

Thankfully the passage under consideration can be broken down very simply. It is structured around three main arguments.

Paul follows his introductory comments of v. 2 by *an argument drawn from the chain of headship and subjection* which extends downward from God to the woman, vv. 3-5 a. The point about the shame of the uncovered woman is then amplified and explained, vv. 5 b-6. The apostle continues with *an argument drawn from creation*, vv. 7-10, which closes with a reference to the angels, who – being fully conversant with the details of the creation of both man and woman – look to see the appointed symbol of man's headship over the woman. At this point Paul adds a short section, vv.11-12, to guard against any possible misunderstanding as to the importance and dignity of the woman. Thirdly, he draws *an argument from nature*, and in particular from the covering with which nature provides the woman – namely her long hair, vv. 13-15. All further contention is silenced by an appeal to the final authority of the apostles of Christ and to the universal custom of the churches which they had established, v. 16.

Paul begins in **v.2** by giving credit to the Corinthians for the way in which they had kept in mind the 'ordinances' – the traditions – the instructions – lit. 'the things handed down' – which he had earlier given them. Sadly, his commendation, 'I praise you' in v.2, must soon be followed by his censure 'I praise you not', v. 17. This because – although, according to v.2, the Corinthians 'remembered' the Lord's servant and his commands – according to the latter part of the chapter, they utterly failed to remember the Lord Himself in keeping with His own commands, vv. 20, 24! But – consistent with his normal practice – Paul first sounds his note of praise; cf. 1.1-9. There had been a time when – as Saul of Tarsus – he had laid great store by the 'traditions' of Judaism – as he told the Galatians, he had 'profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers', Gal. 1.14, but no longer – now his concern lies with 'traditions' which are Christian – the same word as Gal. 1.14 – which he had 'delivered' to the Corinthians – and which in general they had held fast. There were, however, a few cases where they had gone astray. One of these was in the matter of the covering of the head and Paul proceeds to deal with this failure first – so note the ominous 'but' at the beginning of v. 3.

First, **the argument from the chain of headship, vv. 3-6.**

We note that – before the Apostle actually mentions the abuse itself – he first states the principle on which, in part at least, his correction of the abuse is to rest, v.3. There had been a growing tendency among the Greeks to improve the social standing of their women ever since the days of Socrates – some 5 centuries before – and this had received a fresh boost from contact with the Romans. But no doubt the most important factor in the church at Corinth was the Christian doctrine of the full equality of the man and the woman as far as the benefits of salvation are concerned. It seems to me that some of the sisters at Corinth were asserting their spiritual freedom and equality with the man by not wearing a head covering when engaged in their own spiritual activities and meetings. In so doing, ignorant of the implications of what they were doing, they had overstepped the bounds of acceptable Christian behaviour.

Given that there's no 'now concerning' at the beginning of the passage, it's unlikely that the Corinthians had raised this particular issue with Paul. It's likely that Paul had heard of this failure at Corinth from those 'of the house of Chloe', mentioned in 1.11 as the source of some of Paul's information about conditions in the church. There can be no doubt that Paul believed passionately in the personal equality of the man and a woman, vv. 11-12 – just as he believed in their equality in terms of the blessings of the gospel. Prior to his conversion no doubt he recited many times the consecutive benedictions of the synagogue prayer book – 'Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a heathen; blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a bondman; blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a woman'. These particular benedictions went back a long way - tradition ascribes them to the so-called 'Men of the Great Synagogue', who were active between the fifth and third centuries B.C. But all this was now a thing of the past for Paul. Such distinctions had no relevance when it came to a person's standing in Christ. Paul believed and taught that 'There is in neither Jew nor Greek - there is neither bond nor free - there is neither male nor female – for you are all one in Christ Jesus', Gal. 3.28. But Paul equally believed and taught that the woman was subject to the man – both in terms of family and domestic matters, Eph. 5.22, and of spiritual roles, 1 Tim. 2.12.

His words 'I would have you know', **v. 3**, may suggest that Paul was telling the church something new – that previously he hadn't had occasion to explain the reasons for the accepted church practice of the covering of the head. There had been, I guess, no reason for him to anticipate any difficulties at Corinth over this teaching – his reference to the custom of 'the churches of God in v.16 suggest strongly that he had faced none elsewhere. If this construction is right, the absence of any previous explanation by the apostle probably accounts for the gentler tone in which he deals with this issue than that in which he later deals with their inexcusably bad behaviour at the Lord's supper and the church fellowship meal, vv. 17-34.

The expression, 'the head of' occurs three times in v. 3. The statement that Christ is 'the head of every man' provides the basis for Paul's point in v. 4 – and the statement that the man is 'the head of the woman' provides the basis for his point in v. 5. But why, we may wonder, does the apostle add the seemingly irrelevant statement that 'the head of Christ is God'? It's possible, I suppose, that it is no more than his tendency to complete any series he begins – as for instance, in 3.21-23, where he says, 'Let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether

Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come – all are yours – *and you are Christ's – and Christ is God's*'. But I cannot help wondering whether there may not have been more to it – that Paul may have felt that the ladies at Corinth were more likely to accept his point about their subjection to the men, if they were reminded that the Lord Jesus Himself is subject to God – subject, for instance, in that it was the Father who sent, 1 John 4.14, and the Son who was sent, Luke 4.43. There are, of course, vast differences between the three headships mentioned – but they have one common feature – that of an authority and a corresponding submission which springs out of some unique relationship. The reference to God's headship of Christ should therefore help the ladies at Corinth to accept that headship and subjection is perfectly consistent with equality of personal status and dignity.

In v. 3 Paul makes the point that order and authority pervade the whole of God's moral and intelligent universe – and, in vv.4-5a, maintains that both the man and the woman should act in accordance with that divinely constituted order. In meetings of a spiritual nature, the man should bear witness that he has no visible head – and the woman should bear witness that she does – namely, the man – and that she is subject to him. This distinction is to be expressed whenever engaged in such spiritual activities as praying or prophesying.

First, the apostle envisages a situation where the man prays or prophesies 'having his head covered' – literally, 'having something down over his head', v.4 – the Greek expression being that used of Haman in the LXX of Esther 6.12, 'Haman went to his home mourning, having his head covered'. The man's 'head', Paul insists, is thereby dishonoured. By which I understand that, at one and the same time, the man dishonours both his literal head – the 'head' mentioned in v.4a – and his spiritual head – Christ – or we lose the obvious link which there is with v.3. When looking at chapter 10 we noted that Paul sometimes gives a double-meaning to words – we commented on his use of 'Rock' in 10.4 and of 'body' in 10.16-17. I suggest that, in a similar way, he gives here a double-meaning to the word 'head'.

Throughout the whole passage Paul takes it for granted that the covering of the head is a symbol of subjection – whether that covering is provided by a fashion covering – consisting probably then of a shawl or suchlike (though not a veil – which is a face-covering rather than a head-covering) – or by the natural covering of long hair. And so – because the woman has a visible 'head' – the man – she must wear a visible symbol of his headship. For the man to pray or prophesy with his head covered would then be to shame himself – in that his covering would be a symbol of subjection – to the woman if she wasn't covered – whose head he was. It would also be to shame Christ – because it is to Christ alone that God has subjected the man. When engaged in the activities described, the absence of a head covering on the part of the man announced to all that he neither had – nor acknowledged – any 'head' except Christ. For him then to wear a head covering was to deny this – and, in effect, to abdicate the position and dignity bestowed on him by God, v. 4.

Conversely, a woman who failed – or refused – to wear a head covering announced to all that she acknowledged no visible head. This was to deny her true relation to the man, v. 5a, and was tantamount to rebellion against God's appointment and government. Just as the man's covered head would have the effect of dishonouring both Christ and himself, in the same way the woman's uncovered head would have the effect of bringing shame both on her spiritual head – namely, the man – and on her physical head – namely, herself. It would shame the man because her uncovered head declared she recognised no visible 'head' – and implied that in her eyes he wasn't fit to be her head – and it would shame her because – in refusing to wear the symbol and badge of her subjection to the man – she rejected the place and position which God in his sovereignty had allotted her.

I don't need to tell you that some have difficulty in reconciling the first part of v. 5 – which clearly envisages women praying and prophesying – with 14.34-35 – which equally clearly enjoin the women 'to be silent in the churches' and not to speak there. Many suggestions have been offered to explain the seeming contradiction – and we don't have time now even to list – let alone begin to assess – the most common suggestions. If you are interested I do have a handout available after this session which attempts to do this. For now, I can only state my opinion that Paul doesn't have church meetings in view in the first half of chapter 11. Some of my reasons for believing this are set out in [the handout](#).

Although the women were explicitly forbidden to speak in the churches, there were other occasions when it was permissible – and desirable – for them to both speak to God and for God in a relatively public manner. I learn from Paul's teaching in 1 Tim. 2. 8-14, however, that a prominent role such as praying and teaching – and therefore prophesying – should never be assumed by Christian women in the presence of Christian men. I find nothing in Paul's words in the early part of chapter 11 to suggest that he had gatherings of the local church in mind. It's not until v.17 that we meet the first of a lengthy series of expressions about 'the church' or about all the believers 'coming together' – which expressions occur no less than 12 times if we add together the latter part of the chapter and chapter 14 (11.17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14.4,19, 23, 26, 28, 33, 34). Paul couldn't make it clearer when he wants to refer specifically to the church meeting together. I'm of the view then that the occasion he has in view in 11.5 is that of a meeting of Christian ladies in which one or more of them either prophesied or prayed audibly. I say 'prayed audibly' because the coupling of prayer with prophecy strongly implies this.

When then – outside of assembled church meetings – the Corinthian women prayed audibly, exercised their spiritual gifts or otherwise engaged in a spiritual ministry which gave any appearance of leadership, they were to don the symbol of their submission to the headship and authority of the men.

The word translated ‘dishonours’ in v.4 and the first part of v.5 comes from the same root as the word ‘shame’ in v.6 – and would be better translated ‘shame’ to show Paul’s connection of thought. Because in vv.5b-6 he pauses to *amplify and explain* the ‘shame’ which, according to v.5a, attached to the woman who prayed or prophesied uncovered.

Later in the section, v.15, Paul will point out that the woman’s long hair is given to her for a natural covering. If therefore the woman isn’t prepared to wear the fashion covering, Paul says here, it is one and the same as if she has no natural covering! The distinction made between ‘shorn’ and ‘shaven’ is simple – to be shorn is to have the hair cropped close – to be shaven means to have all the hair removed with a razor. Let the uncovered woman, Paul is saying, follow through the principle to its logical conclusion – if she is brazen enough to refuse to wear a head covering on the occasions when she should, let her continue with her rebellion – and let her remove her God-given covering as well as fashion’s covering. It is more than likely that – in first century Corinth – the shaving of the head would mean that she would then be classed with immoral women – of which there were many. There is some evidence that the Romans had adulteresses shaved and that in the Greek world it was also the mark of a prostitute or lesbian. Whether this was in Paul’s mind or not, he was challenging the women of Corinth to be consistent – either let them wear both coverings or none at all!

In any case, because God had given their long hair to them as their ‘glory’, v. 15, for them to have removed it (by cutting it very short or by shaving it all off) was necessarily a ‘shame’ to them, v.6. If therefore, Paul argues, their womanly feelings cause them to shrink back from removing their hair, then those same feelings should forbid them from removing fashion’s covering, because a like shame attached to both.

The argument from creation, vv. 7-12.

Vv.7-8 bring us to Paul’s second main argument – which is drawn from the relationship between man and woman which the Creator established at the beginning. But in what sense, we may ask, is man the ‘glory’ of God and woman the ‘glory’ of man, v.7? V.8 – which is directly connected to v.7 by the opening ‘for’ – seems to argue that woman is the ‘glory’ of man firstly in that she is ‘of’ man – that is she comes ‘out of’ man as the direct source of her existence. All things are, of course, ultimately ‘of’ God – ‘For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever’, Rom. 11.36. But in terms of the creation order, man is so directly – and woman only indirectly. Man has *God alone* for his source and origin – the woman has the man as well. In the case of the man, therefore, the glory for his existence goes directly – and only – to God. In the case of the woman the glory for her existence goes in part to man – because it is to him she owes her existence directly. Paul’s point here reminds us of the wonderful way in which God made man and woman in the beginning – the one from dust and the other from a bone. A friend of mine once commented on such these unlikely materials – ‘At our house’, he said, ‘we sweep the dust out, and throw the bones into the garbage bin’.

V. 9. Paul turns from the man as the direct source ‘of’ the woman’s existence, to the reason ‘for’ her existence – again the man. For Eve wasn’t only formed ‘out of’ Adam – she was formed to be a ‘helper suitable for him’. That is, woman was formed ‘because of’ – ‘on account of’ – man – for his benefit and advantage. Paul’s point is that it wasn’t the other way around – nor did God choose to make the first man and the first woman simultaneously. There’s more than grain of truth in what one brother said - ‘No other man has ever got so much out of a single surgical operation!’ The Lord Jesus once argued that ‘The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath’ on the basis that ‘The sabbath was *made for* man, and not man for the sabbath’, Mark 2.27-28. That is, as the representative Man, He has authority over the sabbath because it was made for Him. In a not dissimilar way, Paul here argues – on the basis that woman was made for man, and not man for woman – that woman is the glory of the man – and, as the opening of v.10 makes clear, subject to his headship and authority.

V. 10. ‘For this cause’ – ie ‘because of this – therefore’ makes the connection back to vv.7-9. Because – for the reasons given there – man is God’s glory – he shouldn’t be covered. Because woman is man’s glory – she should. That is – because – as set out in vv.7-9, the first man and woman were made in different ways – the man’s uncovered head proclaims that he – the man – God’s glory – should be seen – whereas the woman’s covered head says that she – the woman – man’s glory – should not be. Paul is therefore arguing that the implication of the creation order is the same as that of the Christian order set out in vv. 3 - 6. And it is too late now to change the either order! Because – at the beginning – the woman was derived from the man and made for him, she should cover herself if she engages in religious activities.

The expression ‘power (or better, ‘authority’) on her head’ reads rather strange at first sight. I have, however, come across one helpful biblical parallel – this is the literal translation of Numb. 6.7 – where we read concerning the Nazarite that ‘his separation (LXX = ‘vow’) to God is on his head’. The meaning is obvious – it was actually the *symbol of his separation* – viz his abnormally long hair – which was ‘on his head’. Paul clearly uses the word ‘authority’ here in a similar manner – it is *the symbol and sign of authority* which is on the woman’s head – in the

context, I suggest, either the authority of God in establishing the headship of the man – or – in my view, more likely – the God-given authority of the man over the woman.

The Corinthians shouldn't have had any difficulty in grasping the idea that one thing can function as a symbol of another. After all, such symbolism lies at the very heart of the Lord's supper – to which Paul turns in the latter part of the chapter – where he quotes the words of the Lord Jesus, 'this is my body' and 'this cup is the new covenant in my blood', vv. 24-25. Alas, it is clear that some of the Corinthians were guilty of despising both the symbols of the Lord's death and the symbols of the order of headship which He established!

'Because of the angels', Paul adds. But what does a woman's head covering have to do with the angels? Paul doesn't tell us and so we can't be sure. We do know that angelic powers are very interested in matters affecting God's people today – that God currently displays His wisdom to celestial beings through the church: 'Although I am less than the least of all the saints', Paul told the Ephesians, 'this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration (stewardship) of this mystery, which for ages past was hidden in God, who created all things; in order that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies', Eph. 3.8-10; cf 1 Cor. 4.9; 1 Tim. 5.21.

We know also that the angels witnessed – as a crowd of excited spectators – the physical creation – for God Himself said that, 'when I laid the foundations of the earth ... the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted with joy', Job 38.4-7. They would then have been fully aware of the order in which man and woman were created – of the priority of man in the creation – and of the man's headship over the woman. They were also aware no doubt of the disastrous consequences which followed when the first woman 'took the lead' in the incident of the forbidden fruit. It is important therefore that – when the woman takes a place of prominence when no man is present – and in so doing adopts a role which the angels expect to be taken by the man – it is important that the woman – by the means of a covering, *shows to the higher spiritual intelligences* that she still willingly recognises and submits to man's headship.

It hardly needs to be said that the angels of heaven wouldn't have cared a hoot about first century culture or convention – and Paul's reference to them here proves conclusively that he isn't resting his case on changing public sentiment and fashion. And this is just as well because – from what I can tell – nobody is at all sure about the conventions which then governed the wearing of head-coverings during times of prayer, prophesying or worship. It seems that *in general* the Greeks – both men and women – worshipped publicly with their heads uncovered. The evidence is, however, rather ambiguous. For example, taking just the worship of the god Isis, scholars can point to one representation where a priestess is depicted as uncovered but to another where one woman worshipper is covered but a second woman worshipper isn't – and, yet again, to written evidence that at the Isis festival in Corinth, 'The women had ... their heads covered with light linen'. So, frankly, we don't know what really went on. Again, it seems that both Jewish men and Roman freemen had their heads covered when they worshipped – but that Roman slaves didn't.

You can see, therefore, why I say that it is just as well that Paul doesn't rest his case in any way on Corinthian culture and convention! His concern lies rather in what the angels make of what is going on – and says in effect - if a woman at Corinth won't wear a covering when she should out of regard for the man - her spiritual head who she shames by her refusal, v. 5 – then let her do it at least out of regard for the angels. Chrysostom expresses the point well, 'Although you despise your husband,' he says, 'yet reverence the angels'.

Vv. 11-12. But Paul recognised that it would be possible for some readers to misinterpret his teaching in vv.7-10 – for the man to end up despising the woman, and the woman end up devaluing her status and dignity. He therefore enters a necessary caveat and qualification. Although man has been given the place of head, this does not make man a superior and greater person. At no point – here or elsewhere – does Paul suggest that the woman is to submit to the headship and authority of the man because men are smarter, more spiritual, or more capable and better leaders than women. Man is the head only because God has decreed it to be so – as witness both the order he adopted when creating and the teaching He has given in His word.

And so Paul makes the point in vv. 11-12 that both of the sexes are mutually dependent. V. 11 says that they need each other 'in the Lord' – ie according to the will, purpose and plan of the Lord. V.12 says that :
Woman is 'out of man'; as in v.8. This is one single act – that of original creation.
Man is 'by' ('through') woman, v.11. This is a continued process – that of ordinary birth.

Man, if you like, is the fountain – woman is the channel. Every man here today entered this world 'through' a woman. The point was well made by Mark Twain in his address at a banquet of the Washington Correspondents' Club on January 11, 1868. The American humorist quipped, 'What, sir, would the people of the earth be without woman? They would be scarce, sir, almighty scarce'.

'All things are of God', Paul ends. That is, in the final analysis, men and women, like all else, owe their existence to God. In his second letter, Paul asserts 'all things are of God' (same Greek) in the context of the new creation – 'if

any man be in Christ, he is new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are *of God*, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ', 2 Cor. 5.17-18. That is, both in the physical creation and in the new creation, everything is of Him. He has all the glory for both.

The argument from nature, vv. 13-15. Finally, Paul appeals to the woman's instinctive sense of what is fitting and proper. His answer to the question of v. 13, 'Is it fitting for a woman to pray to God uncovered?', is given in vv.14-15. The Christian women of Corinth had only to think through the teaching of nature to know that it was improper for them to pray 'to God' uncovered. The long hair which would be a 'shame' – a dishonour – which would be degrading – to a man – is a 'glory' to a woman – perhaps because it is that which God has given her as a mark of her distinction from the man. The description of the hair of the demonic locusts of Rev. 9.8 is said to be 'like women's hair' – clearly something distinctive of the woman.

I find Paul's comment about long hair being a 'shame' to a man interesting – because it was while at Corinth that he had let his own hair grow long – the visible sign of the temporary Nazarite-like vow he had taken, Acts 18.18. In that situation, his long hair had been a symbol of his consecration to God. But that was an exception – and it was only temporary. As a rule, Paul observes, for a man to have abnormally long hair is a disgrace to him.

It's not, I note, that Paul is arguing here that Christian women *should* have long hair. He takes that for granted and bases this part of his argument on it. Her long hair is given to her as one form of covering – 'to serve as a covering' – the word – not related to 'cover' in vv. 4-7 – means 'that which is flung around' and is used to describe a 'vesture' in Heb. 1.12 – 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed'. Clearly the hair must be reasonably long to resemble a garment which can be 'flung around'.

Paul argues that nature itself provides woman with long hair for a covering – not as a substitute for a fashion covering – but to set the pattern for one. It is obvious that Paul cannot mean that the woman's natural covering acts as a substitute for a fashion covering because – apart from it being a different word for 'cover' to that used of the fashion covering in vv.4-6 – it would be absolute nonsense to reason – as v.6 then would – 'If a woman isn't covered – ie hasn't any hair – is as bald as Elisha – then let her hair be cut short or shaved off!' In answer to the question, 'And if it (her hair) be given her for a covering, why does she need to add another covering?', Chrysostom says, 'That not nature only, but also her own will may have part in her acknowledgement of subjection'. Yes indeed – God wants the woman to show her willing, voluntary submission to the man when she audibly praises and engages in other spiritual activities – and so He expects her to wear a *double* covering – He adorns her with the first Himself and looks to her to adorn herself with the second.

The appeal to the authority of the apostles and to the universal custom of the churches, v.16.

V.16. Before leaving the subject, Paul has a blunt message for anyone – man or woman – who is still inclined to argue. Refusing to discuss or debate the matter further, he makes it clear that neither the apostles nor the churches at large recognised any other custom and practice.

It may be that the champions of women's liberation in the Corinthian church supposed (1) that they would find a firm ally in Paul, the champion of Christian equality and freedom, and (2) that the discarding of the woman's covering was in vogue in other Greek churches. If so, they were wrong on both scores.

By way of summary, as I understand it our passage teaches that – when a woman assumes a semi-public role in spiritual work – whether speaking *to* God or *for* God – she is to wear the symbol of her subjection to the man and his headship. She must make it clear – to the angels if to no one else – that she has no intention of usurping the place of the man – and that she willingly recognises her subjection to him.

Failure to do so, Paul says, constitutes in effect :

- (1) the breaking of the God-appointed chain of headship which reaches from Him down to the woman, vv. 3-6;
- (2) the denial of the God-appointed relationship established between man and the woman at the time of their creation, vv.7 - 12;
- (3) the failure to follow the lead set by nature, vv. 13 - 15; and
- (4) the rejection of the authority of the apostles of Christ and the universal practice of the churches, v.16.

From what I have been able to discover – it seems that Paul's teaching had the desired effect. Not only do sculptures in the catacombs (dated to late in the first century) show the men wearing short hair and the women wearing either a close-fitting headdress or a shawl – but Tertullian of Rome (writing at the end of the second century) actually cites Corinth as an example of the universal compliance among the churches, 'In fact, at this day the Corinthians veil their virgins - as well as their married women. What the apostles taught, their disciples approve', and says of the menfolk, 'we lift our eyes, with hands outstretched ... with head uncovered'. [Veiling of Virgins, ch.8; Apology, ch.30.]

Clarendon Bible, page 118 = 'Paul did not contemplate the possibility of women prophesying or otherwise speaking aloud in public worship. The daughters of Philip the Evangelist and others must have exercised their gift in private, and there is no evidence that until late in the second century anything else was thought possible.'

'And tell me not this, that the error is but small. For first, it is great even of itself: being as it is disobedience. Next, though it were small, it became great because of the greatness of the things whereof it is a sign.', Chrysostom on first half of 1 Cor. 11.

Paul mentions no other alternative symbol [**because man is the 'head' – so not work for ring etc**] nor does he imply there may be some other way to symbolize submission to male headship. The acknowledgement of male headship by women speaking by the Holy Spirit pertained to small groups as well because the head covering would be evidence that the women were acting in subordination. *Would some other symbol substitute for a head covering?*

I do not think so. The basis of the symbol is the divine order. Headship is symbolized by a head covering, which represents a woman's submission to her (metaphorical) head. There is a clear and direct relationship between 'headship' and 'head coverings.' Paul does not mention any alternate symbols and seems to prohibit any practice other than head coverings (verse 16). I think there is significance to the fact that every woman testifies to her submission to male headship by the same symbol. If every woman was free to express her submission in any way she chose, how would the angels or anyone else understand what they were seeing? A wedding ring is a universally accepted symbol of marriage, at least in this part of the world. What if every person decided to symbolize their marriage by a symbol of their own choosing?

Not all church-related conformity, however, referred to gathered public worship. The letter of the Jerusalem Council gave directions to all Gentile churches with reference to food and sexual immorality.

'The use of the word 'veil,' . . . is an unfortunate one since it tends to call to mind the full veil of contemporary Moslem cultures, which covers everything but their eyes. This is unknown in antiquity, at least from the evidence of paintings and sculpture.' (Fee)

Would an informal setting for the exercise of prophecy in 11:2–16 exaggerate the distinction between private and public gatherings in the early church, since many churches met in houses? No, the fact that a church meets in a home does not greatly affect the characteristics of a church assembly, whether in the first century or today. A church meeting, in contrast to many other meetings, generally means church leaders are present, all church members are welcomed, and the meeting time has been announced.

Compare Christ the Head of the church, Eph. 5.23; Col. 1.18, of all principality and power, Col. 2.10, and over all things, Eph. 1.22.

Wallace : *The topic of head coverings must not be one of the fundamentals of the faith as it is only mentioned once, but it is important because it is a matter of obedience, it is symbolic of submission to male headship, and it can be a source of contention and division* (verse 16). A number of other texts teach on the relationship between men and women, on headship and submission, but this is the only text in which one of the apostles seems to require women to wear a head covering. If this is the only text about head coverings, it would probably be unwise to look upon head coverings as a fundamental of the faith, something which determines one's salvation or spirituality. But because it is a command from the pen of the inspired apostle, and an issue which can divide the saints, it is important. It may not be a '**camel**,' but it is a fairly good sized '**gnat**' we dare not ignore.

The subject of the length of one's hair could hardly have been avoided during Paul's stay in Corinth, because it was there that he had let his hair grow long, symbolic of his taking a Nazarite vow (see Acts 18:18).

Paul is instructing women to cover their heads in order to demonstrate to the angels and celestial powers their submission to God's appointed authority. Paul does not present head coverings as a matter of his opinion, but as an apostolic tradition. He does not describe this as a matter of Christian liberty, or as a personal conviction, but as a matter of obedience. ('Let her cover her head' in verse 6 is an imperative, buttressed by the 'ought' of verse 10.)

Paul mentions no other alternative symbol [**because man is the 'head' – so not work for ring etc**] nor does he imply there may be some other way to symbolize submission to male headship. He also speaks of the head covering of women as the consistent practice of every church.

When Paul does refer specifically to the church meeting, he clearly indicates this fact as we can see in 11:17, 18, 20, 33; 14:4, 23, 26.

Corinth appears not to have one given culture; rather Corinth was a cosmopolitan city with a wide diversity of cultures. In 1 Corinthians 1:1-2, 4:14-17, 11:16, and 14:33-34, Paul indicates that his teaching in this epistle is for every Christian in every culture. These truths are not culture-bound; thus, we need not know all we might wish to know about the cultural setting in Corinth. We simply do not know as much about the cultural setting of that day, as some commentators indicate:

In this case, even if we were sure of prevailing customs, we would need to be able to distinguish between Greek, Roman, and Jewish customs as well as differences in geography, how one dressed at home, outside the home, and in worship, and the differences between the rich and poor. This diversity is well illustrated in the various samplings in Goodenough', Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary*, F. F. Bruce, General Editor, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987 [reprint, 1993], pp. 508-509. In two footnotes, Fee adds: 'These kinds of problems render generally useless a large amount of the literary evidence that is often cited in reference to this text. This is especially true of the large collection of otherwise helpful texts, both Greek and Jewish, in Conzelmann, 185 nn. 39-40, since they deal for the most part with 'going out in public.' The question is whether women in Christian worship in Corinth would be thought of as 'going out in public,' or whether, in light of their gathering in homes and calling themselves 'brothers and sisters,' the wearing of ordinary

home 'attire' would be proper—not to mention all the difficulties that may obtain from the fact that the gathering is also 'religious' and that the women are prophesying. See n. 61. Cf. fig. 99 (where a priestess of Isis is uncovered) and 101 (another Isis example, where one woman is covered while the other is not). With this compare the literary evidence from Apuleius, *Met.* regarding the Isis festival in Corinth: 'The women had their hair anointed, and their heads covered with light linen [cf. fig. 101 in Goodenough]; but the men had their crowns shaven and shining bright' (Loeb, 555). See also the two frescoes from Pompeii (nos. 117 and 118), where in scenes that 'unquestionably represent religious ceremonies' (Goodenough, IX, 137) the central figures (women) are covered with the *himation*, while in fig. 117 the flute girl is not. The same ambiguity prevails in fig. 218, where the woman 'crowning the dead' is covered while the (apparently slave) woman holding the umbrella is not.' Edwards = Plutarch = Romans worshipped with the head covered. Here a distinctly Christian observance.

Head covering is a symbol, a symbol designed to convey a message both to men and to angels. The symbol of head covering does not derive from the culture of Corinth, or our own culture, but from the nature of the Godhead and the divine distinctions God has determined and defined.

I can think of instances where men made concessions to their culture, but never compromises.

Paul was a man willing to make concessions to his culture, 9.19-23 – but not budge on divine commands.

Pray and prophesy? In both cases, the one who performs these functions is in direct contact with God. The one who prays speaks directly *to* God; the one who prophesies speaks directly *from* God. If there ever was a time when a woman seemed to be in authority, it would be when she was praying or prophesying.

?a woman's long hair is her glory, and her head covering veils this glory so that her husband is preeminent?

Women should cover their heads when the spiritual ministry in which they are engaged has a leadership function or appearance. Headship is about authority and preeminence. Prayer and prophecy certainly have a 'leadership dimension'.

That a shawl rather than a full veil is in Paul's mind is indicated by the word *covering* (*peribolaios*) in 11:15, which is not the usual word for veil but probably refers to a wrap-around. The evidence in favor of this position is as follows: (1) The verb translated as 'cover' in the *NIV* (*katakalypto*) occurs three times in verses 6-7, and related cognate words occur in verses 5 and 13. These words most often refer to a covering of some kind. For example, the angels who saw the glory of Yahweh in the temple *covered* their faces (Isaiah 6:2). Judah thought Tamar, his daughter-in-law, was a harlot because she *covered* her face (Genesis 38:15). Since the word almost universally means 'to cover' or 'to hide,' the text is probably referring to a hair covering of some kind. ... Esther 6:12 (LXX) employs the same expression found in verse four, *kata kephales*, of Haman, who hurried home mourning, covering his head in shame. He probably used part of his garment to do this. ... To sum up: the custom recommended here is a head covering of some kind, probably a shawl.

Legalism is keeping the rules for the rules' sake. Christian liberty is keeping the rules for God's sake.

Why am I making such a big issue of head coverings?

First, Paul commands women to wear a head covering. We do not do well to ignore any command of God. Can we now set aside any command we do not fully understand or which we dislike and with which we disagree? *Second*, the head covering of the woman is a symbol, a symbol of one of the great truths of the Bible. A woman's head covering symbolizes her submission to the principle of headship – which extends from God through Christ and man to woman.

Reaction due to the fact that the world is not wearing head coverings and neither is the church?

Don't confuse form with function. To merely place a covering upon one's head does not make one submissive. I have observed some very unsubmitive women who would not think of going to church without their head coverings.

Note 1. 'As a covering', not 'instead of'; Edwards. So anti arkous = for a defence.

See BSac—V140 #557—Jan 83—55.

COVERING THE HEAD

1 Corinthians 11. 2-16

- **Apostolic tradition – the faithfulness of the Corinthians, v. 2.**
 - **The argument from headship, vv. 3-6**
 - **The argument from creation, vv. 7-12.**
 - **The argument from nature, vv. 13-15.**
- **Apostolic authority – the custom of the churches, v. 16.**

There have been many attempts to explain the seeming contradiction between Paul's words in 1 Cor. 11. 5 ('... every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head'), and in 1 Cor. 14. 34 ('Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak').

I wouldn't pretend that this note is exhaustive in terms of (i) covering all the possible explanations which have been offered by Bible students, (ii) doing proper justice to the arguments advanced in support of each explanation, or (iii) setting out my full critique of each explanation. I have attempted simply to identify the main candidates and to comment briefly on each.

In my view, there are two principal candidates – listed as numbers **9** and **10** below. But before coming to these, we ought to consider other suggested explanations. Numbers **1** and **2** two suggest that Paul was not in fact responsible for the teaching of 14. 34-35; numbers **3** and **4** regard 11. 5 and 14. 34-35 as wholly irreconcilable; numbers **5-7** attempt to qualify the silence enjoined in 14. 34-35 in one way or another; and number **8** regards 14. 34-35 as relevant to a particular situation in 1st century Corinth and of no direct application today.

1. Paul wasn't responsible for the teaching of 14. 34-35 because these verses don't form part of the original text – they were added by scribes when later copying out Paul's letter.

Arguments advanced in support. (1) Early manuscripts show confusion as to where these verses should be inserted. In several Latin and/or Greek manuscripts and in the writings of two church fathers, the verses are found, not after verse 33, but after verse 40. The verses were created after Paul finished his letter – presumably by a scribe with extreme views on women's subjection – inserted by that scribe into the margin of the copy he was making and later added in differing places by different scribes. (2) The verses interrupt the context – which would read very smoothly if verses 34-35 are omitted. (3) The verses contradict 11. 5.

Analysis. (1) It is important to note that *every* manuscript we possess of the New Testament contains these verses in their entirety – either after verse 33 or after verse 40. Further, the handful of manuscripts which move them from after verse 33 are all of a single text type, the Western – the text type which is notoriously prone to take the greatest liberties with the text. This is extremely weak evidence to set against the host of manuscripts which include the verses after verse 33 – and by far the majority of commentators and editors of the Greek New Testament therefore include them after verse 33 without question. I guess that the Western tradition arose because one scribe (and it would have taken only one) felt that the passage read better if the subjects of tongues, prophecy, and women speaking were all kept entirely separate. (2) The verses do *not* interrupt the flow of the passage. Consistent with the wider context, they set out what is proper and orderly in the meeting of the church; cf. v.40. Yes, it is true that the passage could be read direct from verse 33 to verse 36 without it being obvious that anything was missing – but this proves nothing. The same could be said of other undisputed sections; for example, 12. 13 and 12. 27 – which would also read smoothly if verses 14-26 are omitted. (3) Any imaginary scribe who created and inserted verses 34-35 in blatant contradiction to teaching which he had found earlier in the very same letter must indeed have been 'a few pennies short of a pound'.

2. Paul wasn't responsible for the words in 14. 34-35 because he was simply quoting them as an opinion of the Corinthians – which he immediately rejects.

Arguments advanced in support. (1) It is common for Paul to quote statements and slogans which the Corinthians were advancing to support views which Paul opposes; see 'all things are lawful for me', 6. 12; 10. 23; 'foods for the stomach, and the stomach for foods', 6. 13; 'we all have knowledge', 8. 1; together with his explicit quotes, 'I am of Paul', 'I of Apollos', 'I am of Cephas', 'I am of Christ', 1.12. This must be the case with 14. 34-35 because the verses contradict Paul's known teaching in Gal. 3. 28 and 1 Cor. 11. 4-5. (2) The reference to 'the law', v. 34, is not to the Old Testament but to the traditional teaching of the rabbis. The Babylonian Talmud (a compilation of traditional Jewish teaching put together in 6th century AD) makes similar statements about the silence of women, whereas the Old Testament says nothing about it.

Analysis. (1) There is no evidence whatever that Paul is here quoting the words of the Corinthians. Verses 34-35 display none of the features of the brief slogans and statements cited above. For example: (i) The longest (in 6.13) comprises just nine words in the Greek, in contrast to 14. 34-35 which comprises no less than 36 words; and (ii) each of the quoted slogans is followed by some clear qualifying or contradictory expression such as ‘but not all things are helpful ...but not all things edify’, 10. 23. And I deny that there is any contradiction between 14. 34-35 and 11. 4-5 – or Gal. 3. 28.

(2) On no occasion does Paul use the term “law” to refer to rabbinical teaching. Compare in particular the other occasions when he refers to what ‘the law says’; i.e. Rom. 3. 19; 7. 7; 1 Cor. 9. 8. It should also be noted that elsewhere in this very letter, Paul cites the teaching of ‘the law’ in the context both of the right of Christian workers to financial support, 9. 8–9, and of tongue-speaking, 14. 21. Paul doesn’t claim that the law commands the woman to be silent. He cites the law as teaching that women are to be in subjection – in all probability with Gen. 2. 18-25 in mind; cf. 1 Cor. 11. 8–9; 1 Tim. 2. 12-13. As far as parallels with the Babylonian Talmud are concerned, it is absurd to assume that Christian teaching must differ in every particular from Jewish belief or teaching. Similarities with Judaism in some points (e.g. that there is one God) do not render Christianity legalistic and Judaistic!

3. The passages are irreconcilable. Yes, Paul was responsible for the teaching of 14. 34-35, but his instructions there merely represent a human opinion and aren’t authoritative or binding.

Argument advanced in support. Paul was a converted Pharisee and inevitably carried with him some of his pre-conversion ideas. When he allowed himself to be influenced by his Jewish background, he thought of the woman as subordinate and inferior to the man. But when he followed the prompting of the Spirit and the fresh insights he had gained through the gospel, he knew that the woman was equal to the man in everything. Paul’s own strictly Jewish (and erroneous) opinion crept through in 14. 34-35.

Analysis. The real issue here isn’t the interpretation of 1 Cor. 14. 34-35 – it is that of the inspiration of scripture! We cannot believe the Bible to be inspired and authoritative while accepting that (a) any of the teachings of God’s prophets and Christ’s apostles represent only human opinions or (b) there are contradictions and errors in the Bible. The Holy Spirit has met this very objection in the immediate context; see v.37. Either the writings of the apostle Paul are scripture or they are not; cf. 2 Pet. 3. 15-16.

4. The passages are irreconcilable. On further reflection, Paul felt it necessary to withdraw in chapter 14 the permission he had earlier given in chapter 11.

Argument advanced in support. Just as the apostle changed his mind about his travel plans, 2 Cor. 1. 15-17, 23; 2. 13, so he had second thoughts about what he had said in 11. 5 – and later retracted it.

Analysis. I do not accept the suggested comparison with 2 Cor. 1-2. Nobody denies that the apostles were fallible men; e.g. witness Peter’s bad error of judgement at Antioch, Gal. 2. 11-13. That Paul had on occasions to amend his plans in the light of later developments (e.g. the poor spiritual condition of the church at Corinth) is hardly surprising. This isn’t the point. The question is whether or not *the writings* of Christ’s apostles are inspired. For my part the suggestion that Paul sent two contradictory messages in the same letter because of ‘further reflection’ amounts to a gross insult to the Holy Spirit and is wholly irreconcilable with the divine inspiration of Paul’s epistles. See under number 3 above.

5. The teaching of 14. 34-35 is restricted to women (a) gossiping or chattering, (b) asking questions, or (c) propagating doctrinal error during the meetings of the church.

Arguments advanced in support. (1) The abridged edition of Liddell and Scott’s ‘Greek-English Lexicon’ lists the meaning of the word translated ‘speak’ in 14. 34-35 as ‘to prate, chatter, babble: of birds, to twitter, chirp ... but also, generally, to talk, talk of’. Paul had heard that feminine chatter was disrupting the meetings of the church and therefore took steps to put a stop to it. As in the Jewish synagogue, the women sat in different sections of the room to the men – and weren’t paying attention

to what was being said but gossiping among themselves. **(2)** Paul's words, 'let them ask their own menfolk at home', v. 35 lit., suggest that women were interrupting the meetings of the church by asking questions. **(3)** Some women were propounding fresh revelations and teachings at variance with known apostolic truth.

Analysis. **(i)** Each of these suggestions is entirely speculative – building on a totally hypothetical background for the reason why Paul requires the silence of the women – in effect putting words into Paul's mouth which are not there *and ignoring the words that are*. Paul makes his appeal to the teaching of 'the law' that women are to be in subjection. That is, his teaching rests foursquare on a principle of scripture – which is of permanent validity. **(ii)** Paul further indicates in verses 33 and 36 that for women to speak at Corinth was a deviation from the practice of all other churches. Note that Paul says, 'let ... women keep silence in the *churches*' not 'let ... women keep silence in the *church* (at Corinth)'. I have no problem understanding this reference to the (plural) 'churches' if Paul is requiring the silence of women, as opposed to oral participation by way of speaking in tongues or prophesying – Paul would no doubt be aware of many other churches where such gifts were in operation. But I can't accept that Paul could have been requiring the silence of women who were chattering, asking questions, or spreading false doctrine during the meetings of the church. This would mean either that these bad practices were common throughout the churches – hardly a compliment to the Christian ladies of the first century – or that Paul required *all* the women in *all* the churches to be silent simply because *some* at *Corinth* were given to gossip, interrupting the meeting with their questions or propounding heresy. The Paul I know from the New Testament wasn't given to using the proverbial sledgehammer to crack a nut! **(iii)** As far as (1) is concerned, it should be noted that the word translated 'speak' in 14. 34-35 is found 24 times in the chapter – normally rendered 'speak' or similar – mainly of 'speaking' in tongues or of a prophet 'speaking'. In one instance, it is used of God 'speaking', v. 21. It is impossible to substitute such words as 'chatter' or gossip' in any instance in the chapter. What is more, on no occasion in the entire New Testament – where the word occurs about 300 times – is it possible to understand the word in the sense of chattering or gossip. **(iv)** The same word translated 'let ... keep silent', v. 34, is used in both v. 28 and v. 30 with the meaning 'to refrain from speaking publicly'. **(v)** The desire of the women to learn, v. 35 (cf. 'that all may learn', v. 31) evidences a serious interest in God's word and argues strongly against them chattering away during the meeting of the church.

6. The teaching of 14. 34-35 is limited to women who adopted a formal and authoritative teaching role.

Arguments advanced in support. Neither prayer nor prophecy involved the exercise of authority – which teaching did. Public participation in prayer or prophecy didn't therefore violate the principle of submission – as did public teaching. The law required the woman to be submissive to man but clearly this didn't deprive her of the opportunity to praise and prophesy publicly in the presence of men – as witness the cases of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Anna – and probably that of Philip's four daughters. Again, the truth of the priesthood of all believers applies equally to women as to men. It follows therefore that the woman is free to pray and prophecy in the church – 1 Cor. 14. 34-35 and 1 Tim. 2. 11-14 prohibit her only from teaching there.

Analysis. Several points: **(i)** This explanation rests on the assumption that 'teaching' was of greater significance in terms of gender roles in the church than 'prophesying'. Frankly I fail to see the logic of permitting a woman to *communicate God's word directly* to the church (prophesying), while prohibiting her from *expounding God's word* to the church (teaching). If anything, the apostle saw 'prophets' as coming higher up his list of spiritual gifts than 'teachers' – see especially 'God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers, after that miracles ... ', 12. 28; cf. also the order in Eph. 4. 11. 'The prophets of the New Testament shared with the apostles the privilege and responsibility of being channels of direct divine "revelation"; cf. 14. 30; Eph.2.20; 3.3-5. The very words of their prophecies were inspired and authoritative', Part One of 'Studies in 1 Corinthians 14' in the May 2003 issue. For the argument that the prophecy of New Testament days was different in nature and authority from that of the Old Testament days, see footnote 3 to that same article. The point of 1 Corinthians 14 is that the gift of prophecy is superior to the gift of tongues in the church for instruction, edification, and conviction. I suggest that modern definitions of prophecy, which represent it as no more than some spontaneous word of praise or exhortation with no lasting significance,

seriously underestimate its importance in the New Testament church. **(ii)** The argument assumes that, because (a) the New Testament envisaged women praying and prophesying and (b) there was both prayer and prophesying in the meetings of the church, women must be permitted to pray and prophesy in the church. But surely, by the same defective reasoning, we would be forced to conclude that if (a) women are ever envisaged as teaching (which they are – see Tit. 2. 4) and (b) teaching is given in the church (which it is – 1 Cor. 14. 19), women must be able to teach in the church – which advocates of this interpretation vehemently (and correctly) deny. **(iii)** There is no biblical evidence that prophetesses exercised their gift *publicly* in the presence of men. Deborah and Huldah exercised their gift of prophecy in a very different manner to men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the other male prophets who proclaimed the word of the Lord in public. There is no evidence that Deborah ever publicly proclaimed anything – individuals came to her in private for a word from the Lord, Judg. 4. 5, and when she spoke to Barak she called him and spoke to him face to face, Judg. 4. 6, 14. Similarly, Huldah delivered the word of the Lord in a non-public forum when King Josiah sent messengers to her, 2 Kgs. 22. 14-20. As far as we know, Miriam ministered only in the presence of women, Exod. 15. 20. There is no hint that Anna spoke publicly to those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem, Luke 2. 38, or that Philip's daughters prophesied publicly, Acts 21. 9 (and it is perhaps relevant that, in that very context, the Lord sent the male prophet Agabus to from Judaea to Caesarea to communicate His word to Paul, vv. 10-11). **(iv)** In no place does the New Testament associate the truth of the priesthood of all believers with public participation in the meetings of the local church.

7. The teaching of 14. 34-35 is limited to women participating in the evaluation of the messages of the prophets (assumed by some advocates to be the husbands of the women in mind).

Arguments advanced in support. (1) The structure and flow of Paul's argument. The outline of the section is:

- General Statement. 'Let all things be done for edification', v. 26.
- Specific Example 1 – Tongues, v. 27-28. (i) Restriction in number – two or three. (ii) Must be interpretation – to ensure edification.
- Specific Example 2 – Prophets, v. 29. (i) Restriction in number – two or three. (ii) Others must judge what is said – to ensure edification.
- Postscript to Example 2, vv. 30-34. (i) Regarding prophets speaking, vv. 30–33a. (ii) Regarding the weighing of their messages, vv. 33b–34.

That is, in connection with the subject of prophecy, the two elements of the command 'let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment', 14. 29, are developed separately in the following verses. Verses 30–33a deal with prophets speaking in the church, while verses 33b–36 take up the matter of the evaluation of the prophets' messages. Women were permitted to prophesy, but the public evaluation of prophecies which followed involved the exercise of authority. It is this weighing of prophetic utterances which is therefore prohibited. **(2)** Paul gives no hint earlier in chapters 12-14 – which have been concerned mainly with the gifts of tongues and prophesying – that he would be introducing a new topic, that of women speaking. And indeed there wasn't any reason for him to introduce the subject because it did nothing to promote the edification of the church.

Analysis. (1) Although superficially neat and tidy, I believe the proposed structure of the passage is in fact artificial and is being imposed on the text. I find nothing whatever in Paul's actual words to suggest that the command for silence was related to the weighing of the words of the prophets. And, indeed, I have failed to trace any source for this proposed interpretation which dates before the 1960s. The absence of any such proposed structure in the many commentaries written during the intervening 1900 years suggests strongly that the suggested new outline of the passage is, at the least, far from obvious. Is there any reason to believe that the Corinthians would have understood Paul correctly when commentators and Bible students over the next 1900 years failed to do so? In detail : **(i)** verse 29b is too subordinate a phrase, and there is too much material between this phrase and verses 34-35, to support the required connection. To revert to the subject of judging prophecies in verse 34 would call for some explicit link or cue, such as repeating the word 'judge'. **(ii)** Paul gives no instructions about the interpretations of tongues ('Specific Example 2 (ii)' in the proposed outline); he confines his remarks to the tongue-speakers and specifies the circumstances in which the tongue-speakers should be silent. I do not expect to find therefore Paul giving instructions about the evaluating of prophecy – contrary to the split shown in the 'Postscript to Example 2' in the proposed

outline. I expect him rather to speak to the prophets and to specify the circumstances in which they should be silent – which indeed he does. **(iii)** The words, ‘For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints’, v. 33, provide a natural break in the structure of the passage – reinforcing the instructions which Paul had given about the regulating of both tongues and prophecy in the church. **(iv)** The same women are clearly in view throughout verses 34 and 35. And verse 35 specifically envisages at least some of these as longing to learn – and not as aspiring to sit in judgement on prophetic utterances. **(v)** The proposed understanding of the passage leads to the strange conclusion that women may deliver a prophecy to the church, but may not participate in weighing someone else’s prophecy. The idea that the evaluating of a prophecy involves the exercise of authority but that the actual giving of the prophecy doesn’t, strikes me as decidedly odd. Surely a message ‘revealed’ by God to the prophet, v.30, came on the very highest authority! See also comment (i) under the ‘Analysis’ of number 6 above. **(vi)** The wording of 14. 34-35 doesn’t specify one particular form of speaking (viz. the weighing of prophecies) as inadmissible; the wording excludes speaking as such. As I see it then, verses 34-35 deal, not with the judging of prophecies, but with much the same subject as the similar passage in 1 Timothy 2.12-14 – where the required silence of the woman is connected with the non-exercise of authority over the man. (2) I consider the verses about the silence of the women as forming a distinct section within a larger context which is concerned with proper and orderly conduct during the meetings of the church; cf. v. 40.

8. Paul enjoined the women to be silent in the church in 14. 34-35 because of the particular cultural and historical situation of the Corinthians – and these verses are therefore of no direct application today.

Arguments advanced in support. It seems clear that the open (and vocal) expression of the equality between men and women in Christ was bringing the gospel into disrepute. We know that, earlier, Paul required others to forego their assumed liberty to eat meat offered to idols if this caused others to stumble, 8. 4-13. We know also that he adapted his own lifestyle to the customs and culture of others in order to win them to Christ, 9. 19-23. He also urged slaves to be submissive to their masters – for him (or other Christians) to have then launched an attack on the institution of slavery would have sidetracked men from the main message of the gospel, and brought it into disrepute; cf 1 Tim. 6. 1. In these, and other, ways the early Christians accommodated themselves to the cultural situation of their day so as not to cause unnecessary offence to society around. The command that women be silent in the church was an instance of the churches accommodating themselves to a male-dominated society where it would have caused offense for women to have spoken publicly. The command, that is, should be read against the background of a specific cultural situation which no longer applies today.

Analysis. Several points: **(i)** the reference to slavery isn’t relevant. The argument ignores one fundamental difference – that the institution of slavery had *not* been ordained by God (and was indeed at variance with His purpose for men), whereas the relation of the sexes was established by God at the very beginning of human existence. This relation is basic to the understanding of the Bible’s teaching about the headship of the man and the submission of the woman. **(ii)** Paul makes no suggestion that the command for women to be silent rested on any particular cultural situation. He says that it rested on the subjection implicit in the creation account detailed in ‘the law’, 14. 34; cf. Gen.1. 27; 2. 18, 21; 1 Cor. 11. 8–9. The cultural interpretation rests foursquare on speculation and ignores the specific reason which Paul gives for his prohibition. We can compare the parallel instructions in 1 Tim. 2. 11-15 – where Paul rests his case for the woman learning in silence (cf. the use of the word translated ‘silence’ in Acts 22. 2) on the narratives of the creation and the fall – that is, on two unchanging and culturally-independent foundations. **(iii)** I gather that it is more than likely that the pagan priestesses of the various temples at Corinth spoke and prophesied publicly. In which case, the Corinthian society of the first century wouldn’t have found the vocal participation of the women as offensive as this interpretation requires. **(iv)** See also the ‘Analysis’ of number 5 above.

9. In dealing with the improper actions of the women at Corinth, Paul deliberately seized the opportunity to teach two distinct lessons – (i) the wearing of a head covering by the woman in chapter 11 and (ii) the silence of the woman in the church in chapter 14. (It is important to distinguish this explanation from the ‘on further reflection’ argument considered under number 4 above. The present explanation assumes that Paul, by the Spirit, deliberately chose to tackle the two distinct issues separately.)

Arguments advanced in support. (1) This is the very procedure which Paul employed in chapters 8-10 when answering the question whether Christians were at liberty to enter a heathen temple to eat meat offered to idols. In that case, the apostle first took (in chapter 8) the opportunity of teaching consideration for the conscience of others, and then (in chapter 10) he gave the reasons why the believer could not in any case sit down to eat idol-food at what was in reality the 'table of demons'. In tackling a double issue (a woman's head-covering and a woman's silence) and dealing with each part separately – the one in chapter 11 and the other in chapter 14 – Paul is therefore acting in a way entirely consistent with the method he adopted in chapters 8 and 10.

(2) Paul is careful to distinguish the position he takes in chapter 11 from that which he takes in chapter 14. In chapter 11 he simply notes as a fact that the women do pray and prophesy – without specifying where or when. It should be noted that 11. 5 isn't framed as a command – as is 14. 34; the apostle does *not* say 'let the women pray and prophesy', as he later does 'let your women keep silent'. The form of expression in 11. 5 leaves the door open for him to revisit the issue later and then to limit the audible contributions of the women to situations outside the meetings of the church. **(3)** The section 11. 3-16 focuses on the wearing of head-coverings in any situation where a woman assumes a role normally associated with the men. In chapter 14 Paul makes it clear that the women weren't permitted to speak (including to speak in tongues or to prophesy) in the church, thereby leaving 11. 5 to cover any other situations.

Analysis. This interpretation certainly has much in its favour. It removes the seeming tension between 11. 5 and 14. 34-35, takes seriously the teaching of both sections, and regards the principles taught in both sections as directly relevant for all times. I find it difficult to accept, however, that the parallel with chapters 8-10 (summarised in (1) above) is as close as is suggested. Chapters 8-10 are all of a piece and are concerned with a single subject (with chapter 9 functioning as a parenthesis to illustrate the principle that Paul established in the latter half of chapter 8 – namely that of one's willingness to waive one's legitimate rights for the sake of others). But it strikes me that the case is very different in chapters 11 to 14. These chapters deal with three distinct subjects. The first half of chapter 11 deals with the subject of the head-covering and headship, the second half of chapter 11 deals with the Lord's supper, and chapters 12-14 deal with the subject of spiritual gifts and their regulation in the church – with the emphasis on edification and order. In my view, the 'distance' (both in terms of the disparate subject matter and in terms of the number of verses – no less than 106 – which separate 11. 5 and 14. 34) between the two 'lessons' counts against this interpretation.

10. The passages are concerned with two very different settings and situations – 14. 34-35 is concerned with meetings of the church, but 11. 3-16 is not.

Arguments advanced in support. (1) In common with number 9, this explanation removes the seeming tension between 11. 5 and 14. 34-35, takes both passages at face value (requiring women to cover their heads on occasions when they did pray or prophesy but not permitting them to speak in meetings of the church) and regards the principles taught in both sections as directly relevant for all times. **(2)** There is no suggestion that 11. 3-16 refers to meetings of the church. Indeed, there is evidence that it isn't until verse 17 that Paul turns to such meetings; note the expression 'you come together', vv. 7, 18, 20, 33, 34 (cf. 14. 23-26), and the explicit reference to the 'church', v. 18 (cf. 14. 4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 33, 34, 35). **(3)** The most natural interpretation of the expression 'For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear ...', v. 18, is that the following section deals with the first topic relevant to the meetings of the church. **(4)** I understand 14. 34-35 to forbid women, *inter alia*, prophesying in the church. (The context focuses on the operation of two spiritual gifts – speaking in tongues and prophecy. The two sections which straddle verses 34-36 (vv. 26-33 and vv. 37-39 respectively) are both concerned with speaking in tongues and prophecy. It seems reasonable to conclude therefore that when, in verses 34-35, Paul requires the women not 'to speak' in the church, he means, at the very least, that they are not to speak in tongues or in prophecy.) **(5)** Given that 11. 5 envisaged situations where the women did prophesy, the most natural explanation is that these situations excluded church meetings. The wise words of Tertullian, written about 215 AD, still stand true today, '... it is easier (to believe) that one passage should have some explanation agreeable with others, than that an apostle should seem to have taught (principles) mutually diverse', *De Monogamia* 11.8.

Analysis. Several objections have been raised against this interpretation. The main objections of which I know are as follows. (i) *'The repetition of the phrase, "I praise", vv. 2, 17, serves to unite 11. 2-16 and 11. 17-34; the section to v. 16 is therefore also concerned with church meetings'*. Not so. Paul opened by praising the Corinthians in general terms for holding fast the apostolic 'traditions', v. 2. Both 11. 3-16 and 11. 17-34 act as qualifications of that praise – 'But (δε) I want you to know ...', v. 3, and 'Now (δε) in giving these instructions I do not praise you ...', v. 17. The word translated 'come together', v. 17, clearly relates only to that which follows, and not to the preceding section. (ii) *'The section closes with the words "if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God", v. 16. By specifically referring to the how other churches operate, Paul is indicating clearly that in the preceding section he has been dealing with a church setting – as in 14. 33, 36b'*. Not so. In 7. 12-24, Paul spoke of personal and private matters – marriage and divorce, circumcision and slavery – and yet he makes it clear that the principle he is there establishing (that nobody is required to change his or her status when he or she becomes a Christian) is enforced in other churches, v. 17. That is, Paul refers to the uniform beliefs and practice of churches when speaking of matters other than formal church meetings; cf. 4. 17. (iii) *In the context of 1 Cor. 11-14, both praying and prophesying were activities associated with church meetings – as they are throughout chapter 14. The prayer and prophesying of 11. 4-5 are therefore to be understood as taking place in meetings of the church.* Not so. Yes, it is true that prayer and prophesying were appropriate to church meetings. But neither *required* the 'coming together' of the church. The following points are worthy of note : (a) Prayer is certainly not confined to church meetings. As far as the church is concerned, Paul desired 'the men' ('the males' lit.) to pray in every place, 1 Tim. 2. 8. When in a public place with men present, Hannah prayed to the Lord only 'in her heart', 1 Sam. 1. 9-13. (b) In the same way that Zacharias prophesied in his home among relatives and neighbours, Luke 1, it is by no means unreasonable to suppose that Christian prophets often prophesied in the same setting. (c) There is no record that women who prophesied under the Old Covenant (e.g. Exod. 15. 20; Judg. 4. 4; 2 Kgs. 22. 14; 2 Chr. 34. 22; Neh. 6. 14; Isa. 8. 3; Luke 2. 36) ever did so in Israel's formal worship services. As far as Philip's four daughters were concerned, Acts 21. 9, the comment of Origen is worth quoting, 'If the daughters of Philip prophesied, yet they did not speak in the churches. We do not find that in the Acts of the Apostles'. (iv) *In chapter 12, Paul emphasizes that every member of 'the body' has a spiritual gift to be exercised for the common good. Any interpretation of 14. 34-35 which limits oral participation to the men therefore undermines the teaching of chapter 12.* Not so. Two main points: (a) All gifts are not speaking gifts. Spiritual gifts often fall into the category of what we might call 'serving gifts' as opposed to 'speaking gifts'; see Rom. 12. 6-8; 1 Pet. 4. 11. (b) That many women have speaking gifts doesn't mean that these gifts must be exercised in a church meeting; see Tit. 2. 3-5. (v) *A head-covering would have no relevance outside a meeting of the church.* I understand 11. 5 to apply to any situation where the woman (outside of church meetings – such as among other women) assumes a position of spiritual and audible prominence. When angels observe a woman adopting a public role – which the angels would normally associate with a man – it is imperative that the woman wears the sign and symbol of man's headship and authority; see v. 10.