

## HEAD COVERING: 1 CORINTHIANS 11:3-16

1 Corinthians 11 deals with spiritual order in the Corinthian church gathering. This issue is broader than a physical head covering. Paul is not establishing a new law, as that would be a sin (Deut. 4:2). At no time does Paul establish new laws, if anything he provides principles to follow, but not new laws – as laws are clearly defined by Moses – and they determine what sin is and isn't. Yeshua raised the bar, and if we want to live in grace, there is a higher standard that's why the Bible says Moses gave the law, but truth and grace came through Jesus Christ (John 1:12). Paul addresses the authority structure in the family, church and with God, just like in this example.

Similar to the situation with wives in 1 Cor. 14:34-35, where he uses the law to explain the principle. Later, to Timothy, Paul adds that women should not preach to men (1 Tim. 2:12). This instruction applies to gatherings, not private settings. A woman should not stand up to pray or prophesy without being invited by the elders. If she does, she needs to be covered (protected) with her husband's consent. This concept is similar to Psalm 140:7, where God's covering or overshadowing of David's head refers to protection. Notice it is not an actual physical covering that David has to wear, but he is referring to authority. Regarding actual head coverings: In the Old Testament, men wore a covering when speaking with God (Lev. 10:6; Exo. 29:6-9).

This seems contradictory to what Paul addresses, as he states, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head" (1 Cor. 11:4). But Paul is not contradicting the Old Testament, or adding a new law, as he is talking about order in the family. There is a cultural aspect, but it is not a Biblical one, e.g. in the East, it was customary for both men and women to wear head coverings for protection from the elements, but there was no divine law for everyone to wear one, except for the priests. Examples of women wearing coverings in Scripture include Genesis 24:65, 38:14, 19; Ruth 3:15; Isaiah 3:23; and Song of Solomon 5:7, and for men, 2 Samuel 15:30; Esther 6:12; Jeremiah 14:3-4. I don't believe Paul is endorsing a tradition or the "culture of the day." If we applied the "culture of the day" standard to other messages he gave, we could easily deem other things irrelevant today, which is both a slippery slope and incorrect.

### Verse by Verse Commentary

**(1Co 11:3) 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.**

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ; the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. The divine order of authority provides protection: GOD --> CHRIST --> HUSBAND --> WIFE. God is Christ's head, Christ is the husband's head, and the husband is the wife's head. 1. God is the head of Christ. 2. Christ is the head of the man (specifically, the husband). 3. The husband is the head of the wife. Note that this authority structure is meant to enable effective operation, with neither being more important than the other, but both intertwined in the Lord (1 Cor. 11:11).

**(1Co 11:4) Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonoureth his head.**

When one prophesies, it is generally for others, not for oneself, thus occurring in a gathering. The Greek word "kata" (G2596) is only translated as "covered" in this specific passage. In other contexts, it is translated as "according to," "throughout," "against," "down from," "certain time," etc. (e.g., Septuagint Gen. 1:11 "according to" and Matt. 8:32 "down from"). Given the context in 1 Cor. 11:3, the head refers to authority, not the physical head on the shoulders. Therefore, if we substitute "head" for Christ and use a literal translation, it would read: "Every male praying or prophesying down from having Christ dishonors his Christ." In other words, every male (husband) praying or prophesying to God publicly in the gathering does not need consent. If he seeks consent, he dishonors Christ.

**(1Co 11:5) But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with *her* head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for**

**that is even all one as if she were shaven.**

When prophesying, it is generally for others, not oneself, thus occurring in a gathering. The Greek word “kaluptō” (G2572) means to cover, while “akatakályptos” (G177) means “uncovered.” This negative form is used only once in the New Testament but is translated over 30 times in the Old Testament (LXX) as “cover up/conceal/hide” (e.g., Gen. 38:15; Exo. 26:34). The more intense form, “sugkaluptō” (G4780), is used when Shem and Japheth covered their father’s nakedness (Gen. 9:23). “Katakályptō” (G2619), the negative form, would mean “not cover up/not conceal/not hide.” In context, if we substitute “Christ” for head, and head of woman “Husband” the literal translation would be: “Every woman who prays or prophesies not covering up her husband dishonors her husband.” Paul later states that wives should not interrupt the service to ask questions but should ask their husbands at home (1 Cor. 14:34-35). She needs to be covered (protected) by her husband’s consent, akin to God’s covering of David’s head for protection (Ps. 140:7).

**(1Co 11:6) 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.**

For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. The Greek word “covered” (G2619) is in the present tense. If a woman does not have her husband’s consent to pray or prophesy publicly in a gathering, let her be punished by having her hair cut short or shaved, resulting in public exposure of her shameful conduct. Paul is instructing the leaders to ensure that a woman has her husband’s consent before praying or prophesying publicly.

**(1Co 11:7) 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. (1Co 11:8) For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. (1Co 11:9) Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.**

Besides adhering to the regular order of a gathering (1 Cor. 14:29), the man (husband) does not need his wife’s consent to pray or prophesy publicly. Seeking consent from anyone dishonors Christ, his authority. The woman was made to help her husband (Eph. 5:22). Therefore, “for this reason, the woman (wife) has authority through her husband (her head).” If not, then angels are hindered from helping her. Similarly, a husband’s prayers are hindered if he dishonors his wife (1 Peter 3:7).

**(1Co 11:10) For this cause ought the woman to have power on *her* head because of the angels. (1Co 11:11) Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. (1Co 11:12) For as the woman *is* of the man, even so *is* the man also by the woman; but all things of God.**

For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things are of God. Man (husband) and woman (wife) are both dependent on each other in the Lord. Side Note: Some words in other translations add “a symbol of,” are not in the original text.

**(1Co 11:13) Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?**

Is it acceptable for a woman/wife to pray in a public gathering without consent from her husband/man (1 Cor. 11:5)?

**(1Co 11:14) Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? (1Co 11:15) But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for *her* hair is given her for a covering.**

But if a woman has long hair, it is her glory; for her hair is given to her for a covering. Paul uses nature to explain the spiritual concept. Long hair on a man is a shame (trying to look like a woman), and short hair on a woman is a shame (trying to look like a man, 1 Cor. 11:6). Each has specific roles, but the woman’s long hair benefits her, as it serves as a physical covering, while her husband is her spiritual covering (1 Cor. 3-13).

Side Note: If one thought this was about a physical covering, it would contradict the understanding that long hair is her covering.

**(1Co 11:16) But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.**

We have no custom (tradition) nor in the churches of God, that a wife is over her husband!