

## **WOMEN IN THE CHURCH—THE MATTER OF PUBLIC SPEAKING: 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2–16 AND 14:34–35**

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First Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:34–35 are challenging passages to interpret not only within this letter, but compared to the rest of the NT and perhaps all of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> What is more, not only are they a handful for interpretation generally, but they also pose a daunting challenge in relation to the issue of women in the church. Taking 11:2–16 at face value, it is hard to miss that Paul is commanding the women of Corinth to wear a head covering when they pray and prophesy in church. But we look around at church and for the most part see row upon row of uncovered female heads. Thus at the very outset a shadow of doubt is cast over this text as to its applicability to the church today. Gordon Fee insists that the passage merely concerns a local cultural tradition and has nothing whatsoever to do with any universal principle of women's submission to men.<sup>2</sup>

First Corinthians 14:34–35 is likewise puzzling. At first glance it appears to forbid women to speak in church at all. Again, we look around at church and see women speaking in our services. So what does the passage mean? Craig Keener, very much along the same lines as Gordon Fee above, concludes that Paul's teaching here is bound to the social context of the day and various principles

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg declares that this passage "is probably the most complex, controversial, and opaque of any text of comparable length in the New Testament" (*1 Corinthians*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994]), 214.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, "Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 160.

of social propriety, “none of [which] prohibit women in very different cultural settings from speaking God’s word.”<sup>3</sup>

Now it is one thing to acknowledge the interpretive difficulties of a passage and on that basis be careful not to place too much weight on it. This “may be fair enough as a general theological principle.”<sup>4</sup> But it is another thing entirely to sweep under the rug of cultural relativity passages of Scripture which give all appearances of offering instruction to the church at large and of backing up that teaching with appeals to the nature of God himself and the order of his original creation. As I hope to demonstrate, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:34–35 do this very thing. While these passages allow for women to participate in public worship, they nevertheless instruct women to do so in accordance with the ubiquitous biblical principle of male leadership of the church.

The procedure for this paper is as follows. First, it will offer a brief look at the background of 1 Corinthians. Second, it will present a study of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Third, it will offer a look at 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. Fourth, it will seek to integrate the teaching of these two passages. Finally, I will conclude the paper with points of application from these texts for the church today.

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<sup>3</sup> Craig S. Keener, “Learning in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35,” in *ibid.*, 171. In line with all the contributors of *Discovering Biblical Equality*, Keener means by “speaking God’s word” the complete functional equality of men and women in the church, including the leadership positions of pastor and teacher. Keener states further about 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, “Thus almost everyone has a problem with pressing this text literally, and interpreters must explain the divergence between what it states and what they believe it means” (*ibid.*, 161). But this does not mean therefore that all bets are off and anything goes. The best interpretation is the one which makes the most sense in the context, in relation to 11:2–16, and in harmony with all of the biblical teaching on the subject.

<sup>4</sup> David P. Nelson, “Learning in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35” (Ch. 9) by Craig S. Keener,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 10 (Spring 2005): 24. This issue is devoted entirely to a response to *Discovering Biblical Equality*. In my dissertation I offer a similar caution against putting too much weight on the NT warning passages in relation to their ability to either support or refute the doctrine of eternal security (“New Testament Warning Passages in the Light of the Doctrine of Eternal Security” [PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002]).

## BACKGROUND OF 1 CORINTHIANS

The following section will look briefly at the circumstances surrounding Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians and the basic content of the letter. Then more narrowly it will set the context for 11:2–16 and 14:34–35.

### The Circumstances of 1 Corinthians

Paul founded the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1) and ministered there for a year and a half (Acts 18:11). Later, while in Ephesus (Acts 19:1, 10; 1 Cor 16:8), Paul wrote the believers in Corinth on the subject of immorality (1 Cor 5:9–11)—a letter which did not survive. The Corinthians responded with a letter to Paul touching on various issues (1 Cor 7:1). Besides this letter Paul also received a report of problems in the church (1 Cor 1:11, 5:1).<sup>5</sup>

### The Content of 1 Corinthians

In response to these communications Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to address the issues facing the church. First Corinthians contains a catalog of sticky church problems, a veritable casebook for pastoral ministry. Paul's methodical point-by-point treatment of these issues is what gives the book its structure. Once beyond the introduction (1 Cor 1:1–9), Paul first tackles the reports passed on by Chloe's household (1:10–6:20). Then Paul turns to the matters they had written to him about (7:1–16:12). Paul ends with some concluding thoughts and greetings (16:13–24).

### The Context of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14

In the first thematic half of the book Paul confronts the dual challenges of a church divided (1:10–4:21) and a church in disorder (5:1–6:20). First Corinthians 7:1 functions like a hinge upon which the entire letter turns, for here Paul turns his attention to the

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed reconstruction of the circumstances surrounding all of Paul's dealings with the Corinthians see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 432–64; and D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 259–87.

written concerns of the church. So in the second thematic half of 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the matters of marriage (7:1–40), idolatry (8:1–11:1), women and worship (11:2–16), the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34), spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), the resurrection (15:1–58), and the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (16:1–12).<sup>6</sup>

The second thematic half of the letter seems to be put together according to subject matter. In chapters 7–10 Paul deals with questions of marriage and food sacrificed to idols—matters of individual behavior but with interpersonal ramifications for the believers. In chapters 11–14 Paul turns from the false worship just covered in the previous discussion (chaps. 8–10) to three matters of appropriate Christian worship: the conduct of women (11:2–16), observation of the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34), and exercising of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40) in their gatherings for corporate worship.<sup>7</sup> Paul concludes the main body of the letter with the resurrection (15:1–58), a key theological issue behind not just the previous chapters but the entire letter. As Gordon Fee notes, “Since there is a certain logic to the whole presentation, the present sequencing is probably Paul’s own and is not dictated by their letter.”<sup>8</sup>

To sum up in light of this paper’s concern, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 concerns the subject of women and worship in the church at Corinth. This is the first matter of appropriate Christian worship that Paul turns to after concluding the discussion of things sacrificed to idols. To this passage I now turn.

## 1 Corinthians 11:2–16: Concerning Women and Worship

Following an introductory commendation for the church (v. 2), Paul sets forth an underlying principle regarding headship (v. 3).

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<sup>6</sup> Paul brings up the matters they wrote about with the introductory formula *περὶ δὲ* (“now concerning”), appearing in 7:1, 25, 8:1 (cf. 8:4), 12:1, and 16:1. Paul introduces three further issues just with the word *δὲ* (11:2–16, 11:17–34, and 15:1–58). Paul responds to their letter with a final *περὶ δὲ*, in 16:12, where he includes a comment about Apollos in his concluding remarks.

<sup>7</sup> Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 207.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 267. This seems clear from the fact that in chapters 7–15 Paul alternates between matters about which they had written (see 7:1, 25, 8:1, 12:1) and matters about which he had received a report (see 11:2, 17, 15:1).

With that in place he follows with a discussion of practice—how and why men and women ought to pray and prophesy in distinct ways when the church gathers for worship (vv. 4–15). Paul concludes with an appeal to the common practice of God’s churches at large (v. 16). What follows is a closer look at this passage.

### **Commendation, v. 2**

Paul starts this section with a word of commendation, certainly a rarity in this letter. He praises them for remembering him in everything and for holding to the traditions just as he passed them on to the Corinthians. But in spite of this glowing introduction, Paul has some corrective instruction for them.<sup>9</sup>

### **Underlying Principle, v. 3**

The following study of verses 4–15 will show that the actual problem concerns the physical heads of the women in the Corinthian church. However, as is the case elsewhere in this letter (cf. 1:10, 8:1–3, 12:1–3, 15:1–11), Paul prefers to set up the topic indirectly instead of hitting it head on (pardon the pun). Paul does this by setting forth an underlying theological principle, one important not only for understanding this passage, but also for applying its teaching in the church today. Paul sets up in verse 3 a deliberate construct of three relationships: Christ to man; man to woman; and God to Christ. Paul further defines each relationship by using the word “head” (κεφαλή): the head of every man is Christ; the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

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<sup>9</sup> In light of the ensuing correction and the tenor of the entire letter, one wonders about the sincerity of Paul’s commendation. It seems that the church was neither remembering Paul in everything nor holding to the traditions just as he passed them on to them. Perhaps Paul is echoing their letter here. He appears to do this elsewhere (cf. 6:12, 13, 18, 7:1, 8:1, 4, 10:23). Thus, they may have in their letter *claimed* to be remembering and keeping all of Paul’s teachings. Paul then takes the occasion of their claim to address two key areas in which they were falling short: the conduct of women and observance of the Lord’s Supper.

### HEADS AND HEADSHIP IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:3

<b>Person in Authority</b>	<b>Christ</b> “is the head of”	<b>Man</b> “is the head of”	<b>God</b> “is the head of”
<b>Person in Submission</b>	<b>Man</b>	<b>Woman</b>	<b>Child</b>

Paul is obviously using “head” figuratively in verse 3, but what does he mean? According to BDAG, κεφαλή denotes superior rank when used figuratively for a living being.<sup>10</sup> For example, elsewhere Paul asserts that the husband is the head of his wife (Eph 5:23a), Christ is the head of the church (Eph 4:15, 5:23b), Christ is the head over all rule and authority (Col 2:10), and indeed Christ is the head over all things in the heavens and on the earth (Eph 1:22; cf. v. 10).<sup>11</sup> The figure of speech thus describes a person who holds “pre-eminent status, in view of authority or order or command.”<sup>12</sup>

For centuries Christians took these NT references to head as denoting authority, but in recent years this meaning has been challenged in large part by the evangelical feminist movement.<sup>13</sup> Berkeley and Alvera Mickelsen first offered what may have been the most explicit and influential statement of the position that κεφαλή in the NT means “source” and not “authority.”<sup>14</sup> Many others concurred—some from within but some apart from the

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<sup>10</sup> BDAG, 542.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1: 739.

<sup>13</sup> Like secular feminists, evangelical feminists assert no difference between men’s and women’s roles. But unlike secular feminists, evangelical feminists profess faith in Christ and hold to the total truthfulness of Scripture (“Preface,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem [Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 1991], xiii).

<sup>14</sup> Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, “Does Male Dominance Tarnish Our Translations?” *Christianity Today*, October 1979: 23–29.

evangelical feminist perspective.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps no one has done more to refute this novel understanding of κεφαλή than Wayne Grudem. In a series of articles Grudem has all but proven that when used figuratively of people, κεφαλή denotes authority and not source. In a 1985 article Grudem surveyed 2,336 examples of κεφαλή in 36 authors from the eighth century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. and concluded “that ‘source, origin’ is nowhere clearly attested as a legitimate meaning for κεφαλή, and that the meaning ‘ruler, authority over’ has sufficient attestation to establish it clearly as a legitimate sense for κεφαλή in Greek literature at the time of the New Testament. Indeed, it was a well-established and recognizable meaning....”<sup>16</sup>

But many criticized this conclusion, so Grudem wrote another article in response.<sup>17</sup> Here Grudem interacted with a number of studies on κεφαλή published after his 1985 article and concluded,

The meaning of “ruler, authority over” is still found quite clearly in forty-one ancient texts from both Biblical and extra-Biblical literature, and is possible in two or more texts.... In addition, all the lexicons that specialize in the New Testament period, including two very recent ones, list the meaning “ruler, authority over” for *kephalē*—it appears to be a well-established and valid meaning during the New Testament period.

On the other hand, the evidence for the meaning “source” is far weaker, and it is fair to say that the meaning has not yet been established.... There are still no *unambiguous* examples before or during the time of the New Testament in which *kephalē* has the metaphorical sense “source,” and no lexicon specializing in the New Testament period lists such a meaning, nor does the Liddell and Scott lexicon list such a meaning as applied to persons.... In fact, we may well ask those who advocate the meaning “source” an important question: Where is

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<sup>15</sup> For a list of these see Wayne Grudem, “Does κεφαλή (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *TJ* 6 NS (1985): 39. This article was reprinted from the appendix of George W. Knight III, *The Role Relationship of Men and Women* (Chicago: Moody, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> Grudem, “Does κεφαλή (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over?’” 59.

<sup>17</sup> Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of κεφαλή (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 425–68.

even one clear example of *kephalē* used of a *person* to mean “source” in all of Greek literature before or during the time of the New Testament? Is there even one example that is unambiguous?<sup>18</sup>

Ten more years of discussion prompted yet another update article by Grudem.<sup>19</sup> In this case Grudem responded in particular to an influential article and discussions over the Liddell-Scott lexicon. The article in question reasserted the claim that *κεφαλή* does not denote authority in ancient Greek literature but rather source.<sup>20</sup> Grudem examined the article in detail and found that “in several sections its disregard of facts is so egregious that it fails even to meet fundamental requirements of truthfulness.”<sup>21</sup> As for the Liddell-Scott lexicon, Grudem evaluated the one piece of supporting evidence from Greek-English lexicons often used to support the claim that source was a common sense for *κεφαλή*, namely entry II.1., “Of things, *extremity*.... In plural, *source* of a river ... (but singular, *mouth*); generally, *source, origin*.”<sup>22</sup> But Grudem had pointed out in his earlier articles that this entry describes things, not people. Furthermore, *κεφαλή* could denote both a river’s source and its mouth because either can be considered its “end-point.”<sup>23</sup> In 1997 Grudem sent his 1991 article to P. G. W. Glare, current editor of the Liddell-Scott lexicon, who wrote back saying that he was in broad agreement with Grudem’s conclusions, that

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 467–68, emphasis original. This article is a reprint from *TJ* 11 NS (1990): 3–72.

<sup>19</sup> Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *κεφαλή* (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” *JETS* 44 (2001): 25–65.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Clark Kroeger, “Head,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 375–77.

<sup>21</sup> Grudem, “The Meaning of *κεφαλή* (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence,” 64. Grudem demonstrated how Kroeger misquoted Chrysostom, misrepresented other patristic sources, and mishandled the classical Greek material.

<sup>22</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., rev. Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. with rev. supp. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 945, emphasis original.

<sup>23</sup> Note *κεφαλή* for the “ends” of the poles used to carry the ark of the covenant in 1 Kings 8:8, LXX (Grudem, “The Meaning of *κεφαλή* [‘Head’]: An Evaluation of New Evidence,” 58).

when κεφαλή translates שׂרָר in the LXX, it frequently denotes leader or chief and that the “supposed sense ‘source’ of course does not exist and it was at least unwise of Liddell and Scott to mention the word. At the most they should have said ‘applied to the source of a river in respect of its position in its (the river’s) course’.”<sup>24</sup> After examining several other recent discussions of κεφαλή Grudem summarized,

Where does this leave us with regard to the dispute over *kephalē* [*sic*] in the ancient world? Up to this time, Liddell-Scott was the only Greek-English lexicon that even mentioned the possibility of the meaning “source” for *kephalē* [*sic*]. All the other standard Greek-English lexicons for the NT gave meanings such as “leader, ruler, person in authority” and made no mention of the meaning “source.”

But now the editor of the only lexicon that mentioned the meaning “source” in any connection says that κεφαλή “does seem frequently to denote leader or chief . . . and here it seems perverse to deny authority” and, “The supposed sense ‘source’ of course does not exist.”

These recent developments therefore seem to indicate that there is no “battle of the lexicons” over the meaning of κεφαλή but that the authors and editors of all the English lexicons for ancient Greek now agree (1) that the meaning “leader, chief, person in authority” clearly exists for κεφαλή, and (2) that the meaning “source” simply does not exist.<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion Grudem opined, “We may hope that articles and commentaries written in the future will take into account an increasing consensus in the major lexicons that the meaning ‘authority over’ is firmly established for κεφαλή and that the meaning ‘source,’ as Peter Glare says, ‘does not exist.’”<sup>26</sup>

Schreiner offers three reasons why we should take κεφαλή to mean “authority” and not “source” in 1 Corinthians 11:3. First, κεφαλή as “authority” is clearly attested in many ancient Greek texts but “source” is never certainly attested. Second, in the LXX, the most relevant piece of literature Paul was familiar with, κεφαλή

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<sup>24</sup> Personal letter cited in *ibid.*, 59.

<sup>25</sup> Grudem, “The Meaning of κεφαλή (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence,” 61.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

never means “source” and often means “authority.”<sup>27</sup> Third, Paul’s use of κεφαλή elsewhere when discussing men and women (Eph 5:22–33) seems quite clearly to denote “authority.” After all, what sense would it make to say that the husband is the “source” of his wife, and even if that were a coherent concept, what would it have to do with her need to “submit” to him, which is Paul’s stated requirement for the wife (vv. 22, 24)?<sup>28</sup>

Does the meaning “authority” for κεφαλή in 1 Corinthians 11:3 fit the context? Yes, it does so quite well. To anticipate, Paul offers corrective instruction in this passage regarding the women of Corinth. The instruction concerns appropriate worship: they must pray and prophesy with their heads covered (vv. 5, 6, 10, 13, 15). Paul supports this directive with the order and intention of God’s original creation of man and woman: the woman was created from the man and for the man’s sake (vv. 8–9). God has placed man in a position of authority over woman, demonstrated by the fact that God created the man first and the woman from the man, and God created the woman for the sake of the man and not vice-versa. Man’s position of functional authority over woman is likened by Paul to Christ’s authority over man and God the Father’s authority over Christ; therefore, on the basis of this foundational principle regarding proper lines of authority, women ought to pray and prophesy in the assembly of believers with their heads covered and not uncovered as men do.

Summing up, Paul uses “head” metaphorically for authority in verse 3: Christ is every man’s “head,” the man is a woman’s “head,” and God is Christ’s “head.” This principle serves as the ground for Paul’s subsequent instructions regarding worship. There are differences between men and women which should be reflected in their worship. These differences are patterned after similar differences between the persons of the Trinity (man is woman’s head

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<sup>27</sup> See e.g., Judges 11:8–11 and Isaiah 7:8–9. For a list of all relevant usages of κεφαλή in the LXX see Grudem, “Does κεφαλή (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over?’” 54–56.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 127. Simon J. Kistemaker adds the point that Paul’s threefold construct in verse 3 makes sense with head meaning authority; it does not make sense if head means source. While man was the source of woman (cf. v. 8), Christ is not the source of man, nor is God the source of Christ (*1 Corinthians*, NTC [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993], 366).

as God is Christ's head). However, these differences are not *ontological* (who one is) but *functional* (what one does). The functional difference between Father and Son (the Father functions as the head of the Son) does not imply ontological inequality. In the same way, the functional difference between man and woman (man functions as head of woman) does not imply ontological inequality. When woman functions under the authority of man, she imitates Christ, who functions under the authority of the Father!<sup>29</sup>

One more comment deserves mentioning regarding Paul's underlying principle in verse 3. Notice that the first pair in Paul's construct of relationships is Christ-man: "I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man."<sup>30</sup> If the issue is really about the women of Corinth and their proper worship attire, why does Paul mention the Christ-man pairing first? Perhaps Paul did this to disarm the argument that man is somehow superior to woman. No, says Paul: man is just like woman in the sense that he too has a head, namely Christ.<sup>31</sup> Then the man-woman pair is followed by the God-Christ pair, which in effect elevates the woman's submission as an aspect of Christ likeness. So we see how Paul skillfully

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<sup>29</sup> Evangelical feminists like Kevin Giles argue that the Son submitted himself to the Father temporarily, but this was an exception to their normal and eternal "working together as one" with no set authority structure with regards to activity. Therefore, the Son's temporary submission to the Father "cannot be used to support the subordination of women to men" ("The Subordination of Christ and the Subordination of Women," in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 352; see also idem, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002]). For a refutation of this position and argument for the Son's permanent functional subordination to the Father see Bruce A. Ware, "How Shall We Think About the Trinity?" in *God Under Fire*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 253–77.

<sup>30</sup> Unless otherwise noted Scripture citations in this paper are from the NASB.

<sup>31</sup> According to R. C. H. Lenski, "This statement is placed forward because Christian women may forget that every man is under a head, and that it is therefore not at all strange that women, too, are under a head. It is entirely contrary to fact that women should seek to be like men on the supposition that men are independent. The men are not at all independent—their head is Christ" (*The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963], 433). Paul will return to another equalizing concept between men and women in verses 11–12 (cf. another example from marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:4).

sandwiches the principle of man as the head of the woman between the principles of man's similar position of submission to Christ and that of Christ's to God the Father. When a woman submits to her head, she does no more than what man does and no less than what Christ does!

### **Ensuing Practice, vv. 4–15**

The underlying principle of verse 3 goes a long way toward setting up the ensuing instruction regarding practice and defusing any protestations against it. Paul's concrete instructions for the church include an argument from disgrace, an argument from honor, a qualification, and finally, an argument from nature.

### **Argument from Disgrace, vv. 4–6**

With the underlying principle in place, Paul addresses the matter at hand: the attire of women as they worship. The key idea in Paul's first argument is "dishonor" or "disgrace" (καταισχύνω, vv. 4, 5; αἰσχρόν, v. 6). To pray or prophesy covered for a man or uncovered for a woman is to "disgrace" the "head." There are three interpretive questions to answer. First, does the praying and prophesying indicate private or corporate worship? Second, how should we understand the "disgrace"? Third, is Paul's second use of "head" in verse 4 and 5 literal or figurative? As for the first question, verses 2 and 16 seem to indicate a corporate setting for this activity. In verse 2 Paul refers to the traditions, or the content of Christian instruction, which he had delivered to them when planting their church. In verse 16 he speaks of the practice, or custom, of God's churches. Together these verses seem to indicate that the behavior here is a corporate church matter. Furthermore, the next section (vv. 17–34), which is parallel to this one, is clearly a corporate matter (the Lord's Supper).<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the second question, Paul speaks of disgrace in verses 4–6 in the sense of dishonor or shame. Later he uses a related word to state that if a man has long hair it is a "dishonor" (ἀτιμία) to him (v. 14). On the other hand, if a woman has long

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<sup>32</sup> This matter of private versus public worship will become important when we consider 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and its relationship to this section.

hair, it is a “glory,” or “honor” (δόξα), to her (v. 15). What is more, there seems to be a cultural element to the dishonor or shame in verses 4–6. Paul compares a woman’s uncovering her head with cutting off her hair or shaving her head, using two conditional statements: “if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off” (v. 6a); “but if it is disgraceful [αἰσχρός] for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head” (v. 6b). Apparently in that cultural context, it was just as shameful for a woman not to wear a head covering as it was for her to clip her hair short or shave her head like a man.<sup>33</sup> It is for this reason, Paul argues, that the women of Corinth should not pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered, and by the same token the men should not pray or prophesy with their heads covered. To do so disgraces the head.<sup>34</sup>

This leads directly to the third question in verses 4–6: when a man worships with his head covered and a woman with hers uncovered, does it disgrace their literal head or their “head” as in authority? Both make sense here. On the one hand, to worship God in a way which runs contrary to one’s role based on sex (covered for a man, uncovered for a woman) disgraces the individuals themselves because they are not conducting themselves in accordance with whom God made them and the roles he has assigned them. On the other hand, to behave this way dishonors their authority figure (Christ for the man and man for the woman) because to worship

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<sup>33</sup> As Fee points out, the shame here seems to be related to the women’s becoming like men with regard to their heads, thus blurring sexual distinctions (*First Corinthians*, 511). That we do not know what the head covering actually was, coupled with the cultural element of shame here by which Paul equates an uncovered head with a shorn or shaved head, indicates that Christian women in our culture today need not wear a literal head covering in order to obey Paul here (*ibid.*, 512). Nevertheless, because Paul appeals to the created order and distinct roles of the sexes (vv. 8–9), as well as the very nature of things as God created them (v. 14)—all of which transcend culture—there must be a way for Christian men and women of all times and places to apply Paul’s teaching here. I will suggest at the end how I think this ought to be done.

<sup>34</sup> Alan Ingalls examines head covering practices in the OT and believes that Paul may be drawing upon OT culture and customs in his instruction here in 1 Corinthians 11. Ingalls concludes, “While both men and women wore some kind of cap or headcovering in public, it was as inappropriate for the woman to go about bareheaded as it was for the man to veil himself” (Alan D. Ingalls, “Headcoverings in the Old Testament,” *JMAT* 4, no. 2 [2000]: 51–52).

out of role is to show disrespect toward the one God has placed in authority over them.<sup>35</sup> It is possible that Paul intends both here, making the second use of head in verses 4 and 5 a play on words.

To sum up this section, Paul argues in verses 4–6 that the women of Corinth should worship with covered heads and the men with uncovered heads on the basis of disgrace. It is disgraceful to do otherwise because eliminating the differences in *appearance* between men and women shows a disregard for the differences in *roles* between men and women established by God (v. 3).

### Argument from Honor, vv. 7–10

While Paul's first argument was negative, "do not worship this way because it is disgraceful," his second one is positive, "worship this way because it is honorable." The second argument builds off the former (see explanatory γάρ, v. 7), contains three cascading points, and ends with a concluding assertion (διὰ τοῦτο, v. 10). First, Paul gives a further reason why a man should not worship with his head covered: he is "the image and glory of God" (v. 7a). There is an echo of Genesis 1:27 here and Paul goes on to reference the creation account specifically (vv. 8–9). However, note that Paul does not say the woman is the "image and glory of man."<sup>36</sup> It appears that Paul "values the term image only as leading to the term glory."<sup>37</sup> Upon this term he then builds his argument from honor.

Paul thus uses the word "glory" in the sense of "honor." In verses 14–15 the opposite of "dishonor" is "glory." Therefore, when a man worships God with his head uncovered, he honors God, who is his authority. In contrast, though, "the woman is the glory of man" (v. 7b). In other words, when the woman worships God with her head covered she honors man, who is her authority.

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<sup>35</sup> For a man to cover his head would be to acknowledge some head other than Christ, and for a woman to uncover her head would be to reject her leader who is man (Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1963], 230–31).

<sup>36</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCB (London: Oliphants, 1976), 105.

<sup>37</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 252.

Paul does not specify, but this would hold true whether the case be married women honoring their husbands or women in general honoring their male leadership by worshipping God as women with their heads covered.

Paul's second and third points flow from the first (see explanatory γάρ, vv. 8, 9). The reason woman is to honor man in her worship of God is because of creation: woman came *from* man not vice versa (v. 8; cf. Gen 2:22–23). And further, woman is to honor man because she was created *for* man, not vice versa (v. 9; cf. Gen 2:18). These points are crucial for Paul's overall argument, and they tie in directly with his initial underlying principle: the woman must worship God *as* a woman (in this case covered) because it reflects her relationship to her God-given leader, who is man (v. 3); and God made man her leader when he created her from the man and for the man's sake at the very beginning (vv. 8–9).<sup>38</sup> So when a woman worships God *as* a woman, she not only avoids shaming herself and man who is her leader, she also brings him honor in line with God's original intent of creation.

This leads to a concluding assertion: “Therefore” (διὰ τοῦτο), says Paul, “the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels” (v. 10). In spite of some peculiarities, the best sense of this verse is that Paul is simply repeating his injunction already given to the women of Corinth to worship with their heads covered (cf. vv. 5, 6). Here is where Fee's exegesis veers off. Besides (because of?) his problematic view that “head” in verse 3 means “source” and not “authority” (see above), he explains verse 10 in a way which makes little sense of the context. According to Fee the meaning of verse 10 is this: “For this reason the woman ought to have the freedom over her head to do as she wishes.”<sup>39</sup> Thus Paul is “affirming the ‘freedom’ of women over their own heads.”<sup>40</sup> Of course Fee realizes the problem with this interpretation: “it sounds so contradictory to the point of the argument to this point.”<sup>41</sup> Exactly! So will Fee therefore consider the

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<sup>38</sup> Therefore, “Neither in her origin, nor in the purpose for which she was created, can the woman claim priority” (Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, rev. ed., TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 151).

<sup>39</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 520.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

interpretation which *does* fit the point of the argument? No, he holds to his apparently contradictory interpretation and says “we must beg ignorance.” What he thinks Paul means by verse 10 “remains a mystery.”<sup>42</sup> When a commentator insists on holding an interpretation which he himself admits contradicts the context, one can only conclude that a strongly held pre-commitment is driving his exegesis.

The best sense of the “therefore” (διὰ τοῦτο) in verse 10 is to point backward (cf. similar usage later in v. 30) and conclude what has been just said:<sup>43</sup> for the reasons just given, the woman ought to cover her head when she worships.<sup>44</sup> But there are two peculiarities with what Paul says. First, he does not say the woman “ought to cover her head” as he did in the previous section (vv. 5–6) or as he did of the man’s not covering his head in this section (v. 7), but rather that “the woman ought to have authority on her head” (my translation of ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς). The word “authority” (ἐξουσία) appears earlier in the letter in the sense of “freedom” or “right” (cf. 8:9, 9:4, 5, 6, 12, 18), but we have already seen that this meaning does not make sense here. The word can also mean authority in the sense of “right to control or command.”<sup>45</sup> A number of translations take it this way, with the idea being that the woman’s head covering functions as a symbol of man’s authority over her. Note the following examples (all italics original):

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 521.

<sup>43</sup> Fee takes it as also pointing forward to introduce an affirmation of the woman’s freedom to do with her hair as she pleases, but what sense would this make in light of the previous context? Furthermore, if this were Paul’s intent it would make more sense to introduce such a contrast with a word like πλὴν, “nevertheless.”

<sup>44</sup> One may wonder why Paul is addressing the covering of the head only when one prays or prophesies in the assembly. What about other times and places? As in many cases in this letter, Paul is responding to concrete problems and situations in the church of Corinth which we must try to reconstruct. In this case the most probable scenario is that the women of the church were insisting on the right to participate in corporate worship, specifically praying and prophesying, as the men did, with their heads uncovered. Paul is responding to this situation.

<sup>45</sup> BDAG, 353.

“That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head” (ESV)

“This is why a woman should have [a symbol of] authority on her head” (HCSB)

“Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on her head” (NASB)

“For this reason a woman should have a symbol of authority on her head” (NET)

“For this reason . . . the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head” (NIV)

“For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on *her* head” (NKJV)

“For this reason . . . a woman should wear a covering on her head to show she is under authority” (NLT)

“For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head” (NRSV)

The NET Bible sees two possibilities for the meaning of ἐξουσία here. It may be a figure of speech which substitutes the result (the right to participate in worship) for the appropriate appearance that makes it possible (the head covering). Or it may refer to the outward symbol (the head covering) as representing the inward attitude the woman is to possess (deference to male leadership in the church).<sup>46</sup> Which makes the most sense in the context? The first option certainly affirms something true in this passage: women have the right to participate in corporate worship (pray and prophecy). But is this what Paul is saying in verse 10? It does not seem so for the following reasons.<sup>47</sup>

First, verse 10 rounds out the point started in verse 7 and these two verses are parallel: a man should not wear a head covering (v. 7), but a woman should (v. 10). The “therefore” of verse 10 refers

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<sup>46</sup> The NET Bible, in loc., online version (available at <http://www.bible.org>).

<sup>47</sup> The following points come from Schreiner’s response to M. D. Hooker who champions this first view in “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. xi. 10,” *NTS* 10 (1964): 410–16 (see Schreiner, “Head Coverings,” 135–36).

back to verses 8–9, which explain why a woman should wear a head covering as an expression of her proper role relationship to man. Second, the focus of verse 10 is not freedom but obligation: it describes what the woman ought (ὀφείλει) to do in line with the thrust of the preceding context. Third, understanding verse 10 as a command for the women to wear head coverings fits best with the preceding context, where such a command is clear and repeated (vv. 3–9).

Fourth, the qualification which follows in verse 11 (see below) makes more sense if verse 10 commands the woman to wear a head covering as a symbol of man's authority over her. With the "however" (πλήν) of verse 11 Paul guards against the faulty conclusion that women are somehow inferior to men. This would not make sense if verse 10 is affirming the woman's right to prophesy. Fifth, it is not unusual for something on the head to symbolize something else (cf. crowns in Rev 12:3 and 19:11–12). Sixth, there is an interesting parallel example from Diodorus of Sicily (1.47.5, written c. 60–30 B.C.) of crowns on the head of a woman symbolizing not her authority but the authority of her father, husband, and son who were all kings.<sup>48</sup> Seventh, because the woman "ought" (ὀφείλει) to have "authority" on her head, it makes more sense to identify the authority here as the man's, not woman's.

For all these reasons the second option for understanding the meaning of ἐξουσία in v. 10 is better: Paul uses it for the outward symbol (the head covering) as representing the inward attitude the woman is to possess when she participates in worship (deference to male leadership).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Schreiner, "Head Coverings," 136.

<sup>49</sup> In light of the fact that ἐξουσία appears to be the Corinthians' own word in claiming their rights in Christ (8:9; cf. 6:12, 10:23), it would be rhetorically effective for Paul to use that same word here in 11:10 to remind the women that far from having the "authority" to worship uncovered like men, they should remain covered to demonstrate their being under the "authority" of man. There is one more question from verse 10: What about reference to the angels? First Corinthians contains several other intriguing references to angels (4:9, 6:3, 13:1). Perhaps in their "overrealized eschatology" (Fee, *First Corinthians*, 12) the Corinthians were claiming because of their spiritual position in Christ to already be like the angels—hence, they no longer need marriage or sexual relations (chap 7), with their gift of tongues they speak like the angels (13:1), and they no longer have to bother with sex roles and submission (11:10). But they are not angels; they are men and women with God-given roles to fulfill, and the elect angels them-

To summarize this section, in verses 7–10 Paul furthers his argument with the concept of honor. Because God made woman from man and for man’s sake, man honors God (i.e., his head; cf. v. 3a) when he worships with his head uncovered and woman honors man (i.e., her head; cf. v. 3b) when she worships with her head covered.

### Qualification, vv. 11–12

As we saw earlier, the underlying principle of verse 3 is that there are differences in authority between man and woman (man is the woman’s head, not vice versa). But these differences are not ontological, as if women are essentially inferior to men. No, while there is functional distinction and subordination, there is equality of essence and worth before God. Paul makes this clear in verse 11–12, where he qualifies his argument somewhat to bring out this balance of truth.

Paul sets this qualification off with *πλήν*.<sup>50</sup> “Nevertheless,” says Paul, neither man nor woman is “without” (*χωρίς*) the other (v. 11). Furthermore, Paul adds, just as the woman originates from the man (cf. v. 8) so also the man now gets his life through woman, “and all things originate from God” (v. 12). Two important points are worth noting here. First, Paul acknowledges a certain interdependency and equality between men and women in spite of their different roles. They need each other to exist, literally. Second, Paul places men and women on equal footing before the Lord. It is “in the Lord” that they both have equal value and “from God” that they both receive their existence. Subordination in roles does *not* indicate inferiority of essence or worth before God. In *this sense* of essence and worth there is equality between the sexes.<sup>51</sup>

Other Scriptures bear out the ontological equality of men and women and their equal standing before the Lord. Regarding ontol-

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selves are concerned to observe the Corinthians maintaining God’s created order.

<sup>50</sup> This adverb is used as a conjunction to mark something “that is contrastingly added for consideration” (BDAG, 826).

<sup>51</sup> Paul touched on another aspect of this equality earlier in this same letter: in the bond of marriage the husband and wife have equal authority over each other’s body as it relates to meeting each other’s sexual needs (1 Cor 7:4).

ogy, both men and women were created in God's image (Gen 1:27). As it relates to worth, men and women are spiritual equals and spiritually one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Furthermore, men and women are fellow heirs of the grace of eternal life (1 Pet 3:7). In spite of the persistent denial of evangelical feminists, different and even subordinating roles between men and women does *not* mean women are inferior in essence or worth. Just as between the persons of the Trinity (v. 3), so also between men and women, there is *both* essential equality *and* functional distinction and subordination.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Rebecca Merrill Groothuis presents a theological and logical argument against the concept of role distinctions between men and women (“Equal in Being, Unequal in Role”: Exploring the Logic of Woman’s Subordination,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, 301–33). Her argument against this construct is that: (1) it contradicts the theological principle of the spiritual and ontological equality of men and women; and (2) it violates the law of non-contradiction. Her second point actually undergirds the first: if it is logically impossible for women to be both ontologically equal yet functionally subordinate to men, and the Bible teaches that men and women are ontological equals, then the Bible *cannot possibly* teach the functional subordination of women. Of course complementarians say it does, egalitarian logic notwithstanding. But what should we make of Groothuis’s assertion that “equal in being, unequal in role” is unbiblical and a logical impossibility? It fails on two counts. First, the “equal in being, unequal in role” construct does not violate the law of non-contradiction. The law states that A and non-A cannot both be true at the same time in the same respect. But complementarians do not claim that men and women are both ontologically equal (A) and ontologically unequal (non-A), or that they are both equal in role (A) and unequal in role (non-A). Second, Groothuis’s argument rests finally on the opinion that the functional subordination of women is bad because it makes them “inferior.” It is not and it does not. Submission to proper authority according to Scripture is a good thing. Groothuis would not claim that submission on other counts besides gender (ability, giftedness) is also bad because it makes people “inferior.” But why not? What is the difference? Do not ability and giftedness also have to do with “who we are”? God has made all of us ontologically and spiritually equal and yet has assigned us different roles based on various factors such as gender, ability, and giftedness. A woman’s submission to her husband no more indicates her inferiority than a man’s submission to his pastor indicates his. And both are deemed to be good by God. The issue in the end is not whether the construct “equal in being, unequal in role” is logical or biblical, for it is both. The issue is, granting the validity of the construct, can we accept it and live by it?

### Argument from Nature, vv. 13–15

Paul follows up the qualification (vv. 11–12) with a final argument for why a woman should cover her head when she worships. He asks the Corinthians to judge for themselves: is it proper (πρέπον) for a woman to worship God with her head uncovered (v. 13)? This is a rhetorical question. Paul is not entertaining different answers here. By the question Paul is declaring its propriety. And why is it proper? Similar to his appeal to creation earlier (vv. 8–9) Paul points here to “nature itself,” that is, to the “regular or established order of things” (φύσις).<sup>53</sup> Like a schoolmaster the created order itself gives the instruction (διδάσκει), says Paul, that long hair is a dishonor to a man but an honor (δόξα) to a woman. This is because “her hair is given to her for a covering” (vv. 14–15).

God has created men and women different in more ways than one. We can see that he has created them to *look* different—their heads being one obvious way. So why does Paul say that long hair dishonors a man? Because it makes him look like a woman! Why does he say that long hair honors a woman? Because she *is* one! Because God *made* men and women different, they should *reflect* the difference in their appearance when they come together to worship him. In the case of Corinth the different appearance is the man’s uncovered head and the woman’s covered head. By maintaining this difference of appearance, the Corinthians would acknowledge and show their respect for God’s created order and roles for men and women.

### Conclusion, v. 16

Paul closes this section with an appeal to custom. If after all he has said, any (τις) of them want to be quarrelsome or contentious (φιλόνηκος) about it, “we have no other practice,” Paul concludes (v. 16a). The word for practice here (συνήθειαν) indicates custom, habit, or usage.<sup>54</sup> Those who would resist Paul’s teaching that the women of Corinth should cover their heads when they worship need to know they would be going against the practiced custom of the apostolic leadership (“we”). Furthermore, their behavior would run counter to the practice of all “the churches of God” (v. 16b).

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<sup>53</sup> BDAG, 1070.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 971.

I will defer the application of this passage until after consideration of 14:34–35. Nevertheless, there are five important observations to point out from this passage. First, the conclusion is inescapable that Paul is commanding the women of Corinth to wear a head covering when they pray and prophesy during corporate worship. Second, because Paul bases his directives on relations within the Godhead and God’s created order, which transcend culture, there must be a universal application of this passage for the church today. Third, Paul also appeals to shame and custom, which are culture-sensitive, which means there must be a cultural element in this passage which may or may not be applicable for the church today. Fourth, while he maintains distinct roles for men and women, Paul also affirms their equality of essence and worth before God. Fifth and last, by regulating the attire and not the actions of the women of Corinth, Paul implicitly endorses their participation in corporate worship through prayer and prophecy. We will return to these observations later when I integrate this passage with 14:34–35 and apply the teaching of both passages to the church today.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 14:34–35: CLARIFICATION ON WOMEN AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS**

To repeat a point made earlier regarding context, in 1 Corinthians 11–14 Paul addresses three matters of appropriate Christian worship: the conduct of women (11:2–16), observation of the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34), and exercising of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40) in their gatherings for corporate worship. Thus the second passage of this study, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, appears toward the end of Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts.

With chapter 12 Paul offers first a general word regarding spiritual gifts, touching on the criterion (vv. 1–3) and diversity (vv. 4–31) of spiritual gifts. Chapter 13 comprises a theological interlude regarding spiritual gifts and the importance of love. In chapter 14 Paul comes back to regulate the use of spiritual gifts, particularly tongues. Paul stresses the need for intelligibility (vv. 1–25) and the need for order (vv. 26–40).

In the section on order Paul exhorts that all be done for edification (v. 26). Then Paul regulates the gifts of tongues (vv. 27–28) and prophecy (vv. 29–31). Finally Paul admonishes the church: order is *possible* because prophets can control themselves (v. 32);

and order is *necessary* because God is not a God of confusion but of peace, “as in all the churches of the saints” (v. 33).

The focus of our attention here is verses 34–35, where Paul makes a clarification. In doing this Paul returns to the same general subject dealt with in chapter 11, namely, the participation of women in the assembly. However, while in chapter 11 Paul regulates the manner of their participation, here he seems to abolish it altogether. In these verses Paul gives a command, presents a contrasting directive, deals with a concession, and then offers a concluding charge.

### **The Command, v. 34a–b**

The command Paul gives is actually twofold. First, Paul directs that the women are to keep silent in the churches (v. 34a). The verb translated “keep silent,” σιγάω, is rather straightforward and simply means to be silent or to not speak.<sup>55</sup> Second, by way of further explanation (note the explanatory γάρ), Paul states that it is not permitted (οὐ . . . ἐπιτρέπεται) for the women to speak (v. 34b). The verb for “speak” here, λαλέω, expresses the opposite of σιγάω. The twofold command is really one: the women are to keep silent in the churches and not speak.

### **The Contrast, v. 34c**

Paul follows up that twofold command with a contrasting directive: rather than speaking (note the adversative ἀλλά), the women are to “subject themselves” or “be in subjection” (ὑποτασσέσθωσαν). Furthermore, this subjection is “just as the Law also says.” The NASB translators capitalize ὁ νόμος (“the Law”) to reflect their judgment that Paul has the OT Scriptures in mind. I believe their judgment is correct. Paul appeals to “the Law” in this sense earlier in verse 21. But what OT passage is Paul referring to here? A good case can be made for Genesis 2:20–24 since he references this passage on two occasions when addressing the roles of women in the church (1 Cor 11:8–9; 1 Tim 2:13).<sup>56</sup> So the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 922.

<sup>56</sup> D. A. Carson, “Silent in the Churches”: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 152. See also Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 136.

contrast Paul sets up in verse 34 is between speaking in the churches (what the women are not permitted to do) and being in submission (what they are to do).

### The Concession, v. 35a

In verse 35a Paul concedes that the women will desire (θέλωσιν) to learn (μαθεῖν) and therefore would want to speak out. However, instead of speaking out they are to “ask their own husbands at home.” This seems to indicate that Paul has in mind at least in part married women in Corinth who instead of speaking out in the assembly need to be in submission.

### The Conclusion, v. 35b

Paul’s concluding reason (see explanatory γάρ) for his instruction in verses 34–35 is that “it is improper for a woman to speak in church” (v. 35b). The word NASB translates “improper” (αἰσχρόν) is the same word Paul used in 11:6 (cf. verb form in v. 5) when he said it was “disgraceful” for a woman to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered. According to Paul, for women to speak in church and not be in submission is “morally unacceptable.”<sup>57</sup>

## INTEGRATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34–35 WITH 11:2–16

It is one thing to analyze the meaning of 14:34–35, which seems rather straightforward. The problem comes when we try to integrate it with 11:2–16. How can Paul order the women of Corinth to keep silent in the assembly and not speak when earlier he speaks of their praying and prophesying in church?<sup>58</sup> But this problem only follows if we think Paul’s prohibition in chapter 14 is *absolute*: no speaking in church whatsoever, period.<sup>59</sup> There are

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<sup>57</sup> BDAG, 29.

<sup>58</sup> The mention of a psalm in 14:26 may also assume the participation of women in singing (Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 512).

<sup>59</sup> John W. Robbins takes the passage this way, holding as “the plain meaning of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14” that women “are not to speak aloud before the congregation, even to ask questions in a church meeting, for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (*Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries: Part I: Feminism* [Jefferson, MD.: The Trinity Foundation, 1985], 10). I thank Rod Decker for bringing this example to my attention.

four options if we take it this way, but none of them is very good (see fig. 2). First, one could say that Paul simply contradicts himself between chapters 11 and 14. Apart from any bearing on the doctrine of Scripture, could Paul really contradict himself so brazenly (or foolishly) in the space of only a few pages?<sup>60</sup>

Second, one could claim with Fee that Paul did not write 14:34–35 but they were added by some later editor who probably knew 1 Timothy 2:9–15 and felt the need to qualify Paul’s instructions even further.<sup>61</sup> But Fee proceeds on the assumption that 14:34–35 gives an absolute prohibition and therefore “[stands] in obvious contradiction to 11:2–16”<sup>62</sup> So 14:34–35 cannot be authentic because Paul could not make such an obvious mistake.<sup>63</sup> Apparently Fee has no trouble thinking a later editor could do the deed. As for the text critical issue, Carson examines Fee’s appeals to transcriptional and intrinsic probabilities and concludes that neither appeal “is very convincing. With all respect to a brother whose text-critical prowess is far greater than my own, his arguments in this case sound a bit like the application of a first-class mind to the defense of a remarkably weak position.”<sup>64</sup>

Third, one could claim that Paul does not condone the praying and prophesying of women when he regulates their behavior in chapter 11. Paul reluctantly concedes the behavior to those who cannot submit to the absolute prohibition of chapter 14.<sup>65</sup> But chap-

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<sup>60</sup> Carson, “Silent in the Churches,” 146.

<sup>61</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 705. Fee bases his view on the fact that verses 34–35 are located after verse 40 in some manuscripts. He believes on the basis of Bengel’s first principle of transcriptional probability that the insertion of these verses by a later editor best explains the fact that some manuscripts have them after verse 40 and not after verse 33 as the majority do (Ibid., 699).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 702.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 706.

<sup>64</sup> Carson, “Silent in the Churches,” 145. According to Metzger the textual variant is attributable to a scribal alteration: at some point someone transposed verse 34–35 to follow verse 40 in an attempt “to find a more appropriate location in the context for Paul’s directive concerning women” (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. [New York: American Bible Society, 1994], 499).

<sup>65</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: The Christian’s Special Gifts in the Light of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 230–31, cited in Carson, “Silent in the Churches,” 488n15. Charles C.

ter 11 offers no evidence of reluctant concession. Paul appears to have no problem with the women praying and prophesying in the assembly; his problem is with their doing so with their heads uncovered.

Fourth, one could claim that the women were not praying and prophesying in the context of corporate worship in chapter 11, but rather privately.<sup>66</sup> But the context of chapter 11 seems to indicate matters of corporate concern. In 11:2 Paul refers to the traditions, or the content of Christian instruction, which he had delivered to them earlier. Then in verse 16 he speaks of the practice, or custom, of God's churches. Together these verses seem to indicate that the behavior is a corporate church matter. Furthermore, the next section (vv. 17–34), which is parallel to this one, is clearly a corporate matter (the Lord's Supper).<sup>67</sup>

None of these options which assume an absolute prohibition in 14:34–35 is satisfactory. Is it possible that Paul's prohibition is *not* absolute, but relative? I believe so and the evidence supports it. Two other times in chapter 14 Paul uses the same verb for “keep silent” (σιγάω) that he uses in verse 34. In verse 28 Paul says that a tongues speaker must “keep silent in the church” if there is no interpreter. Notice the silence here is not absolute: only if there is no interpreter present must the tongues speaker keep silent; otherwise, he may speak in the tongue for the edification of the church (vv. 26–27). Then in verse 30 Paul commands a prophet to “keep silent” if another prophet receives a revelation. Again, the prohibition is not absolute: only if and when another prophet receives a revelation must the first prophet keep silent so that all the prophets may prophesy one by one and all may learn and be exhorted (v. 31).

But is there any evidence that the prohibition of verse 34 is not absolute? Yes, there is. As I pointed out earlier, the contrast in verse 34 is between speaking in the churches and being in submis-

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Ryrie also takes this position (*The Ryrie Study Bible* [Chicago: Moody, 1978], in loc.).

<sup>66</sup> See Carson, “Silent in the Churches,” 488n14 for some sources which take this view.

<sup>67</sup> Reacting to options three and four, Barrett insists, “Only special pleading ... can deny that chapter xi concedes the right of women (suitably clothed) to pray and prophesy in a public meeting of the church (*First Corinthians*, 331).

sion. Therefore, Paul is not prohibiting *all* speaking by women in church, but only *certain* speaking that would indicate a failure to be in submission (see fig. 2). What kind of speaking could that be? Some surmise that Paul is prohibiting noisy disruptions during church.<sup>68</sup> But if mere disruption were the problem, why single out the women? Were there no disruptive men? Paul must have some other kind of speaking in mind which specifically pertains to women and is related to their being in subjection.<sup>69</sup>

The best solution is to look to the preceding context. Paul has just offered regulations regarding the exercising of the gifts of tongues and prophecy (vv. 27–33). More specifically, he has directed that two or three prophets speak and that “others pass judgment” (v. 29). “Pass judgment” (διακρίνω) is the verb for “distinguishing of spirits” (διάκρισις πνευμάτων) in 12:10. This gift operated in conjunction with the gift of prophecy so that those possessing it could carefully weigh and pass judgment upon prophetic pronouncements. Paul is not commanding the women to not speak in church at all, for they may pray and prophesy in the assembly (chap. 11). Rather, they may not judge the pronouncements of the prophets for this would place them in a position of authority over the male leadership of the church.<sup>70</sup> Some of the women may have been married and were sitting in judgment over the prophetic

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<sup>68</sup> See Keener, “Learning in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35,” 164–65; Dan Mitchell, *The Book of First Corinthians*, Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary Series (Chattanooga: AMG, 2004), 202. Mitchell does accept the possibility that the judging of prophecy might be in view.

<sup>69</sup> The reason Paul gives for his instructions here are the OT Law and the principle of submission, not a problem with noisy women (Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* [Sisters, OR.: Multnomah, 2004], 246–47). Carson deals with and refutes several lesser possibilities for understanding verses 34–35 such as ascribing them to the Corinthians themselves (see “Silent in the Churches,” 147–51).

<sup>70</sup> This is not unlike what Paul later does in 1 Timothy 2:11–12, where his injunction for women to learn in silence (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ) is likewise not an absolute prohibition of speech. Rather, they are to be submissive to the male leadership of the church. They are not allowed to teach or exercise authority over a man and in this sense must “remain quiet” (εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ). Thus in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12 the prohibition against women speaking in church is not absolute but relative to their need to be in submission to the male leadership of the church. That submission to men entails in the first case not judging their prophecies and in the second case not teaching them.

speech of their own husbands, or perhaps were constantly intervening with questions under the guise of sifting their husbands' words (14:35a).<sup>71</sup> But it is shameful (v. 35b) for a woman to judge prophecy, for it places her in the role of the man, just as it is shameful (11:6) for her to worship with her head uncovered like a man.<sup>72</sup>

This understanding of Paul's prohibition in chapter 14 makes the most sense. It takes the prohibition as relative and not absolute in harmony with the teaching of chapter 11. It sees the prohibition as relative to the need for the women of the church to be in submission. It looks to the context to find the most plausible way in which the women needed to be silent in relation to submission to male leadership in the church.<sup>73</sup> First Corinthians 14:34–35 immediately

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<sup>71</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1152–53.

<sup>72</sup> The very fact that 1 Corinthians contains these two corrective passages in chapters 11 and 14 indicates that the women of Corinth were seemingly attempting to cast off male-female distinctions in appearance as well as role (perhaps because of a misunderstanding of the principle of equality of spiritual status in Christ) and insisting on the right to look and function like men in the assembly. Paul forbids them to do both. It is interesting to note that Paul gives the same threefold rationale for his instructions in chapters 11 and 14: (1) an appeal to the created order; (2) the disgrace of contravening it; and (3) the universal practice of the churches (Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 287).

<sup>73</sup> Fee offers four strikes against this interpretation of the prohibition: (1) it faces the “extreme difficulty” of being so remote from verse 29; (2) “nothing in the passage itself even remotely hints of such a thing”; (3) verse 35a seems to indicate not judging but failing to understand what is going on at all; and (4) it makes that which is lesser (discerning prophecies) “more significant than prophecy itself” (*First Corinthians*, 704). In response, Fee shows that he cannot countenance the interpretation even before he considers it. He describes the interpretation as implying that weighing prophecies would put the women “in the ‘unbiblical’ position of sitting in authority over” the men (*ibid.*). Notice the bias against the interpretation at the outset. Does not verse 34 itself say that the women are to be in submission? Oh yes, but Paul did not write that verse, says Fee! And we have already seen how Fee gets around the teaching of chapter 11 on the submission of women to male leadership. As for Fee's specific arguments above: (1) verse 29 is not that remote from verse 34; Paul simply ties up the section on prophecy before giving this final directive to the women; (2) verse 34 states the women are to not speak but be in subjection, which can easily be connected to the authoritative role of judging prophecies; (3) verse 35b indicates that the women are to ask and learn at home and not orally judge prophecies in the assembly; and finally (4) to pronounce judgment upon prophecy indeed does place a person in a position of authority and leadership in the church. We see an example of this in Acts 15, where Peter,

follows a section on the evaluation of prophets, further refines that discussion, and therefore does not disrupt the general flow of the argument in chapters 12–14. I therefore agree with Carson that “no other interpretation of these disputed verses ... so neatly fits the flow of the argument.”<sup>74</sup>

## **THE NATURE OF PAUL’S PROHIBITION IN I CORINTHIANS 14:34-35**

### **Absolute Prohibition**

\*Paul contradicts himself in chapters 11 and 14; but would or could Paul really ignore or forget what he had written earlier?

\*Paul did not write 14:34-35, a later editor inserted it; but there is no manuscript support for this conjecture.

\*11:5 does not condone women praying and prophesying in church; but then why regulate a banned activity?

\*11:5 was not taking place in church; but 11:2, 16 seem to set the context in church activity.

### **Relative Prohibition**

\*Paul prohibits not all talking of women but just their noisy disruptions during church; but what about noisy men?

\*Paul prohibits women’s passing judgment on other prophets (cf v. 29); this is similar to I Tim. 2:11-12 and women’s being quiet in the sense of not teaching or having authority over men.

Several important points bear repeating from this passage regarding women in the church of Corinth. First, Paul’s prohibition against the women speaking in church is not absolute. Second, Paul

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Barnabas, and Paul give testimony (vv. 7–12) and James, brother of Jesus and pillar of the church, passes judgment (vv. 13–21).

<sup>74</sup> Carson, “Silent in the Churches,” 152.

connects the prohibition to the need to be in submission on the basis of the OT Scriptures. Third, the clearest contextual indicator of a relevant example of speaking is the judging of prophecy. Fourth and finally, then, Paul prohibits the women from passing judgment when prophets prophesy in church, for this would place them in authority over and not in submission to the church's male leadership. With the study of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and 14:34–35 in place, I will now conclude this paper with points of application from both texts for the church today.

### **APPLICATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2–16 AND 14:34–35 TO THE CHURCH TODAY**

The conclusion is inescapable that in 11:2–16 Paul is commanding the women of Corinth to wear a head covering when they pray and prophesy during corporate worship. But since Paul argues in part on the basis of norm (for the Corinthian women an uncovered head was as shameful as short hair) and custom, which are culture-sensitive, I conclude with most evangelicals that Christian women in our society need not wear a head covering in church in order to obey Paul here. However, since Paul also argues on the basis of relations within the Godhead and God's created order, which transcend culture, there must be a universal application of this passage for the church today. What is it? Paul's basic point is that the sexes ought to be distinct in appearance as a reflection of God's created order and authority structure. Schreiner applies this to dress and concludes that "both men and women today should dress so that they do not look like the opposite sex. Confusion of the sexes is contrary to the God-given sense that the sexes are distinct."<sup>75</sup> I agree with the point on principle, but Paul is not talking about clothing styles here, but the head.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, I believe the primary application of this passage is that men and women should wear their hair in a style befitting their sex, which will generally mean shorter for men and longer for women.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Schreiner, "Head Coverings," 138.

<sup>76</sup> Distinct clothing style is a secondary application of this passage. Appropriate dress is a primary application of 1 Timothy 2:9–10 and 1 Peter 3:3–4.

<sup>77</sup> One might want a more concise definition, but long and short are broad categories with cultural norms once again coming into play. Thus I

As for the participation of women in corporate worship, Paul does not forbid it. He permits it on the basis of women's equality of essence and worth before God. As for the specific speech Paul mentions, I do not believe men *or* women exercise the gift of prophecy today.<sup>78</sup> The gift of prophecy was revelatory and functioned during the foundation-laying stage of the church during the apostolic era (Eph 2:20; 3:5). The NT apostles and prophets delivered the body of gospel truth to the church "once for all" (Jude 3). When the revelation was complete the revelatory gifts ceased.<sup>79</sup> There is no contemporary application for the church today regarding prophecy.<sup>80</sup>

Prayer, on the other hand, is certainly an activity for all believers at all times. According to this passage women may certainly participate in corporate prayer. Are there other appropriate ways

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conclude that distinct hair styles will *generally* mean shorter hair for men and longer for women, leaving room for individuality and Christian liberty. Practically speaking I often put it this way: if after seeing the back of a head I discover that I have mistaken a man for a woman or vice versa, I have to wonder whether the person has taken to heart the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11.

<sup>78</sup> I am assuming here for the sake of argument a cessationist position. For an able defense see Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "A Cessationist View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 25–64.

<sup>79</sup> But what about the women of Corinth who prophesied? Did that not make them leaders in the church? No, for prophecy was not a leadership gift. As Alan Ingalls points out from the account of Miriam in Numbers 12, the fact that she was a prophetess did *not* make her a leader in Israel. "Prophetic authority was strictly limited to the scope of revelation" and the fact that Miriam was a prophetess "did not grant [her] any additional authority or position" (Alan D. Ingalls, "Women and the Work of God in the Pentateuch" Part Three of a faculty chapel series: *Women Pastors and the Word of God*, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, 4 December 2007).

<sup>80</sup> Grudem attempts to argue for a two-tiered understanding for NT prophecy whereby the offering of upper-level infallible authoritative prophecies ceased with the apostolic era while the offering of lower-level fallible non-authoritative prophecies is ongoing in the church today (see Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* [Lanham, MD.: U of America, 1982]; Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* [Westchester, IL.: Crossway, 1988]; and Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 1049–61). But this interpretation of NT prophecy does not hold up to close scrutiny (for a refutation see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, *Contours of Christian Theology* [Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1996], 214–21).

for women to speak in corporate church gatherings? Wayne House asks,

Does the Biblical model preclude a woman from giving her testimony in a church meeting or offering the Scripture reading, or making announcements, or leading songs, or offering a public prayer? These questions can be answered with another question: Are any of these ministries an expression of authoritative elder-like teaching over men? Probably not, and thus they should not be excluded from the ministry opportunities afforded qualified women of God.<sup>81</sup>

Other examples one could offer are presenting special music, performing drama, translating sermons and lessons from another language into the language of the congregation, and participation in corporate church gatherings such as business meetings.

Moving on to 14:34–35, if there is no prophecy in the church today, and consequently no judging of prophecies, there does not seem to be any direct application of this passage for women in the church today. But if we think in terms of secondary application, we might say by principle that any speaking by women in church needs to be in accordance with their submission to male leadership. Any speaking that would place women in a position of teaching or having authority over men would not be allowed.

We may affirm the speaking participation of women in the corporate gatherings of the church. However, on the basis of biblical teaching they should speak in ways not contrary to the principle of male leadership, out of an attitude of the heart which is submissive to male leadership, and in appearance befitting them as women of God.

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<sup>81</sup> H. Wayne House, “Principles to Use in Establishing Women in Ministry,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 361.