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# 1 Corinthians

**Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head.**  
1 Corinthians 11:4

This verse and those to follow show what is orderly and proper in terms of conduct within the church. Paul doesn't actually explain why he says these things, thus it assumes that those in Corinth would understand his words without the need for explanation even if we today don't. Knowing this, we can look at the situation as it was when Paul wrote. It was, and still is, the custom of Jews to pray with their heads covered by a talit; a prayer shawl. It is a sign of their unworthiness to communicate face to face with God. Greeks, on the other hand, were known to pray with their heads uncovered.

Because of these differences, those in Corinth must have added this into their list of questions. Which is correct and why? There are several good reasons for Paul's words and they would have been understood without further details in the response.

First, the removing of a hat or turban (or whatever head covering was used) was considered a sign of respect towards a superior. Those who wear hats today will still often do this. It would have been disrespectful to do otherwise. Therefore, as a sign of respect to our Head, who is Christ, we should have our heads uncovered when "praying or prophesying." Otherwise, we would dishonor our Head (meaning Christ). The Greek word for "head," which is *kephalé*, carries both the idea of a physical head as well as one in authority just as it does today.

Secondly, if we are "in Christ" because of our faith in His work, then we have become worthy before our heavenly Father. This is not because of our own righteousness, but because of the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to us. To keep our heads covered, as the Jews obviously continued to do, was to imply that they remained unworthy before God. It was an unnecessary show of piety which was set aside by the work of Christ. It demonstrates a failure (albeit probably unintentionally) to accept the honor granted upon us as believers in Him.

And thirdly, as he noted in the previous verse, "the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God." If women are present in the gathering then another issue arises. As the head of woman is the man, then the man actually dishonors his Head (meaning Christ) when he renounces his authority over the woman by being covered in the presence of the woman, over whom he is the head.

For at least these reasons, and possibly others which were understood within the Corinthian church, Paul has given us these instructions.

Life application: There is an order and propriety in how we are to conduct ourselves within the church and while presenting ourselves before the Lord. And yet, we need to understand that we can take things to unintended extremes which can only lead to legalism. Care needs to be taken concerning how we conduct ourselves while at the same time we need to not push personal peeves concerning an issue to the forefront of our church life. In all things, adhering to the word of God will keep us from going beyond what is written.

**But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.**

1 Corinthians 11:5

Paul will note elsewhere that it is right for a woman to "keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak" (1 Corinthians 14:34). He will also state, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a

woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence" (1 Timothy 2:11, 12). Therefore, Paul is not giving instruction on the public assembly of the church in 1 Corinthians 11:5. The items he is addressing here are explicitly forbidden in those other two verses. Therefore, we know he is rather giving general guidelines for specific occasions not particularly pertaining to a church gathering.

He is addressing issues one at a time in his letter and slowly revealing proper conduct for believers. Therefore, to use this verse as a text to indicate that it was either right or acceptable for a woman to speak or lead in the church will result in improper handling of the entire intent of his instructions. His concern at this point is not to determine the correctness of that issue, but to ensure proper conduct of this particular issue.

In cases concerning this matter, which are being addressed in response to an inquiry by the Corinthians, he now gives the continued response. First, he gave instruction concerning the man and what was to be considered orderly and proper. Now he gives the contrast by beginning with the term *pasa de*, or "every moreover" which is thus translated "but every..."

He then notes that "every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head." This, like the previous verse, uses the double signification of the word "head." The first time it is speaking of her literal head. The second time it is speaking of her "spiritual head" which was defined in verse 3 as "man." If a woman prays or prophesies with her physical head uncovered, she dishonors her spiritual head, man, who has authority over her. If she does this, then he notes that "for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved."

The question which obviously arises then is, "Does shaving a head have significance in the culture at that time?" The answer is "Yes." Scholars are in agreement that among both the Jewish culture and the Greek culture long hair was considered honorable and a glory to a woman. The Bible gives several examples of when a woman would shave her head -

- Ritual cleansing from leprosy, Leviticus 14
- Completion of a Nazirite vow, Numbers 6
- Shaving one's head for the dead (in a negative context), Deuteronomy 14
- Shaving one's hair in mourning as a captive, Deuteronomy 21

Each of these were out of the ordinary occasions; the norm was to have long hair, thus identifying her as a woman under authority. Seeing the cultural shame of a woman being shorn, it leads to understanding the significance of her retaining her long hair. As a woman wears her hair long as a sign of her subjection to man, so the man wears his hair short as a sign of subjection to Christ.

Life application: Paul meticulously handles matters, going from subject to subject and addressing issues in an orderly fashion. If his writings, like any part of the Bible, are taken out of context, inevitable confusion or incorrect doctrine will result. His words are always directed toward the ultimate goal of exalting Christ. Therefore, special care and respectful handling of the word of God is of paramount importance.

**For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. 1 Corinthians 11:6**

As seen in the preceding verse, there were instances noted in the Old Testament when a woman's hair was to be shaved. Those instances were for specific purposes and not as a usual custom. Paul builds on that now. He noted that praying with her head uncovered is the same as if she were shaved and now he says if she isn't covered, "let her also be shorn." In the first half of this verse, Paul is giving a direction. If she is going to disregard the first, she shames her head (meaning the man under whose authority she stands). If she does this, then she should be shaved as a shame to herself.

In the second half of the verse, he notes that "if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered." The intent is that because it is shameful (and presumably no woman would want to be shamed in this way) then she

should cover her head to avoid the first shame (to her head, the man), which would result in the second shame (that of being shorn).

To shave the head is to "unveil" the head. What was given by nature as a covering and what serves as a fashion statement in women, is removed in the process of shaving the head. These natural traits are lost and that which is considered unnatural is what results.

What Paul is saying in this verse is not specifically a command, but rather it is an attempt to get his audience to think through to a logical conclusion what it means for a woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered. If she insists on this, then she also by default should insist that she be shorn (either explicitly or implicitly by her actions). And if she does this, then it implies that the concept of equality between the sexes does not actually apply in all cases. As Ellicott astutely observes -

"...it is illogical to argue in favour of any general principle as if it were of universal obligation, when you yourselves admit that it is not applicable in some cases."

God has shown us in His word what is right and appropriate and he has shown that there is a hierarchy which exists and is to be adhered to. When it is violated, it upsets what is natural and proper. Unfortunately, many accepted principles of the New Testament are simply dismissed in today's churches. This is especially true in churches which have deviated from the principles concerning propriety of conduct in regards to women. If these principles are ignored, then the floodgates of Scriptural deviation are opened wide. In essence, it is a rejection of Christ's Headship over His church.

Life application: One cannot simply ignore verses or precepts which they don't like without opening up a rushing torrent of bad doctrine. Every word of God has been given to instruct the people of God and thus a refusal to accept every word can only lead down one sorrowful path of eventual apostasy. It may take time, but it is the inevitable outcome.

**For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 1 Corinthians 11:7**

The words thus far on this subject have been referring to the relation between women, men, and Christ as pertaining to the church, and order within the church. Now and for a few verses, they will refer to the relation between women, men, and Christ as pertaining to creation and order within creation. It is a switch to the concept of the woman in relation to the man who is created in the "image and glory of God." For this reason, man should not cover his head.

This then is the answer to the problem addressed in verse 4. Because man is created in God's image he should reflect that image when he is performing one of the two awesome duties of praying or prophesying. However, "woman is the glory of man." This indicates her glory (it does not say "image") is once-removed from God. Does this in any way contradict Genesis 1:27?

In that verse it says -

"So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

The answer is, "No, this is not a contradiction." Paul only says woman is the "glory" of man. If "image" were implied in this context, the fact would still remain that woman is in the image of man and man is in the image of God. This would indirectly mean woman is in the image of God. We can see that Paul is carefully using his words to show that the creation account itself supports his directives concerning covering one's head while praying or prophesying.

The Pulpit commentary once again describes the relationship quite eloquently -

"As moonlight is to sunlight, or as the earthshine is to the moonshine. Man reflects God; woman, in her general nature in this earthly and temporal dispensation, reflects the glory of man."

Life application: Nothing demeaning or spiteful is flowing from the pen of Paul as he gives his directives for men and women in the church. Rather, that which is most glorifying to God is his intent. Because this is so, to reject his words is to deny God the glory which is intended for God in his words. Let us not be found in such an untenable position.

*The words of the Bible are meant to show God's glory  
The directives found there are for that intent and aim  
And so as we peruse the wondrous redemption story  
Let us consider our actions as bringing glory to His name  
When we stray from the words intended for us to follow  
We then deny Him His just and rightful due  
That is certainly a horrid pill to taste or to swallow  
And so, to His word, let us be faithful and true*

*He will reward us in due time for adherence to His word  
And nothing we do in His name will He overlook  
And so in everything we do, let us glorify our Lord  
By following the directives that have been given in His book*

**For man is not from woman, but woman from man. 1 Corinthians 11:8**

The details of the creation of man and the subsequent creation of woman from man are recorded in Genesis chapter 2. They confirm points which are pertinent to Paul's argument. Man was created first by God, directly from the dust of the earth. After this, woman was created for the help and benefit of man. Her creation came about from man, not from the dust of the earth. And her creation was not for her own benefit, but for the benefit of the man.

Three citations from that Genesis account will show this -

"And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Genesis 2:7

"And the LORD God said, '*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.'" Genesis 2:18

"And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. <sup>22</sup> Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man." Genesis 2:21, 22

It can be seen then that just as Eve stood in relation to Adam, all women stand in a general relationship to all men. In other words, there is order even in this issue which prompts thought and implies a hierarchy.

Life application: The Bible progressively reveals truths which are to be applied in a logical sequence in order to properly grasp what God is doing in redemptive history. Taking things out of that logical order will inevitably lead to disorder. For example, societal breakdown can be directly tied to not following the patriarchal system of family rule. When the father is removed from family headship, all of society suffers. Paying attention to what God has ordained will keep individuals, families, societies, and even the state of man on earth in proper functioning order and in a right relationship with God.

**Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.**

1 Corinthians 11:9

Stated in concise form, Paul reiterates the thought of Genesis 2:18 -



And the LORD God said, "*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Man was not created for the woman, but rather "woman for the man." Thus man has been given headship over the woman. And yet there is a benefit from the subordinate position. Because her true happiness is dependent on him, she has an entitlement to his care and protection. If one thinks of Christ and the church (as Paul is making this connection) then they can rightly see this. Christ will be pleased with His church when His church is in its proper subordinate position. When they follow His instructions and meet His plans as they are laid out, He has the onus to care for them as His word states.

The concept here is not one of tyrannical rule over a wife, but one of love, care, and protection. Women who cast off this model only prove themselves unworthy of all three of these points, just as a disobedient church will have its lampstand removed when it stands contrary to the Lordship of Christ (see Revelation 2:5).

Another point to consider concerning this verse is that it fully supports the notion of creation, not evolution. It further implicitly teaches short-term creation. In addition to countless other verses which people want to ignore or claim as allegorical, Paul acknowledges that humans were created; we did not evolve. If man was created, it was in a day and it was in the manner which the Genesis account states. Otherwise, Paul would have nothing to back up his statement in this verse.

Due to the logical progression of creation and the introduction of what is termed "good" in the creation account, the sixth-day of creation was one literal day. As the pattern is a literal day for the sixth day, then it would be a complete abuse of the text to assume that the other five days were not literal. Allegory schmallagory. The Bible's proclamation of the events of Genesis are backed up by the words of the apostles, and more importantly, by the words of Christ.

Life application: There is nothing demeaning in the Bible concerning the roles of men and women and the hierarchy which is noted there. Instead, it is how God has ordained these things so that we can also understand the other hierarchies which exist. We don't rule over Christ; He rules over us. If we get our levels of subordination out of order, only chaos will result. This is perfectly evident as western society has progressively thrown off the patriarchal family.

**For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head*, because of the angels. 1 Corinthians 11:10**

"For this reason" is referring to the hierarchy mentioned in verse 9. The covering mentioned earlier is a symbol of authority over the woman. Based on this statement, we can then interpret the meaning of "head" from verse 11:5 as "authority" and not the physical head. An example of this is found later in Paul's writings in 1 Timothy 2:12 –

"And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence."

This "covering" shows the authority placed over her and therefore what Paul writes in 1 Timothy is both explicit and expected. The modern church which is inundated with women pastors, preachers, teachers, reverends, and the like is therefore in willful disobedience of the word of the Lord. There can be no rewards for disobedience, and so the work they are doing, even if it brings others to Christ, will only bring self-inflicted loss.

Paul then explains this by saying, "because of the angels." What exactly does this mean? There is no verse elsewhere in Scripture that explicitly refers to this statement. A search of several sound and notable Bible commentaries indicates the following:

"Thus would the apostle have the women appear In Christian assemblies, even though they spoke there by inspiration, because of the angels, that is, say some, because of the evil angels. The woman was first in the transgression, being deceived by the devil (1 Tim. ii. 14)), which increased her subjection to man, Gen. iii. 16. Now, believe evil angels will be sure to mix in all Christian assemblies, therefore should women wear the token of their shamefacedness and subjection, which in that age and country, was a veil. Others say because of the good angels. Jews and Christians have had an opinion that these ministering spirits are many of them present in their assemblies. Their presence should restrain Christians from all indecencies in the worship of God. Note, We should learn from all to behave in the public assemblies of divine worship so as to express a reverence for God, and a content and satisfaction with that rank in which he has placed us." Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible

"What this means, I do not yet understand." The Geneva Bible

(In a lengthy discourse on the subject) - "I do not know what it means; and I regard it as one of the very few passages in the Bible whose meaning as yet is wholly inexplicable." Barnes Notes on the New Testament

"...who are present at our Christian assemblies (compare Ps 138:1, "gods," that is, angels), and delight in the orderly subordination of the several ranks of God's worshippers in their respective places, the outward demeanor and dress of the latter being indicative of that inward humility which angels know to be most pleasing to their common Lord (1 Co 4:9; Eph 3:10; Ec 5:6). HAMMOND quotes CHRYSOSTOM, "Thou standest with angels; thou singest with them; thou hymnest with them; and yet dost thou stand laughing?" BENGEL explains, "As the angels are in relation to God, so the woman is in relation to man. God's face is uncovered; angels in His presence are veiled (Isa 6:2). Man's face is uncovered; woman in His presence is to be veiled. For her not to be so, would, by its indecorousness, offend the angels (Mt 18:10, 31). She, by her weakness, especially needs their ministry; she ought, therefore, to be the more careful not to offend them." Jamieson, Faussett, and Brown

"The insubordination of women in refusing to acknowledge the authority of their husbands would offend the angels who, under God, guard the created universe (cf. Col 1:16; Eph 1:21), and know no insubordination." The Wycliffe Bible Commentary

The commentaries from the Geneva Bible and Barnes above are probably the most honest commentaries on this subject, although they don't help very much. Due to the variance of opinion on the matter, and the lack of direct scriptural links which actually support the statement, there is truly no harm in stating "I don't know what this means." However, the comment by Matthew Henry and the "evil angels" makes at least partial sense.

In the end, Paul knew what he was writing and the Corinthians at that time understood it. Because of this, we can trust that the statement "because of the angels" is valid in and of itself, even if it isn't fully understood. It is a tenet which we can know is both sound and reasonable.

Life application: Even if we don't fully understand "why" tenets are given in the Bible, or further - even if we don't understand the explanation given for the "why," if we understand the directive then we need to be obedient to that directive. Not understanding why something is directed is not an excuse to disobey the command.

**Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:11**

Paul's words thus far have shown that there is an understood hierarchy that exists between men and women. Because of this hierarchy, there are restrictions and rules which are to be adhered to in this relationship. However, Paul begins verse 11 with the word "nevertheless."

The introduction of this word is to have the reader stop and consider what he will present next. They are words which indicate that even if there are defined lines of authority in the male/female relationship, they are not to be abused. Care is to be exercised so that this relationship isn't harmed or somehow perverted in a way which degrades the female. And so he says, "neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord."

The fact is, despite a hierarchal relationship, men and women in the Lord need each other and compliment each other. In Genesis 2:23, 24, it says –

And Adam said:

“This is now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called Woman,  
Because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Since that time, all men have been born of a woman. Men and women have a undeniable natural interdependency, and though woman is subordinated to man in the family and in the church, it is a subordination intended for order and propriety, not for heavy-handed rule or abuse. The need for a woman to continue the species is seen in a notable way in the book of Ruth. When Ruth, Naomi's stepdaughter, had a son the women of Bethlehem rightfully called out the value of Ruth saying -

"...for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." Ruth 4:15

What seven sons could never have done without a woman, namely bearing a child, Ruth was able to do in her union to Boaz. As is evident here and throughout

Scripture, the subordination of women is not without purpose and their importance is not only noted, but highlighted.

Life application: If you are in a discussion with a modern feminist and they tell you the tired old line that the Bible diminishes the role of women, tell them to quit with the clichés, read the Bible for themselves, and grow up.

**For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.** 1 Corinthians 11:12

This verse begins with "For." Paul has taken a broad concept and is bringing it down to very specific points to be considered. Because of the delicate nature of this passage, it would be good to stop, go back, and review the main prepositions and conjunctions as they are given to show us the sequence of thought from the beginning of the passage.

Remember particularly that this is considered a "tradition" established through the apostles for the church. It is not merely a "cultural" thing which pertained only to the Corinthians, but it is an expected propriety during all of the church age. Note the main thought of verse 2 which is to "keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you" and remember it while considering each highlighted word while reading -

"Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. <sup>3</sup> **But** I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God. <sup>4</sup> Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup> **But** every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. <sup>6</sup> **For** if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. **But** if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. <sup>7</sup> **For** a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> **For** man is not from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup> Nor was man created for the

woman, but woman for the man. <sup>10</sup> **For** this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head*, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> **Nevertheless**, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup> **For** as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.

In the first half of verse 12, Paul builds on verses 11:8 and 11:11. In the second half of the verse, he reminds the Corinthians (and thus all readers) that both men and women are not independent of God, but are subject to Him as the creation is to the Creator. The mystery of God's ways is demonstrated here. Eve was taken from Adam's side, but man since then has come through woman.

A point that should not be missed is that even Christ came through a woman who came from both a man and a woman. Christ is the Head of man, but man fell and all who are born of man are fallen in Adam. However, because Christ came through a woman but not directly from man, the fallen nature of Adam was cut in Him. It is the fulfillment of the picture made by the rite of circumcision. The cutting of the male organ was a picture of cutting away the sin nature of man.

Eventually, Christ came and fulfilled that picture. Now, when one calls on Him, they move from Adam to Christ and thus the sin nature is likewise cut in that person. Therefore, Christ is our Head and therefore we owe Him the respect of staying within the parameters of what His word mandates for us. And so the coming verses concerning hair and head coverings are given to show us what is right and proper. Paul has shown in this discourse why it is so.

Life application: What may seem arbitrary and unnecessary in a command or exhortation is often not so when properly understood. Taking the time to review passages and looking for key markers within each passage will help us to solidify our understanding of why things are expected. In the end, it should always come back to what is honoring to our Lord.

**Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 1 Corinthians 11:13**

Paul asks the Corinthians to judge, to make a correct decision, concerning this matter. When Paul says "judge among yourselves" he is asking them to see how obvious the matter is; there should be no question as to a right determination. Because of the context, he expects the reader to understand that it is not proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered. It is a rhetorical question which demands a "No" answer. A woman dishonors her head when she does so.

Going further, the petition isn't merely to "judge" but to "Judge among yourselves." An open judgment among the people will show what the individual heart may attempt to hide. As an example to understand the universal nature of this, or any such issue, we can look at the issue of abortion. People make claims about the propriety of abortion all the time. They even do it in public forums. However, if two or more people were in an honest debate on the issue - one without personal attacks or red herrings, the truth would come out.

If one were to ask, openly and frankly from a natural perspective (which is what Paul is doing concerning the issue he is addressing) as to the morality of removing a live baby from a woman and murdering it, the proponents of abortion would have no true argument. Unfortunately, the morality of the issue is never addressed in this manner. Rather "legality" or "personal feelings" are inevitably introduced and the abortion issue continues to cast its deathly pall over society.

Paul is using the same tactic here. He could ask, "Is it legal for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" The answer, at least within Christian circles, is certainly "Yes." He could ask, "How do you personally feel about the issue?" If he did, he would receive all kinds of responses and the most vocal group would prevail, regardless of propriety. However, he returns to the very basics of the issue. He first shows the nature of the Godhead itself. He then shows the nature of propriety within creation. And finally, he asks his question. He cuts out the argument before it begins and so his answer to their question will not need further clarification or explanation later.



If only we would follow the same pattern in our own moral decisions we would have them more in-line with what is right and proper in the eyes of the Creator. Unfortunately, Christianity in great measure has become a religion of personal likes and dislikes and of clinging to what is legal instead of what is moral. Rather than following these temporary avenues, the Christian should pursue personal (and corporate) obedience to God and to His word.

Life application: Am I discerning the obvious when I read the Bible and making correct decisions based on this discernment? Or am I overlooking exhortations which apply to me without giving them proper consideration? Am I trying to insert my personal likes and dislikes at the expense of right doctrine? If so, Lord - please change my heart.

**Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? 1 Corinthians 11:14**

Paul brings in "nature itself" as a witness to his instruction. This is based on his previous verse which called out, "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" Just as it was obvious to those in Corinth concerning that issue, so this one is obvious as well. His words about natural revelation are that "if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?"

If one is a great traveler, they will come to the conclusion that wherever he goes and in whatever culture he finds himself, it is normally rather easy to distinguish men from women. One doesn't travel to the heights of Tibet and find this to be untrue. Nor does one travel to the deepest jungles of Africa and find it to be untrue. Men and women are usually easily distinguished between one another. And the general distinction is that of hair. How the hair is worn generally makes the first notable distinction between the sexes.

Paul's observation, based on nature, is again "if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him." This thought however needs to be taken and contemplated with extreme care lest a discouraging line of legalism enter into one's theology.

First, the natural question should be, "What is to define 'long hair' on a man?" Is it more than a marine-style jarhead haircut? Is it more than one inch? Is hair on the collar a dishonor? What if hair goes to past the neck? What if... what if (perish the thought!) the hair is found to touch the shoulders? Just what is the definition of "long hair?"

It must be misunderstood that the Bible never contradicts itself. However, the following people were Nazirites from birth (a consecration detailed in Numbers 6) and never cut their hair throughout their entire lives – Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist. Amos 2:12 indicates there were other Nazirites in Israel, and even Paul took such a vow in Acts 18:18. If some of these men of God never cut their hair and others didn't cut it for extended periods of time, then how can Paul's words be reconciled with hair that goes past the top of the ear (as so many legalistically minded people seem to define "long hair")?

Having long hair, in and of itself, cannot be a shame or dishonor to a man because men of God were known to have had long hair. Therefore, this would be a contradiction in the Bible. Understanding this, it must be the *appearance* of the long hair which is dishonoring to his head. If a man looks like a woman, then he has passed from manliness to femininity. This, in and of itself then, would be dishonoring to him. It would be in then line with the precept found in Deuteronomy 22:5 for example –

"A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this."

Men are men and women are women. God intends for men to look like men and He intends for women to look like women. Further, the actions of the man are to be manly actions and the actions of a woman are to be feminine. These concepts are stated implicitly throughout Scripture. Therefore, it must be that Paul is referring to an *appearance of femininity* concerning long hair in this verse. If long hair causes a man to appear to be a female, then he has assumed an appearance which would place him in a point of subjection as described in the earlier verses

of this passage. But man is to be under the Headship of Christ, thus honoring Him directly.

If a man has a beard, no matter how long his hair is, he will certainly not be mistaken for a woman. However, if the long hair on a man becomes the primary point of identifying him as a female, then he has brought shame upon himself.

Life application: Who decides in your church how long your hair can be? If someone is walking around with a ruler and checking length, he probably has more serious problems that should be watched. Legalism is a poison which can only bring about a congregation full of neurotic people. In all precepts, taking the time to think the issue through from a "let Scripture interpret Scripture" viewpoint will generally lead to healthy, happy congregations.

*What a joy! Thank You O God for the freedoms You have given me in Christ. Way too often I hear people of the world claiming that faith in Him is some type of bondage or some type of joy-limiting walk. But the closer I get to You, the more freedom I find. Surely a person can serve only one master and I know that sin is a raging, destroying enemy. But You are a kind, gentle Lord. The further I am from sin, the closer I am to perfect freedom. Thank You for the gentle yoke of Christ. Thank You for the wide and expansive pastures to which You are leading me! Amen.*

**But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her for a covering. 1 Corinthians 11:15**

As we can see from this verse, the many traditions of various sects or denominations which require bonnets or some other type of covering based on the thought in verse 5 have misinterpreted Paul's intent. They ran ahead without finishing the passage and properly applying his words. Rather, his intent was and is that a woman's hair is given to her for a covering. No bonnet or other headpiece is required as a sign of authority. Her covering is her long hair; it is a glory to her and to her husband.

Therefore, if she does not have long hair as a symbol of her authority, then she should wear a covering. If she will do neither, then she has shamed her husband and should be shaven herself as a sign of shame (verse 6). Just as a Nazirite had long hair as a mark of separation to God, a woman should have long hair as a mark of submission to her husband. This again brings in an obvious question though - "What defines "long hair" on a woman?" And a second question then arises - "Who decides what the definition is?"

As no biblical advice is given on either of these questions, two possibilities are:

- 1) Just as a man should not look feminine with long hair, a woman should not look masculine with short hair.
- 2) The husband should be consulted in the wife's hair length so that he is not dishonored by her appearance.

If these two requirements are met, then the matter should be concluded. Were there other references in the Bible concerning this, then greater restrictions or freedoms could be imposed, but none exist. Therefore, let the father or husband of the woman be pleased to determine what he feels is appropriate for the woman's hair length; her covering.

Life application - Legalism is a poison which should be avoided at all costs. The Bible gives details for proper conduct. Adding to them can only harm the congregation and lead down unhappy paths.

Lord, You created woman for man, what a gift!

And You ordained that they should be joined as one

When a man has a bride, his spirit she does lift

And to him she can add times that are fun

Together they can walk the road of life  
Hand in hand sharing in each joy and trial  
Blessed is the man who has a good wife!  
Who comes home to such a friend who can make him smile

Thank You Lord for the beauties around us  
Who grace us with joy and make our lives complete  
And help us to do the same for our Lord Jesus  
Our Husband and Lord, our precious Savior so sweet

**But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God. 1 Corinthians 11:16**

From verses 2 until 16, Paul has been addressing the issue of hierarchy within the church, within creation, and what is proper concerning the covering of one's head. His argument has been with authority and he has written it as if his statements were obvious; they are a given. And so because this is true then there is nothing else left to fall back on which would be proper. What he has written is the only right and acceptable view concerning the matter. With that he says, " But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God."

Those who are contentious about the issue, or disagree with his conclusions, are left without any other acceptable custom or practice; this is how things should be. Modern scholars have tried to isolate this and other arguments made by Paul, saying they are merely cultural and applicable to the people in Corinth, but no longer apply in our modern and "enlightened" world. This is not case at all. Two reasons for this are made known:

- 1) His arguments not only covered the church, but they are understood from nature itself (as noted in verses 7:12).
- 2) In this verse, he says that there is no other custom to be found among either the apostles (we) or in any other established churches (the churches of God). The principle is to be universally applied and only those who are "contentious" will stand against it; they are the very people that necessitated his letter in the first place (see 1 Corinthians 1:10 concerning "divisions").

Therefore, as this is in "all the churches of God" it cannot be a cultural issue isolated only to Corinth. Nor can this apply only at the time of Paul's writing. It is authoritative doctrine for the Church in all locations and for all time.

Life application: It is tempting and easy to say that a difficult issue in the epistles was merely "cultural" or "temporary." However, when the context of the entire passage is carefully reviewed, it is discovered that this is generally not the case. The words of the apostles, particularly Paul, are given to the church for all ages and in all times. We disregard them at the expense of proper doctrine and right living.