

**HEADY THOUGHTS & HAIRY SITUATIONS:  
HEAD COVERINGS IN 1CORINTHIANS 11.2-16**

In our culture whenever you start telling someone what he or she can or cannot do, you may start a fight quickly. If you base the inability to do this or that on their sex, well then, you have blasphemed the gods of the age. Everyone knows that a woman can do anything a man can do and probably better. And, if you ask the man, you will get just the opposite answer. We know that it is not true that men and women can do anything that the other can do. There are some things that only males can do. And there are some things that only females can do. But what about those common areas in which men and women both have the ability to do the same things? Here we move away from raw ability to whether or not a man or woman *ought* to do something. Having the ability to do something doesn't mean that you ought to do it. Just because someone has the ability to punch you in the nose doesn't mean he ought to do so. Well, in the same way, just because a man or woman has the ability to do something doesn't mean that he or she ought to do it.

Paul is dealing with a situation in the church at Corinth where there are some very gifted men and women. He said so in the beginning of his first letter to them (1Cor 1.7). Some seem to have thought that because they have the ability to do certain things, they ought to be allowed to do them whenever and wherever they wished. Paul tells them that this is not the case, especially when it comes to how the church conducts herself in corporate worship. The worship of God is not a free-for-all display of our abilities. It has order that is imposed upon us from our authority. In 1Corinthians 11.2-16 Paul speaks about this order in the context of dealing with a situation concerning men and women and how they dress up their heads. *Men and women should submit to the proper authority structures designed by God, and their appearance within the congregation should reflect that order.*

There are some deeper issues about the God-created relationship of men and women in the text from which Paul is teasing out the implications. These issues seem to have arisen from the Corinthians misunderstanding of how the new economy under Christ's lordship works. The Corinthians were notorious for taking something Paul said, misinterpreting it, and using it as a slogan and a hammer to insist on their rights to do this or that. For instance, earlier in the letter Paul deals with what appears to be one of these slogans, "All things are lawful" (1Cor 6.12). I believe that you can hear Paul saying something like that. But the Corinthians took him out of context and abused liberty to the point of disobeying God's command.

That is probably the case in our text as well. You can imagine that Paul probably taught them something similar as he did the Galatians when he said, "In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female" (Gal 3.28). Well, that is about all they needed. No more distinctive roles for males and females! What this means is that women can lead in worship, utilizing the obvious revelatory gifts of praying in tongues and prophesying (both of which are Paul's main concerns in this section in my opinion). Besides this, many of the Greeks probably grew up with plenty of priestesses around them in the pagan temple. "Women have a part in the worship at the temples. I don't see a problem with them having a lead in the worship in the church. That's our culture." Paul is setting some things straight in this section. Like the rights he just finished discussing, so it is with the gifts: people can't use these gifts whenever and wherever they wish without regard to proper order, which, I might add, considers others and not just oneself.

The first matter of proper order is dealing with the roles of men and women in the

worship service. I believe this is the context because of Paul moving on to the Lord's Supper in the next passage (11.17ff.; more on this below) and dealing with the exercise of praying in tongues and prophecy in the congregation in ch 14. Paul must correct some wrong-headed notions about how the new economy under Christ doesn't create this egalitarian free-for-all in the worship service. In fact, it does just the opposite. It establishes and promotes order. So, the first order of business is to establish men as men and women as women in God's new economy.

Paul speaks to the men and women in the church about issues of headship. In certain defined relationships, men are the heads of women (e.g., in marriage and in the church). The woman is the glory of the man, having been created from the man and for the man. This is an order of authority that arises from the creation itself. Since Christ came to redeem the creation and set it back on God's intended track, the order established in creation matters. The whole issue before us about head-coverings has to do with observing that order.

## CONTEXT

To reconstruct the situation, we need to look at the entire section that extends from 1Corinthians 11.2 all the way to the end of ch. 14. Let's begin by looking at the overall context of this section. That will give us what we need to come back and look at where this passage fits into what Paul is discussing. There seem to have been some problems in the gathered worship of the church in Corinth. Things weren't being done "decently and in order" and Paul is writing to straighten these matters out (14.40). The references throughout the passage indicate that this is a matter of public worship. The next issue after our text deals with how they are conducting themselves "when they come together" to have the Lord's Supper (11.17ff.). The praying and prophesying spoken of in ch. 14 is obviously done in the presence of the gathered church because Paul calls them to take their proper turns and submit to one another (14.26ff.).

Paul is ordering their gathered worship as the church. This sets some of the context. Our view of what is going on sharpens a bit more when we see how Paul speaks of the people "praying and/or prophesying." Paul obviously deals with the proper use of gifts in this section. Praying and prophesying are two gifts that Paul is saying need to be used properly for the edification of the body. Praying and prophesying are not general but the specific gifts of speaking in tongues and Spirit inspired prophetic utterances.<sup>1</sup> Both were revelatory gifts (i.e., God was revealing something to the congregation through a person). When people stood to exercise these gifts, everyone was supposed to listen (something Paul indicates in 14.26ff.). At that particular time they were leading or "heading up" worship in some sense. This is important for our text because it is directly applicable to the whole head-covering issue. Whatever the head-covering might be *it only applies when a person is engaged in this particular activity within the context of the corporate worship of the church*. Paul designates this several times in our passage: 11.4, 5, 13. If a covering is to be used (and this is a big "if"), it was only to be used during the public exercise of these gifts. *This is **not** about general participation in worship with the rest of the people of God. This is about taking a leadership (i.e., speaking) role before the entire congregation in the context of worship.*

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<sup>1</sup>For my take on tongues and prophecy, please refer to my sermon *The Church: The Spirit-filled Body (Part 3)*, preached June 10, 2012. It may be found here: <http://www.communitypca.org/?p=2730>. This understanding is filled out more when you read on into chapter 14. There Paul contrasts the gift of prophecy and the gift of tongues, associating public prayer in the Corinthian situation with the gift of tongues (cf. esp. 14.1-25).

There are then two issues that must be taken into account while reading this text. First, a redemptive-historical issue: if these special revelatory gifts have ceased (which I believe they have as they were practiced in the first century), then the whole discussion about head-covering for women in worship is a non-issue. Like many of the historical passages of Scripture, we are in a different time on God's calendar. That doesn't mean that these passages are irrelevant. It means that we apply them differently in our time. For example, just because the Ten Commandments are situated in a specific time in Israel's history doesn't mean that they are irrelevant. So it is with this situation. The principles of order and proper structures of authority may look different today, but the principle foundation still applies.

There is a second issue within Paul's context that the interpreter must face. At the end of this section, Paul does not allow women to speak as leaders in the corporate worship of the church (1Cor 14.33b-35). How is it here that Paul talks about when they pray and prophesy they are to have their heads covered but later he says that they can't pray and prophesy when the church is gathered for worship? That is a tension that is rarely resolved in many interpretations. I believe the two passages are mutually interpretative. I may not have the resolution that settles all the questions in the reader's mind, but the reader needs to face the reality that this head-covering passage cannot stand alone and be interpreted apart from what Paul says later. Women keeping silent in the church must have some bearing on how we interpret the head-covering passage. It goes to the larger issue of, "Should women lead the corporate worship of the church?"

## **PRAISE**

Paul begins by praising the Corinthians for remembering him in everything (which may include supporting him in his ministry). He also praises them for holding fast the traditions he delivered to them. The Corinthians aren't all bad. They are doing some things right with regard to what he is about to say concerning order in worship. They understand at least some of the things Paul handed down to them concerning the relationships between men and women. But, once again, it looks as if they may have been taking some things that Paul said too far. We've seen this before. Twice now Paul dealt with their sloganeering about all things being lawful. They probably took some bits of Paul's teaching to the extreme and, in this way, actually turned it on its head. They took this to mean, "I may demand my rights to do anything that I wish because I'm free from the Law. It doesn't matter what other people think or how my actions affect them." That, of course, is a great distortion of what Paul actually taught. In our passage it seems to me that they are taking what Paul taught them about men and women in the New Covenant to an extreme. As I mentioned earlier, we can be relatively certain that Paul taught them what he taught the Galatians; namely, that in Christ Jesus there is no more "male and female." We don't even have to imagine what they could have done with that. Modern day theologians have abused that probably much in the same way the Corinthians did. "We all have equal access to God in Christ. Therefore, there are no more authority structures within the church that require male-only leadership. That is *so* Old Covenant-Tabernacle-Temple-Aaronic priesthood stuff. Besides, the fact that God has gifted women means that women should be able to use these gifts anytime and in any place they want." They have misunderstood the changes in the New Covenant and, consequently, they have insisted upon certain perceived rights that they have. Because a woman has the ability to pray in tongues and prophesy doesn't mean she has the *right* to do so anytime she desires. Just because someone has a gift in the church doesn't mean he has the *right* to exercise it without regard for authority in the church or for the good of others (again, something

Paul will deal with toward the close of this section specifically; 14.26ff.) The Corinthians have latched on to some of things Paul handed down. That is good. But some things need some tweaking, something he deals with in vv. 3ff.

### THE ISSUE

There is much about this passage that is difficult and, therefore, confusing. Paul is speaking into a very specific situation in the church at Corinth into which we have very little insight. This doesn't mean that we can't know anything. God has given us what we need to know in order to live in the church as we ought to live. But we are only listening to one side of a conversation. We are trying to reconstruct the entire conversation by only hearing one side.

Imagine that you are in phone conversation with your spouse. There is a bystander close to you and hears you gasp in horror and then angrily say, "I'm going to get that boy." The bystander, seeing your reaction and hearing your words thinks, "Oh, no! A murder is about to take place." He has only heard one side of the conversation and doesn't know the relationship you have with other person on the other end of the line. He doesn't know that your husband just told you that your two-year old son took all the flour out of the pantry and spread it all over the house. There are all sorts of dynamics to the relationship and the words used that the bystander doesn't understand. He doesn't know that you are simply frustrated at the work your son has created for you and, consequently, you are reacting with a figure of speech that could be interpreted a number of ways. The intimacy of the relationship with the person on the other side of the conversation allows you to use words and phrases that you wouldn't normally use with people who don't know the situation.

This is a personal letter of Paul to the Corinthians. There are things happening to which we have not been made privy. Though we are in the same family, Paul is speaking into a specific situation in this particular church at this time in history. We are bystanders listening to one side of the conversation. We must be careful as we seek to reconstruct the situation.

While many of the details may be difficult to reconstruct, we can be sure that the main issue with which Paul is dealing is *proper order in worship, especially in relation to male-female roles*. This is evident throughout our passage as Paul deals with headship issues.

### CULTURAL CONVENTIONS OR DIVINE CREATION?

When approaching this passage, some want to run straight to the Greco-Roman world of the first century to either prove their case or dismiss the whole passage. The cultural situation is not completely irrelevant because they are in the first century Greco-Roman world. Cultural studies coming from literature and archaeology of the time have unearthed all sorts of conclusions. For example, when Paul speaks of the a woman having a "shaved head" and that being a "shame" to her, there is some evidence that points to the fact that a woman caught in adultery would have her head shaved, giving her a public display of shame.<sup>2</sup> The "covered head," which might refer to a woman having her hair bound up instead of being loose or having some type of covering over her hair, might have been a sign of modesty that told men that she was

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<sup>2</sup>David Garland, *Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 520.

“unavailable.”<sup>3</sup> There are many problems in deciphering the evidence from ancient texts and archaeology because there seem to have been many different practices so that nothing can be really nailed down with certainty. These things can be helpful, but they are far from conclusive.

But we do have a way forward; one that is much more certain. Paul deals with the situation from the perspective of Trinitarian relationships and created order. He is not appealing to cultural norms ... unless you are speaking of the culture of the church, which, he says, abides by all the things that he is saying no matter in what city or province she find herself (11.16). Those who want to dismiss the whole passage on the basis that it is so culturally specific that it is irrelevant, lose their foundation at this point. There are principles in the passage that transcend time and culture. Headship derives from the relationships within the Godhead (11.3) and the order and the purpose for which God created the man and the woman (11.7-9), not the prevailing cultural winds blowing through the Roman Empire.

With that said, as mentioned earlier, there are some matters that can't be translated into our situation one-for-one either. Discerning between what transcends the time and culture and what remains is the difficult task.

Now, speaking of headship, headship and how it functions is the point of contention for Paul. Who is head of whom and how does that work out within the worship of the church? When Paul speaks about headship, his primary emphasis is on authority; i.e., who has the “right” to do what and when? This order is reflected in how the male and the female adorn their physical heads in worship. While this may seem strange to us, it is not a strange thing either Scripturally (for those familiar with the Scriptures) or culturally.

### THE MAN AND HIS HEAD

When dealing with this passage, most of the focus tends to be on the woman. There is a good reason for this. Paul focuses much on the women and their headgear. The men are generally overlooked. But Paul says something about the men and their heads in vv. 4 & 14. He says that a man praying or prophesying is not to cover his head lest he shame his head; i.e., Christ himself. There are biblical as well as cultural reasons that Paul must speak about this. One author writes that archaeological evidence shows that there was “widespread use of male liturgical head coverings in the city of Rome, in Italy and in numerous cities in the Roman East ... on coins, statues and architectural monuments from around the Mediterranean Basin.... Men covering their heads in the context of prayer and prophecy was a common pattern of Roman piety.”<sup>4</sup> In 11.4, when Paul speaks about men not covering their heads, he uses an odd phrase that speaks of something “coming down” from the head.<sup>5</sup> This may have been a well-known idiomatic phrase with which that world would have been familiar. They may have covered their heads in prayer much like we see Jewish men today taking their prayer shawls and covering their heads.

Men may have been covering their heads. Whether they were or not, Paul tells that they shouldn't. When Paul says this, it may have been a radical cultural change, but it was even more

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<sup>3</sup>Garland, 521. Anthony Thiselton, *The New International Greek New Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 828-833

<sup>4</sup>Oster in Thiselton, 805.

<sup>5</sup>κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων (*kata kephalēs echōn*)

radical when you looked at the Scriptures. In Scripture God prescribed a head covering for those coming into his manifested presence in the Tabernacle and Temple, which at that time were males only. The high priest had a God-prescribed turban with a golden plate on the front that said “Holy to YHWH.” He had to wear this headgear when he came into YHWH’s presence for his own protection. Once a king named Uzziah tried to burn incense before YHWH without being a priest and having no headgear. He was struck on the forehead with leprosy, symbolic death (2Chr 26.19). In the Old Covenant the man needed a covering. But now in the New Covenant if he leads worship in some sense with something on his head, it will “shame” his head, who is Christ. Men lead worship now without head coverings because Christ has come and removed the wrath and curse so that we can draw near to him. For men to have a head covering in a leadership position in the church shames Christ. It is the proclamation that Christ has not accomplished the satisfaction of God’s judgment against us. Some very large branches of the church have their men leading worship with covered heads. This is direct disobedience to the Tradition that Paul handed down to us and it dishonors Christ, our head. God’s intention for man was to be able to come into God’s presence with his head uncovered. This is the way God created man to be. It is only because of sin that for a while man had to cover his head.

Paul moves from the specific worship-covering in v. 4 to the general head covering of hair in 11.14-15. In 11.14 Paul says, “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him...” What we learn and will get to momentarily, is that the hair of both the male and female indicate their God-given vocations. A woman’s long hair is her glory and is given to her for a covering (literally, “cloak”) in her creation by God (15). Her long hair is one indicator that she is female and not male. The male, by creation, is ordinarily to have shorter hair.

Paul says that “nature” teaches us these things. Paul’s use of the word “nature” speaks of the way God created something to be (cf. e.g., Rom 1.26; 2.14, 27; 11.21, 24; Gal 4.8). There are exceptions to the rule. For instance, God commanded that some men be Nazarites, and Nazarites weren’t to cut their hair until the vow was over. They stood in the place of and for the bride, becoming a warrior bride. The exception here proves the rule: men had to be commanded to grow long hair.

The man’s glory is the woman, not his own hair. Men growing long hair in general (i.e., looking like women) is a rejection of their vocation as men and seeks self-glorification instead of being glorified by another, namely, the woman. The woman’s long hair is her glory and, consequently, the glory of her husband. Since we no longer have Nazarite vows, it is inappropriate for men to grow their hair long so as to look like women.

All of this goes to the acceptance of the vocation and the place of authority and responsibility God has given. Men are to accept their roles and lead. There are to be no role reversals. Some might retort, “Well, this is the style right now.” To which I respond, “In whose culture? The churches of God or American culture?” We have our own culture that dictates to us what parts of the prevailing culture we can accept and what we are to reject. This is one of those areas where Scripture and specifically this passage are quite clear: men are to look like men and not like women in the length of their hair.

## **THE WOMAN AND HER HEAD**

Women have a vocation as well. We will begin with the general here and move to the specific situation. The full question I started earlier reads like this, “Does not nature itself teach you that on the one hand if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long

hair it is her glory? Because her long hair is given to her for/instead of a covering” (11.14-15). The word Paul uses here to speak about a woman’s hair being her “covering” is different from the other words used in this passage to speak about coverings. The word literally speaks of a “cloak.” There seems to me to be some connection here to Deut 22.5 where Moses speaks about a woman not wearing a man’s gear and a man not putting on a woman’s cloak.<sup>6</sup> In that context it has specific reference to military combat; i.e., men and women aren’t supposed to switch roles so that the woman goes out and fights for the man. But the deeper reference is to the fact that men and women are not to exchange God-given callings. Clothing in Scripture indicates a person’s vocation (as it does still today). A woman’s long hair is her cloak. That is, it indicates her general calling in the world as a woman. What Paul is saying here is that in the created order, God has made it clear that men and women occupy different roles. This is indicated in the order of their creation—man is created first and then the woman—the purpose of their creation—the woman is created for the man and not man for the woman—and with the different hair lengths—the man has short hair and the woman has long hair.

Moving to the more specific, I used to take the woman’s long hair to be her covering as that to which Paul referred throughout the passage. I no longer think that is the case. It simply will not work throughout the passage. I believe that Paul is referring to something else in the context of worship, whether it be hair that is bound up rather than loosed or some type of external covering. 1Cor 11.14-15 are only proof from general vocations of man and woman that these things ought to be true within God’s new creation, the church, and her worship in a specific way.

So, what does all this head-covering stuff mean and should our women being wearing head coverings in worship today? Well, there are several things to take into account. First, there is the context to which I referred earlier. This special head covering only applies to ladies who are leading public prayers (in tongues) and prophesying in the church. If this were not the case, the instructions Paul gives to the Christian ladies through pastor Timothy doesn’t make sense. In 1Tim 2 Paul tells Timothy to teach the ladies that they are not to be immodestly ostentatious in worship. Among the things they are not supposed to do is have “braided hair.” Whatever else this means, it means that the woman’s hair could be seen by others in worship. If head coverings were the universal practice for all women merely participating in worship, then Paul could have simply said, “Tell these women to get in line and cover up their heads when they come to worship.” But he doesn’t say this. What Paul is instructing in 1Cor 11 is true for all the churches of God (11.16) and is not something with which they are to contend. Head coverings would have only been for a specific situation of leadership within worship and not merely participating in worship.

Now, what is interesting about this passage is that it structurally parallels 14.33b-35 where Paul says that it is not proper for the woman to be exercising the gifts of praying in tongues or prophesying in the public worship at all. Paul organizes this section in chiasmic fashion. That is, there are parallel passages that point to and emphasize the center. Here is the way I see the passage being arranged:

- A (11.2): Introduction: keeping those things Paul handed down
- B (11.3-16): Women shouldn’t be leading worship through praying and prophesying
- C (11.17-34): The Lord’s Supper: Wait for one another
- D (12.1-31): Gifts: for the building of the body

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<sup>6</sup>The word is not the same in the LXX, but it is the same concept.

**E (13.1-13): Love: the greatest gift that governs use of all other gifts**

D' (14.1-25): Gifts of prophecy and tongues: use for the building of the church

C' (14.26-33a): Praying & Prophesying: Submit to/Wait for one another

B' (14.33b-35): Women shouldn't be leading in worship through praying and prophesying

A' (14.36-40): Conclusion: acknowledge the authority of what Paul is writing<sup>7</sup>

Some commentators have seen Paul contradicting himself here. One place he says that they have to pray and prophesy with their heads covered and the other place he says that they can't speak at all. Is this schizophrenic Paul? No. The way Paul approaches the situation in our passage may be strange for us, but he is dealing with a very specific situation in Corinth. It is like having an inside joke. You have to be on the "inside" to understand the nuances and get it. They know what is going on. We don't. We are seeking to get into the dynamics of Paul's intimate relationship with the Corinthians and understand the one side of the conversation we hear within that context.

Let me try to summarize what I believe Paul is saying in this passage so that he agrees with himself.<sup>8</sup> Paul is taking the long way to say something like this, "Hey ladies, you are not supposed to lead in worship. You have gifts, but they are not supposed to be used in this context." It doesn't make sense for a person to be a "head" or a leader in worship with his head covered in this New Covenant situation. This is why a man, who is supposed to be the one leading in worship, cannot cover his head. For the woman to pray or prophesy in the assembly, she would have to do so with her head uncovered. What this means is that she would have to assume the vocation of the man. Well, if she uncovers her head, she might as well cut off all indications of her female vocation. That is, she should cut or shave her head so as to look like a man. Paul doesn't encourage this because this would be a rejection of her female vocation and would be a shame to her. She would have to do away with her God-given glory. But if she uncovers her head, revealing her hair, she is revealing the glory of her man. Paul has said that the woman is the glory of the man (11.7). Since her hair is her glory (11.15), it reveals the glory of the man (because her glory belongs to the man). Remember, the woman *is* the glory of the man; that is her irrevocable, unchangeable, God-created calling. She can only choose to accept or reject the calling. In worship it is an improper challenge to God's own glory to exalt the glory of man. It is, in effect, to idolize her man in the presence of God. If she brings this idol into the presence of God and his holy angels to lead in worship, that is a dangerous place. She is disrupting the God-ordained order.

When Paul says that she ought, literally, "to have authority on her head because of the angels," he is saying there must be proper order in worship so as not to make the angels death angels in the church.<sup>9</sup> If the woman prays and prophesies with her head uncovered, she is a

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<sup>7</sup>Some people believe that chiasmic structures such as this are forced upon the text. This is not the time nor is there the space to defend these types of structures. But even if I were to concede that the passages were not parallel structurally, there is still the five-hundred pound gorilla in the room of an apparent contradiction in what Paul is saying.

<sup>8</sup>There are, no doubt, holes in my interpretation. Any mirror-reading of the text always has its challenges. Quite frankly, I haven't seen any interpretation of this passage that doesn't have holes; usually the greatest of which is failing to reconcile these two passages.

<sup>9</sup>I take the angels here to refer to the angels spoken of in Heb 12 with whom we gather in worship. They are guardians of the glory of God. And the glory of God demands proper order.



shame to her head; i.e., her man. “Shame” here may include embarrassment, but that is not all it covers. With the images of original creation in this passage, I think Paul means us at least to see this as “exposing the nakedness” of the man and bring him to shame before God. By uncovering her head, the woman turns the glory of man into shame by exposing his failure to lead as he ought, disregarding God’s command. Women, who should be submissive to their men in worship, can’t uncover their heads. This means that they cannot pray or prophesy publicly (i.e., they can’t lead in worship). The woman would reject the place of glory that God has given her. She has a vocation. Within that vocation she has tremendous power. But if she exchanges this glory for what she perceives to be glory (or if the church allows her to do so), then her glory is turned into shame for everyone and will eventually lead to the death of the church. God will abide no rivals. She has, at this point, rejected her God-given glory. So then, because women would have to have head coverings if they were to lead in worship, it is completely inappropriate for women to lead in worship.

### WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR US?

This passage has relevance still today for what is appropriate and inappropriate in worship. First, the passage is about more than pieces of cloth that may or may not be on a woman’s or man’s head. This passage is about authority structures. Paul teaches us that *distinctions between men and women don’t disappear during worship*. There are certain roles reserved for males. This says nothing about the abilities or inabilities of females ... or males for that matter. There are probably some women who can teach much better than me. This is not about ability but about order; specifically the way God orders his church. We are not to take the leaps that the Corinthians did (and many still do today): “Well, she has this gift. This gift is to be used in Christ’s church. Therefore, she should be able to use it when we gather for worship.” Be careful. Solid logic doesn’t always make sound doctrine. Your syllogism may be sound but your doctrine may be skewed. We are to obey God’s order by faith.

Are there places for women to use their gifts? Certainly. Philip’s daughters were prophetesses (Ac 21.8-9) and used those gifts in other settings. Aquila *and* Priscilla taught Apollos (Ac 18.26). Can women teach men in general? Seems so. We have biblical examples of it. Can women write books that men can read and from which they can be taught? Sure. Can women teach men how to relate to their wives better? Certainly. Can women lead and teach in worship? No. This is a different setting, and context matters.

One of our problems as humans in our immaturity and sin is our inability to recognize the propriety of different actions in different contexts. Just because it is appropriate for a woman to teach a seminar where men learn how better to relate to their wives, for example, doesn’t mean that she can lead when the church gathers around the Lord’s Table.

Second, a word to the ladies: *Ladies, it is not necessary for you to wear head coverings to worship*. Again, the context is not about worship in general but about assuming a leadership role in worship in praying (in tongues) and/or prophesying, something that Paul doesn’t allow either. So, you don’t have to wear a head covering.

Now, if you disagree with my interpretation of this passage and are convinced that you ought to wear a head covering, and your church authorities don’t mind (because this passage is all about submitting to proper authority) by all means you may do so. But understand that this is not a clear-cut issue and you can’t be contentious about it.

Some might say, “Well, it has been the practice of many branches of the church for a very

long time. That should hold some authority.” We should examine that carefully and give it some weight to be sure. But it has also been the practice of men in the church to wear some type of head covering—whether Pope or Patriarch—for just as long and Paul says that this is not the Tradition that he handed down. Just because the church has done something for a long time doesn’t make it right. It just means that the church has been doing the wrong thing for a long time.

As you consider what to do, you might also consider Paul’s exhortations and admonitions throughout most of this letter concerning how you exercise your freedoms or even your “rights.” Let’s say that your church leadership gives you the freedom to wear head-coverings during worship. What may be lawful (i.e., allowed) may not be profitable; indeed, your insistence on wearing head-coverings might even violate the principles that you are trying to uphold. When we come to worship, we come to worship corporately. Corporate worship is not about any one person making himself or herself stand out. We are worshiping together as the body in unity. It is not the time for you to sing the songs that you want to sing, creating a cacophony. It is not about the individual standing up and speaking whenever he or she has the urge to do so. (That is one thing that Paul deals with specifically in ch. 14.) It is about submission to one another, which means that each one of us is to have a sense of modesty about us. Certainly this means that our ladies aren’t to attend worship in bikinis and our men in biking shorts. But modesty is more than that. Modesty, as Paul deals with in 1Tim 2 is about drawing unnecessary attention to yourself, especially within the context of worship. Is it a possibility that by wearing a head-covering you are actually being immodest by drawing unnecessary attention to yourself? If head-coverings for women are not the culture of the local church, is your going against that grain really the best thing for life of the church? Again, it may be lawful under your church authorities, but is it profitable?