

### CHAPTER IX 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

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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).<sup>78</sup> 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.

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<sup>78</sup> Some confuse this concept with Arianism, 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.

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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,<sup>79</sup>

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).<sup>80</sup>

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.

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<sup>79</sup> “1 Cor. 11:2-16—A Re-investigation,” pages 208-210, published in Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, page 210, footnote 79.

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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.<sup>81</sup> 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.

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<sup>81</sup> 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.

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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 re-established, 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

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not subjected to men in general.<sup>82</sup> And if men are to rule women, just what is the extent and nature of this kind of headship? Does it 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.<sup>83</sup>

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.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, finding “leadership” in contrast to “rule” in the New Testament is a 21st Century bias not found in scripture.

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<sup>82</sup> (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.’”

<sup>83</sup> Theological term meaning to extract truth from scripture rather than reading our biases into scripture.

<sup>84</sup> 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

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**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

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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.

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subordination of women (except in the sense that all Christians are to be in submission to all other Christians).<sup>85</sup>

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.<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup> And a portrait is a representation of what? A

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<sup>85</sup> Eph. 5:21.

<sup>86</sup> See also 1 Cor. 15:49. “Likeness” in the NIV translates *eikon*, translated “image” in 1 Cor. 11.

<sup>87</sup> “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.

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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.<sup>88</sup>

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:

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<sup>88</sup> The same thought is found in Deut. 5:4, "The LORD spoke to you *face to face* out of the fire on the mountain."

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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

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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.<sup>89</sup>

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.

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<sup>89</sup> 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).

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**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.

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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

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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.<sup>90</sup> The Jews formed the core of many, if not most, congregations at the time 1 Corinthians was written,<sup>91</sup> 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

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<sup>90</sup> Black, *ibid*, page 204.

<sup>91</sup> 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.

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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).<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> 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.

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<sup>92</sup> 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.

<sup>93</sup> 2 Cor. 3:7-18.

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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:

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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*<sup>94</sup>—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.

**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.

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<sup>94</sup> “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.

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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 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.<sup>95</sup> 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.

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<sup>95</sup> Mark 7:10-13.

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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!