applied to our passage, Paul’s argument becomes:

Major Premise: A woman praying or prophesying with short hair is essentially equivalent to praying or prophesying with a shaven head.

Minor Premise: If it is a shame to have a shaven head,

Conclusion: Then women should not pray or prophesy with short hair. They should be covered.

¹ Marion Lovett in *A Woman’s Head in Public Worship* says, “It is clear that this distinction in worship cannot be the woman’s hair. If the hair were the woman’s covering in worship, then we have problems when we go back and plug it in verses 5-7. By plugging in “hair” as the woman’s covering in verse 6, the verse would read, ‘For if the woman be not covered (doesn’t have her hair), let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered (have her hair).’ This is nonsense and could not be the meaning of the passage.”

Scott Wang articulated a similar position, “Let’s look at it logically. If a woman prays without a head covering, she should be shaved. Therefore, if she should be shaved, she couldn’t have already been shaved. It’s kind of hard to shave and shaved head. They say that hair is her covering... So if she doesn’t have hair (i.e.. a covering), she should be shaved. But how can you shave the head, if there is no hair to shave?!” ¶ “Paul is speaking of women who DO have hair, and hair can’t be the covering. If it were a covering, then men should be bald.”

Retrieved from <http://www.angelfire.com/wi/godseesyou/headcovering.html> on Dec 11, 2011.

² Like all analogies, this one fails if pressed too hard. This one fails in that immodest dress is a shame for both men and women. Having short hair (i.e. a men’s style haircut) is only a shame for a woman, not a man. However I think it is useful in showing how Paul can say “if a women is not covered, let her be shorn” without engaging in a tautology when covering means long hair.

Covered by What?

Seen this way, this is a very meaningful statement. Paul's teaching is that for a woman to have short hair is equivalent to her having a shaved head. Paul's assumption is that everyone would agree that for a woman to have a shaved head is humiliating. This remains true today. Most any female chemotherapy patient would agree that having a bald head is embarrassing. On the other hand, many men shave their heads as a matter of choice, especially if they have little hair to begin with. The force of his argument is that if a woman has short hair like a man, it is the same as if her head was shaved. If a woman has a man's style of haircut, she loses some of her femininity. It is not becoming to her. It is a shame just like a shaved head is embarrassing. This is true all the time. However, it is especially important when a woman is praying or prophesying. To use our previous analogy again, it is always important to be dressed modestly; however it is especially important when we come before the throne of grace. That is why we wear our "Sunday best" to church.

This understanding also comports with both the cultural context and the grammatical meaning of the word, cover. According to Strong, the Greek word used in verse 6, (*katakaluptō*) means to cover wholly, that is, veil: - cover, hide. Most commentators understand it to be referring to a veil of some sort. It seems that in Paul's day it was not uncommon for women to be veiled when appearing in public. By using the word for veil in teaching that women need to have long hair, Paul related to something that people readily understood. People would have readily understood the discomfort of a woman appearing in public without a veil. Having established the moral necessity of a woman being covered for reasons of headship, Paul then makes it clear that a woman's hair is given to her as a covering or veil. Ordinarily one should be wary of substituting something else in place of the grammatical meaning of a word; however in this case, the text itself makes the connection in verse 15 by saying that a woman's hair is given as a covering or literally, a veil. (The significance of different words for *covering* being used in v 6 & 15 is discussed later.) The preposition translated *for* in v15 often implies a substitution, something instead of, or in place of, something else. For example, Matthew 20:28, which states that Jesus gave his life a ransom for many, uses this same preposition to convey the idea of substitution – one thing in place of another. 1 Corinthians 11:15 is a clear statement teaching that a woman's long hair is given to her in place of a veil and serves the important function of covering her.

With this understanding, verses 13-15 dovetail very naturally with the instruction in verses 4-6. In the earlier verses Paul taught that woman ought to be covered (have long hair) and that men ought to be uncovered (have short hair) in worship. In the later passage Paul supports his point by appealing to nature or the created order to demonstrate that the opposite (i.e. long hair on men and short hair on women) is shameful.

For a man to have long hair is a shame. He has assumed that which pertains to women. Likewise, for a woman to have short hair is a shame because she has assumed that which pertains to a man.

The essence of Paul's argument is that the bodily features that differentiate men and women are important, especially in worship. Women must not "look like" men, and men must not "look like" women.

The Applicability of the Command for Women to be Covered

Among those who believe this passage requires a woman to wear a head covering in addition to her long hair, there is a wide variation of opinion regarding who must be covered (all women or only some)

Covered by What?

and when they must be covered. It generally hinges on how one understands praying and prophesying. “Does it always involve leading?” and “Can it occur outside corporate worship?”

Here’s a summary of the logical options of understanding the praying and prophesying command in 1 Corinthians 11. I believe it is logically comprehensive, i.e. there are no other categories possible. When combined with the teaching in Corinthians requiring a woman to keep silent in the church³, the following conclusions can be drawn:

	P&P Only Happens in Corporate Worship	P&P Can Happen in any Setting
P&P Implies Leading	<p>A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women not permitted to P&P • Head-covering command (HC) only applicable to disobedient women. 	<p>B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women only permitted to P&P outside corporate worship. • HC only applies to women P&P outside of corporate worship.
P&P Doesn’t Imply Leading	<p>C</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women permitted to P&P if not leading. • HC applies to all women, but only in corporate worship. 	<p>D</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women permitted to P&P if not leading in corporate worship. • HC applies to all women whenever they pray or prophesy.

If praying and prophesying happens only in corporate worship (Case A or C), wearing a head covering must either apply to all women or only to disobedient women leading in worship. Case A (only some women must wear a head covering) should never exist in a faithful church.

On the other hand, if this passage is not limited to corporate worship, then it is requiring that women should be covered where ever and whenever they might be praying or prophesying – one on one with the young sister in the Lord on Tuesday morning, Monday with her family, weekday mornings praying with her husband etc.

My understanding is that that praying and prophesying can be used to describe non-leading activity and that it is not limited to public worship (Case D). My rationale is as follows. Why would Paul waste time teaching women how to properly do something they were forbidden from doing? It is like saying “Don’t forget to tithe on any money that you steal” or “Don’t forget to thank God for stolen food.” I grant that this is not a logically airtight argument. The previous statements might have some useful context. For example, Paul gives direction on forbidden activity when he specifies that men who have

³ 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.(35) And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

Covered by What?

more than one wife are not qualified to be elders. However, in this situation the men were not able to undo their previous sin, if both wives consented to live with their converted husband. But this doesn't apply to praying and prophesying. If it was wrong for women to pray and prophesy, I can think of no reason why a woman would have to continue the practice, had she been engaged in that activity. I think a better solution is to understand praying in a passive sense. We say of a group that "they are praying" when the majority of the group are listening to one man pray. A case might be made for understanding prophesying in a similar way when the congregation is singing. (See appendix A.) Women were prophets in both the OT and NT. They were just not allowed to exercise this gift in public worship.

The question of whether this passage applies outside of worship would depend on whether there was any textual support to interpret the passage as applying to more than corporate worship. We know the subsequent context is public worship because Paul explicitly makes it so. In v17 he talks about when they "come together" and in v18 he says again when you come together in church. In chapter 14 he says women are "to keep silent in the church" and let them "ask their husbands at home for it is a shame for a women to speak in church." Chapters 12 & 14 are filled with references to church, other people, or the body. Chapter 10 also contains instruction related to public worship. This much is granted. But it is also true that there is no specific reference to public worship in the head-covering passage. While much of the overall context, both preceding and subsequent, is clearly public worship, not all of the immediate context is exclusively applicable to public worship. The immediate preceding passage speaks of doing all to the glory of God – even eating and drinking. While that applies to the Lord's Supper, most would not limit the applicability of that command to public worship. In other words we should always do all to the glory of God both in and out of public worship. It speaks of thinking in terms of what is edifying and not merely what is lawful. That principle doesn't only apply during public worship. Likewise, I don't think anyone would argue that 1 Corinthians 13, which is a part of the whole discussion on gifts, is limited to corporate worship, despite being right in the middle of the 2 chapters dealing with gifts in the church. In the same fashion, I don't think 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 which actually precedes the passage on the exercise of gifts in the church has to be limited to corporate worship, though it certainly includes it.

Seeing the passage as applicable all the time is also consistent with the earlier passages in 1 Corinthians that deal with marriage, Christian liberty, and believers suing one another. These all have broad application to body life outside corporate worship. The chapter on marriage is clearly not limited to corporate worship since it goes without saying that no one would argue that it's OK to touch a woman outside corporate worship. The passages dealing with Christian liberty are also applicable outside of corporate worship for the same reasons.

1 Timothy 2 is another passage with a strong church context. There Paul says that "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over men. Most agree this prohibition includes a Friday evening home Bible study. This has historically even been applied outside the church to civil government. Calvin calls women rulers a monstrous thing. For these reasons, I believe arguments to limit praying and prophesying only to corporate worship that are drawn from the church context of 1 Corinthians prove too much. In fact I think they prove just the opposite. These broad commands in other chapters relate to church life all the time and in all of our relations. 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 should be handled in a similar fashion. If the activity being addressed can be done outside of corporate worship, then the commands should also apply outside of corporate worship. Praying and prophesying are clearly things that were done outside of formal public worship and the command for women to have a covering should apply whenever they are performed. Applying this passage to all of life, not just public worship, completely eliminates the difficulty of Paul teaching women how to properly do something they are forbidden to do.

Covered by What?

For these reasons I have always thought that if a covering in addition to a woman's long hair is required, the Mennonite's position is the most consistent. They wear it all day because they never know when they will offer a prayer. But even that has some problems. They take their covering off when going to bed. Now they can't pray without violating this command - which I think is problematic. Don't Christians often pray in the night? Would a woman have to wear a head covering even to bed to keep from sinning? Yes, if that's what Scripture required. But now we are talking about a woman having to wear an external article all her life- day and night- as a covering. Doesn't her long hair fit that requirement beautifully?

Difficulties with Other Pro-Veil Arguments

Some veil advocates reason that the woman's hair is to be covered because it is her glory. One author says "the woman's hair is that which magnifies the woman and brings a high opinion to her onlookers. In this way her hair is her glory." A few paragraphs later he says, "Her glory, that is, her hair, should be covered since it exists to her own honor and praise." In his view, the point of the covering is to cover her glory, that which causes other people to look at her. However many people who do wear a head covering in obedience to this passage, wear a hat that is even more glorious or ostentatious than the hair they are covering. They are probably more likely to cause people to look at them than if they had not worn anything on their head. This is another reason why I think the Mennonites' net is more consistent. The simple net is not more ostentatious than their natural glory (i.e. long hair), although it does fail to fully cover the hair.

But there is a much bigger problem with the idea that the 1 Corinthians 11 is teaching that women must wear a veil on their hair so that only the Glory of God is left uncovered during public worship. Not only are all human glories not covered if a woman wears a veil covering her hair, but covering them all would directly contradict the explicit teaching that men are not to be covered.

Scripture teaches that there are other human glories in addition to the three given in this text – a woman's long hair, the woman herself, and the man who is the glory of God. For example, the glory of children is their father and grandchildren are the glory or crown of old men (Proverbs 17:6). The glory of young men is their strength and the glory or splendor of old men is their gray head (Proverbs 20:29). If 1 Corinthians 11 were teaching that all glory but God's must be covered in worship, then the strength of young men, fathers, and the grey heads of old men would also have to be covered in some way during worship. But this would result in men being covered, something that is expressly forbidden in this passage. However, if this passage is understood to be teaching that women are to have long hair, then this passage is about maintaining a distinction in dress between men and women (something that is also taught in the Old Testament⁴), with women having long hair and men short hair.

Another argument for the use of a head covering in addition to hair is made from the different words used in the verse 15 *covering* and the verse 6 *covering*. Proponents for head coverings point out that the covering in verse 6 entails more complete coverage than the covering in verse 15 which Paul equates to a woman's long hair. They argue that the verse 6 covering is veil and the verse 15 covering is

⁴ The woman shall not wear that which pertains unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God. Deuteronomy 22:5.

Covered by What?

more like a shawl thrown around someone's shoulders – like a woman's long hair. But even here there are problems.

First, if one wants to argue from the precise meaning of the two words that the bigger covering in verse 6 cannot be the hair, then to be consistent one should use a covering that covers more than the hair covers, not less. However most, if not all, head-coverings that I have seen cover less than the hair in that the hair is still visible from beneath the covering. If the difference in meaning is sufficiently significant to require the two words to be referring to different things, then it seems that it would also be significant for the verse 6 covering to actually cover more than the long hair covers.

Secondly, some have argued that a veil is in mind in 1 Corinthians 11 because the word Paul uses for covering when he equates hair with the covering in verse 15 (περιβολαιου) is different than the word Paul uses for covering when he teaches that women must be covered when praying or prophesying in verse 5 (ἀκατακάλυπτος, akatakaluptos). The argument goes that in using a different word for the covering provided by hair from the word used in the discussion of praying and prophesying, Paul is teaching that these are two separate coverings. However this also proves too much because Paul uses a different word in verse 5 and 6 to teach that women must be covered than he uses in verse 4 to teach that men must not be covered. When he says that a man is not to be covered, it's κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων, (*kata kephale echon*), literally, "down the head." But when he talks about women being covered he uses *kaluptos*. If the covering of verse 15 and the covering of verse 5 have to be different coverings because different words are used in each case, then consistency would require Paul to be referring to two different things in verse 4 and verse 5 & 6. If one argues verse 4 is referring to the covering of hair and verse 5 is referring to a veil in addition to hair, then we still have two different words for being used for hair as a covering. There doesn't seem to be any interpretation that doesn't have Paul using different expressions to refer to the same thing.⁵

Another frequent pro-veil observation is that the practice of women wearing veils on top of their hair in church was not questioned or abandoned until feminist and egalitarian arguments began to arise in the last couple of centuries. However, session and presbytery records from the Presbyterian church in Scotland during the 16th and 17th century indicate that they did not believe that men not being covered and women not being uncovered in worship to be a morally binding principle. Rather women were

⁵ Another example of different words being used for a veil is in Esther where the Septuagint says of Haman in Esther 6:12 that he went home with his head covered (κατὰ κεφαλῆς). But in the next chapter when his face was covered as the death sentence fell on him, another word is used. When David ascended the Mount of Olives in fleeing from Absalom, he went up with this head veiled (ἐπικεκαλυμμένος) and his feet bare. Although his covering was probably very similar to Haman's in purpose (i.e. a sign of grief and shame) a different word is used.

In the Mark 14:3 when the woman poured the spikenard κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς,, "on his head" – one would naturally understand the perfume to have flowed down his head as a result of being poured on his head. Although the Mark passage employs a definite article and verse 4 does not, it would seem to suggest κατὰ κεφαλῆς can be used for more than a veil covering a person's head. If this is so, might it not also refer to hair flowing down the head?

Covered by What?

commanded to sit through worship and prayers with their head uncovered in certain circumstances. See quotes from a recent RPNA position paper for more details.⁶

Lastly, the final problem I see with the covering spoken of in 1 Corinthians 11 being a veil is that it contradicts Exodus 28 where the priests were commanded to wear hats. If the covering in Corinthians is referring to a veil, then Corinthians forbids men to wear a hat on their head when worshipping while Exodus commanded some men to wear hats on their head when worshipping. The conflicting nature of

⁶ *The Practice Of Head Coverings In Public Worship*, Issued by the Reformed Presbytery In North America. June 4, 2001, p3-4, 7.

George Gillespie states that head coverings are one example of a customizable sign: "Customable Signs; and so the uncovering of the head, which of old was a sign of preeminence, has, through custom, become a sign of subjection." (*Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies*, Naphtali Press, p. 247.

Samuel Rutherford states: "For uncovering the head, it is a sort of veneration or reverence, not adoration; and Paul insinuateth so much when he saith, 1 Cor 11:4. "Every man praying and prophesying having his head covered, dishonoreth his head": But it is not his meaning that he dishonoreth God. The Jews to this day, as of old, used not uncovering the head as a sign of honour: But by the contrary, covering was a sign of honour. If therefore the Jews, being made a visible Church, shall receive the Lords Supper, and Pray and Prophecy with covered heads, men would judge it no dishonoring of their head, or not of disrespect of the ordinances of God: Though Paul having regard to National custom in Corinth, did so esteem it. (*The Divine Right of Church Government*, Still Waters Revival Books, pp. 89, 90.)

In January 1584, a session records the following:

"The which day, compears [appears—RPNA] Jhone Paterson, merchant and citiner in St. Andrews, who grants and confesses that he has had carnal dealings with Issobell Gray in adultery, he being married to Jonet Trymlay his spouse (he then admits his guilt but denies part of Issobell's statement). The Session, in respect of his confession, with one voice ordains the said Jhone Paterson, and also the said Issobell in respect of her confession, to begin, upon the Sunday next to come, their humiliation for the said offense; to wit that both together to compear clothed in sackcloth, bare headed, and bare footed at the Kirk of the said city, at the second bell to sermon before noon, and to stand there until the third bell to sermon be ceased; and thereafter to compear together on the highest degree of the penitent stool, and sit as said until the sermon and prayers be ended, and so forth to continue each Sunday until the Kirk be satisfied." (The Register of the Minister[,] Elders and Deacons of the Christian Congregation of St. Andrews, Comprising the Proceedings of the Kirk Session, and of the Court of the Superintendent of Fife, Fothrik, and Strathhearn, 1559-1600, p. 551, emphases added).

Similar rulings and examples can also be found in the same Register upon pages 441, 572, 705, 731, 767, 785, 793, 866, 877, 886, and 921. Note here, that in the above cited ruling by this covenanted Session in Scotland, we find that a man and a woman are commanded to sit on the penitent stool with a bare head "until the sermon and prayers are ended." Again, if a woman is not to be in public worship with her head uncovered during prayer without being chargeable with immodesty, then why did the Session command her to remain on the penitent stool until the prayers were ended? Can we possibly impute to this covenanted Session the contradiction of having a woman repent of adultery by committing acts of sinful immodesty?

Covered by What?

these commands is not relieved by the fact that one command pertains to the ceremonial law. The teaching in Corinthians is grounded in the proper recognition of the glory of God in worship. God does not change with time. If it was proper in the Old Testament for a man, and a priest no less, to stand in the presence of God's glory with a hat on his head, then it is also proper in the New Testament for him to stand in God's presence with a hat on his head. Obviously the form of some activities has changed. But even where the form has changed, the meaning and purpose has not. For example, it isn't proper to bring a sacrificial lamb. But the impropriety is not because it is improper to bring sacrifice but because Christ is the sacrifice. The only way to make the argument that men can no longer be covered is to show that the function accomplished in wearing a hat is something that pointed to Christ and was either done by Christ or is being done by Christ.

What is the purpose of the priest's hat? According to Exodus 28, the purpose of the hat is specifically given as being for beauty and glory (v2, 40). Some could attempt to harmonize this purpose with 1 Corinthians 11 by seeing the priest as pointing to Christ and therefore his hat as being a sign of Christ's glory. If that is the case, it would have been wrong for any non-priest to wear a hat during worship. But this is nowhere commanded or taught in the Old Testament. To not wear a hat was a sign of mourning. Lepers were to be uncovered (Lev 13:45). When Aaron's sons were killed for offering strange fire he was strictly forbidden from removing his hat or showing any other sign of sorrow for what God had done (Lev 10:6). Later it seems that having the head covered became a sign of mourning.

Alternatively, some might try to argue that the priest's head was covered in order to cover man's glory when he stood before the Lord. However this would seem to contradict the words of Exodus 28 which states that the purpose of the hat was specifically to add glory and beauty and not to cover man's glory.

If however, one sees 1 Corinthians 11 as referring to how men and women wear their hair and underscoring the importance of our appearance when we worship God, then 1 Corinthians 11 and Exodus 28 are perfectly harmonized. Glory and beauty are important in worship. Having long hair is a shame to man and especially wrong in worship.

Conclusion

Taking all these factors into consideration, I think the two most consistent positions are:

- If women are to wear a head covering in addition to their long hair, it should be worn all the time and it should be a simple covering that covers all her hair and doesn't add to her glory.

Or

- Her hair is given to her as her covering.

Regardless of which position one takes on what constitutes the covering, the imperative in 1 Corinthians 11:6 clearly creates a requirement for a head covering. I think it requires a lot of juggling to limit this imperative to public worship. The context more easily supports applying this command anytime a woman is praying and prophesying – something which is beautifully fulfilled by a woman's hair. This is exactly the connection that Paul himself makes in the last few verses of the passage. The earlier part of the passage explains the underlying reason why a woman must be covered; the latter part of the passage identifies the hair as the covering.

I understand Paul simply to be teaching that a woman must not have short hair like a man. There must be a distinction in gender. The maintenance of this distinction of genders should be a characteristic of the church – just like chastity or not suing one another at law – that is clearly visible in the day-to-day activity of the body. In doing so Paul used the standard word for veil emphasizing the function of the covering, rather than the article. Having explained the reasons, he then explains that a woman's hair has been given to her to perform the function of covering.

Appendix A

A Note on Prophesying

Prophesy⁷ is used over 100 times in the OT to refer to bringing either the Word of God or lies. When it is used of true prophets bringing the word of God it always involves either the anointing of the Holy Spirit or ordination (setting apart usually with the laying on of hands). The cases of speaking lies often involve inhabitation of evil spirits.

The case mentioned in 1 Chronicles 25 involves the setting apart or ordination of the Levitical singers – Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun – and clearly establishes that prophesying can be done with singing⁸.

While prophesying can be done by speaking the word of God or singing the word of God, the key that makes it prophesy is that it involves declaring the word of God. If prophesying can be singing, then it must involve singing the word of God, not simply playing an instrument in church without any words. If this is the case, then anyone who is singing the inspired word of God in the congregation is prophesying just as much as someone “leading” playing the piano. 2 Chronicles 5 give the words they sang – Ps 136. Other places just mention praising and thanking God.

2 Chronicles 5:12-13 Also the Levites which were the singers, all of them of Asaph, of Heman, of Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, being arrayed in white linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets:) (13) It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endures forever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD;

2Chronicles 29:30 Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.

1 Chronicles 5 seems to indicate that daughters also prophesied by singing – God gave 14 sons and 3 daughters to Heman. All these were under the hand of their father for song in the house of the Lord. When the lots were chosen we read that a certain man with his sons and all their “brethren” were chosen for a certain month. The word brethren⁹ is a very broad term that means kindred and it could

⁷ Strong's: נָבֵא nâbâ'

⁸ See 1 Chronicles 25:1-3 where prophesying is used three times in connection with the work of the Levitical singers, e.g. “...prophesying with harps, psalteries, and cymbals...” & “...prophesying by order of the king.” & “Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp...”.

⁹ Strong's: אָח 'âch A primitive word; a *brother* (used in the widest sense of literal relationship and metaphorical affinity or resemblance: - another, brother (-ly), kindred, like, other.

A Note on Prophesying

include daughters. Even if it doesn't, in the NT women sing with the congregation in public worship in the place of the Levitical choir.

Since the New Testament congregation has replaced the Levitical choir, Paul's reference to women praying or prophesying could possibly be a reference to women participating in congregational prayer and singing of the word of God. This seems to make much more sense out of Paul's instruction. When understood this way, he is not telling women how to do something only to forbid them from doing it a few minutes later.

Finally, it's not my purpose here to discuss the closure of canon and whether people can still prophesy today. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, prophesying still occurred and could have been done by women participating in the congregational singing.

Appendix B

Textual Notes

In opening up the headship and head covering discussion, Paul praises the Corinthians for remembering him and following the tradition he delivered to them. Verse 3 says “But I want you to know....” meaning that the comments which follow are not because the Corinthian church was out of order in their practice. Rather the teaching is given so that they understand the basis of the tradition that they were following. In closing the section, he says that if anyone wants to be contentious (i.e. dispute what Paul is teaching), we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. In other words, if people want to dispute Paul’s teaching, they can’t point to the practice of the Corinthian church or any other church to support their contention because the current practice of the church was praiseworthy – unlike their practice in other areas, such as the Lord’s Supper.

This is in marked contrast this with the introduction to the teaching on the Lord’s Supper in verse 17 where Paul says, “Now in giving these instructions, I do not praise you...” It’s the exact opposite of what he says in introducing head coverings. He goes on to rebuke their practice and exhort them in the proper celebration of the supper.