

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

### Background

In Corinth and Ephesus, some women became outspoken in church due to their newfound freedom in Christ (Gal 3:28). This may have been influenced by past roles in pagan religions that had female leadership, along with a lack of clear instruction in early Christian gatherings. These factors led to disruptions, esp. when women publicly challenged their husbands or assumed authority in the church.

A similar issue appears in 1 Cor 14:34–35, where Paul refers to the Law to affirm that women (specifically wives) should remain silent in the churches and ask their husbands questions at home. Later, in 1 Tim 2:12, Paul states that women are not to teach or have authority over men. These instructions apply to public worship settings, not private situations.

**Was wearing a head covering when praying required under the Law?** No. It was only required for male priests under the OT (Lev 10:6; Ex 29:6–9).

**Were there examples in Scripture where women wore head coverings?** Yes. Rebekah veiled herself in Gen 24:65. Tamar wore a veil in Gen 38:14, 19. Ruth's outer garment was used to carry barley in Ruth 3:15, likely a shawl or cloak. Men also wore head coverings during mourning in 2 Sam. 15:30, Est. 6:12, and Jer. 14:3–4.

### Verse by Verse Commentary

#### Introduction

- It is a given that this is for the gathering of believers and not for the privacy of the home.
- Also, that this is specifically for two actions—not everything—**prayer and prophecy** for the people. And less likely for self.
- The Greek word for *man* and *woman* can also be translated *husband* and *wife*.
- Given these conditions, the interpretation deviates regarding head coverings, as there are two possible interpretations:
  1. A **spiritual head covering (left)**, based on 1 Cor 11:3, where the "head" of every man is literally Christ, and the head of a woman is man. The woman needs the man's consent to pray or prophesy in the gathering.
  2. A **physical head covering (right)**, such as a veil covering the top of a woman's head as she prays or prophesies, to show her submission to her husband, father, or elder.

#### My Personal Perspective

I am currently leaning about 60% toward a spiritual interpretation and 40% toward a physical head covering.

Why 60% Spiritual?	Why 40% Physical?
If there were any strict observance of a physical head covering, it would have been in the law of God—and there is none, except for the male priests. However, there is a law of a wife submitting to her husband, going back to the Garden of Eden. Paul clearly outlines head covering in 1 Corinthians 11:3 as spiritual—yet somehow, when we read verse 4, it is unlikely flipped to physical. “Woman head = Man” is treated as though it means “Woman head = woman head.” In addition, it seems unlikely that Paul is talking about a physical head covering but more a condition of the heart than wearing something.	Some of my respected commentaries support a physical covering. If the text read plainly in isolation and without 1 Cor. 11:3, it would imply a physical head covering and a sign of submission to her husband and the angels as Angels can't see the heart.

**(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 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 and unified in the Lord (1 Cor. 11:11).

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

SPIRITUAL COVERING	PHYSICAL COVERING
<p>Similar to v. 3, which refers to a spiritual—not physical—head, the covering is also spiritual, not physical. Remember, God covered David’s head for protection, and it wasn’t physical but spiritual (Ps. 140:7). The word “covered” (<i>kata</i>) means “down from” (cf. Mt. 8:32). Since man’s head is Christ (1 Cor. 11:3), then “having a covering down from Christ” implies having a covering other than Christ. Therefore, any man who prays or prophesies under something other than Christ’s authority dishonors Christ as his head.</p>	<p>A man who covers his physical head with a cloth or anything else while praying or prophesying publicly—like the Pharisees—dishonors Christ, who is his covering.</p>

**(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.**

<p>The Greek word <i>akatakalyptō</i> (1 Cor. 11:5) means “not covered up” and doesn’t necessarily refer to a physical veil. Unlike <i>sugkalyptō</i> (used in Gen. 9:23), which describes a literal covering, <i>akatakalyptō</i> can suggest a spiritual condition. Therefore, consistent with the headship structure of verse 3, the verse could be understood spiritually as:  “Every woman (wife) who prays or prophesies with head (her husband) uncovered dishonors her head (her husband).”</p> <p>And if she doesn’t, it is physically the same as one who is shaved - dishonored or disgraceful. A natural principle to a spiritual law.</p>	<p>Every woman (wife) who does not something on her physical head (not her face) when praying or prophesying in public dishonors her husband. The physical covering (a cloth) is a symbol of her submission to her husband and, therefore, her right to pray and prophesy publicly. This means a woman may sit without a covering at other times, but when she is praying or prophesying in public, she needs to put it on.</p> <p>And if she doesn’t, she is the same as one who is shaved - dishonored or disgraceful.</p>
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**(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.**

<p>If a woman (wife) is not covered by her husband and does not have his consent to pray or prophesy publicly in a gathering, but she does so anyway, then she should be publicly humiliated with a physical consequence—having her hair cut short or shaved.</p>	<p>Every woman (wife) who refuses to wear something on her head when praying or prophesying (such as a veil or cloth) shows that she does not submit to her husband and should therefore be publicly humiliated with a</p>
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	physical consequence—having her hair cut short or shaved.
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**(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.

Man (husband) is not to cover Christ with anyone or anything, for he is made in the image and glory of God, whereas woman (wife) was created for the glory of man, as a helper to him.	Man (husband) is not to cover his physical head with a cloth or anything physical, for he is the image and glory of God, whereas woman (wife) was created for the glory of man as a helper to him.
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**(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 this reason, the woman (wife) ought to have <i>her husband's (man)</i> authority on <i>her</i> , because of the angels. (Angels would be hindered by a disorderly authority structure)	For this reason, the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the messengers—human messengers from the Lord who are able to recognize proper authority.
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**(1Co 11:13)** Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?

As the Corinthian church judged whether it was acceptable for a woman (wife) to pray publicly in the church without being covered by her husband—that is, with his consent.”	As the Corinthian church judged whether it was acceptable for a woman (wife) to pray publicly in the church without a something physical on her head. Women with covering on their head showed that they were married and submissive.
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**(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.

Paul now uses natural law to explain the spiritual principle. Long hair on a man is shameful (as it resembles a woman's), and short hair on a woman is shameful (as it resembles a man's). Each has specific roles, but a woman's long hair benefits her by serving as a physical covering for a spiritual principle.	Paul uses a woman's long hair to show that she has a natural covering for her husband, but before God, she needs another covering (such as a veil or cloth) to glorify Him. A man having long hair would be disgraceful; therefore, he similarly does not need a covering when praying to God.
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**(1Co 11:16)** But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

Here, it is not “any man” but, more literally, “anyone.” So, if anyone wants to argue about the new freedom in Christ (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11), Paul emphasizes that the custom remains the same both here and in other gatherings—a woman needs her husband's consent when praying or prophesying in a church assembly before the people. This lines up with 1 Cor 14:34–35.	Here, it is not "any man" but, more literally, "anyone." So, if anyone wants to argue about the new freedom in Christ (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11), Paul emphasizes that there is no such custom—or practice—in the churches: neither for men to have long hair nor for women to pray or prophesy uncovered.
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