



## “CONFUSION”: Covering vs. Culture

This first section of 1 Corinthians chapter 11 focuses primarily on proper attitudes and conduct in worship ... not on the marriage relationship or on the role of women in the church.

*“Context, Context, Context”* ... It is vital to your accurate understanding of Paul’s instructions here, to read the entirety of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 before drawing any conclusions of meaning.

While Paul’s specific instructions may be cultural (women covering their heads in worship), the principles behind his specific instructions are timeless -- for they instruct believers to show respect for their spouse and to have reverent behavior in worship.

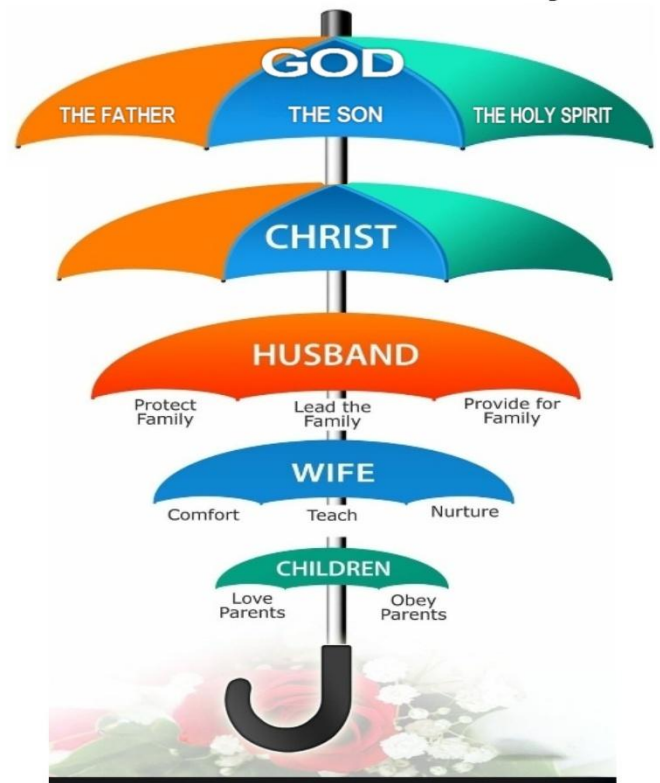
***If a believer’s actions offend members and could divide the church ... then the believer should change his or her ways to promote church unity.*** Paul told the women who were not wearing head coverings to wear them, not because it was a scriptural command, but because it kept the congregation from dividing over a petty issue that took people’s focus off Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, the apostle Paul addresses the topic of head coverings for women ... a subject that has sparked much debate, confusion, and substandard interpretations throughout history.

### Respect the Context

Contrary to misconceptions ... Paul’s intention was not to demean women or diminish their role in the home or society. Instead, he addressed the issue of proper respect within marriage and worship. Before going into 11:2-16, however, it is only appropriate to set the stage before turning back to the previous chapter.

### Biblical Order of the Family



In 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, Paul writes ... **“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved.”** (ESV)\*

### All to God’s Glory

Before discussing “headship” and “head coverings” ... Paul establishes a fundamental principle to guide Christians in their daily lives. *We are to honor God in everything we do ... and to love others as we share the gospel with those who are perishing.*

*Paul’s Fundamental Principle: We are to honor God in everything we do ... and to love others as we share the gospel with those who are perishing.*

Keeping this guiding principle in mind, let us try to understand what Paul meant in 11:2-16. **From the context ... it is clear that Paul is attempting to rectify the misuse of freedoms leading to division and inappropriate behavior.** His primary concern is not about men and women (in general) ... but rather about the testimony of a husband and wife faithfully living out their marriage before God in church and society.

In verse three, Paul writes ... **“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.”**

To understand the word “headship” used by Paul, we must understand its historical and cultural context. The Greek word is *kephalé*, which translates as “head” but also carries broader meanings such as “authority” or “source.”

### Hints at the Trinity

Paul’s approach is intriguing because he refers to the relationship within the Triune Godhead ... before acknowledging the esteemed roles of a husband and wife. Paul does this to connect our relationships, that ought to reflect the perfect unity shared with the Triune Godhead!

*Each Person of the Trinity is a subsistence of the same substance (GOD = His Nature). Yet, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct (not divided) ... in their functions (operational roles) in the economy of salvation.*

In 1 Corinthians 15:28, Paul elaborates on this very point ... **“When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.”**

Similarly, Paul emphasizes the significance of the role of headship within the framework of God’s divine order in the context of marriage. Paul refers to the husband’s and wife’s unique roles and responsibilities, reflecting both the unity and diversity within the Trinity.

He did not imply ... that headship means *a husband ruling over his wife* ... or suggest that qualitative differences between women indicate they are inherently inferior to men.

## **Sacrifice and Submission**

In Ephesians 5:21-33 ... the apostle Paul emphasizes the sacrificial love that **husbands** should have towards their wives while highlighting the importance of **wives** voluntarily respecting their husbands. **This passage explains that marriage is meant to exemplify Christ's relationship with His church ... where both husband and wife have distinct roles ... but are equal in value before God.**

- Therefore, having a harmonious partnership where both spouses “honor and support” each other is essential.

## **The Meaning of Head Coverings**

The second controversial verse from Paul is as stated ... ***“For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. but since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head”*** (11:5).

**To fully grasp the meaning and underlying principles behind head coverings in this passage, it is essential to explore cultural and historical contexts.**

It was not customary for Corinthian women to cover their heads as it was for Jewish women. Many of the upper-class Greek women would flaunt their hairstyles, causing a clash with less privileged women and Jews. In Paul's day, it was customary for women (in the Ancient Mediterranean) to cover their heads in public or among strangers, as symbolic representation of modesty and submission.

- In Genesis 24:65 ... Rebecca veiled (Hebrew *tsaciph*) herself in the presence of Isaac.

By wearing a veil or covering their heads during worship or public gatherings, women demonstrated their acknowledgment of societal norms and their commitment to honor their husbands as leaders within their homes. If a Jewish woman revealed her long hair in public, she was either in mourning, or she was being publicly humiliated as an accused adulteress.

Additionally, if a woman took off her head covering (veil or scarf) in the worship service ... it could be a sign or suggestion that she was withdrawing from her husband and “available.” Because of that ... if a wife were participating in church, she would keep her veil over her head to avoid people thinking of or assuming several things:

- (1) She was abusing her freedom,
- (2) Rejecting honor to God, and ...
- (3) Disrespecting her husband by making a public gesture that she was promiscuous.

Furthermore, when Paul was writing this letter ... temple prostitutes were known for wearing their hair very short and not covering their heads. Thus, giving weight for Paul to advise against adopting a similar appearance to avoid giving the wrong impression and causing others to stumble.

- **Paul Was Teaching About Dignified Femininity ... Not About Fashion**

It is important to understand that the topic of head coverings was related to the cultural norms then, and not a command given by Paul for Christians today. The underlying principle behind the advice of wearing head coverings ... is to behave with dignity, avoiding actions that might lead to division or cause others to stumble.

***“If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.”*** 1 Corinthians 11:16

When we honor God and strive to do good for others, our witness is beyond reproach in marriage, family, and society, as Paul mentions in his overarching principle in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33.

*In light of these considerations ... it becomes evident that Paul’s teachings on headship and head coverings, is rooted in promoting harmony within marriage rather than enforcing gender inequality.*

**Although cultural practices may differ across different societies and periods, what remains crucial ... is the need for mutual respect and honoring one another in our relationships, particularly in marriage!**

By understanding these principles, we can appreciate the importance of head coverings and uphold equality and respect between spouses in accordance with biblical teachings.

***THE ISSUES OF CHURCH LIFE ...***