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MINISTRIES

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Head Coverings (1 Corinthians 11) - Part 1

In 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul gives an unusual instruction to the Corinthian church regarding how they should pray and prophesy. Here is what he says:

1 Corinthians 11:4-5

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.

What does Paul mean by this? Is he saying that men should not wear hats? Is he saying that women need to wear something on their heads? What does this have to do with praying and prophesying? And why does Paul talk about hair length both here and later in this chapter?

In order to evaluate these verses, we’re going to look at some of the major contextual themes of 1 Corinthians 11. That’s what part 1 of this teaching will mainly be focusing on. Then, in part 2, we will evaluate three different ideas about how to interpret verses 4 and 5, and discuss how this passage of scripture can be applied to our lives today.

The major themes from chapter 11 that we will be examining are:

- 1) Tradition
- 2) Headship
- 3) Dishonor
- 4) The Image and Glory of God, and
- 5) Hair Length

We'll start by looking at the first one of these themes: *tradition*.

1 Corinthians 11:1-2

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you.

Paul commends the Corinthian church for maintaining the traditions that he delivered to them. The Greek word for “tradition” is *paradosis*. *Paradosis* is frequently used in a negative context, because in many places it refers to the traditions of the Pharisees (Mark 7:8) or even the traditions of pagans (Colossians 2:8). These traditions are not the same as the commands of God, and both Yeshua and Paul rebuke those who value man’s traditions more than God’s own word. However, *paradosis* is used in a positive way when referring to the traditions of the apostles. In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to imitate him in his tradition of working to provide for himself (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Just one chapter earlier, Paul said to obey the traditions that the apostles taught (2 Thessalonians 2:15-17). So, according to Paul, traditions are not bad; in fact, they can be very good, so long as they do not supersede God’s word.

Here in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul seems to be establishing that he is about to discuss a tradition—one that involves covering or uncovering one’s head. There is no other scripture that commands what men and women should wear on their heads, so the term “tradition” is fitting here. What Paul is about to discuss is not a commandment from God, but it is a commendable apostolic tradition.

Historically, it was a second-century Jewish tradition for married women to cover their heads. Here is how the Talmud describes it:

The mishna stated: And who is considered a woman who violates the precepts of Jewish women? One who goes out and her head is uncovered. The Gemara asks: The prohibition against a woman going out with her head uncovered is not merely a custom of Jewish women. Rather, it is by Torah law, as it is written with regard to a woman suspected by her husband of having been unfaithful: “And he shall uncover the head of the woman” (Numbers 5:18). And the school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: From here there is a warning to Jewish women not to go out with an uncovered head, since if the Torah states that a woman suspected of adultery must have her head uncovered, this indicates that a married woman must generally cover her head.

-*Ketubot* 72a:19, translation from *The William Davidson Talmud* (www.sefaria.org)

(see also: *Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 35:5)

Now, we don’t know for sure if this tradition dates back to the first century, when 1 Corinthians was written. Rabbi Yishmael, who is referenced in the quote we just gave, lived in the second century (www.jewishencyclopedia.com). He claims that this tradition goes all the way back to Moses or before, but the logic he uses to support that claim is flawed. He says, “if the Torah states that a woman suspected of adultery must have her head uncovered, this indicates that a married woman must generally cover her head.” But, this is not necessarily true. Just because the woman accused of adultery in Numbers 5 must appear before the priest with her head uncovered, that does not imply that she would normally keep it covered. It only indicates that it may not be covered during that particular procedure.

Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to think that Jewish women in the first century may have had a head-covering tradition. This tradition could very well be what Paul is referring to when he says that women should cover their heads when they pray. Of course, there are other ideas about what this tradition may be, and we will discuss those ideas more in part 2 of this teaching. In any case, 1 Corinthians 11 does seem to be describing a tradition of some kind.

The next theme in this passage is *headship*. Here is how Paul describes it in verse 3:

1 Corinthians 11:3

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

So, Paul establishes a chain of headship: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and a man is the head of his wife. This passage parallels another of Paul's writings in Ephesians chapter 5:

Ephesians 5:22-23

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Why does Paul draw this analogy between Christ's headship over the church and a man's headship over his wife? Well, here in Ephesians, it's because he teaches that husbands and wives should submit to authority, and emulate Christ. Their marriage relationship should look like the relationship between Christ and the church. The man should love his wife like Christ loves the church, and the wife should submit to her husband like the church submits to Christ. Here it is in Paul's own words:

Ephesians 5:24-33

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

In Ephesians, Paul equates the husband's behavior with Christ, and the wife's behavior with the church, but if we incorporate his comments from 1 Corinthians, we can see how both man and woman emulate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:3 says that "the head of Christ is God." So, Christ submits to his head (see 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; John 8:26-29, 54-55; Philippians 2:8), and both men and women should submit to their heads. They should both emulate Christ by obeying those who have authority over them, and showing love to those that they have authority over. Yeshua describes this very thing in the gospel of John:

John 15:9-10

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

So, when Paul mentioned this headship in Ephesians, the point he was making was that a husband and wife should emulate Christ's behavior. Perhaps he is bringing up the headship issue in 1 Corinthians 11 for a similar reason.

Another thing to note is that, in 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul defines what a "head" is. He says that a man's head is Christ, and that a woman's head is her husband. So, when he says that a man should not pray or prophesy with his head covered, this could be referring to Christ, rather than to his physical head. Likewise, when he says that a woman should not pray with her head uncovered, this could be referring to her husband rather than her physical head. It seems strange that Paul would define what a "head" is in verse 3, and then use the term "head" to mean something different in verses 4 and 5. We will look at this more closely in part 2; for now, we will note that the idea of headship and authority is important to what he is teaching.

Continuing with this theme, we arrive at verses 4 and 5:

1 Corinthians 11:4-5

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.

Why does Paul mention praying and prophesying here? Other scriptures do not give any indication of what we should wear when we pray or prophesy. The Scriptures do say that prayer should be accompanied by faith and righteousness (Proverbs 28:9; 15:29; Isaiah 1:15; James 1:5-8). Likewise, they say that prophecies should be true and inspired by God (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). They have nothing to say about the clothes that a person is wearing while he prays or prophesies. However, Peter mentions something interesting about prayer that may be relevant:

1 Peter 3:7

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Peter says that the way a person treats his spouse can "hinder" his prayers. The rest of 1 Peter 3 contains similar themes to Ephesians 5; it mentions the husband's headship (vv. 1 & 5), how the wife should respect her husband (vv. 5 & 6), and how the husband should love his wife (v. 7). So, 1 Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 all seem to be focusing on these principles of headship and proper husband-wife relations. Since these passages have similar contexts, Paul's mention of prayer in 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 might have the same reason as Peter's in 1 Peter 3:7. That is to say, the thing that affects prayer and prophecy—covering or uncovering one's head—seems to have something to do with the husband-wife relationship.

For more on the topic of Biblical headship in marriage, we recommend our teaching, Marriage Authority.

Moving on to the next theme, what does it mean for a person to “dishonor” his head? As we mentioned, verse 3 defines what the “head” is; for the man, his head is Christ, and for the woman, her head is her husband. It’s possible that the “head” that is covered or uncovered in verses 4 and 5 is a physical head, but it is most likely that the “head” that is dishonored in verses 4 and 5 is not a physical head. The dishonored head is most likely a reference to Christ in verse 4, and to the woman’s husband in verse 5. So, the man is dishonoring Christ, and the woman is dishonoring her husband, rather than dishonoring their physical heads.

Why is this interpretation most likely? Because the term “dishonor” (Greek *kataischuno*) means to discredit or humiliate. This term is used to describe what Yeshua did to the Pharisees when he showed the flaws in their doctrine (Luke 13:14-17). Also, when Paul bragged about the Corinthian church later, he said that they did *not* dishonor him (2 Corinthians 7:13-14). That is, they did not humiliate nor discredit Paul, but they showed that what he said about them was true. When we apply this definition to “dishonoring” one’s head, it’s hard to imagine how a body part could be humiliated or discredited. You could no more discredit your physical head than discredit your foot or your elbow. However, a person—Christ or a husband—can certainly be humiliated or discredited. This seems to be what Paul is getting at when he mentions dishonoring one’s head.

So how does Paul describe this dishonoring or humiliation? In the woman’s case, he compares it to her head being shaved. He says, “[every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.](#)” The only other scriptural reference to a woman with a shaved head comes from Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 21:10-14

[When you go out to war against your enemies, and the LORD \[YHWH\] your God gives them into your hand and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire to take her to be your wife, and you bring her home to your house, she shall shave her head and pare her nails. And she shall take off the clothes in which she was captured and shall remain in your house and lament her father and her mother a full month. After that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. But if you no longer delight in her, you shall let her go where she wants. But you shall not sell her for money, nor shall you treat her as a slave, since you have humiliated her.](#)

So, this passage describes a situation in which a foreign woman has been captured in war. She is no longer under her parents’ authority, and she does not have a husband. It’s possible that this lack of headship is why her head is shaved, though the text does not tell us why exactly this is done. It also mentions here that she is “humiliated;” again, this humiliation could be a reference to her lack of headship.

If it is true that a lack of headship is what is being discussed in Deuteronomy 21, then there would be a logical connection to 1 Corinthians 11. If a woman is dishonoring her spiritual head, then that is similar to being a captive woman who has lost her spiritual head. This would explain how the woman who dishonors her head is like the woman whose head is shaved. Both of them are lacking a spiritual head. If this is the point of the analogy of the shaved head, then it stands to reason that the woman in 1 Corinthians 11:5 is disrespecting her husband in some way.

How about the man in verse 4? How is he dishonoring his head, that is, dishonoring Christ? Again, it could be pointing to some element of spousal relationship. If the man is failing to love his wife, then he is failing to act like Christ. Since the members of the Corinthian church are supposed to be “in Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:30) and boasting “in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31), their failure to emulate Christ would be dishonoring Christ.

So, whatever tradition Paul is recommending in verses 4 and 5, it may have something to do with emulating Christ in a believer’s marriage. If that’s true, failing to do so would bring shame or dishonor upon Christ.

Let’s move on to the next theme in this chapter: how is a man the “image and glory of God”?

1 Corinthians 11:7

For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.

This is an odd way to distinguish between men and women, because other scriptures indicate that women can also display God’s glory. To explain how, let’s look at a few scriptures that explain how God’s image and glory are shown. Originally, man was made in God’s image:

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

To be in God’s image is also to bring him glory, as we see in the example of Yeshua. Yeshua is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15) and the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). He did what his father taught him (John 8:28), and brought glory to his father by accomplishing the work that God gave him to do (John 17:4). He showed God’s works to the world, and in so doing, showed God’s image and glory to the world. As Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 4:4

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the **glory** of Christ, who is the **image** of God.

Hebrews says much the same thing:

Hebrews 1:3

He [Yeshua] is the radiance of the **glory** of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

(See also John 13:31-32; Matthew 16:27)

So, Yeshua displays what mankind was originally supposed to be. Mankind was originally made in God’s image, for the purpose of doing God’s work and displaying God’s glory. However, when man sinned, he lost that image and glory, as it says in Romans:

Romans 3:23

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 1:22-23

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the **glory** of the immortal God for **images** resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

However, through Christ, man can display that Godly image and glory again, as Paul explains later on in Romans:

Romans 8:29-30

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the **image** of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also **glorified**.

How can we be conformed to the image of Christ, and display the glory of God? By becoming like Christ:

Colossians 1:27-28

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, **which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

...God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may **obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ [Yeshua Messiah]**. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

So, when we are sanctified by the spirit, believing in the truth, standing firm in the traditions of the apostles, and mature in Christ, then we will bear the image of Christ, which is the image of God, and bring glory to God in so doing. Now, here is the next question: can only men bear this image of Christ, or can women also do this? Paul indicates that *both* can because males and females are one in Christ:

Galatians 3:27-28

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua].

So, if both men and women can bear the image and glory of Christ, why does Paul make this distinction in 1 Corinthians 11:7, between the glory of a man and the glory of a woman? The reason seems to be that God has assigned different roles to husbands and wives, and those roles must be honored in order for a family to properly emulate Christ. The Scriptures have many things to say on this topic, but here are just a few:

In the Scriptures, wives are under the authority of their husbands. This male authority was established after man sinned (Genesis 3:16). Time will not permit us to go into the details of how this authority structure should look in practice, but it is clear that a woman who does not abide by this structure is not

fit to teach in the church. Paul says as much in the book of Titus:

Titus 2:3-5

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

Now, Paul is not just picking on the women here, because later in Titus, Paul tells the entire church, male and female, to submit to the authorities that are over them (Titus 3:1; see also Hebrews 13:17). Also, in 1 Timothy, Paul insists that the male church leaders need to also be good examples within this family structure:

1 Timothy 3:2-5

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. **He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?**

As we mentioned before, Ephesians 5 tells us that this authority structure is based on the example of Christ and the church, so the men and women who submit to this authority are emulating Christ, who submitted to his Father's authority. The man who leads his family well brings glory to Christ, who leads the church well. The woman who provides for her family well under her husband's headship also brings glory to Christ and to her husband. The opposite of bringing glory is bringing dishonor or shame, which Paul mentions in verses 4 and 5. There are other scriptures that mention how women can bring either glory or shame upon themselves and their families:

Proverbs 12:4

An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rottenness in his bones.

Proverbs 31:10-12

An excellent wife who can find? The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

The rest of Proverbs 31 describes how these excellent wives provide good things for their families: by diligently providing for their families' material needs (vv. 13-19, 21-24, 27), by caring for the poor (v. 20), by being strong and dignified (v. 25), by teaching kindness with wisdom (v. 26), and by fearing YHWH (v. 30). This kind of provision will yield praise and glory:

Proverbs 31:28-30

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD [YHWH] is to be praised.

So, a wife who is responsible and provides what her family needs brings glory to God and to her husband. However, a wife who does not do these things brings shame upon her family. In fact, any family member can bring this kind of shame:

Proverbs 10:5

He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.

So, a son can also bring shame upon his family by being lazy and uncaring. Paul exhorts every Christian to provide for his own family:

1 Timothy 5:8

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

So, men should provide for their homes, by loving and honoring their wives and taking care of their families. Women should also look after their families under the headship of their husbands. Both men and women in positions of leadership must put on the image of Christ and glorify God in what they do (Titus 2:5). In the case of women, this image includes submission to their husbands. Paul explains why this is in the next few verses of 1 Corinthians 11:

1 Corinthians 11:8-10

For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

So, everyone should be emulating Christ and providing for their families, and both husbands and wives should respect the roles that they have been given. Everyone should seek to display the image of God by emulating Christ, which brings God glory. The Scriptures are fairly clear on this point, and Paul is repeating those ideas here in 1 Corinthians 11.

Again, for more on how men and women can reflect the image of God, see our teaching, Marriage Authority.

There is another detail here worth addressing: that is, in verse 10, what is the “symbol of authority” that a wife should have on her head, and what do “angels” have to do with it? The phrase “symbol of authority” sounds like the wife’s traditional head covering, since that is a physical indication that she is under her husband’s authority. However, the word “symbol” does not actually appear in the Greek. The entire phrase “symbol of authority” comes from a single Greek word, *exousia*. This word is simply translated as “power” or “authority” in every other place it is used. Other translations of 1 Corinthians 11:10 translate this word in this more consistent way, including the King James Version:

1 Corinthians 11:10 (KJV)

For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

The reason that translations like the ESV use the phrase “symbol of authority” is because they assume that this passage is talking about a physical head covering. However, if we do not make that assumption, then it’s easy enough to understand this passage to mean that a woman should have an actual authority over her head, rather than just a symbol of that authority. Even if Paul is recommending that a woman wear a head covering, it seems clear that the reason is to show that she has a spiritual head covering, which is more important. If a woman physically covered her head, but insisted on mistreating her

husband, then she would simply be a hypocrite. She would be creating the same shame and dishonor that Paul wants the church to avoid. So, it is probably more accurate to say that the woman should have “authority” on her head, not just a symbol of authority.

Paul’s reference to “angels” in verse 10 is a bit mysterious. It’s hard to determine exactly why angels are referenced here, but the Scriptures do frequently portray Christ as having authority over the angels. Some examples of this are 1 Peter 3:21-22, Hebrews 1:1-4, Hebrews 2:5-8, and Psalm 8:4-6. We also see in various places in the New Testament, especially the book of Colossians, that there was a heretical doctrine going around that encouraged Christians to worship angels. For more details on this heretical belief, see our teaching, [A Shadow of Things to Come](#). So, it is possible that, in verse 10, Paul is saying that believing husbands and wives should be submitting to Christ’s authority structure, rather than some perverse authority structure involving angels. Since Christ has authority over the angels, believers should be looking to Christ, and following the example that he gave. Paul doesn’t say anything else about angels in this passage, so we won’t speculate on it any further.

The final theme we will cover from 1 Corinthians 11 is hair length. Why is it disgraceful for a man to have long hair? Why is it glorious for a woman to have long hair? And, how does “nature” teach these ideas? Here’s what Paul said:

1 Corinthians 11:14-15

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.

As we mentioned earlier, other scriptures do not say anything negative about men having long hair, so what is Paul talking about in this passage? He says that long hair is a glory to a woman, but a disgrace to a man. This word for “disgrace” (Greek *atimia*) is contrasted with the word “honor” in other New Testament passages; it is used to refer to dishonorable vessels which will be destroyed (2 Timothy 2:20-21; Romans 9:21-24), and to sinful flesh (1 Corinthians 15:42-49). However, what is particularly interesting is that it refers to homosexuals in Romans 1, and the term “nature” is used in that passage as well:

Romans 1:24-27

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the **dishonoring** of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to **dishonorable** passions. For their women exchanged **natural** relations for those that are contrary to **nature**; and the men likewise gave up **natural** relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

So, Paul considers homosexual relations to be “contrary to nature” and “dishonorable.” Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 11 that “nature” teaches that men having long hair is “dishonorable.” These ideas seem to be connected. The second-century Roman author Juvenal similarly mentioned that homosexuality was against “nature” (Juvenal, Juvenal and Persius, Satire 2.127-142). The idea that long hair on a man was dishonorable (and suggested homosexuality) was also taught in the first-century poem, “Sentences.” Here is what that says:

Do not grow locks in the hair of a male child. Braid not his crown or the cross-knots of the top of

his head. For men to wear long hair is not seemly, just for delicate women. Protect the youthful beauty of a comely boy; for many rage with lust for sex with a male. Guard a virgin in closely shut chambers, and let her not be seen before the house until her nuptials [sic]. The beauty of children is hard for parents to defend.

-Pseudo-Phocylides, *Sentences* 210-217, (English translation from Walter T. Wilson, *The Mysteries of Righteousness: The Literary Composition and Genre of the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), p. 139)

Having long hair on a boy, this Jewish author claims, will subject him to the lusts of other men. First century Roman authors also told men not to have long hair. For example, the poet Ovid advised men to avoid curling their hair and shaving their legs when they were trying to attract women (Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* Book 1, Part 14). So, Paul seems to be saying the same thing as these Roman authors: that long hair is an effeminate feature, so it is glorious for women, but not fitting for men. Paul ties this idea of a “natural” head covering for women to the idea of her having authority on her head. So, just like it is “natural” for women to have long hair as a physical head covering, it is also appropriate for women to have their husbands as a spiritual head covering. However, it is not “natural” for men to behave or try to look like women. Hair is regarded as a physical symbol of the difference between the sexes.

So, to wrap up part 1 of this teaching, let’s review these themes from 1 Corinthians 11.

First, Paul frames this passage in verses 1 and 2 by talking about “traditions” that he commends the Corinthians church for keeping. Since no other place in Scripture describes a dress code for prayer or prophecy, it makes sense that Paul is speaking of a tradition.

Second, in verse 3, Paul explains the chain of headship and authority. In other places where this chain of authority is mentioned, the point is that men and women should emulate Christ; they should obey the authorities that are over them, and love those that they have authority over. Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 11 may be similar.

Third, to “dishonor” one’s head means to discredit or humiliate it. This is almost certainly a reference to the “heads” described in verse 3. A person can bring dishonor to Christ or to her husband, but not to a literal head.

Fourth, being in the image and glory of God is the condition that mankind was originally in, but we fell short of the glory of God when we sinned. Yeshua is “the image of the invisible God,” and he glorified God by obeying him and doing the work that God had for him to do. In Christ, we too can bear the image of God and display his glory. One of the elements of obeying God is providing for our families, and women who provide for their families are considered to bring glory to their husbands, rather than shame.

Fifth, the cultural standards of the first century were that men should have short hair, and women should have long hair. Paul used these standards to illustrate that a wife should have a spiritual covering on her head as well as the natural covering of her hair.

In part 2, we will go into detail on three of the theories concerning what the “head covering” of 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 might be. We will also discuss what practical lessons we can take away from this passage of scripture.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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