

I Corinthians

October 2019

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²I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. ³But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

⁷A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. ¹¹Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

¹³Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, ¹⁵but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. ¹⁶If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 The Message**To Honor God**

¹⁻²It pleases me that you continue to remember and honor me by keeping up the traditions of the faith I taught you. All actual authority stems from Christ. ³⁻⁹In a marriage relationship, there is authority from Christ to husband, and from husband to wife. The authority of Christ is the authority of God. Any man who speaks with God or about God in a way that shows a lack of respect for the authority of Christ, dishonors Christ. In the same way, a wife who speaks with God in a way that shows a lack of respect for the authority of her husband, dishonors her husband. Worse, she dishonors herself—an ugly sight, like a woman with her head shaved. This is basically the origin of these customs we have of women wearing head coverings in worship, while men take their hats off. By these symbolic acts, men and women, who far too often butt heads with each other, submit their “heads” to the Head: God.

¹⁰⁻¹²Don’t, by the way, read too much into the differences here between men and women. Neither man nor woman can go it alone or claim priority. Man was created first, as a beautiful shining reflection of God—that is true. But the head on a woman’s body clearly outshines in beauty the head of her “head,” her husband. The first woman came from man, true—but ever since then, every man comes from a woman! And since virtually everything comes from God anyway, let’s quit going through these “who’s first” routines. ¹³⁻¹⁶Don’t you agree there is something naturally powerful in the symbolism—a woman, her beautiful hair reminiscent of angels, praying in adoration; a man, his head bared in reverence, praying in submission? I hope you’re not going to be argumentative about this. All God’s churches see it this way; I don’t want you standing out as an exception.

1 Corinthians 14:34-40 (NIV)

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸ But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

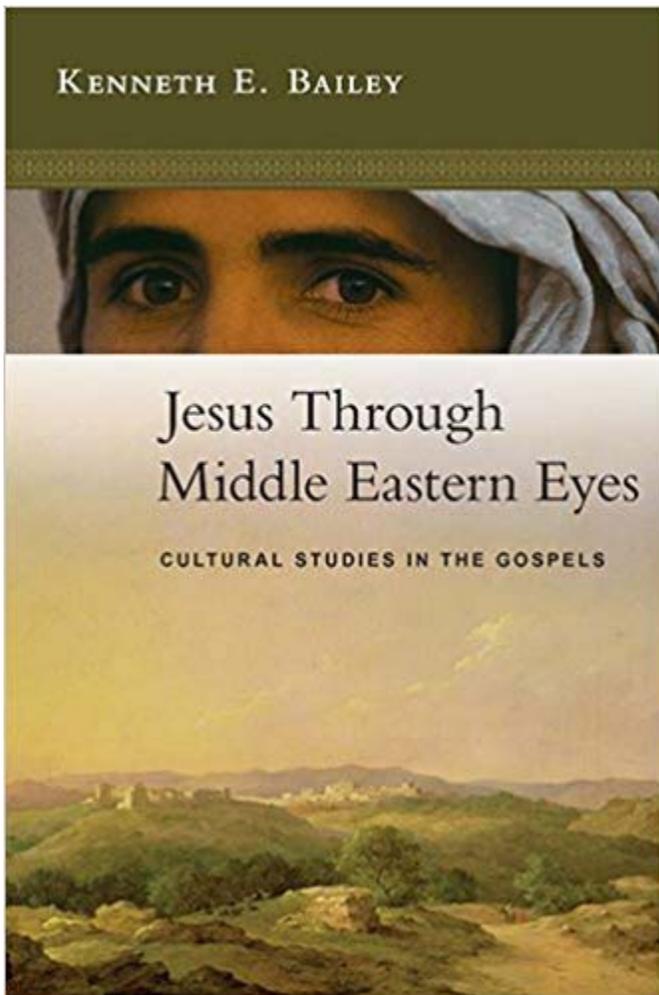
³⁹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

1 Corinthians 14:34-40 The Message (MSG)

³⁴⁻³⁶ Wives must not disrupt worship, talking when they should be listening, asking questions that could more appropriately be asked of their husbands at home. God's Book of the law guides our manners and customs here. Wives have no license to use the time of worship for unwarranted speaking. Do you—both women *and* men—imagine that you're a sacred oracle determining what's right and wrong? Do you think everything revolves around you?

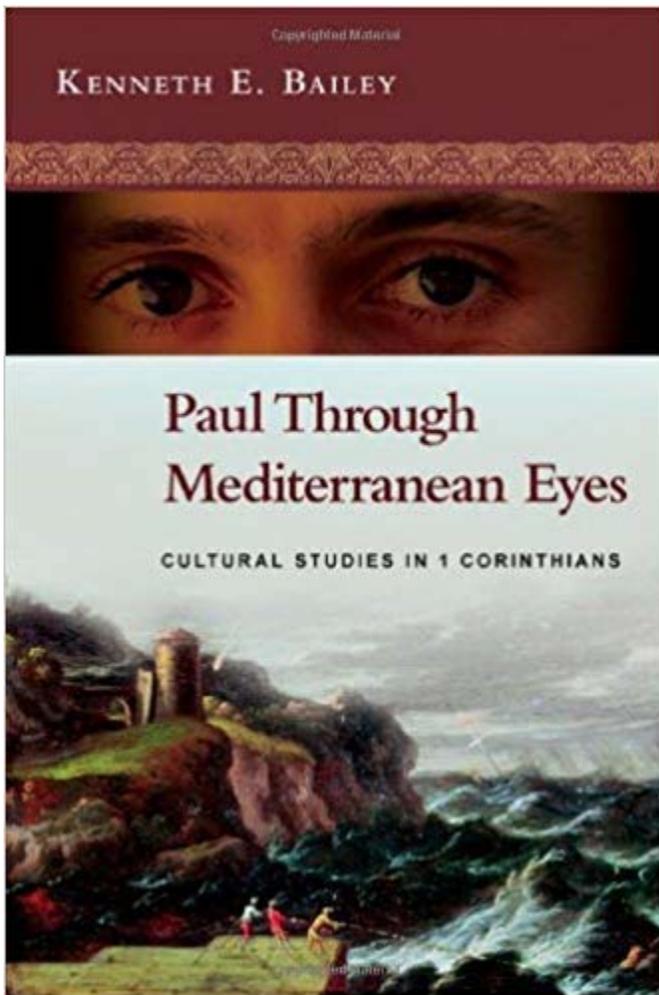
³⁷⁻³⁸ If any one of you thinks God has something for you to say or has inspired you to do something, pay close attention to what I have written. This is the way the Master wants it. If you won't play by these rules, God can't use you. Sorry.

³⁹⁻⁴⁰ Three things, then, to sum this up: When you speak forth God's truth, speak your heart out. Don't tell people how they should or shouldn't pray when they're praying in tongues that you don't understand. Be courteous and considerate in everything.



Beginning with Jesus' birth, Ken Bailey leads you on a kaleidoscopic study of Jesus throughout the four Gospels. Bailey examines the life and ministry of Jesus with attention to the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, Jesus' relationship to women, and especially Jesus' parables. Through it all, Bailey employs his trademark expertise as a master of Middle Eastern culture to lead you into a deeper understanding of the person and significance of Jesus within his own cultural context. With a sure but gentle hand, Bailey lifts away the obscuring layers of modern Western interpretation to reveal Jesus in the light of his actual historical and cultural setting. This entirely new material from the pen of Ken Bailey is a must-have for any student of the New Testament. If you have benefited from Bailey's work over the years, this book will be a welcome and indispensable addition to your library. If you are unfamiliar with Bailey's work, this book will introduce you to a very old yet entirely new way of understanding Jesus.

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- 2012 *Christianity Today* Book Award winner

Paul was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, steeped in the learning of his people. But he was also a Roman citizen who widely traveled the Mediterranean basin, and was very knowledgeable of the dominant Greek and Roman culture of his day. These two mighty rivers of influence converge in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. With razor-sharp attention to the text, Kenneth Bailey examines the cultural milieu and rhetorical strategies that shaped this pivotal epistle. He discovers the deep layers of the Hebraic prophetic tradition informing Paul's writing, linking the Apostle with the great prophets of the Old Testament. Throughout, Bailey employs his expert knowledge of Near Eastern and Mediterranean culture to deliver to readers a new understanding of Paul and his world. Familiar passages take on a new hue as they are stripped of standard Western interpretations and rendered back into their ancient setting.

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Through His Eyes: God's Perspective on Women in the Bible

by [Jerram Barrs](#)

In our churches, much teaching on women begins with the “restrictive” passages in I Corinthians 11 and 14 and I Timothy 2 – and often ends there. While those passages are important, Jerram Barrs seeks to answer a more foundational question. How does the Lord see women? In *Through His Eyes* Barrs answers this question by examining several biblical case studies. These examples reveal God’s perspective on women, then and now.

Through His Eyes begins with a series of Old Testament examples (such as Eve, Sarah, and Ester) that demonstrate the respect God gives to women and their significant place in salvation history. Moving on to the New Testament, we see how God blessed Mary by calling her to be the mother of our Savior and how beautifully Jesus treated women (such as the woman at the well and sisters Martha and Mary). Then we turn to the Day of Pentecost and the fulfillment of the prophets words, “Your daughters shall prophesy,” and consider what this should mean today for all God’s people. Finally we reflect on the image by which God chooses to describe his church – the bride of Christ – and rejoice in the honor that God shows to all women with this title.

In these pages is a happy exposition of the dignity and glory the Lord showers on women. As readers learn to see women through God’s eyes, women will be encouraged to delight in their creation and calling, and men will be challenged to honor women as does the Lord himself.

Jerram Barrs is the founder and resident scholar of the Francis Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Theological Seminary, where he also teaches apologetics and outreach as professor of Christian studies and contemporary culture. He and his wife were on staff at English L’Abri for many years. His publications include *Being Human* (with Ranald MacAulay) and *The Heart of Evangelism*.

<http://www.crossway.org/books/through-his-eyes-tpb/>

http://www.amazon.com/Through-His-Eyes-Perspective-Women/dp/1433502240/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1374678744&sr=8-1&keywords=through+his+eyes

Women in the Church

Reclaiming the Ideal

By Carroll Osburn

Women in the Church: The Present Quandary

At the outset not much can be said with certainty on the matter but it can be said with confidence that the topic of women in the church is complex, volatile and unavoidable.

Prejudices on two extremes have resulted in heated discussions of women, particularly in churches. Diverse views are held with almost fanatical zeal. The mere mention of the topic evokes deep seated feelings and emotions all across the spectrum of thought. Many turn to the Bible, but with different presuppositions, agendas, and traditional arguments. On both extremes, the complex matter of women in the church has become a matter of belief upon which fellowship hinges. For others, it is a matter of opinion to be researched and discussed. Unfortunately, if one seeks middle ground on this issue, one should be prepared to dive for cover, as shots will be fired from both directions. No more volatile topic exists in the church today.

In recent years I have received numerous letters and phone calls from people who sincerely want to re-examine scriptures carefully in search of truth, but who are uncertain about how to sort out what is truly biblical and what is cultural. The topic of women in the church is not solely a religious issue; it is rooted deeply in the culture in which we live. Whether one likes it or not, changes are occurring regarding women in our culture and the impact of those changes on churches are significant. Frankly, some of these changes are scary. Fearing these changes, some staunchly hold on to the patriarchal model inherited from the past. They tend to regard anyone who thinks otherwise as radicals who merely let contemporary culture override their biblical mooring. Now, for obvious reasons the voice of radical feminists is not at all strong in conservative churches. Still, some feel forced to choose between patriarchalism and feminism, reluctantly opt for the latter and leave the church. However, many are caught in the middle who see problems with patriarchalism on one hand, yet who do not want to be identified with radical feminism on the other. What options exist for them? “Women in the Church” is a complex topic. It is an agonizingly unavoidable topic.

I fear that the way we are now addressing the matter can only lead to extremism, chaos and hardening of attitudes. If we are to investigate the matter afresh, we must find a more productive approach.

The way this question is asked will have much to say about religious identity and how the church is to interact with contemporary culture. To ask what *roles* women can have in the church and its worship is, I think, to ask the wrong question. It is true that the role of women in the church and its public worship are important topics. But what compels me to enter the explosive minefield of “Women in the Church” does not have to do so much with women handing out communion trays in worship, for instance. I am more concerned with wide spread problems of abuse and inequity in our society and, more than I care to admit, in our churches. I am particularly bothered by any view of women that demeans, depreciates, and exploits women as merely tools for man’s enjoyment in service. The question is not “What *roles* can women have in the church?” but “*How shall we view women?*”

Although the question of women in the church does not seem to be at the heart of the Christian message, it does surface some very diverse feelings. It is to be expected that some readers will hope to learn quickly in these pages whether I am their ally or their enemy and, having “pigeon-holed” me, find the remainder useless, because I would either confirm their hopes or annoy them greatly. In a way, I feel much like Sisyphus, a mythical king of Corinth who attempted repeatedly to “roll the stone of conservatism to the top of the mountain of consensus, only to have it come crashing back down.” Couching the question in terms of extreme views only hinders objectivity and conversation. We need to move beyond the impasse created by extremism.

What I would really like to see is more gracious, objective, and balanced discussion of the topic of women in the church. My modest tasks in this book are: 1) To couch the question in a more productive way so that genuine communication can take place, and 2.) To apply my biblical understandings to church life. Accordingly, while the role of women in Christian worship and administration should be discussed, that discussion can occur only after several significant matters have received clarification-matters concerning not the “*role* of women” but the “*view* of women”.

1. *Approaching the Topic Productively*

Discussion of women in the church must avoid several pitfalls --pitfalls such as traditionalism and extremism. To avoid pitfalls, I offer the following suggestions:

First we need to understand the various views of women that exist and how they came to be. These views did not come about in a religious vacuum apart from society. All of them have been shaped to a great extent by culture. How women are to be viewed is not a peculiarly religious topic, but is basically a human dilemma that must be examined in a wider context.

Second, we need to avoid extremes and concentrate on realistic options. The question of women in the church should be couched in terms of median views rather than in terms of the extreme views of *patriarchalism* and radical *feminism*, which will be discussed and dismissed in chapter 2. Neither the extreme views of radical feminists nor the “Archie Bunkers” of this world provide an adequate view of women. **Moderate views do exist**, however, that will provide adequate understandings of women--*evangelical feminism* and *hierarchal complementarianism*. Now don't be too bothered by these terms. Every field has terms that require a little extra effort to understand, but which make work in that field much easier. Both of these views will be discussed in detail in chapter three. Both have much in common, but there are important differences. It is vital to understand both of these views accurately.

Third, we must cultivate a willingness to rethink the problem. Intellectual honesty often challenges old traditions. Long-standing presuppositions that become identified with “eternal truth” must be dethroned and reclassified as mere presuppositions. Long-standing arguments that, with the passing of time, have hardened into “sacred truth” must now be dethroned and reclassified as mere arguments. Long-standing practices that have become almost like “the unchangeable law of the Medes and Persians” must now be dethroned and reclassified as cultural preferences. Rethinking means that some change might result. So, we must have an honest willingness to change our views and modify our behavior if necessary.

Fourth, we need to clarify the role and function of the Bible. Instead of rummaging through the Bible to find texts that might support our preconceived notions, we must re-examine the biblical text--and we must do so rigorously. Women in the church is a serious topic and deserves serious study. Now, I am not at all suggesting erudite excursions into intellectual black holes, vortices of endless regression into which scholars sometime drift, never to be seen again. I am suggesting patient exegesis (getting out of the Bible what the writer meant) as the basis for responsible implementation in contemporary life of ancient biblical principles and values.

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CHAPTER X

1 CORINTHIANS 11—THE HEAD OF THE WOMAN IS THE MAN

The first part of 1 Corinthians 11, dealing with veils, hair length, and such, is a puzzlement. No, “puzzlement” is not strong enough. This chapter is a consternation. Commentator after commentator throws up his hands in frustration at trying to reach a clear sense of Paul’s meaning. Our respect for inspiration and the brilliant Paul is too great to even imagine that Paul was unclear to his readers in Corinth, but today the chapter is indeed very challenging—and it is challenging to those who take any position on the women’s issues. It is not made hard by my view of things. It is just hard.

(1 Cor. 11:2-16) I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.

If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

What is a “head”? For our purposes, the most important portions of this scripture are those dealing directly with the relationship of men and women. Paul begins by pointing out that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. This statement is puzzling, in that nowhere else do we see the Bible refer to Christ as the head of man as opposed to woman. Certainly, if by “head” Paul means “Lord,” then Christ is the head of both men and women. A woman does not need a man to serve as mediator between her and Christ.

“Source.” As mentioned earlier with respect to Ephesians 5, the Greeks did not use *kephale* or “head” in quite the same way as 21st Century Americans. While *kephale* occasionally took the meaning “ruler,” this was not the normal or usual sense. Indeed, it appears that there was no well-established idiomatic usage of “head.” In modern English, we use “head” so often to mean ruler or leader that we forget that we are using a metaphor. The Greeks also used the word metaphorically, but the metaphor was not nearly so standardized. The meaning must therefore always be taken from the context.

Moreover, as much as we’d like to do so, we can’t turn over to Ephesians to determine the meaning of “head” in 1 Corinthians 11, because this chapter was written many years before Ephesians was written—and to different people. The Corinthian church members could not turn to Ephesians to interpret Paul’s meaning, and so we must resist the temptation to do so.

One use of “head” found in then contemporary Greek literature is “source,” much as we speak of a river’s “headwaters” today. The sense of “source” certainly can fit the verses themselves. The commentators hotly debate this, and it is true that “source” was not a common metaphor in First Century Greek. But there are precedents for “source.” Indeed, the nature of metaphors is that there doesn’t have to be a precedent. We all freely coin metaphors all the time. The only test is whether the context makes the meaning of the metaphor clear to the original readers.

The Bible speaks of God “begetting” Christ (John 3:16; Acts 13:33; Col. 1:15).⁷⁸ (78 Some confuse this concept with Aryanism, as though God being the source of Christ would make Christ a created being, rather than co-eternal with God. But Heb. 1:3 refers to Christ as the “radiance” or “effulgence” (RSV) of God’s glory. The radiance is the shining brightness that surrounds a light—imagine a picture of a candle with a flame in the middle and a glow around the flame. The glow is the radiance. The radiance clearly finds its source in the light and yet is as old as the light. If the candle has been burning forever, the radiance has been around the flame forever.) Christ is pictured in the New Testament as the immediate Creator (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and hence as the source of Adam. And Eve was made from Adam’s rib.

Verses 8-9 also build an argument based on the source of woman.

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

The use of “head” as “source” is reinforced by verses 11-12:

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

Clearly, this passage extends the thought in verses 3, 8, and 9 in terms of the source or origin of man and woman. Plainly, Paul’s argument hinges on the notion of man as the source of woman and woman as the source of man.

“Ruler.” There is also limited support in First Century Greek literature for “head” to be used of a ruler. While there is clear support for “head” to mean source in 1 Corinthians 11, is there language in 1 Corinthians 11 referring to the head as a ruler? (obviously, other than the word “head” itself—we can’t argue in circles!)

Verse 9 states that woman was created “for man,” while man was not created for woman. But we have already studied the Creation accounts. Clearly, the reference to woman being created for man recalls that Eve was created as Adam’s complement.

But God did not give Adam *rule* over Eve until He cursed the Creation. Therefore, Eve’s being created “for” Adam—before the curse—cannot be interpreted as making Adam her ruler—or as making men rule women. It means, rather, that Eve (and any wife) is to make up what is lacking in her husband, since it is not good for man to be alone. Moreover, as man’s complement and helper, woman must not bring shame to man.

Verse 10 states, in the NIV, that a woman is to have a “sign of authority on her head.” But “sign of” is absent in the Greek and has been added by the translators. The KJV is more literal in translating that the woman must have “power on” her head. As noted by Mark C. Black, assistant professor of the New Testament at David Lipscomb University,⁷⁹ (79 “1 Cor. 11:2-16—A Re-investigation,” pages 208-210, published in Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women*.)

Another possible reading would translate “the woman has to exercise control (*exousia*) over her head,” and therefore does not directly refer to the head-covering at all. Because of the creation principles (8-9) and because of the angels (10), she must behave correctly with regard to her head (which of course means wearing the covering).⁸⁰ (80 *Ibid*, page 210, footnote 79.)

Thus, the reference to “authority” in verse 10 is the woman’s exercise of authority, not the man’s. Since the woman is never referred to as a head but is referred to as exercising authority, “head” does not mean one with authority in this passage.

More traditionally, “authority” has been interpreted as the veil itself, the idea being that the veil is symbolic of the husband’s authority over the wife or the authority of a woman to be in public while veiled. However, the suggestion that “authority” is the woman’s own authority makes the best sense because it is consistent with the fundamental notion that Christians have freedom coupled with responsibility not to use their freedom to harm others. This thought is the essence of Paul’s teachings.

Moreover, there are serious difficulties with interpreting “head” as ruler. Jesus, at least while on earth, was subordinate to His Father’s will. Men are subordinate to Christ. And so, one might argue, the meaning is that women must be subordinate to men. But Paul says that God “is” the head of Christ, long after Jesus announced, “All authority has been given to me on heaven and on earth” due to His resurrection (Matt. 28:18). Thus, the relationship between God and Christ at the time 1 Corinthians was written was one where God had yielded “all authority.” Paul is not speaking of what Christ’s relationship with God was before His glorification.⁸¹ Therefore, we cannot impose especially on women the example of Christ while on earth as a servant learning obedience. Indeed, as we’ve already seen, Christ’s example of service and obedience is particularly applied to *husbands* in Ephesians 5.

⁸¹ Paul deals with the same subject later in 1 Corinthians:

(15:23) But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign *until* he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 For he “has put everything under his feet.”

Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, *then* the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

We see that Paul makes clear that Christ’s authority does not extend to God Himself and that the authority of Christ is temporary until He has truly extended His authority over all things, with the last step being the conquest of death itself. The resurrected Christ is not pictured as being “subject to” God until death is conquered. Thus, we are in a period during which Christ has been given rule over the universe while not subject to God (except, of course, in the sense the Christ and God are One).

A similar conclusion may be drawn from Phil. 2:5-11, where Christ is said to have been equal with God before He came to earth (v. 6). Following Christ’s return to heaven, God “exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.” How could Christ be higher now than He was before His incarnation—when He was already equal with God? If we understand Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 15 correctly, Christ has been given complete rule over the universe, not subordinate to God until the entire history of the Creation is finished.

Obviously, such considerations are very difficult and confusing, especially when we consider Christ and God as One and yet two persons. Their relationship is far beyond human understanding and very dimly expressed in mortal language. And yet we see clearly enough that comparing the relationship of men and women to the present relationship of God and Christ hardly argues for women as either inferior or subordinate.

Thus, both men and women, husbands and wives must follow Christ’s example of sacrificial living, and the comparison of men and women to God and Christ no more justifies male domination over women than Paul’s command in Ephesians that husbands follow Christ’s example justifies wives dominating their husbands. Both passages make the same point—we must submit to one another just as Jesus gave Himself up for the church.

Moreover, the headship of men no more means that women are inferior to men or may be dominated by men than the headship of God means that Christ is inferior to or dominated by God. In fact, it would seem to plainly teach that the relationship of men and women is much like the relationship of God and Christ. They have different roles. They take on different responsibilities. But they are equal. And they are One!

(John 10:30) "I and the Father are one."

(John 17:20-21) "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

In John 17 we see Jesus praying that *all Christians be one* in the same way that He and God are one. It would be remarkable indeed if Jesus intended that husbands and wives be *less* united than Christians in general! Whatever Paul meant with regard to the headship of God and the headship of men, it must be considered in light of the relationship of the resurrected Christ and God the Father. This relationship is so close that we refer to them as God in One Person. Moreover, we refer to them as equals and as being of the same essence. *This* is the Bible's pattern for the relationship of husbands and wives.

Some commentators argue that because the relationship of men and women is like the relationship of God and Christ, women can be subordinate and equal simultaneously. Jesus was obedient to God while on earth, and this arguably demonstrates that Jesus could be equal with God while being subordinate to God. But Philippians 2:6-11, which we've previously studied, teaches that Jesus had to *give up* equality in order to be obedient (verses 6-8)! God and Christ are equal—now, but not while Jesus was on earth, as the author of Hebrews says, "learning obedience" (Heb. 5:8). But in 1 Corinthians 11, written when Jesus had already been glorified and His equality with God had been reestablished, Paul was explicitly referring to the relationship that God has with Christ *after* the resurrection and glorification of Christ.

But the difficulty of interpreting "head" as ruler goes much deeper. First, if man is the ruler of woman, then this is the first time in the entire Bible that this doctrine appears. In Genesis 3:16, wives are cursed with the domination of their *husbands*, but women are not subjected to men in general.⁸² (82 (Gen. 3:16) "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your *husband*, and he will rule over you.'") And if men are to rule women, just what is the extent and nature of this kind of headship? Does this apply to the workplace? Home? Church? Friendships? And just what service may men command from women? To what extent must your daughters submit to whatever man they should happen across?

The difficulty is this: While many fine and studious Christians have concluded that men are the heads of women—meaning rulers of women—these same Christians cannot agree what this means in practice or in theory. By interpreting "head" as ruler, these commentators impose a doctrine with boundaries that cannot be found in the pages of scripture. It is as though God has told us just enough of His will for us to know that there is a rule, without knowing what the rule is! Each hierarchalist commentator seems to reach different conclusions as to where to draw the lines. Some frankly admit that they don't know where the lines are but insist that there be lines limiting a woman's role somewhere. Finding these lines thus becomes an exercise in human wisdom and bias rather than biblical exegesis.⁸³ (83 Theological term meaning to extract truth from scripture rather than reading our biases into Scripture)

Some would limit the impact of this headship to just the explicit passages dealing with men and women: women can't be elders, can't speak in the assembly, can't teach, can't usurp authority—but this approach begs the question. What is the male authority that cannot be usurped? Can women teach teenage boys? What if the boys have been baptized? We simply have no guidance without a unifying principle.

Others would find these to be but examples of a larger principle—the universal principle of male leadership. But they are unable to agree or prove from the Bible just what this principle is. And thus such persons find themselves construing the command of male dominion over women to suit their personal prejudices but with very little in the way of biblical support for the particulars and boundaries of their doctrine.

The 21st Century notion of a biblical principle of “male leadership” is often pronounced by hierarchalists, but the verses they rely on fail to support a leadership principle. Thus, Genesis 3:16 declares that husbands *rule* their wives, not that they just lead them. 1 Peter 3:6 urges women to emulate Sarah by calling their non-Christian husbands “master” or “lord,” much stronger words than “leader.” The Greek language studies regarding translating “head” support “ruler,” as a possible but not necessary meaning—not “leader.”⁸⁴ Thus, finding “leadership” in contrast to “rule” in the New Testament is a 21st Century bias not found in scripture. (⁸⁴ The only example of the Septuagint translators using *kephale* as “ruler” is found in Judges 11:11, where Jephthah is declared “head and commander” over the people. Here, “head” clearly means “ruler,” not just leader, due to Jephthah being made head “over” the people. Thus, the only Septuagint passage that supports “head” as ruler does not support “leader” as a possible meaning.)

Conclusions regarding “head” as “source” or “ruler.” Thus, we find—

- (1) that there is support both in contemporary Greek and in the context of chapter 11 for “head” to mean source;
- (2) that “source” is suggested by Ephesians 4:15-16, where Christ as “head” is pictured as the source of growth or nourishment of the church, as “body.”
- (3) that while “head” conventionally means “ruler” in today’s English, this was not true in First Century Greek unless compelled by the context;
- (4) that there is nothing in 1 Corinthians 11 outside the word “head” that suggests that men are to rule women;
- (5) that imposing the meaning of ruler on “head” leads to serious theological difficulties, such as (a) making men and women, husbands and wives less united than Christians in general, who are commanded to submit to one another, to be united, to be of one mind, and to consider others as more important than self; and (b) creating a doctrine that has undefined boundaries (for example, does it apply in the workplace? on a date?); and
- (6) that we cannot bail out of the difficulties of calling husbands rulers by recharacterizing their role with the euphemism “leader.” This is quite enough reason to conclude that the correct reading of “head” in verse 3 is source. The meaning is clearly not ruler.

A. An alternative interpretation of “head” in 1 Corinthians 11

I suggest the following alternative interpretation of “head” with some trepidation. I don’t believe that any commentator has ever made this proposal, and one should walk lightly when trying to be the first in nearly 2,000 years of scriptural exposition to propose a new idea. But I see another possible meaning for “head” in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 worthy of consideration.

“Image.” In verses 7-9 of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul states that man is the image and glory of God, and woman is the glory of man. Surely, this is a reference to the Genesis accounts. Genesis 1:26 plainly states that the Godhead made *both* man and woman in their image. And yet God made Adam first, in

His image, and then made Eve from Adam's rib. Eve was also made in God's image, and so Paul does not state that woman was made in the "image" of man. Rather, she was made as the glory of man. Certainly, the fact that woman was made in God's image, as was man, does not argue for the subordination of women (except in the sense that all Christians are to be in submission to all other Christians).⁸⁵ (85 Eph. 5:21)

Now Paul does not say so in chapter 11, but he states in a number of other places that Christ is the image of God:

(2 Cor. 4:4) The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

(Col. 1:15) [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Thus, we see that Christ is the image of God and man is the image of Christ.⁸⁶ (86 See also 1 Cor. 15:49. "Likeness" in the NIV translates *eikon*, translated "image" in 1 Cor. 11.) Just what did "image" mean when 1 Corinthians was written?

In an account appearing in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus uses *eikon*, the Greek word translated "image" in 1 Corinthians 11, in an instructive way:

(Matt. 22:16-22) They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

"Portrait" translates *eikon*. An "image" was simply a portrait, especially one made by engraving as on a coin. Certainly, the word could be used in a broader sense, but the most literal definition of *eikon* is a portrait.⁸⁷ (87 "The word *eikon*—sometimes in its diminutive form *eikonion*—was the word which was used for a *portrait* in Greek. ... It is the nearest thing to our modern word *photograph*." William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1959), page 142.) And a portrait is a representation of what? A head. Thus, if I'm metaphorically your image, then you're metaphorically my head. The closest English equivalent I can think of is "model." If I'm your image, you're my model.

We haven't yet come far enough to be confident of this conclusion, and I readily concede that it would not be standard English usage. After all, "head" in English connotes "ruler," and this is a thought that is very foreign to being the source of an image.

"Glory." To test this theory, we must look at the meaning of "glory." Like image, "glory" is a word rich with theological meaning. The glory of God first appears while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness. It represented the presence of God Himself:

(Exo. 24:15-18) When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

When the Israelites finished the tabernacle, the glory of God descended to dwell in the Holy of Holies:

(Exo. 40:33-35) Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

God then began to speak to Moses from within the cloud of glory “face to face.”

*(Exo. 33:10-11) Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD would speak to Moses *face to face*, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.⁸⁸ (88 The same thought is found in Deut. 5:4, “The LORD spoke to you *face to face* out of the fire on the mountain.”)*

In the Psalms 8:3-5 we again see glory associated with the head or face, with glory being pictured as a crown surrounding the head:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

The picture is that glory is much like a halo, being a radiant presence surrounding the head.

In the account of the Transfiguration, we see that Luke places emphasis on the face of Jesus as showing His glory:

(Luke 9:28-32) About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.

In one of the Bible’s most lyrical passages, Paul associates the image of God with God’s glory. Paul states that God glorifies (brings into the presence of His glory, that is, heaven) those whom God has conformed to the likeness (*eikon*, or image) of Christ. Thus, all Christians are re-made by God in the image of Christ, and so they ultimately partake of God’s glory.

(Rom. 8:29-30) For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness [image] of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

The same thought appears in 1 Corinthians:

(15:42-49) So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness [eikon] of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness [eikon] of the man from heaven.

Among Paul's points is the idea that Christians shed the image of Adam (the earthly man) and replace it with the image of Christ (the man from heaven). By taking on the image of Christ, we will be raised in glory, that is, in the presence of God where His glory dwells.

2 Cor. 4:4-6) The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Once again, Paul associates "image" with "glory" and with "face." Here, we are told that Christ is the image of God. Accordingly, the glory of God shines forth in the face of Christ. Logically, then, we would expect that Christians, who are the image of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3), would show forth the glory of Christ in their faces.

And as we read earlier in the Psalms, glory is sometimes pictured as a radiant crown surrounding the head:

(1 Pet. 5:4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

We see the glory of God repeatedly connected with the face or head, such as the face of Christ, the face of Moses, the face of all Christians, or a head crowned with glory. "Glory" is thus pictured in the Bible as much like the halos that we see around the heads of "saints" in much Christian art.⁸⁹ (89 Paul could have begun 1 Corinthians 11 referring to each person's "face" rather than "head," but this would not have made the point he was intending to make regarding veils. As Black points out, the "veil" worn in First Century Corinth did not cover the face, but rather was more of a hood, extending the fabric of a cloak up the back of the neck and over the top of the head, covering primarily the hair—but not the face (unlike the veil worn in Muslim lands today).

And so we see that the Bible repeatedly associates "image" and "glory" with the head or face. Moreover, except for the relationship of women to men (which we've not yet considered in this context), we see that the relationship God:Christ:Man is a relationship that follows image and glory. Christ is both the image and glory of God. Man is both the image and glory of Christ (as well as God). Therefore, since Paul describes the same relationship in terms of "head," we see that God as Christ's "head," and Christ as man's "head" is simply the reverse of Christ as God's glory and image and man as Christ's glory and image.

Moses' veil and the glory of God. Perhaps the key passage to understanding 1 Corinthians 11 is found in Exodus, where we see an association between God's glory, the face, and a veil:

Exo. 34:29-35) When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them.

Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

This may well be the passage that Paul had in mind in his teachings in 1 Corinthians 11. We see that Moses removed his veil when talking to God. Paul may well be reasoning that if Moses considered it appropriate to remove his head covering when speaking to God, the same rule should hold true when Christian men address God.

This passage is the basis for Paul's teachings in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the account of Moses' face becoming radiant from being in the presence of the glory of God. Paul says that all Christians also reflect the glory of God due to the workings of the Holy Spirit within us. But Moses' glory was temporary and faded away. He even wore a veil to hide the fading of his glory. But the Christian's glory is not only permanent, it is ever increasing.

The idea behind this passage is surely very much the idea behind 1 Corinthians 11. Christians reflect the glory of Christ. Because our glory is greater than Moses', being permanent and ever increasing, we should not veil the glory when speaking with God, but should boldly speak with unveiled faces. In fact, one advantage of this interpretation is that it explains why concern for someone's metaphorical "head" affects what one wears (or doesn't wear) on one's literal head. This aspect of 1 Corinthians 11 has puzzled commentators, but if Paul is urging us to follow Moses' example of speaking to God without a veil, the metaphor makes sense.

Why does Paul treat women differently from men? The difficulty that this interpretation leaves is why should women be veiled when men should not? While the doctrines of man being in the image of God and Christ and of Christians sharing in the glory of Christ are well documented, why are women treated differently from men? After all, women Christians are just as much in the image of God and just as reflective of the glory of God as men! Paul's explanation is in verses 7-9:

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

Paul is referring the Genesis 2, where Eve was made as a suitable complement for Adam. Paul does not refer to woman as the image of man, because Genesis 1:26 plainly states that she is made in the image of God ("our image"—which includes Christ's image, too). But Paul concludes that woman is nonetheless the glory of man because Eve was made "from" Adam, and Eve was made "for" Adam.

(1 Cor. 11:10) For this reason, ... the woman ought to have control over her head.

Thus, Paul concludes that woman's role as suitable complement to her husband requires her to exercise control over her literal head.

(1 Cor. 11:13-16) Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you ... that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

Paul reasons that since a woman must exercise authority or control over her head in a manner consistent with her role as a suitable complement to her husband, she must wear long hair and must have her head covered while praying to God. Why?

The reasons that Paul gives are “the very nature of things” and “we have no other practice.” In verse 5 he stated that she would “dishonor her head,” meaning dishonor her husband, by violating these directives. Indeed, in verse 6 Paul declares that to do otherwise would be a “disgrace.” These statements by Paul are references to the expectations of other people, that is, culture. Paul doesn’t say that failing to wear a head covering would be a violation of God’s eternal command regarding head coverings; rather, he sees such a failure as a violation of propriety and convention.

Black makes the point that Jewish women were expected to wear head coverings, regardless of where they were in the Roman Empire.⁹⁰ (90 Black, *ibid*, page 204.) The Jews formed the core of many, if not most, congregations at the time 1 Corinthians was written,⁹¹ (91 Most commentators consider 1 Corinthians to be among Paul’s earliest writings, dated to around 53 or 54 AD, early enough that the churches still had a Jewish core of members, if not a majority Jewish membership.) and many church practices were borrowed from Jewish synagogue practice—not necessarily as doctrine but as a convenient standard of behavior that would not offend the Jewish members.

As to the two other major cultures that made up Corinthian society (as well as the society of the eastern Roman Empire in general), the Greeks and the Romans, Black comments:

Though we cannot be sure, the evidence seems to favor the position that in Corinth, women in the marketplace would often be covered, and in religious contexts they would usually be covered. All that can be stated with assurance, however, is that “the wearing of a head-covering by an adult woman (especially in ritual context) was a traditional practice known to Jews, Greeks, and Roman.”

If we look ahead to 1 Corinthians 14:35, we again see Paul’s particular concern for the sensibilities of the Jews in the role of women. After restricting women as to their speech in the assembly, Paul states: *1 Cor. 14:33b-34a, 36 As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. ... Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?*

Of course, the word of God originated not with the Corinthians but with the Jews in Judea, and it reached the Jewish people first. This is a plain reference to the sensibilities of the Jewish members with respect to the role of women, and the language is remarkably similar to 1 Corinthians 11:16:

1 Cor. 11:16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

Thus, we see that there are eternal principles involved. Christian men and women are made in the image of God and Christ. Christ is the image and glory of God. Christian men and women are the image of God and Christ. And Christian wives are the complements for and, therefore, the glory of their husbands.

And being someone’s glory has significance, demonstrated throughout the Bible. For example, God’s glory radiantly and powerfully showed forth the very presence of God. Indeed, God spoke and acted

by the means of His glory. By declaring that Christ is God's glory, Paul tells us that God speaks and acts through Christ and that the words and actions of Christ bring praise to God.

Thus, the fact that Christians are the glory of God and Christ means that the Godhead speaks and acts through all Christians (through the Spirit's indwelling).⁹² (92 For example, Rom. 8:1-17; 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 3:3; 3:18; Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 5:18-19.) Therefore, Christians bring glory (or shame) to God by their actions and by how they exercise the authority and control over themselves that God has given them.

In the ordinary circumstance, Christians do not wear head coverings when speaking with God. Moses uncovered his face when speaking with God, even though his glory was an inferior, temporary, fading glory.⁹³ (93 2 Cor. 3:7-18.) But our glory as Christians is permanent and increasing—not fading. Therefore, we should boldly show forth God's glory—not only in public but especially when addressing God in prayer. If Moses' relationship with God was such that he spoke to God with an uncovered head, then Christians have much less reason to cover their heads. Head covering evidently showed not respect so much as unworthiness—hiding one's face or head from God. Christians have no reason to hide.

But this is far from an absolute rule. While there is important symbolism in this practice, and while it reminds us of our intimate relationship with God—we who can speak with God with more intimacy than Moses—there may be concerns that override such symbolism. One overriding concern is the role of wives as complements to their husbands. Any practice that might appear unsubmitive or rebellious against the marriage covenant must be avoided. In the First Century, a woman having her head uncovered in a public place—especially a place of prayer—indicated to many that the woman was in rebellion to her husband—even brazenly immoral. While the symbolism may not have been universal, it was common enough that the early church had to take it into account in its practices. Therefore, women could not pray with uncovered heads without reflecting badly upon their husbands to whom they owe a duty to bring no shame, but only glory. In particular, the practice of covering a woman's head showed respect for the sensibilities of Jewish Christians.

Accordingly, the lesson flows not from the power of men over women, but from the unity and one flesh ideal of husbands and wives. The actions of the wife reflect on the husband, for good or bad. What is perceived as a bad reflection may often be defined by the local culture, and so wives must be willing to forego some of the freedom that they otherwise enjoy in Christ for the sake of reputation.

Reconciliation of “source” and “model.” One further advantage of the “model” interpretation of “head” in 1 Corinthians 11 is that it shares the advantages of taking “head” to mean source. After all, the essence of the idea behind the “model” interpretation is that a person's head is the source of the glory shown forth through that person. Thus, God is the source of Christ's glory, thereby making Christ like a portrait of God.

A re-translation. Thus, we can re-translate verse 3 as follows:

3 Now I want you to realize that the model of every man is Christ, and the model of a woman is man, and the model of Christ is God.

or as

3 Now I want you to realize that the “head” of which every Christian man is a crown of glory or portrait is Christ, and the “head” of which a woman is a crown of glory is man, and the “head” of which Christ is a crown of glory or portrait is God.

Plainly, woman is modeled on man, man is modeled on Christ, and Christ is modeled on God. Just so, shameful behavior by a woman reflects badly on her husband, since she represents her husband to the world. Shameful behavior by a man reflects badly on Christ, since men are to represent Christ to

world. Accordingly, any behavior considered to shamefully reflect on one's "model" in terms of local culture is forbidden.

The balance of this passage would then be translated as follows:

4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors *Christ*. 5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her *husband*⁹⁴—it is just as though her head were shaved. 6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.

7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of *her husband*. 8 For *the husband* did not come from *the wife*, but *the wife* from *the husband*; 9 neither was *the husband* created for *the wife*, but *the wife* for *the husband*. 10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the *wife* ought to have *control over* her head.

11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not *culture* teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. 16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

⁹⁴ "Man," or *aner*, can mean husband or man. The true meaning can only be determined by context, with "husband" being the more common usage in the New Testament. "Her head" becomes "her man," which certainly would mean "her husband." Moreover, since women are complements to their husbands, not to *all* men, any other translation would make no sense.

Some commentators protest using *aner* as both "man" and "husband" in the same passage, but Paul's word play cannot be so limited. He uses *kephale* to refer both to a person's literal head and to a metaphorical head, that is, to a body part and to someone to be glorified. Paul is thus changing the meaning of his words to use word plays to make or illustrate his points.

Gune can mean either woman or wife, and we see Paul similarly shifting meaning 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, where *gune* is translated "woman," but requires women to ask their husbands questions at home, clearly indicating that wives are in mind. But, of course, it is improbable that Paul meant to allow single women to ask questions and prevent married women from doing so. Rather, the Greek language itself uses one word for either man or husband and for either woman or wife, and this leads to a subtle tendency in Greek writing to assume that all women and all men are married, which was typically the case but certainly not always the case.

Are men and women independent? We need to also consider verses 11-12:

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

Paul was understandably concerned that his readers might conclude from verses 3-10 that he was teaching that men have dominion over women. He refutes this interpretation in unambiguous language. Paul had earlier pointed out that woman was made from man, thereby giving rise to a duty of wives to be complements to their husbands. But Paul points out that that every man since Adam has been made by God from a woman. Indeed, in the Ten Commandments, we are all (husbands included) commanded to honor our father *and mother*. This command applies to adult children as well as under-age children.⁹⁵ (⁹⁵ Mark 7:10-13) Thus, we find that all men are commanded to submit to their mothers—that is, to a woman. Certainly, this notion contradicts the false interpretation that all women are subordinate to all men!

Moreover, Paul takes pains to place men and women in precisely equal relationship to one another. The key to understanding this verse is found in the first four words: “In the Lord, however.” This marks a contrast and a clarification of what Paul had earlier stated.

Certainly what Paul said in verses 3-10 was also said “in the Lord.” After all, Paul was reasoning from the relationship of Christians with God and Christ. By declaring that what he is about to say deals with those of us “in the Lord,” Paul is saying that he is about to announce a change from how things used to be before Christ. And Paul’s “however” indicates that Paul is contradicting a possible misunderstanding of what he’d just said. Thus, a reader might misunderstand verses 8 and 9, dealing with Adam and Eve, as referring to a husband’s rule over his wife, in Genesis 3:16. And so Paul instead goes to pains to make clear that his argument that man is the source of woman does not allow man to claim superiority over his wife.

Rather, Paul points out that the biblical role of man as source of woman is balanced by the biblical role of woman as source of man. Thus, man may not bring disgrace to woman anymore than woman may bring disgrace to man. Indeed, God is the source of all, and this relationship overwhelms any argument based on man’s relationship to woman. By not bringing disgrace to God, we also bring no disgrace to our spouses— which God made in His image.

Some commentators find that verses 11-12 soften the impact of Paul’s earlier instruction but that the verses do not eliminate the subordination of women. But Paul had earlier argued based on woman’s source—man—that women may not bring shame on their husbands. Verse 8. He also uses a source argument in verses 11-12, plainly following the same train of thought as in verse 8 and plainly intending to contrast and balance his teaching in verses 11-12 with his teaching in verse 8.

If the fact that a woman’s source is man requires her to submit to man, then the fact that a man’s source is woman just as clearly teaches that he is to submit to woman. Neither can claim independence, and thus neither can insist on dominance.

Advantages of the proposed interpretation. The notion that all women are subordinate to all men is foreign to the Bible taken as a whole and contradicts much within the Bible, including the account of Deborah and the command for sons to honor their mothers. Moreover, the merit of the proposed interpretation is shown by its richness. The interpretation is consistent with and digs deeply into numerous passages throughout the Bible. It delves into the doctrines of the glory of God, the image of God, the relationship of God with Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the very nature of Christ, and much more. It is consistent with the teachings of Genesis, Exodus, Judges, and Ephesians 5. Moreover, this interpretation makes Paul’s commands logically drawn conclusions from the Genesis accounts—not arbitrary rules.

The notion that man is the ruler of woman cannot claim such a rich heritage. Indeed, this notion suffers the embarrassment of being best supported by God’s curse on Creation, separating the Creation from God, the very act that Jesus died to undo!

<http://oneinjesus.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Buried-Talents-2014-PDF.pdf>

CHAPTER XI

1 CORINTHIANS 14—SILENCE IN THE CHURCHES

1 Corinthians 7 and 11 are not the only passages in 1 Corinthians dealing with men and women—they are not even the most controversial.

1 Cor. 14:33b-36 As in all the congregations of the saints,⁹⁶ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

(⁹⁶ Osburn, in his *Women in the Church 1*, indicates that “As in all the congregations of the saints” is properly a part of the preceding sentence and that Paul’s discussion of women begins with “women should remain silent.” There was no punctuation in the original Greek, and First Century Greek was written entirely in capital letters. Scholars disagree on where this sentence begins)

Scriptural context. Like all scripture, we must first consider the context of this passage. The following synopsis of chapters 11 through 14 will serve to set the stage:

1 Cor. 11:2 *I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings*, just as I passed them on to you. 3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

4-16 [discussion of prayer, prophecy, and head coverings]

17 *In the following directives I have no praise for you*, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18-19 [condemnation of division]

20-34 [discussion of the Lord’s Supper]

12:1 *Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.* 2-30 [discussion of spiritual gifts and the unity of believers] 31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way. 13:1-12 [discussion contrasting faith, hope, and love to other spiritual gifts] 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

14:1 *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts*, especially the gift of prophecy. 2-25 [spiritual gifts are good, but must edify the church when used in the assembly].

26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

37 If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

This long quote shows the structure of these four chapters of 1 Corinthians. You should first notice that chapter 11 contains two general discussions—head coverings and the Lord's Supper. Paul ties them together. He introduces the first by saying, "I praise you." In clear contrast, he introduces the next section of chapter 11 by saying, "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good."⁹⁷ (97 KJV: "I praise you not ...")

It is possible that the lack of praise relates not only to the Lord's Supper, but also the abuses of the Spirit that are discussed in chapter 12-14. Paul says that he has no praise "in the following directives," indicating that there would be a series of critical directives. And certainly the criticisms made in chapters 12-14 fit well within Paul's pointed "your meetings do more harm than good." Chapter 14 in particular describes meetings that do more harm than good and fits Paul's words as well as Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper in chapter 11. Also tying the chapters together is the theme of condemnation of division.

The point is simply this. All of chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14 are closely related discussions dealing with division and related problems in the Christian assemblies. Different particular problems are discussed, but the general theme is the same—stop sinning in your assemblies, especially the sin of division.

A. Exposition—Introduction.

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at the passage.

"Women should remain silent." What does this mean? As tempting as it is to say, "Means what it says; says what it means," no thinking Christian can believe this passage really means that women must be silent during the assembly. Why not?

First, we conventionally allow women to break their silence in the assembly for any number of reasons, including:

1. Singing. We allow women to sing even when men do not accompany them. Many songs have not only female leads, but also female section solos.
2. Speaking in unison. There are many occasions where the congregation speaks in unison. Some churches say the Lord's Prayer or some other prayer in unison. Others recite scripture in unison. Some do responsive readings. In each case, the women are not silent.
3. Praying. Many of our favorite hymns are prayers. For some reason, some have fallen into the habit of omitting the "amen" at the end of such songs, but the song is a prayer nonetheless. Women sing these prayers out loud, in the presence of men, and our only justification is that the women do so to a tune. I suppose we justify it due to the commands to sing, but these commands do not command women to sing apart from the men, nor do they even require singing in the assemblies. They just say sing with other Christians. They don't say when or where.⁹⁸ (98 Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16. Of course, if the general commands to sing grant women license to sing in the assembly, one might argue that the general commands to teach, preach, spread the gospel, pray, etc. would also grant women the right to obey these commands in the assembly.)
4. Greeting. How many times have you attended a church where the service was interrupted while the members were asked to greet one another and the visitors? Were the women required to stay silent?

5. Confessing Jesus. When a woman comes to the front to be baptized, do we make her fill out a card to say that she believes in Jesus? Or does she say it out loud? I've never seen anyone make a candidate for baptism wait until after services or write down the answer to this question. And yet the passage says "silent." It doesn't say members only. It says "women." And there is really no necessity for a confession during services. After all, we could wait until after the closing prayer. But that's not our way.

So what's my point? Those who insist on a strictly literal interpretation of this passage must admit that their interpretation is neither strict nor literal. I have just offered a truly literal interpretation, and yet common sense tells us that this is not what Paul meant. So while we are searching for the truth of the matter, let's remember that no one at all occupies the "high ground" of literalness or even strictness. And while the interpretation that I will offer of this passage may not be very traditional, it is stricter and more literal than the traditionalists.

Second, the Bible's text itself, and not our culture or tradition, raises certain questions that must be taken into account in whatever conclusion we reach:

1. 1 Corinthians 11 is a discussion of appropriate headcoverings for women while they prophesy or pray in an assembly with men present. If it is a sin for a woman to pray or prophesy in the presence of men, why didn't Paul simply condemn the practice? If it is a sin for a woman to pray or prophesy in the presence of men, then Paul's instructions are on the order of instructing women on what to wear while committing adultery! If it's wrong, it's wrong, and Paul has no business discoursing on appropriate dress during sin.⁹⁹ (99 Ferguson criticizes Osburn for concluding that Paul approves of women prophesying in chapter 11. "The text does not say Paul 'approves' of the practice." True, but Paul would hardly spend so much effort addressing proper apparel for a practice that he disapproved. It is an absurd thought.)

2. There is nothing in the text that suggests that the assemblies under discussion in chapter 11 are different from those in chapter 14. As pointed out above, there is good reason to believe that the same assemblies are under consideration. After all, chapter 11 is part of the same discussion that concludes in chapter 14. But if we conclude that only one chapter is discussing the general assembly, comparable to our Sunday morning assembly, and the other is discussing some special assembly, it is much more logical to conclude that chapter 11 is discussing the general assembly since it is most closely tied to the discussion of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, the reference to angels being present in the assembly in chapter 11:10 indicates that much more than a casual gathering is at issue. To argue, as many do, that chapter 14 deals with the Lord's Supper assembly and chapter 11 is dealing with something more like our Sunday School classes is to ignore the textual evidence and impose our traditions on the scriptures. The argument simply has no support in the Bible.

3. That the assembly is in mind in chapter 11 is also plain from our own history. Until the last few decades, Church of Christ women felt compelled to wear hats (and even fashionable veils) to the assembly. If chapter 11 doesn't apply to the Sunday morning assembly, why did we require women to wear hats to such assemblies for nearly a century? I grant that the hat interpretation is false, but the assembly interpretation is actually quite sound.

And so we have what appears to be a perfect contradiction. Chapter 11 indicates that women may pray and prophesy in the presence of men in the assembly, but chapter 14 compels them to be silent in the assembly. How can both be true? How are we going to get out of this fix? And I must hasten to point out that the problem derives, not from any effort to impose modern culture on the text, but from the text

itself. Commentators were struggling with this issue long before the women's liberation movement began.

We must remember that the challenge is not to come up with some theory that is merely consistent with these passages. That would be to add to the Bible. No, the true challenge is to state an interpretation of the passage that is both based on the passage and consistent with all scripture. God does not have a book of rules that is outside the Bible and that is only hinted at within its pages. Indeed, the only principles that we are accountable for are those *in* the Bible.

With these limitations in minds, let's consider how to interpret this passage:

B. Overriding Principles.

Let's first remember that our relationship with God as Christians is defined by the overriding principles of love and grace. God doesn't just make up arbitrary rules and impose them on us. It is, therefore, entirely proper to ask if our usual way of reading this passage actually makes sense.

For example, if it is disgraceful and wrong for a woman to speak in the worship assembly, wouldn't it be equally disgraceful and wrong for her to speak in a Sunday School class? Most Churches of Christ prohibit female speech in the assembly but permit—and even encourage—female questions and discussion in a classroom setting. I mean, Paul was particularly clear that women are not to ask questions—but we traditionally only allow question asking in Sunday School. We don't even allow men to ask questions in the assembly! If there is some eternal principle prohibiting women from asking questions in the assembly, why not in Sunday School classes?

The distinction has often been suggested that women are not to speak or ask questions in a "public" setting, and the Sunday School classes are said to be "private." But this is plainly wrong. We advertise our Sunday School classes to the public just like we advertise our assemblies. Our classes are in no real sense private.

Another distinction made is that, in context, Paul is addressing the assembly, not a class, as is evident from all of 1 Corinthians 11-14. And I agree that this is true, but the answer to my question must come from more than context. It can't be *just* a rule! The question is *why* are Sunday School classes different from the assembly—if indeed they are? Why is speaking in the assembly disgraceful and speaking in a Sunday School class okay—even good?

If we can't come up with an intelligent answer to that question, we are forced to confess that we really just don't understand this command. Paul didn't just order women to remain silent. He gave reasons, and he surely meant for those reasons to be well understood by his readers.

First, Paul explains that women "must be in submission, as the Law says." We will spend some time discussing the meaning of "the Law." Plainly, Paul believes that asking questions in the assembly is unsubmitive. Now, I ask again, what makes a woman unsubmitive when she speaks—particularly when she asks a question—in the assembly but perfectly submissive when she asks a question somewhere else? What "magic," if any, does an assembly have that compels female silence?

Next, Paul states that it is "disgraceful" for a woman to "speak in the church." Why? Must women be more submissive at church than at the workplace? More submissive in the assembly than in the foyer? Is the requirement to be submissive purely about the assembly? And how can "the Law"—surely a reference to some part of the Old Testament—create a rule for the Christian assembly that doesn't

apply to other gatherings of Christians? I mean, there were no comparable assemblies in Old Testament times.¹⁰⁰ (100 The synagogue, which elements of the Christian assembly are often patterned on, was not invented until after the completion of the Old Testament.)

Finally, Paul refers to the sensibilities of those from whom the “word”—meaning the gospel—originated, certainly a reference to the feelings of Jewish Christians. And what possible impact could the feelings of First Century Jewish converts have on the eternal pattern of how men and women are to relate to one another?

And what on earth does this passage have to do with love and grace? Is this just an arbitrary rule, with no real purpose, or does it somehow further the overarching command to love my neighbor?

Is Paul saying that women are too stupid or foolish to be allowed to speak before a large group? Surely not! And besides, why allow women to speak in a class of 100 members but deny her the right to speak before an assembly of 25?

And what about “ask their own husbands at home”? How does Paul intend for this to work? What about the woman who is unmarried? or whose husband is not a Christian? or whose husband wasn’t at church that day?

Notice that Paul does not tell the woman to ask the preacher about his sermon in the lobby after services—he tells her to ask her husband at home. Why not allow questions of other men in private after services? Why may she only ask her own husband?

Let’s be honest enough to admit that we have never really enforced this passage as it’s written. I’ve never attended or heard of a church that requires women to only ask questions at home of their own husbands! Indeed, we quite often encourage women to ask questions in the hallways, in the foyer, and certainly in the classroom. After all, we really encourage Bible study and it would make no sense to deny a woman the ability to sincerely inquire into the Word with the help of her fellow Christians.

C. The Status of First Century Women.

With these questions in mind, we should consider the very real possibility that Paul’s command was caused by temporary cultural circumstances that no longer apply.

There is considerable support from history that First Century Jewish and Grecian women were very uneducated and lived extremely sheltered lives. This was especially so among the Jews, who formed the core of most congregations in the church’s early history. The questioning of a teacher by such women would have been ignorant and a burden on the time of the men. Thus, the women had to be brought to a better understanding by some means other than remedial instruction before the entire congregation.

Also in support of this view is the phrase, “If she should learn¹⁰¹ anything” (101 KJV. The NIV incorrectly translates “inquire about” rather than “learn.”) This language seems to be a reference to the extreme lack of education and degradation of women of the day. Few women could read or write and few could have profitably participated in the Socratic debates that characterized teaching in ancient Greece and Judea. Thus, Paul begins with an “if.” He does not assume that the woman will choose to learn anything. This is not due to Paul’s sexism, but a simple recognition of the degraded state of women in those days. In fact, Paul’s encouraging of the education of women put him well out in front of society (which took nearly 2,000 years to catch up with Paul!)

Similarly, the asking of questions of a teacher could often become a confrontation. In a society where submissive women did not provoke confrontations with men (especially before an audience) such as the First Century Roman Empire, no Christian woman would have been considered moral or honoring God if she engaged in a debate with the teacher before the congregation (all or a part). “Silence” therefore refers only to the asking of questions—or more precisely, to engaging in Socratic-style debating with the teacher.

Jewish women. The ignorance of women in the First Century was not unique to the Jews, but the Jews of that time took special care to keep their women ignorant. There was a saying that wives should only be taught enough of the Torah¹⁰² to know the penalty for adultery! And there was no exaggeration in the saying. (¹⁰² The Hebrew word for the first five books of the Bible, that is, the books of Law.)

This conclusion is buttressed by history:

*In Jewish law a woman was not a person; she was a thing. She was entirely at the disposal [of] her father or of her husband. A woman was forbidden to learn the law; to instruct a woman in the law was to cast pearls before swine. Women had no part in the Synagogue service; they were shut apart in a section of the were allowed no share in the service. A man came to the Synagogue to learn; but, at the most, a woman came to hear. In the Synagogue the lesson from Scripture was read by members of the congregation; but not by women, for that would have been to lessen “the honour of the congregation.” It was absolutely forbidden for a woman to teach in a school; she might not even teach the youngest children. A woman was exempt from the stated demand of the Law. It was not obligatory on her to attend the sacred feasts and festivals. Women, slaves and children were classed together. ... Rabbi Jose ben Johanan is quoted as saying, “ ... Everyone that talketh much with a woman causes evil to himself, and desists from the works of the Law, and his end is that he inherits Gehenna.”¹⁰³ (103 William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon—The Daily Study Bible* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pa., 2nd ed. 1960), page 77.)*

Barclay also notes that among the Jews, a strict follower of the Jewish *Talmud*¹⁰⁴ would not even speak to his own sister in public. (¹⁰⁴ A compilation of the traditional laws of the Jews.)

That Paul had the Jews especially in mind is evidenced by his exclamation at the end of the paragraph, “Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?” Certainly the word of God originated with the Jews. It had reached many other nations, but in the church’s early history, the other churches were largely either Jewish or had a large Jewish component. Thus, the “disgrace” referred to by Paul was particularly in the eyes of the Jewish members of the congregation, the people from whom the word of God originated.

It would seem, therefore, that there is ample evidence in the text that Paul had concluded that preservation of unity and fellowship with the Jewish members and congregations demanded that women take a submissive role in certain church services.

Grecian women. Corinth was a very cosmopolitan city, being a major port and a Roman colony. Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans and then rebuilt as a colony. But the city was squarely in the middle of Greece, and all north-south land traffic had to go through Corinth. Moreover, Corinth was an important east-west port city, making it one of the Empire’s premier commercial centers. By the First Century, Corinthian culture was predominantly Greek, but highly mixed. Due to its wealth and vigorous trade, Corinth had also become notoriously immoral. The city worshipped Aphrodite, the goddess of

love, and her temple had 1,000 temple prostitutes who plied their trade on the streets of the city. Immorality was not only common, it was considered a religious duty!

Osburn quotes the Grecian historian Plutarch, a near contemporary of Paul: “Not only the arm but the voice of a modest woman ought to be kept from the public, and she should feel shame at being heard, as at being stripped. ... She should speak either to, or through, her husband.”¹⁰⁵ (105 Plutarch, *Conjugal Precepts* 31.)

Barclay comments,

The respectable Greek woman lived a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone: she never went to any public assembly, still less did she ever speak or take any active part in such an assembly. The fact is that if in a Greek town Christian women had taken an active and a speaking and a teaching part in the work of the Christian Church, the Church would inevitably have gained the reputation of being the resort of loose and immoral women.¹⁰⁶ (106 Barclay, *ibid.*)

The risk of being considered immoral was, therefore, very real. Moreover, to appease the sensibilities of the various levels of society, especially the Jews, strict rules would have to be followed.¹⁰⁷

(107 Ferguson disputes this view of First Century women. He concedes the low estate of Jewish women of this age, but points out, “There were plenty of priestesses in Greco-Roman religions, and one historian of ancient Rome, Carcopino, describes a women’s emancipation movement in Rome in the first century.”

Ferguson misses some key points. First, the fact that there was an emancipation movement for women plainly tells us that women felt the need to be emancipated. Moreover, there is no evidence that the movement succeeded. Recall the Women’s Suffrage Movement of the early 20th Century. Women actually prevailed, gaining the right to vote, and yet continued to suffer severe discrimination for decades thereafter. If a successful emancipation movement doesn’t necessarily grant women equal legal rights, plainly a *failed* emancipation movement hardly proves that women were emancipated.

Finally, the fact that women could serve as priestesses in pagan religions doesn’t indicate emancipation in their roles as housewives—or even as priestesses. In fact, many of the priestesses were little more than prostitutes, certainly not an elevated status. As Barclay writes in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, “To that temple [of Aphrodite], there were attached one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and at evening time they descend from the Acropolis and plied their trade on the streets of Corinth”

Thus, the silence commanded is the avoidance of such speech as might open the women to charges of moral laxity as measured by the culture of the community. Thus, singing, speaking in unison, and such would not be prohibited. Neither would prayer and prophecy. However, the direct addressing of a man, where a woman engages in conversation or debate with someone else’s husband, would be a violation of propriety. This conclusion is supported by Paul’s statement that such speech is disgraceful.”¹⁰⁸ (108 Verse 35)

“Own.” Notice the word “own.”¹⁰⁹ (109 Verse 35. KJV fails to translate *idios* (“own”), but most modern translations do.) Wives are to ask their *own* husbands at home. *Strong’s Dictionary* translates *idios*, the word translated “own,” as “pertaining to self, i.e. one’s own; by implication, private or separate.” Thus, the meaning is not just that the wife should ask her husband at home, but that she should ask her *own* husband and not someone else’s husband!

The command is thus a prohibition on conversation between a woman and another woman’s husband. It would have been unseemly in First Century society for married women to speak freely to married men. Such consorting would have opened the church up to accusations of unchastity.

Summary. In context, and taking into account the emphasis on a woman speaking to her *own* husband, the command is a prohibition on speaking to another woman's husband. It is, therefore, a command founded on the appearance of immorality in a society where women were not permitted to speak in public to men other than their own husbands. Paul's command is therefore a reference to local cultural standards.

The sense of Paul's teaching can be seen in an example from the mission field:

My mother used to compare the situation in Corinth to the one she and my father faced in northern China. Back in the 1920s when they were first to bring God's message to that forgotten area, they found women with bound feet who seldom left their homes and who, unlike the men, had never in their whole lives attended a public meeting or a class. They had never been told as little girls, "Now you just sit still and listen to the teacher." Their only concept of an assembly was a family feast where everyone talked at once.

When these women came to my parents' church and gathered on the women's side of the sanctuary, they thought this was a chance to catch up on the news with their neighbors and to ask questions about the story of Jesus they were hearing. Needless to say, along with babies crying and toddlers running about, the women's section got rather noisy! Add to that the temptation for the women to shout questions to their husbands across the aisle, and you can imagine the chaos. As my mother patiently tried to tell the women that they should listen first and chitchat or ask questions later, she would mutter under her breath, "Just like Corinth; it just couldn't be more like Corinth."¹¹⁰ (110 Kari Torjesen Malcolm, *Women at the Crossroads* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity, 1982), pages 73-74, as quoted by John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (San Francisco, CA; HarperCollins, 1991), page 64.)

D. Some Definitions.

With this cultural background in mind, let's search out the meaning of a few words and phrases.

"Speak." The Greek word translated "speak" throughout the chapter, *lalein*, takes its exact meaning from the context, and can refer to anything from silent meditation (v. 28) to disruptive speech of about any kind. There is nothing in the word itself to indicate what kind of speech is in mind. However, the verb is in present tense, indicating continuous action. Thus, Paul is saying something like "they are not allowed to *continually speak*."¹¹¹ (111 Osburn, *Women in the Church 2*, p. 199, citing F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1971), p. 135. The present indicative refers specifically to continuing action, while the aorist infinitive indicates neither point time nor continuing action.)

"Silent." The Greek word translated "silent" in 1 Corinthians 14:34, *sigao*, does not necessarily mean "not speak at all." Rather, the word may mean nothing more than "be quiet" or even "keep a secret." The italicized portions of the following verses are all the other occurrences of the word in the Greek New Testament:

Luke 9:36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples *kept this to themselves*, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Luke 20:26 They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became *silent*.

Acts 12:17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to *be quiet* and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

Acts 15:12-13 The whole assembly became *silent* as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Rom. 16:25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the *mystery* hidden for long ages past

1 Cor. 14:28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should *keep quiet* in the church and speak to himself and God.

1 Cor. 14:30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should *stop*.

1 Cor. 14:34 [W]omen should *remain silent* in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

Notice that in its normal use in the New Testament, *sigao* refers to a temporary silence, typically the courteous silence of not interrupting while another speaks. In 1 Corinthians 14, *sigao* is used in verses 28 and 30 to refer, not to total silence, but to abstaining from rude or inconsiderate speech.¹¹² (112 *Sigao* is a synonym of *siopao*, frequently translated as “keep one’s peace.”)

In verse 28 Paul told the tongue speakers to “keep quiet [*sigao*] in the church,” a phrase not significantly different from verse 34’s “remain silent in the churches.” And yet we readily see that Paul did not mean for tongue speakers to be completely silent, only that they should not speak in tongues when no interpreter is present. Other speaking by those with the gift of tongues is not banned by the “keep quiet” command.

Similarly, in verse 30 Paul tells the prophets to stop speaking, literally to “be silent [*sigao*].” But this command to silence clearly only means to stop talking long enough to let another speak. Thus, in each case, in context, *sigao* means “refrain from inconsiderate speech” of a certain type.

Thus, when Paul tells women to “remain silent” because they “must be in submission,” we should understand that the command to silence is limited to speech that is not submissive. After all, the Law only requires submission of women, as complements for their husbands, not silence. Women should be silent to the extent that speaking would, in the circumstance and at the time, violate the command to submission, that is, their role as suitable complements. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find women told to be silent in the presence of men.

But prophets and tongue speakers are given the same limited command—not that they should not use their gifts to God’s glory, but that common courtesy and mutual submission of Christians to one another requires the taking of turns, using gifts in a manner that edifies, and behaving decently and orderly.

Clearly, where considerations of courtesy and orderliness do not prevent speaking, tongue speakers and prophets are free to speak, even as stated in verse 28, “in the church.” Likewise, in a culture and place where a woman may speak in the presence of men without causing a scandal or being perceived as immoral, the command to silence has no application. This interpretation will become clearer as we proceed more deeply into the scripture.

“The Law.” Paul’s reference to the Law as supporting his command is either (a) the Law of Moses, (b) the curse pronounced on women in Genesis 3, or (c) a reference to the “one flesh” relationship that God created, described in Genesis 2. No one has plausibly suggested any other possibility.

But Paul cannot be arguing from the Law of Moses, since the Law of Moses never commands women to be silent in the presence of men or even to be submissive to men. And Paul cannot be arguing from the curse in Genesis 3, as many would suggest. This is a curse and not a command and is the result of sin, not a pattern for righteous living. Thus, the only possible explanation is also the most appealing

explanation. Paul is referring to the command that husbands and wives be one flesh and the role of women as suitable complements—for their husbands.

“Women.” The Greek word translated “women” is *gune*, which can be translated “wives” or as “women”—the distinction can only be found in the context. Translating *gune* as “wife” solves a number of problems and has much to commend it. First, only a wife can ask her husband at home. A widow, divorcee, or other unmarried woman could hardly do so. Second, the Law (Genesis 1 and 2) imposes submission on *wives*, and then only to their husbands. Nowhere does the Law require all women to be in submission to all men. Genesis 2 only talks about husbands and wives. Eve was Adam’s helpmeet, not a helpmeet to all men.

“Inquire.” In the New International Version, Paul is translated as saying, “If they wish to inquire about something ...,” but the King James Versions translates, “And if they will learn anything” In this case, the King James Version has it right. For reasons mentioned earlier, Paul makes it clear that while women are certainly permitted to learn, he is unwilling to assume that they will.

With these definitions in mind, let’s try our hand at a clearer translation:

As in all the congregations of the saints, *wives* should not *speak in a way considered rude or immoral* in the churches. They are not allowed to [so] speak, but must be in submission, as *Genesis 2* says [about wives being suitable complements for their husbands]. If they want to *learn* about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a *wife* to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you [rather than the Jews]? Or are you the only people it has reached [the gospel has reached many people who consider female questioning of men very immoral]?

E. Cultural Limitation.

Doesn’t this passage remind you of the abuses of the Lord’s Supper discussed in 1 Corinthians 11? Paul commanded the Corinthians to eat “at home” (1 Cor. 11:34). We readily understand that this is a response to the local situation in Corinth and not a universal rule, and yet it is phrased very similarly to the command to silence in 1 Corinthians 14:34.

Also, Paul’s reliance on arguments using such phrases as “as in all the congregations of the saints” and “it is disgraceful” are very similar to his statements made in 1 Corinthians 11 dealing with veils. We readily acknowledge that such arguments show that only temporary cultural concerns were at issue when veils are under discussion. We should hold to the same standards here. Note the close comparison:

1 Cor. 11:14-16 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a *disgrace* to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, *we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.*

1 Cor. 14: 33b-36 *As in all the congregations of the saints*, women should remain silent *in the churches*. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is *disgraceful* for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

The same traditionalist commentators who insist that “As in all the congregations of the saints” in chapter 14 makes the command to be silent an eternal rule will argue that “we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God” applied only in the First Century so that veils are no longer required¹¹³.

(¹¹³ D. A. Carson suggests an alternative interpretation in his excellent *Showing the Spirit* (Baker Books 1987), pages 129-131. Carson first argues that the First Century gift of prophecy differs from the Old Testament gift, because (i) the First Century gift had to be tested (pages 91-100), noting 1 Cor. 14:29 (interpreting “weigh” as evaluate) and 1 Thess. 5:19-21); (ii) Paul treated New Testament prophets as inferior to the apostles (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:37-38); (iii) the latest epistles, rather than encouraging reliance on the prophets who survived the apostles, urged reliance on apostolic teaching (“Guard the deposit!” “Keep the faith once delivered to the saints!” “Return to what was from the beginning!” 2 Tim.; Jude; 1 John, respectively); (iv) in some cases, Paul specifically refused to follow the counsel of an acknowledged prophet (Acts 21:4) and another prophet inaccurately prophesied Paul’s fate (Acts 21:10-11—the Jews didn’t bind Paul, the Romans did; the Jews didn’t turn Paul over to the Romans but attempted to lynch him). Accordingly, Carson suggests that in vv. 33-35, Paul directs that while women may prophesy, they may not engage in the questioning of prophets in order to test them. Without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with Carson’s theory, it is not inconsistent with the above theory. After all, Paul’s reason for so limiting women may well have been cultural, as a woman’s testing of a male prophet by interrogation certainly would have been seen as highly disrespectful, even immoral, in Corinthian society.

F. Conclusions.

These considerations aren’t true in the United States today. It is not at all uncommon for me to teach classes having women with more formal Bible education than I have or who have published more Bible-based literature than I have. We have blessedly advanced far beyond the First Century in educating women, and only the worst of bigots would bar women from asking questions on the basis of this passage, which is why our tradition permits such questions. We *already* let women ask questions—so long as it is in Sunday School class and not in the worship service, when no one asks questions anyway.

When Paul tells women to be “in submission” in verse 34, he is not telling them to be in submission to their husbands or to men in general. Rather, they are to be in submission to the requirement of decency and orderliness. In the Greek, “as the Law says” does not modify “not allowed to speak” but “submit yourselves.” There is, of course, no command in Genesis or the Law of Moses compelling women to be silent. Rather, the Law (Genesis 2) requires submission, but this is little different from the submission that Paul later commands in 1 Corinthians 16:16: “submit yourselves to one another.”¹¹⁴ (¹¹⁴ See Osburn, *Women in the Church 1*, pages 108-109.) And this submission ultimately flows from the fact that we are all, men and women, created in God’s image, as discussed earlier.

This reasoning, rooted deeply in Paul’s own words, tells us that the command to be silent in 1 Corinthians 14 is no longer binding today in American culture. We have yet to study 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and many advocates of the silence rule would concede that 1 Corinthians is not a sound basis for commanding female silence, but they instead rely on the commands in 1 Timothy.

I am not the first within the Church to reach this conclusion. David Lipscomb, a co-founder of the *Gospel Advocate* and the Nashville Bible School (now David Lipscomb University) and long-time editor of the *Gospel Advocate* stated,

Yet, women have the right to teach those who know less than themselves; Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos (Acts 18:24- 26). So, I am sure that a woman may teach the Bible to young and old, male and female, at the meeting house, at home, at a neighbor’s house, on Sunday or Monday or any other day of the week, if they know less than she does, if she will do it in a quiet, modest, womanly way.¹¹⁵ (¹¹⁵ M. C. Kurfees, ed., *Questions Answered by David Lipscomb and E. G. Sewell* (McQuiddy 1921), page 736, quoted by Rowland, page 140. Rather inconsistently, another book quotes Lipscomb as saying in the same text, “I cannot write it in simpler words, plainer, or put in a connection that would make it easier to be understood. ‘Let your women keep silence in the churches ...’ I do not know how to add a word that can make it clearer, more direct, or more forcible. One who can explain that away can explain away anything I can write.” p. 729, quoted by Osburn, *Women in the Church 2*, p. 189. Perhaps Lipscomb made a distinction between the formal assembly and other speaking opportunities)

Lipscomb's long tenure as editor of the *Gospel Advocate* made him the leading thinker within the Churches of Christ at the time they split from the instrumental churches and for many years thereafter.

Burton Coffman, the author of a series of commentaries on the entire New Testament and long-time minister of the Manhattan Church of Christ, concludes,

To blow this up to a universal law that no woman might open her mouth in a church service is simply contrary to all reason.¹¹⁶ (116 Coffman, page 240.)

The late George W. DeHoff, a well-respected preacher, leader, evangelist, educator, publisher, and scholar, states,

No verse in the Bible teaches that women must teach God's *word at home*, or *in private*, those limitations having been added by false teachers. Any teaching that does not usurp authority over a man does not violate this passage.¹¹⁷ (117 *Sermons on First Corinthians* (The Christian Press, Murfreesboro, Tenn. 1947) page 99, quoted with approval by Coffman, page 243.)

The traditional view is also disputed by J. W. McGarvey, who is certainly the most respected of the late 19th Century Restoration leaders and second only to Alexander Campbell in the quality of his scholarship among the 19th Century Church leaders:

The powers of woman have become so developed, and her privileges have been so extended in gospel lands, that it is no longer shameful for her to speak in public; but the failing of one reason is not the cessation of both. The Christian conscience has therefore interpreted Paul's rule rightly when it applies it generally and admits of exceptions. ... The gift of prophecy no longer exists; but, by the law of analogy, *those women who have a marked ability, either for exhortation or instruction, are permitted to speak in the churches.* ... The law is permanent, but the application of it may vary. If man universally gives woman permission to speak, she is free from the law in this respect.¹¹⁸ (118 *Commentary on First Corinthians* (The Standard Publishing Co., Cincinnati, Ohio 1916) page 143, quoted approvingly by Coffman, *ibid*, and DeHoff, *ibid*. McGarvey's commentary on 1 Corinthians has also been republished as part of the *Gospel Advocate* commentary series.)

More recently, Carroll D. Osburn, Professor of New Testament at Abilene Christian University, and among the Church's foremost living Bible scholars, concluded,

Far from being intolerant, Paul neither teaches nor suggests in this text anything regarding hierarchicalism or female subjection. ... Paul's corrective does not ban women from speaking in worship. Referring, as it does, to a very specific problem of disruptive questions by these women, 1 Cor. 14:34-35 teaches that these particular wives, like the uncontrolled tongue-speakers and prophets at Corinth, must defer to the assembly by voluntarily yielding to orderliness. The general principle that is to be applied to contemporary church life is that decorum is mandatory for all in the public assembly, without regard for gender.¹¹⁹ (119 Osburn, *Women in the Church 1*, pages 110-111.)

Thus, we see from writings from 1916, 1947, 1977, and 1994 that well-respected and prominent commentators within the Churches of Christ have rejected the notion that women may only speak in private gatherings. The commentaries vary in the details of the conclusions that they draw, but they each disagree with conventional thinking within the Church today. Coffman goes so far as to say, with respect to the requirement that women not ask questions but be silent,

What about the woman whose husband is an ignoramus, an unbeliever, or an open enemy of God and all religion; should *she* comply with this rule? Until it is affirmed that she should, it is a sin to make this rule universal.

But of course we *do* make this rule universal. Isn't it amazing that anyone who supposes that a woman may speak in an assembly will be condemned and "marked" as a heretic while many of our best scholars do not agree with the traditional view now being insisted on by so many? Moreover, isn't it also amazing that we are so intimidated by the right wing of the Church that only the rarest of congregations would actually engage in the practices approved by Lipscomb, McGarvey, DeHoff, Coffman, and Osburn (among very many others)? In fact, precious few of our members are even aware that many of our best scholars have taken these positions. Instead, the current thinking of many is that anyone allowing women to speak in assembly is *per se* a liberal and not one of us.

The assembly should be a reflection of our seven-day a week relationship with God. We aren't held to higher standards Sunday morning than the rest of the week! We can't put on show for God—He won't be fooled! Whatever submission is required Sunday morning is required all the time.

Isn't it very implausible that God invented an eternal rule for women in the assembly that applies nowhere else? If women are inferior or subordinate in the assembly due to the curse of Eve, then they are inferior or subordinate in private worship, during church committee meetings, at Sunday School class, in the work place, and in the home. God did not curse Eve only between 10:30 and 11:30 on Sunday mornings! We are left with the conclusion that the command to be silent was a temporary expedient and is not binding in current American society.

I started by pointing out that this passage must be read in light of the overriding principles of love and grace. Have we done that? I think so. Why were women to refrain from certain speech? Because to do so would have subjected them to accusations of immorality, bringing shame to their husbands and to Christ. Paul's command was far from arbitrary—it is simply one of many examples of Christians yielding their freedom for a greater cause.

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The Letters to the Corinthians
The Daily Study Bible Series
William Barclay
(THE NECESSARY MODESTY)

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

I praise you because you remember me in all things and because you hold fast to the traditions as I handed them down to you. But I want you to know that Christ is the head of every man, and that the man is the head of the woman, and that God is the head of Christ. Every man who prays or preaches with his head covered shames his head. Every woman who prays or preaches with her head uncovered shames her head, for she is in exactly the same case as a woman whose head has been shaved; for, if a woman does not cover her head, let her have her hair cut also. If it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or to be shaved, let her have her head covered. A man ought not to cover his head because he is the image and the glory of God; but woman is the glory of man; for the man did not come from the woman but the woman from the man; for the man was not created for the sake of the woman but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to retain upon her head the sign that she is under someone else's authority, for the sake of the angels. All the same it is true that, in the Lord, woman is nothing without man nor man without woman; for just as woman came from man, so man is born through woman, and all things are from God. Use your own judgment on this. Is it fitting for a woman to pray to God uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach us that it is a dishonor to a man if he lets his hair grow long? But if a woman lets her hair grow long it is her glory, because her hair was given to her for a covering. All the same, if anyone wishes to go on arguing for the sake of arguing, it is sufficient to say that we have no such custom, nor have the Churches of God.

This is one of these passages which have a purely local and temporary significance; they look at first sight as if they had only an antiquarian interest because they deal with a situation which has long since ceased to have any relevance for us; and yet such passages have a very great interest because they shed a flood of light on the domestic affairs and problems of the early Church; and, for him who has eyes to see, they have a very great importance, because Paul solves the problems by principles which are eternal.

The problem was whether or not in the Christian Church a woman had the right to take part in the service unveiled. Paul's answer was bluntly this –the veil is always a sign of subjection, worn by an inferior in the presence of a superior; now woman is inferior to man, in the sense that man is head of the household; therefore it is wrong for a man to appear at public worship veiled and equally wrong for a woman to appear unveiled. It is very improbable that in the twentieth century we are likely to accept this view of the inferiority and subordination of women. But we must read this chapter in the light not of the twentieth century but of the first, and as we read it we must remember three things.

- (i) We must remember the place of the veil in the East. To this day eastern women wear the *yashmak* which is a long veil leaving the forehead and the eyes uncovered but reaching down almost to the feet. In Paul's time the eastern veil was even more concealing. It came right over the head with only an opening for the eyes and reached right down to the feet. A respectable eastern woman would never have dreamed of

appearing without it. Writing in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, T. W. Davies says, "No respectable woman in an eastern village or city goes out without it, and if she does, she is in danger of being misjudged. Indeed English and American missionaries in Egypt told the present writer that their own wives and daughters when going about find it often best to wear the veil."

The veil has two things. (a) It was a sign of inferiority. (b) But it was also a great protection. Verse 10 is very difficult to translate. We have translated it: "For this reason a woman ought to retain upon her head the sign that she is under someone else's authority," but the Greek literally means that a woman ought to retain "her authority upon her head." Sir William Ramsay explains it this way—"In Oriental lands the veil is the power and honour and dignity of the woman. With the veil on her head she can go anywhere in security and profound respect. She is not seen; it is a mark of thoroughly bad manners to observe a veiled woman in the street. She is alone. The rest of the people around are non-existent to her, as she is to them. She is supreme in the crowd.... But without the veil the woman is a thing of nought, whom anyone may insult.... A woman's authority and dignity vanish along with the all-covering veil that she discards."

In the East, then, the veil is all-important. It does not only mark the inferior status of a woman; it is the inviolable protection of her modesty and chastity.

- (ii) We must remember the status of women in Jewish eyes. Under Jewish law woman was vastly inferior to man. She had been created out of Adams's rib (*Genesis* 2:22, 23) and she had been created to be the helpmeet of man (*Genesis* 2:18). There was a Rabbinic piece of fanciful exegesis which said, "God did not form woman out of the head lest she should become proud; nor out of the eye lest she should lust; nor out of the ear lest she should be curious; nor out of the mouth lest she should be talkative; nor out of the heart lest she should be jealous; nor out of the hand lest she should be covetous; nor out of the foot lest she should be a wandering busybody; but out of the rib which was always covered; therefore modesty should be her primary quality."

It is the unfortunate truth that in Jewish law a woman was a thing and was part of the property of her husband over which he had complete rights of disposal. It was true that in the synagogue, for instance, women had no share whatever in the worship but were segregated completely from the men in a shut-off gallery or other part of the building.

In Jewish law and custom it was unthinkable that women should claim any kind of equality with men.

In verse 10 there is the curious phrase that women should be veiled “for the sake of the angels.” It is not certain what this means, but probably it goes back to the strange old story in *Genesis* 6:1 and 2 which tells how the angels fell a prey to the charms of mortal women and so sinned; it may well be that the idea is that the unveiled woman is a temptation even to the angels, for an old Rabbinic tradition said that it was the beauty of women’s long hair which tempted the angels.

- (iii) It must always be remembered that this situation arose in *Corinth*, probably the most licentious city in the world. Paul’s point of view was that in such a situation it was far better to err on the side of being too modest and too strict rather than to do anything which might either give the heathen a chance to criticize the Christians as being too lax or be a cause of temptation to the Christians themselves.

It would be quite wrong to make this passage of universal application; it was intensely relevant to the Church of Corinth but it has nothing to do with whether or not women should wear hats in church at the present day. But for all its local significance it has three great permanent truths in it.

- (i) It is always better to err on the side of being too strict than on the side of being too lax. It is far better to abandon rights which may be stumbling-block to some than to insist on them. It is the fashion to decry convention; but a man should always think twice before he defies it and shocks others. True, he must never be the slave of convention, but conventions do not usually come into being for nothing.
- (ii) Even after he has stressed the subordination of women, Paul goes on to stress even more directly the essential partnership of man and woman. Neither can live without the other. If there be subordination, it is in order that the partnership may be more fruitful and more lovely for both.
- (iii) Paul finishes the passage with a rebuke to the man who argues for the sake of argument. Whatever the differences that may arise between men, there is no place in the Church for the deliberately contentious man or woman. There is a time to stand on principle; but there is never a time to be contentiously argumentative. There is no reason why people should not differ and yet remain at peace.

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The Letters to the Corinthians

The Daily Study Bible Series

William Barclay

(FORBIDDEN INNOVATIONS)

1 Corinthians 14:34-40

Let women keep silent in the congregation, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but let them be in subjection even as the laws says. If they wish to learn about anything, let them question their husbands at home. It is a shameful thing for a woman to speak in the congregation. Was it from you that God's word went out? Or, was it to you alone that it came?

If anyone thinks that he is a forthteller of the truth, or that he has a special spiritual gift, let him understand what I write to you because it is the Lord's command. If anyone does not understand it, let him remain in his ignorance.

So then, my brothers, be eager to have the gift of forthtelling the truth and do not forbid speaking with tongues. Let everything be done with propriety and with order.

There were innovations threatening in the Church at Corinth which Paul did not like. In effect, he asks what right they had to make them. Were they the originators of the Christian Church? Had they a monopoly of the gospel truth? They had received a tradition and to it they must be obedient.

No man ever rose completely above the background of the age in which he lived and the society in which he grew up; and Paul, in his conception of the place of women within the Church, was unable to rise above the ideas which he had known all his life.

We have already said that in the ancient world the place of women was low. In the Greek world Sophocles had said, "Silence confers grace upon a woman." Women, unless they were very poor or very loose in their morals, led a very secluded life in Greece. The Jews had an even lower idea of women. Amongst the Rabbinic sayings there are many which belittle their place. "As to teaching the law to a woman one might as well teach her impiety." To teach the law to a woman was "to cast pearls before swine." The Talmud lists among the plagues of the world "the talkative and the inquisitive widow and the virgin who wastes her time in prayers." It was even forbidden to speak to a woman on the street." "One must not ask a service from a woman, or salute her."

It was in society like that that Paul wrote this passage. In all likelihood what was uppermost in his mind was the lax moral state of Corinth and the feeling that absolutely nothing, must be done which would bring upon the infant Church the faintest suspicion of immodesty. It would certainly

be very wrong to take these words out of their context and make them a universal rule for the Church.

Paul goes on to speak with a certain sternness. He is quite certain that, even if a man has spiritual gifts, that gives him no right to be a rebel against authority. He is conscious that the advice he has given and the rules he has laid down have come to him from Jesus Christ and his Spirit, and if a man refuses to understand them he must be left in his willful ignorance.

So Paul draws to an end. He makes it clear that he has no wish to quench anyone's gift; the one thing he strives for is the good order of the Church. The great rule which he in effect lays down is that a man has received from God whatever gift he may possess, not for his own sake, but for the sake of the Church. When a man can say, "To God be the glory," then and only then will he use his gifts aright within the Church and outside it.

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Women in the Church (Reclaiming the Ideal)

Carroll D. Osburn

4. Conclusion

(Conclusion to his chapter on I Corinthians 14:34-36 – Disruptive Corinthian Wives)

There is no reason to believe that vv. 34-35 are a Corinthian quotation Paul refutes in v. 36. There is no convincing evidence that the admonition in vv. 34-35 is an interpolation from a later period. There is no evidence that Paul contradicts what he had taught earlier in 11:2-16, that 11 represents a reluctant concession, or that he changed his mind between chapter 11 and 14. Two different matters are involved: the praying and prophesying by the women in chap. 11 in the assembly differs markedly from some wives continually “piping up” in the assembly in chap. 14. The insubordination which these wives had in common with that of the tongue-speakers and prophets caused Paul to include this firm directive at this point in the text.

Since 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 cannot be excluded on text-critical grounds, one must conclude that, “14:33b-36 are in their right place and quite authentic.”⁶² Paul is dealing with a particular problem in Corinth. The problem is not one of disdain for creation order or family order, but one of church order. Far from being intolerant, Paul neither teaches nor suggests in this text anything regarding hierarchalism or female subjection. Smith⁶³ wrongly concludes, “The real issue is the extent to which a woman may *participate* in the work and worship of the church.” He simply has not understood what is being dealt with in the context. The real issue is not the *extent* to which a woman may participate in the work and worship of the church, but the *manner*. Paul’s corrective does not ban women from speaking in worship,⁶⁴ but stops the disruptive verbal misconduct of certain wives who are giving free rein to “irresistible impulses” to “pipe up” at will with questions in the assembly by redirecting these questions to another setting where they can have access to information without causing verbal chaos.

This text remains authoritative regarding the point it was intended to make originally. Referring, as it does, to a very specific problem of unacceptably disruptive questions by these women, 1 Cor 14:34-35 teaches that these particular wives, like the uncontrolled tongue-speakers and prophets at Corinth, must *defer* to the assembly by voluntarily yielding to orderliness.⁶⁵ Specifically, if a woman (or man) speaks in a disruptive manner while someone else is speaking, this text authorizes the congregation to call that person out of order and to ask her (him) to be quiet. The general principle that is to be applied to contemporary church life is that decorum is mandatory for all in the public assembly without regard to gender.

As a footnote to this study, I might add that the text says nothing about women singing, praying, making announcements, reading Scripture, witnessing, reporting, asking questions, teaching, performing drama in a Christian assembly- -whether standing or sitting, whether in front or not- - as long as they do so in an orderly and non-disruptive manner. Even a decidedly literal interpretation of this verse need not forbid women from serving as ushers, serving communion, taking up the offering, passing out bulletins and orders of worship, or any such capacity of service. “Sit down and shut up!” is not a biblical mandate for Christian women. 1 Cor 14:34-36 may be considered a biblical mandate against disruptive behavior in any form in any Christian assembly.

62 Hering, *First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 155. See also now Curt Niccum, “The Voice of the Manuscripts on the Silence of Women: The External Evidence for I Corinthians 14:34-5,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 242-255.

63 Smith, *Men of Strength for Women of God*, 250, appropriately subtitles his discussion of 14:34-35, “Grasping at Straws.”

64 Grosheide, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 343, has missed the point of the text in arguing that “everybody will agree that it is unbecoming for a woman to speak in a public meeting of the church.” Neither in this nor in any other biblical text is there a prohibition against women speaking in public, *on the ground that it is public*.

65 Bruce, *I and II Corinthians*, 137 “Much of the teaching in this chapter is relevant only to such exceptional circumstances as prevailed in the church of Corinth.”

Reproduced from Women in the Church; Reclaiming the Ideal

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Carroll D. Osburn is an American scholar recognized as one of North America’s leading [New Testament textual critics](#), is Carmichael-Walling Distinguished Professor Emeritus at [Abilene Christian University](#) (retired 2004)

Yale Divinity School Dean Harold W. Attridge and Professor Emeritus David L. Bartlett discuss The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

[Corinthians 1: Introduction \(20 minutes 13 seconds\)](#)

[Corinthians 1, 11:2-31: The Lord's Supper and Women at Prayer \(13 minutes\)](#)

[Corinthians 1, 12:1-14:40: Glossolalia: Spiritual Expression and Social Order \(9 min\)](#)

[Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians](#)

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is a masterpiece of pastoral theology in which the Apostle to the Gentiles treats a number of issues that have caused difficulties in the Christian community at Corinth. The issues faced by Paul and his church reflect conditions and issues of the first-century. At the same time they often offer remarkable parallels to issues that confront Christian communities today. Study of the letter provides an opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a community of believers, who share many things but disagree on others. It challenges us to think about how we relate to the wider world that we fully engage even if it does not always share our values, provoking us to imitate Paul's pastoral logic, which probes fundamental convictions to see how they apply in difficult situations. First Corinthians, then, is a must read for Christians who have made the decision to do life together as church. We hope this study will aid you in your attempt to do just that.

Meet Our Professors

Harold Attridge, Sterling Professor of Divinity at Yale Divinity School, has made scholarly contributions to New Testament exegesis and to the study of Hellenistic Judaism and the history of the early Church. His publications include *Essays on John and Hebrews*, *Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, *First-Century Cynicism in the Epistles of Heraclitus*, *The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus*, *Nag Hammadi Codex I: The Jung Codex*, and *The Acts of Thomas*, as well as numerous book chapters and articles in scholarly journals. He holds degrees from Boston College (B.A), Cambridge University (M.A.), and Harvard University (Ph.D.).

David Bartlett, J. Edward and Ruth Cox Lantz Professor Emeritus of Christian Communication at Yale Divinity School, is the author of several books including *Fact and Faith*, *The Shape of Scriptural Authority*, *Between the Bible and the Church*, and *What's Good About This News? Preaching from the Gospels and Galatians*. He is also the co-editor of the *Westminster Bible Companion* and *Feasting on the Word* commentary series. He holds degrees from Swarthmore College (B.A) and Yale University (B.D, Ph.D.), and is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches, USA.

Radical Feminist

Women are just as smart and capable and gifted as men. Yet, men have ruled the world for centuries. This has to stop. In fact, we don't need men any more at all. It is our turn.

Egalitarian

Equal. In all aspects. Yes, even as Elders and Preachers and Missionaries and whatever else God has called them to be.

Galatians 3:28 *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. “*

Methodists, Assemblies of God, Quakers, Seventh-day Adventists, Northern Baptists, and some Presbyterians.

Complementarian (Hierarchal)

Equal in value, worth, and dignity.
Equally redeemed and equally heirs of God.

Different (and Complementary) roles have been given to men and women in the church and in marriage.

Ephesians 5:21-25

²¹ *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

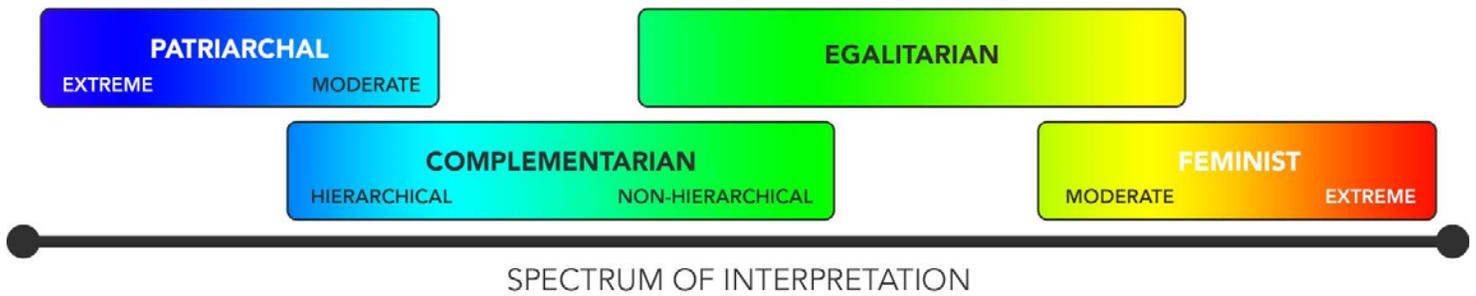
²² *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

²⁵ *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*

Southern Baptists, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Orthodox Judaism.

Paternalist

Women should know their place. And their place is in the home. She should wash and clean and do whatever else I tell her to do (and she ain't capable of much more than that anyway if you want to know the truth).



Description of Terms

Patriarchal (extreme): Men are required to rule over women in personal life, home, marriage, religious institutions, and society.

Patriarchal (moderate)*: Subordination of women to men is considered voluntary rather than required. Leadership, not rulership, is the preferred terminology. There are strong similarities between moderate patriarchy and hierarchical complementarian.

Complementarian (hierarchical)*: This term stresses the complementary "difference" or "distinction" between genders and affirms male hierarchy. The complementary "role" of women is to be in subjection to, under the final authority of, and led by men in the home and in the church.

Complementarian (non-hierarchical):** There are complementary "differences" between the genders, yet without an emphasis on male hierarchy (chain of command). This term avoids seeing the genders as identical, interchangeable, or basically the same.

Egalitarian:** This term stresses the "biblical equality" between genders without referring to an essential sameness or interchangeability of male and female. It suggests that the Bible does not teach a stereotyped gender "role" in which women are subordinate to men.

Feminist (moderate):** In moderate feminism there is equal worth, justice, privilege, standing, opportunity for service, and leadership of women in all spheres of life: home, marriage, church, and social structures. However, this view maintains significant gender distinctions.

Feminist (extreme): In extreme feminism, gender distinctions are blurred and female hierarchy is often assumed.

* There are strong similarities between moderate patriarchalism and hierarchical complementarianism.

** There are similarities between non-hierarchical complementarianism and egalitarianism, and perhaps moderate feminism as well.

WOMEN IN OUR CHURCH FAMILY

What if...?

If the Church of Christ did not exist.....

(please bear with me with this question.....purely hypothetical),

And you had to choose a different church.

And you only based your decision on their position with regards to the role of Women.

And you had never studied the topic before and you were starting from scratch.

And you found the following churches and the following links.

Which church would you join? (and why?!?)

Compare:

A)

[Redeemer Presbyterian Church \(PCA\)](#) to [Assembly of God](#)

B)

[Southern Baptists](#) to [Evangelical Presbyterian Church \(EPC\)](#)

C)

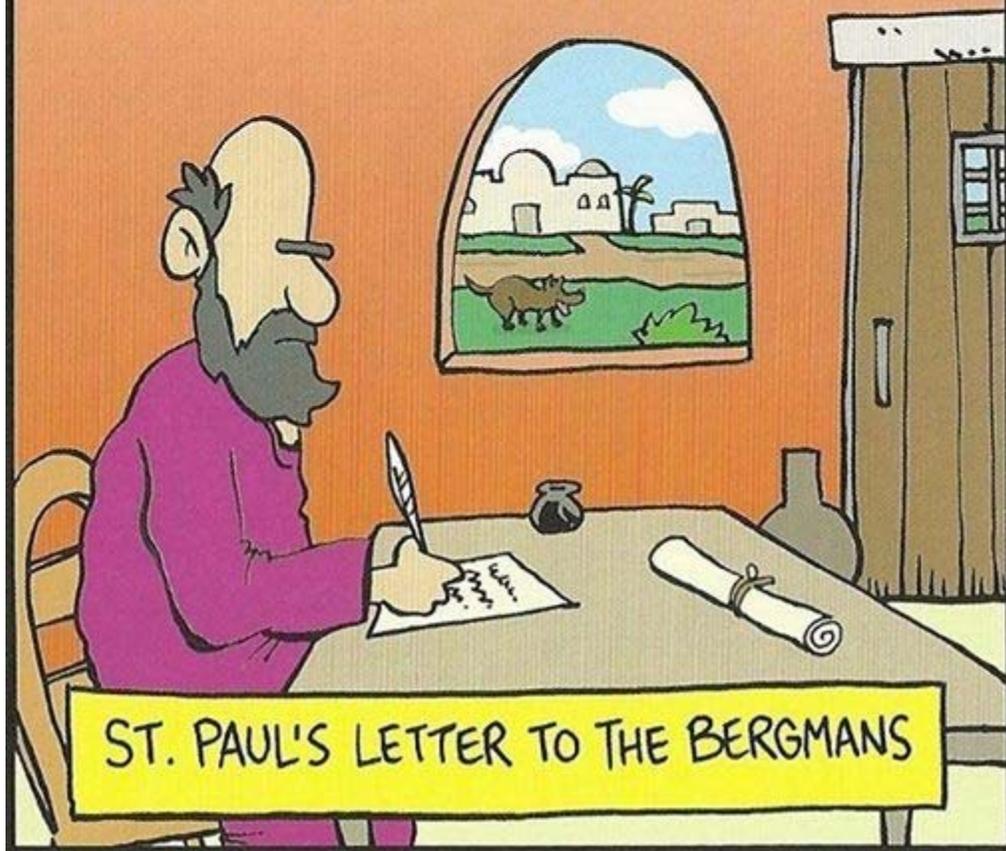
[Lutheran Evangelical Lutheran Synod](#) or [Lutheran church – Missouri Synod](#)
to Methodist [United Methodists and the Ordination of Women](#)

D) Also consider,

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

[The Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#)

I, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus,
greet you in the name of the Lord,
and ask you to keep your dog
out of my petunias.





"... I was given a thorn in my flesh, a Messenger from Satan, to torment me. Three times I...."

I Corinthians

October 2019

Bonus Material

(Available on web site only)

- Listing of Gender inclusive Churches of Christ in the U.S.
82 different congregations (pages 2–22)
- CBE International (Christians for Biblical Equality)
www.cbeinternational.org/content/about-cbe (page 23)
- Deacons: Male and Female? A Study for Churches of Christ (pages 24-25)
- The Junia Project www.juniaproject.com (pages 26 – 28)

But, another perspective to consider:
Touchstone Magazine Junia Among the Apostles
The Story Behind a New Testament Saint & the Egalitarian Agenda
<http://touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=21-08-022-f>
(pages 29-41)
- Two Views on Women in Ministry (Counterpoints: Bible and Theology)
(pages 42 - 43)

The Counterpoints series provides a forum for comparison and critique of different views on issues important to Christians.