

First Epistle to the Corinthians

21 – Essay Four: Women and Men in Church (4.1) – Leading in Worship

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

1. Outlines

a. *ESV Study Bible*

- i. Divisions over Corporate Worship (11:2–14:40)
 - 1. Head coverings and worship (11:2–16)
 - 2. Social snobbery at the Lord’s Table (11:17–34)
 - 3. Elevating one spiritual gift above others (12:1–14:40)

b. *Reading the New Testament Series*

- i. Problems in Corporate Worship (11:2-14:40)
 - 1. Prayer and Prophecy (11:2-16) – Different Though Equal in the Lord
 - 2. The Lord’s Supper (11:17-34) – Social Significance of the Supper
 - 3. Prayer and Prophecy (12:1-14:40) – Regulation, Not Suppression of Spiritual Gifts

c. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*

- i. In Response to the Corinthian Letter (7:1-16:12)
 - 1. Marriage and Related Matters (7:1-40)
 - 2. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1)
 - 3. Women (and Men) in Worship (11:2-16)
 - 4. Abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)
 - 5. Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual People (12:1-14:40)

d. Bailey¹

- i. Worship: Men and Women in the Church (11:2-14:40)
 - 1. Men and Women Leading in Worship (11:2-16)
 - 2. Order in Worship: Sacrament (11:17-34)
 - 3. Gifts and the Nature of the Body (12:1-30)
 - 4. The Hymn to Love (12:31-14:1)
 - 5. Spiritual Gifts and the Upbuilding of the Body (14:1-25)
 - 6. Order in Worship: Word (14:26-33)
 - 7. Women and Men Worshipping (14:3b-40)

2. Rhetoric

- a. Elaborate 1 + 11 part ring-composition
- b. V.2 is an intro to entire essay and not part of the rhetorical structure

Table 1: Bailey, location 3457

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (ESV)		Rhetoric
0-Intro	2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.	Tradition
1-Intro	3 <u>But</u> [now] I want you to understand that the <u>head</u> [origin] of every man is Christ, the <u>head</u> [origin] of a <u>wife</u> [woman] is <u>her husband</u> [man], and the <u>head</u> [origin] of Christ is God.	Theological Principle

¹ Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, loc. 3428.

2-A	4 <u>Every</u> [any] man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 5 but <u>every wife</u> [any woman] who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head,	Church Practice
3-B	since it is the same as if her head were shaven. 6 For if a <u>wife</u> [woman <i>prophet</i>] will not cover her head, then she should <u>cut her hair short</u> [cut off her hair]. But since it is disgraceful for a <u>wife</u> [woman] to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.	Example - Women shaved=dishonor
4-C	7 For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, <u>but</u> [and] woman is the glory of man.	Men - Not Cover (Gen 1:27)
5-D	8 <u>For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.</u> [<i>alt.</i> , For man is not from woman, but woman is from man.]	Man - not from woman Woman from man (Gen 2:21)
6-E	9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. [<i>alt.</i> , For man was not created because of { <i>dia</i> } woman, but woman because of { <i>dia</i> } the man.]	Dependence (Gen 2:18)
7-F	10 That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. [<i>alt.</i> , Because of { <i>dia</i> } this the woman should have authority { <i>exousia</i> } on the head, because of { <i>dia</i> } the angels.]	Authority [Creation Authority Creation]
8-E'	11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; [<i>alt.</i> , More specifically woman is not independent of man nor man independent of woman in the Lord;]	Dependence
9-D'	12 for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.	Woman - from man and through woman (Ge 1:27)
10-C'	13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a <u>wife</u> [woman] to pray to God with her head uncovered?	Women - covered
11-B'	14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.	Example - Men (long hair=dishonor) Example - Women (long hair=glory)
12-A'	16 If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.	Church Practice

- c. Center is v.10 (7F)
3. First Thoughts
- a. Traditional interpretation
- i. Verse 3 speaks to hierarchical authority (head → headship)
 - ii. Creation accounts referenced in vv. 7-9, 12 is evidence of male priority and thus headship

- iii. Verse 10 is Paul commanding women to be subordinate to men in worship
 - 1. Also bringing in 14:34 where Paul commands women to be silent
- iv. Verse 16 is showing that this practice is the norm in all churches
- b. Traditional interpretation is based on an overly simplistic and tradition-conditioned reading
 - i. Modern scholars differ widely in interpretation and run the gamut in views
 - ii. Most agree that this section is very difficult to interpret
 - iii. Many agree that Paul is not primarily addressing women's roles in worship
- c. The difficulties
 - i. Translation and use of words

Greek	English	Comments
g2776. κεφαλή kephalē	head, source, origin	Literal and/or metaphorical use? Which applies where? Hierarchical or "source"?
g0435. ἀνὴρ anēr	man, husband	Is the usage intended to specify gender or marital relationship? Many English translations use both words to translate the singular Greek; i.e., inconsistency.
g1135. γυνή gynē	woman, wife	As above
g2619. κατακαλύπτω katakalyptō	cover, veil	A head covering, possibly the hair, or some kind of veil over the face?
g1223. διά dia	for, because of	v.9 "created for" or "created because of"?
g1849. ἐξουσία exousia	authority, freedom, right	Paul used this same word in writing of "his rights and freedoms" as an apostle (ch. 10).

- ii. What is meant by the "symbol of authority" (v.10)?
 - 1. To be subordinated or to wear a symbol that identifies the right of a woman to lead in worship?
- iii. What does "angels" (v.10) have anything to do with the discussion?
- iv. What about the argument from "nature" (vv.14-15)?
 - v. The actual historical context is lost to us – we do our best to try to reconstruct it but it is, at best, an educated guess
 - vi. Do you see any other difficulties?
- 4. Details – Intro 0
 - a. Commendation – this is in contrast to what will come up in the next topic (v.17)
 - i. First hint that this present topic is not a huge concern for Paul
 - b. Traditions – Ken Bailey suggests that, contrary to some opinions, Paul did not create his own version of Christianity, but joined and passed on what was already being taught: "Paul did not create a movement, he joined one!"²
 - i. Paul opens each of his essays by an appeal to tradition³
- 5. Details – Intro 1
 - a. But now – they are deviating from some of the traditions
 - b. Head – is Paul appealing to hierarchy and accompanying authority structures?

² Bailey, locations 3447-3451.

³ Bailey, location 3435.

- i. "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.'"⁴
- ii. There is no indication that Paul intends any kind of hierarchy to be read into this statement⁵
- c. Man/woman vs. Husband/wife – is Paul speaking to marriage and its apparent hierarchy?
 - i. ESV translation (as well as many others) is inconsistent. Some better ones:
 - 1. "But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ." (NET)
 - 2. "Now I want you to 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." (CEB)
 - ii. The problem of seeing "head" as promoting hierarchy is that if this text is seen that way, we must also accept that Christ is subordinate to the Father – a heresy
 - iii. It should not be seen to be about marriage because it begins "every man" and "every" can be seen as carrying over to the next phrase (c.f., vv.4-5)
- d. Paul is making a theological statement about source of life – not hierarchy and subordination
 - i. Christ created man – the woman was created from man – Christ depended upon his Father for life
- e. So what was the problem?
 - i. The "eschatological women" were casting off their societal norms and traditions because Christianity had ushered in a "sexless/genderless age" and could appear in public without elements to distinguish their gender⁶

From 11:16, it appears that the general practice in the Pauline churches was for women to keep their heads covered during worship. To cover the head was an act attesting a woman's sexuality. To remove the head covering, moreover, was a social symbol of one's transcendence of her sexuality. In *Joseph and Aseneth*, a pre-Christian Hellenistic Jewish propaganda tract, Aseneth is a virgin converted to Judaism through the agency of an archangel. Afterwards he orders her to remove her clothes of mourning and to put on radiant garments. This she does, including a head covering. When she returns, the angel orders her to take off the head covering, "because you are a holy virgin today and your head is as that of a young man." That is, in this Hellenistic Jewish document, Aseneth is believed to have transcended her sexuality as the result of her religious experience. With the transcendence of her femaleness goes the discarding of the social symbols of that sexuality (Scroggs, 1974).⁷

- ii. The church had worshipers from both Jewish and Greco-Roman backgrounds worshipping together. Jewish women were expected to keep their hair covered (it was thought to be sexually enticing, among other things). There is some evidence that it was only prostitutes that kept their heads uncovered. In any case, uncovered women's hair would have been a distraction during worship. Paul is discussing appropriate "clerical garb."⁸

⁴ *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:3.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Reading the New Testament: Reading Corinthians*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:5, 6.

⁸ Bailey, locations 3484-3498.

From the outset, it is clear that the issue is gender *distinction*, not gender *subordination*.⁹

6. Details – 2-3AB/11-12B'A'

- a. Prayers can be offered in private, but prophesying is necessarily a public act
 - i. I.e., Men and women are leading worship and offering words and teachings from God
 - ii. Paul has no problems with the act of women leading churches, worship, and teaching
- b. What is the problem with men and covering his head while leading worship?
 - i. It may be considered a sign of mourning and it is inappropriate to worship God in this way¹⁰
 - ii. In the Middle East a servant is expected to cover his head in the presence of his master. But Jesus considers his people “friends” and not servants/slaves. To continue to consider Jesus as a master is to deny the intimacy that he offers.¹¹
- c. What about the women?
 - i. First, Paul says nothing about women who are part of the congregation – he does not say that they must have their heads covered. Paul only speaks to the women who are leading worship.
 - ii. Paul could have ended all the controversy by command women to stop leading worship. But he did not do that.¹²
 - iii. Women’s hair has sexual connotations and is distracting to worshipers. Please leave it covered when up front.
 - iv. Paul offers another, hypothetical solution: Since the hair connotes sex and is distracting, if women shave it off, it would solve the problem. But it is *shameful*¹³ for a woman to look like a man, so why not accept the simpler solution of covering up?
- d. Men with long hair look like women and therefore are considered shameful in that society.¹⁴
- e. Paul in v.16 writes that they really shouldn’t be having a controversy over this issue – it really is a simple problem with an easy solution.
 - i. His appeal is to tradition (i.e., nature) – not scripture
 - ii. The second hint that this is an issue that doesn’t concern Paul all that much

That he is dealing strictly with “custom” (church “custom,” to be sure) is now made plain, as is the fact that this argument, for all its various facets, falls short of a command as such... First, the very fact that Paul argues in this way, and that even at the end he does not give a commandment, suggests that such a “church custom,” although not thereby unimportant for the Corinthians, is not to be raised to Canon Law.¹⁵

7. Details 4C/10C'

⁹ Bailey, location 3484.

¹⁰ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:4.

¹¹ Bailey, location 3540.

¹² Bailey, location 3562.

¹³ *Shameful* does not necessarily imply right vs. wrong but rather refers to what is acceptable and honorable to society.

¹⁴ Bailey, chapter 4.1, Note 15

¹⁵ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:16.

- a. Paul alludes to creation accounts of Genesis 1 and 2 in this passage
- b. Does “first” mean “more important?” The frequent argument made for patriarchy and female subordination is that God created man first and woman second, therefore, males are meant to rule and females to submit. But is this correct?

The difficulty with this conclusion is that the creation stories begin with the lesser forms of life and move on to the more advanced forms. If created earlier equals more important, then animals are more important than people, the plants are more important than the animals and the primitive earth “without form and void” is the most important of all!¹⁶

- c. Paul does not say “woman is the image of man” – because that would contradict Genesis 1:26-27 where all of humanity (*adam* – plural form meaning humanity) is created in God’s image, both male and female.
 - d. “Woman is the glory of man” could be understood to mean that woman is the crowning act of creation, the glory of all humankind.¹⁷
 - e. Or it could mean that just as man’s existence brings honor and glory to God, the woman’s existence brings honor and glory to man – again Paul is writing not about roles and authorities but about honor in relationships¹⁸
 - f. Or it could mean something that is totally lost to us
 - g. Paul returns to social conventions – men’s heads should be uncovered in leading worship and women’s heads should be covered in leading worship – **what will result in the least friction among worshipers of differing cultural traditions?**
8. Details – 5D/9D’
- a. Arguing about who came first and therefore who has authority over the other is a meaningless argument – **because all things come from God**
 - i. Which came first – the chicken or the egg?
 - ii. Yes, woman originated from man, but man must be born of woman – so what is your argument?
9. Details – 6-8/EE’
- a. Woman created for man (to serve him)?
 - i. Not so fast... Don’t create theologies based on a particular translation of the text when the text could be read just as validly in other ways
 - ii. This particular translation is (inappropriately) used to justify patriarchy and complementarianism in the church

Paul really is reflecting the sense of the OT text to which he is alluding. Man by himself is not complete; he is alone, without a companion or helper suitable to him.¹⁹

- b. Genesis 2:18, “helper” and “ezer”²⁰
 - i. Eve is referred to as *‘ezera*
 - ii. *‘Ezer* is used to refer to God when he comes to save Israel

¹⁶ Bailey, location 3522.

¹⁷ Bailey, location 3582.

¹⁸ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:7.

¹⁹ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:8-9.

²⁰ Bailey, location 3620.

- iii. 'Ezer is not an assistant but a powerful figure that can even be seen as having superior powers

Seen in this light, our understanding of the text and of Paul's view of women are transformed. Women, for Paul, are not created "for men" ... Rather women, as descendants of Eve, are placed by God in the human scene as the strong who come to help/save the needy (the men)... Paul emerges as a compassionate figure who boldly affirms the equality and mutual interdependency of men and women in the new covenant.²¹

- iv. This view helps explain why powerful women were attracted to Christianity
- c. In chapter 7 Paul elaborated on the interdependency of husbands and wives. In this current passage Paul broadens it to all men and women in the church (another reason to dismiss any sort of husband/wife reading into this passage). **In other words, a healthy church requires the leadership of both men and women.**

10. Details – 7F

- a. Authority or Symbol of Authority?
- b. Where have we seen *exousia* recently?
 - i. Appears repeated in and around chapter 9 and 10 where Paul discusses his "rights" and "freedoms" as an apostle and also in the assertion of Corinthian Christians and their rights and freedoms
- c. Three major lines of interpretation
 - i. Traditional: the head covering as a symbol of subordination to male authority (e.g., husband); or metaphorically, the woman is "under the authority" of a male figure.²²
 - ii. Bailey: head covering represents something akin to a crown on a royal head. It symbolizes the right and authority of an office. In the case of women prophets of chapter 11, the head covering represents the right and authority for them to speak and lead in worship.^{23 24}
 - iii. Fee: offers the most straightforward interpretation; that is, to see it as "right or freedom to choose"²⁵

Thus: "For this reason the woman ought to have the freedom over her head to do as she wishes."²⁶

- 1. This is Fee's preference. The problem with this view is it seems to contradict the rest of the passage. Fee's solution is to explain that for Christians, individual freedom is restricted by responsibility for the common good.²⁷
- d. But what about the "angels?"
 - i. Possible interpretations from Fee²⁸

²¹ Bailey, location 3623.

²² The illustration found in some conservative Christian circles of umbrellas representing coverings of Christ – the man – the woman – the child – representing hierarchical authority is based on this interpretation.

²³ Bailey, location 3641.

²⁴ Gordon Fee (*NICNT*) offers this alternative also, with a slight variation. He writes that this symbol represents new rights and freedoms to publicly prophesy and lead – things that were forbidden before. (Entry for 1 Cor. 11:10.)

²⁵ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:10.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:3.

²⁸ *NICNT*, entry for 1 Cor. 11:10.

1. "Male" angels looking down upon women might lust after them if uncovered
 2. Angels participate in Christian worship and for some (unknown) reason, women ought to be covered
 3. Since saints will judge angels, women ought to have the wisdom to exercise proper authority in small matters like head coverings
 4. The eschatological women thought themselves already like angels, without gender, so they thought head coverings were unnecessary, but Paul writes that time has not yet come
- ii. Bailey²⁹
1. Sees a ring-composition within a ring-composition – center is "the woman should have authority on the head" – on either side are references to Creation
 - a. Jewish tradition held that angels were present at creation praising God
 - b. Now these same angels are present at the new creation – the creation of the church, the new temple

The climax in the center affirms women in worship leadership and gives them a sign of their authority... A part of this new creation is the restoration of the equality and mutual interdependence between men and women in Christ.³⁰

11. Given that what Paul is addressing is so tied to time and place, does this passage have any relevance for the 21st century church?
- a. Today's church faces a different issue: should women be allowed full participation in all areas of church ministry?
 - i. The solution is not for women to become more like men
 - b. How can the church live out the mutual interdependence of women and men that Paul preached? **How can the church value the gifts of all equally?**

The issue as Paul defines it seems to be whether redemption (religious experience resulting from Christ) cancels out creation (human sexuality) or whether creation and nature are from God just as are redemption and being in the Lord. The Corinthian women acted as though their redemption had caused them to transcend their created sexuality. Paul's posture grows out of his conviction that creation (sexual differences) is not cancelled by redemption (Christian equality) but rather is enhanced. Hence 1 Cor. 11:2-16 does not aim to silence Christian women but rather to guarantee that in their self-expression they were not denying an integral part of themselves (Derwood C. Smith, 1976).³¹

²⁹ Bailey, locations 3646-3660.

³⁰ Bailey, locations 3655, 3659.

³¹ *RNT*, "Conclusion" 1 Cor. 11:2-16.