

1 CORINTHIANS 11: 3-16

Here, Paul makes a very coherent and ingenious argument as to why women should not be veiled. Included is my translation of the Greek and an analysis. At the end, the translation is also given with [added words] which aid in comprehension.

1 CORINTHIANS 11: 3-16

PAUL'S MODEL:

³“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head (F) of every man, and the man is the head (F) of a woman, and God is the head (F) of Christ.”

PAUL QUOTES A FACTION OF MEN FROM CORINTH WHO WROTE HIM:

⁴“Every man who has anything down over his head (L) while praying or prophesying disgraces his head (L). ⁵But every woman who has her head (L) unveiled while praying or prophesying disgraces her head (L); for it is one and the same thing as having been shaved. ⁶For if a woman is not veiled, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, let her be veiled.”

PAUL'S REBUTTAL AND REFERENCE BACK TO HIS MODEL:

⁷“For a man indeed ought not to veil his head (F), since He is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man is not of woman, but woman of man; ⁹for indeed, man was not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man. ¹⁰For this reason the woman ought to have authority over her head (F), because of our Messengers. ¹¹However, in the Lord, neither is woman without man, nor is man without woman. ¹²For as the woman is from the man, so also the man through the woman, and all things from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves that it is proper for a woman to pray to God unveiled. ¹⁴For not even nature itself teaches you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her, because the long hair has been given instead of a covering. ¹⁶But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor have the people of God.”

(F) – Figurative (source/origin)

(L) – Literal

ANALYSIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11: 3-16

Verse 3 - Paul gives his model with the figurative meaning of head.

3“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head (F) of every man, and the man is the head (F) of a woman, and God is the head (F) of Christ.”

There are three things to note about verse three.

1) The reason why Paul gives his model using a figurative head argument is because a faction of men had written him using a literal head argument. Therefore, Paul wants them to understand head in a figurative sense so that he can refer back to his model, when he gives his rebuttal, to explain exactly why women are not to be veiled.

2) The reason why Paul uses the word “andros”, meaning “man”^[1], at the beginning of his model (Christ is the head of every man), instead of the word “anthropos”, meaning “human being”^[2], is because it is men who wrote him and he directs both his model and rebuttal to the men.

3) “Head” used figuratively in the Greek, in Paul’s time, meant “source/origin/first/beginning”. It did not mean “leader/ruler/chief/authority”. (See “Head — Source or Leader?”)

3“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head [source] of every man...”

16“For by Him [Christ] all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.” (Colossians 1: 16 ^{NASB})

“...and the man is the head [source] of a woman...”

22“The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib [flesh and bone] which He had taken from the man...” (Genesis 2: 22 ^{NASB})

“...and God [the Father] is the head [source] of Christ [incarnate].”

¹⁴“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father...” (John 1: 14 ^{NASB})

⁴“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law...” (Galatians 4: 4 ^{NASB})

Verses 4-6 – Paul quotes the faction of men from Corinth who wrote him.

⁴“Every man who has anything down over his head (L) while praying or prophesying disgraces his head (L). ⁵But every woman who has her head (L) unveiled while praying or prophesying disgraces her head (L); for it is one and the same thing as having been shaved. ⁶For if a woman is not veiled, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, let her be veiled.”

Look carefully at verses 4-6 because those who teach on this passage maintain that Paul is saying that every man who has anything down over his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his figurative head, Christ, and that every woman who has her head unveiled while praying or prophesying disgraces her figurative head, the man. However, it is clear from the context that a literal head argument is being used. For if verse five was referring to a woman’s figurative head, the man, then verse six would also have to be referring to her figurative head due to the words ⁵“...it is one and the same thing as having been shaved.” However, if one reads verse six they will find that it is the woman who is disgraced by having her hair cut off. There is no mention of the man being disgraced. As a result of this fact, along with the totality of Paul’s words, it is clear that verses 4-6 are the words of a faction of men who wrote Paul.

Note: Many Bible translations have added the word “head” multiple times in this passage. For example, the NASB has added the word “head” five times where it does not appear in the Greek (once in verse five, three times in verse six, and once in verse thirteen). However, this only helps to confuse the passage since Paul gives his model and refers back to it. Therefore, I have used the word “head” only when it appears in the Greek. In addition, it is also important to note that the original Greek was written in all majuscule [capital] letters, had no spacing between words or sentences, and had no punctuation of any kind.^[3] Therefore, one has to determine by context whether a portion of Scripture is quoted.

Verse 7 – Paul uses Jesus Christ as a correlation as to why women should not be veiled.

⁷“For a man indeed ought not to veil his head (**F**), since He is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man [so she ought not to be veiled either].”

Here in verse seven, Paul agrees with the men that they ought not to veil their head. The only difference is that the men were talking about their own literal heads while Paul, in his rebuttal, is speaking of the man’s figurative head, Christ. Indeed, Scripture is clear that it is Jesus Christ, **NOT** man, who is the image and glory of God!

³“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4: 3-4 ^{NASB})

¹⁵“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” (Colossians 1: 15 ^{NASB})

³“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature...” (Hebrews 1: 3 ^{NASB})

²³“And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Revelation 21: 23 ^{NASB})

So Paul is making the point that just as a man ought not to veil his head, Christ, because He is the image and glory of God, so also the man ought not to veil the woman because she is his glory. Indeed, no one takes a lamp and puts it under a basket; they put it on the lamp stand so that all may see by its light. (Matthew 5: 14-15, Mark 4: 21, Luke 8: 16)

Verses 8-9 – Paul states the reason that the woman is the glory of man.

⁸“For man is not of woman, but woman of man; ⁹for indeed, man was not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man [because of his need for her].”

Here, Paul is telling the men that the woman is the glory of man because she came from him. Indeed, the man was not created because of a deficiency on the woman's part, but rather the woman was created because of a deficiency on the man's part.

In Genesis 2: 18 we can clearly see that God said that it was not good for the man to be alone. God then went on to say that He would make him an "ezer ke'negdo" [in the Hebrew].

Ezer – The word "ezer" is typically translated as "helper". However, it does not refer to a subservient helper because it has a combination of two roots: one means "to rescue, to save"; the other means "to be strong".^[4] Furthermore, of the twenty-one times that the word "ezer" is used in the Bible, sixteen of those times it refers to God as our "helper". It is also used to describe God bestowing "strength" on a warrior in Psalm 89: 19 ^(NIV).

Ke – marker of comparison: "similar", "as" or "like"^[5]

Neged – "in front of"^[6]

As a result, these words clearly show us that God was not making a companion for Adam because he was lonely (as is typically assumed), but rather that He was making him a strong helper [ezer] one like him [ke] to be in front of [neged] him. A woman, with her wisdom and discernment, is a light that helps the man see. She helps to guide his path. This is why God created her to be "in front of" the man. For just as we would not cover up a light, so also we would not hold a light behind us. Indeed, a light is held in front of a person to help guide the way. The woman was taken from the man's own flesh and bone to fill what was lacking on his part. The man needed a helper; someone wiser than himself.

Verse 10 – Paul answers the pride of the men who wrote him.

¹⁰"For this reason the woman ought to have authority over her head (F), because of our Messengers [Elohim; plural of majesty]."

In verse ten, Paul answers the pride of the men who wrote him. For Paul well understood that these men made their argument under the guise that a woman praying or prophesying unveiled was the same as a woman whose head was shaved, but that the real reason was one of dominance. For men had always given themselves prominence for the reason that they were the source of a woman. They made the claim, as men do today, that they were to be in authority over women because the man was created first and the woman came from him.

Therefore, having women veiled was a sign of their subordination. However, because Paul is aware of their underlying reason for wanting women to be veiled, he makes the following argument. The woman came from the man because she was created for his sake; she was created because of a deficiency on his part. For this reason, she ought to have authority over the source from which she came.

7“...but the woman is the glory of man. 8For man is not of woman, but woman of man; 9for indeed, man was not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man. 10For this reason the woman ought to have authority over her head (F)...”

(Paul’s model: 3“...and the man is the head (F) of a woman...”)

Note: Many Bible translations have added the words “a symbol of” in verse ten. However, the words “a symbol of” are not in the original Greek.

In addition to this, Paul then refers to God as “Messengers” to remind them of what God said about man and woman at the beginning.

18“Then the LORD God (Elohim) said...”

18“...It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a strong helper, one like him, to be in front of him.” (Genesis 2: 18)

24“For this reason [because she was taken out of man (vs. 23) (for his sake)] a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cling to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” (Genesis 2: 24)

Note: “Elohim” means “God; plural of majesty.” Elohim is plural in form but singular in meaning.^[7] Therefore, because Elohim is plural in form but singular in meaning, so also Messengers is plural in form but singular in meaning. Also, the definite article in the Greek often has the force of a possessive pronoun (10“...dia tous [the/our] angelous.”)^[8]

Verses 11-12 – Paul explains how things are in the Lord.

11“However, in the Lord, [we do not rule over one another because] neither is woman without man, nor is man without woman. 12For as the woman is from the man, so also the man through the woman, and all things from God [so give Him the glory and let neither one boast].”

So here, Paul makes the point that, in the Lord, we do not rule over one another because neither is woman without man, nor is man without woman. Indeed, God has purposefully designed men and women to have interdependent origins so that neither one could claim superiority in order to dominate the other. What's more, Paul then makes the point that all things are from God. Thus, Paul is making the point that men and women should give God the glory and that neither one should boast. Indeed, no one is to boast in themselves; for all things come from God.

Note: Many Bible translations have added the words "has his birth", or something similar, in verse twelve. However, these words are not in the original Greek.

Verse 13 – Paul wants the men to determine the correctness of this matter for themselves.

¹³"Judge for yourselves that it is proper for a woman to pray to God unveiled."

Here, Paul is not asking a question (is it), but rather he is making a statement (it is). The Greek word "estin" means "it is".^[9] Paul wants the men to judge for themselves that it is proper for a woman to pray to God unveiled.

Note: Many Bible translations have added the words "with her head", or something similar, in verse thirteen. However, these words are not in the original Greek. Paul has intentionally left the word "head" out in verse thirteen because he is now talking about the woman's literal head. And his use of the word "head" in his rebuttal only corresponds to his model with the figurative meaning of head. Thus, Paul leaves the word "head" out so that he will not confuse the people to whom he is writing.

Verses 14-15 – Paul tells the men that their argument has no merit.

¹⁴"For not even nature itself teaches you ¹⁵that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her, because the long hair has been given [to us all] instead of a covering."

It is important to know here that virtually all Bible translations add the word “does” at the beginning of verse fourteen. However, the word “does” is not in the Greek and its addition (the question mark also) actually changes the meaning of Paul’s words. For Paul is actually telling the men that nature does **NOT** teach us that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her^[10] because God, who created and controls nature, has given us all long hair instead of a covering. In other words, Paul is saying that it is acceptable for men to have long hair because God has allowed it through nature. If God did not want men to grow long hair, then He would have disallowed it through nature just as He has disallowed women to grow facial hair through nature. So God has allowed men to grow long hair, not as a dishonor to him, but rather for protection from the sun’s harsh rays and from the bitter cold. Likewise, God has given women long hair, not for vain beauty purposes (as many women have unmanageable hair – flat, limp, frizzy), but rather for protection from the sun’s harsh rays and the bitter cold. So, since nature does not teach us that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, it is therefore not disgraceful for a man to grow long hair. Likewise, since nature does not teach us that if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her, it is therefore not disgraceful for a woman to cut her hair. Indeed, Paul has rendered the men’s argument as baseless.

Note: The pronoun “aute” (translated as “to her”) in verse fifteen is omitted by the Papyrus 46, D, F, G, and also by the majority of later Greek manuscripts.^[11] Therefore, since the majority of ancient Greek manuscripts do not contain the word “aute” it confirms to us that the words “to her” were not words original to Paul. For it would be absurd to think that the scribes would have overlooked this word in one of the most scrutinized passages of the Bible. Indeed, it is much more probable that this word was added to some manuscripts by scribes because of their own bias. Furthermore, the context shows us that the words “to her” do not belong because Paul has included men in his argument in verse fourteen. Indeed, God has given men the exact same coverings on their heads as He has given women.

It is also important to note one more thing before I move on. The fact that Paul is speaking of a man, and not Christ, when stating that long hair does not dishonor a man (vs. 14), confirms to us that a literal head argument is being used in verse four, not a figurative head argument. Indeed, Paul made this argument because the men had made the argument that every man who has anything (“anything” would include hair) down over his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his own literal head. For Paul knew that many Jewish men had long hair (see Numbers 6: 5, Judges 13: 3-5, 1 Samuel 1: 11, 2 Samuel 14: 25-26, Acts 18: 18). Hence, since the men made the argument of women disgracing their head in relation to hair, Paul made a hair argument for them. (Note: It is likely that the men were thinking of a man disgracing his head in relation to a veil, not long hair.)

The Men's Argument: ⁴*“Every man who has anything down over his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.”*

Paul's Refutation: ¹⁴*“Not even nature itself teaches you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him¹⁵...because the long hair has been given instead of a covering.”*

Verse 16 – Paul plainly tells the men that the people of God have no such practice of requiring women to veil their heads.

¹⁶*“But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice [of requiring women to veil their heads], nor have the people of God.”*

And finally, Paul ends his rebuttal by making it clear to the men that if any of them are inclined to be contentious about this issue, then they should plainly know that they have no such practice of requiring women to veil their heads, nor have the people of God.

Note: Some Bible translations translate the Greek word “toiauten” as “other” in verse sixteen. However, the Greek word “toiauten” means “such, such as this, of such a kind”.^[12]

So, within this passage Paul ingeniously answers both the underlying argument of these men, which was one of dominance, and the stated argument of these men, which was one of shorn or shaven hair. The real argument (which was not stated), he answers with his model and verses 7-13, and the argument of guise (verses 4-6), he answers in verses 14-15. He intertwines both answers with such perfection and flawlessness that we cannot help but see the penmanship of God and the love He has for His daughters. This passage clearly shows us that although the world may treat women with disdain and inequity, the God of the universe does not. Certainly, one would think that Christian men would be different, but even they, through their lies, have made Galatians 3: 28 ring hollow. But truly, there is neither male nor female in Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 11: 3-16

PAUL'S MODEL:

³“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head [source] of every man, and the man is the head [source] of a woman, and God is the head [source] of Christ [incarnate].”

PAUL QUOTES A FACTION OF MEN FROM CORINTH WHO WROTE HIM:

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PAUL'S REBUTTAL AND REFERENCE BACK TO HIS MODEL:

⁷“For a man indeed ought not to veil his head [Christ], since He is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man [so she ought not to be veiled either]. ⁸For man is not of woman, but woman of man; ⁹for indeed, man was not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man [because of his need for her]. ¹⁰For this reason the woman ought to have authority over her head [the man], because of our Messengers [Elohim; plural of majesty]. ¹¹However, in the Lord, [we do not rule over one another because] neither is woman without man, nor is man without woman. ¹²For as the woman is from the man, so also the man through the woman, and all things from God [so give Him the glory and let neither one boast]. ¹³Judge for yourselves that it is proper for a woman to pray to God unveiled. ¹⁴For not even nature itself teaches you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her, because the long hair has been given [to us all] instead of a covering. ¹⁶But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice [of requiring women to veil their heads], nor have the people of God.”

2 Corinthians 3: 17-18

¹⁷“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is **freedom**. ¹⁸But we all, with **unveiled** faces, reflect the Lord's glory and are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

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