

Veil vs. Hair, Uncut vs. Long?:
Assessing Recent Claims in the Light of Available Data
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In my 2003 paper, *Ἐκὼν καὶ Δόξα Θεοῦ: An Interpretive Key to 1 Cor. 11:2-16*,¹ I argued that since God required OT priests to wear a material head-covering while performing their office, Paul cannot be talking about a material head-covering in 1 Cor. 11:7 when he says, “A man, indeed, ought not to cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God.”¹ Two NT scholars, Ben Witherington III and Preston Massey, have argued to the contrary that Paul’s language in 1 Cor. 11:4 cannot refer to anything other than a material head-covering.² In this paper, my goal is to address two questions. First, what does the phrase in v. 4 “having *his* head covered” (NASB; *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων*) mean? Does it, as Witherington and Massey argue, necessarily refer to a material head-covering?

The second question is does Paul’s language support the conclusion that women are not to cut their hair at all? To put the question another way, does Paul only require women’s hair to be long and leave to our discretion whether to trim it or not?

An Analysis of *κατὰ [τῆς] κεφαλῆς* in Extra-Biblical Literature

The phrase, ‘having *his* head covered’ (*κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων*) literally means “down/on head having.” This phrase does not occur anywhere else in the NT or in the Septuagint. A search of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*⁴ and the *Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri*⁵ reveals that the exact construction *katá kephalés échon* (*κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων*) occurs nowhere else in extant Greek literature.⁶ This lack of evidence makes it difficult to discern Paul’s meaning.

¹ This paper has also been supplied in your Forum notebook after this paper and is also available online at <http://apbrown2.net/web/1Corinthians11/ImagoEtGloriaDei.pdf>.

² Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 233-34; Preston T. Massey, “The Meaning of *κατακαλύπτω* and *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* in 1 Corinthians 11.2–16,” *New Testament Studies*, 53.4 (2007): 502-523.

³ The “his” is italicized by the NASB because the word “his” does not occur in the Greek text.

⁴ <http://www.tlg.uci.edu/>. This database catalogs most literary texts written in Greek from Homer to the fall of Byzantium in AD 1453.

⁵ <http://papyri.info/>. This site allows users to search the Advanced Papyrological Information System (APIS), the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (DDbDP) and the Heidelberger Gesamtverzeichnis der griechischen Papyrusurkunden Ägyptens (HGV) simultaneously.

⁶ Specifically, the phrase *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* without an explicit direct object for *ἔχων* occurs in no (electronically available) extant Greek literature from the 8th c. BC to the 3rd c. AD, unless in church fathers who are quoting this passage. This is true regardless of whether *κεφαλῆς* is anarthrous or not. A search of the *Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri* at Papyri.Info yielded only three instances of *κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς*, all of which were dated after AD 200. Further, in none of these cases did the phrase refer to covering the head but to the head as the location of a blow or wound. In *Les Papyrus Fouad I* 29.11, (AD 224), a father complains of his son’s head being wounded by someone throwing a stone (*ρίψαντος ἐξ αὐτῶν τινος λίθου, τραυματίαιος ὁ υἱός μου, ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἐστηκώς, ἐγένετο κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς*). *P.Oxy.* 33.2672dupl (AD 218), lines 15-18, also registers a complaint regarding someone being

Data Advanced by Ben Witherington

In 1995 Ben Witherington III published a commentary on 1 Corinthians in which he states, “the discussions by Murphy-O’Connor, Hurley, Padgett, and others of hair and hairstyles are quite beside the point. The issue is headcoverings...Plutarch uses the same phrase that Paul does, *kata kephales*, to refer to something resting on the head, not hair and much less long, flowing hair (*Regum* 200F; *Aitia Romana* 267C; *Vitae Decem Oratorae* 842B; *Pyrrhus* 399B; *Pompeius* 640C; *Caesar* 739D).⁷

To the normal reader, the extended list of citations Witherington gives from Plutarch⁸ would give the impression of an overwhelming array of evidence for the material-covering position. However, there are several problems with this evidence.

The first problem is that two of the cited sources are irrelevant: *Vitae Decem Oratorae* 842B and *Pyrrhus* 399B. In both of these texts the phrase *katá tés kephalés* (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς) occurs in the context of someone being struck on the head, in the first with a staff and the second with a sword. Neither have anything to do with head coverings.⁹

Second, although the rest of the texts cited from Plutarch do provide partial parallels to Paul’s construction, each of them has one significant difference.

(1) Plutarch’s *Moralia*, “Sayings of Romans,” 200F, provides the closest parallel to 1 Cor. 11:4. Recounting Scipio the Younger’s arrival in Alexandria to inspect the city for the Roman Senate, Plutarch says, “after disembarking, he was walking with his toga covering his head.”¹⁰ Although this statement has been often cited as confirmation that Paul was referring to a material head covering,¹¹ most commentators ignore the fact that Plutarch

struck on the head with a stone (καὶ λίθῳ με ἐνετίναξεν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς). *P.Oxy* 16.1885, (c. AD 509), line 8 speaks of someone being struck repeatedly on the head and receiving a mortal wound (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς κόψας ἀφειδῶς καὶ θανατηφόρον ἐπενεγκῶν).

⁷ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community*, 233. As the following discussion will demonstrate, Witherington is certainly correct that *κατὰ κεφαλῆς* by itself does not refer to hair or long, flowing hair. The articles Witherington is referring to include Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 482-500; “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 265-274; James B. Hurley, “Did Paul require Veils or the Silence of Women: A Consideration of 1 Cor 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1973): 190-220; Alan Padgett, “The Significance of *anti* in 1 Corinthians 11:15.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994): 181-187; “Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (1984): 69-86.

⁸ Plutarch (c. AD 46-120), a contemporary of the Apostle Paul and Josephus, was among other things a Greek historian and biographer, best known for his works *Parallel Lives* and *Customs (Moralia)*.

⁹ I suspect that a research assistant is responsible for this mistake and that Witherington himself did not actually think these were relevant references.

¹⁰ *Regnum* 200F: ἀποβάς ἐβάδιζε κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἔχων τὸ ἱμάτιον. *Plutarch’s Moralia*, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 3, p. 190-91.

¹¹ For example, David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 517; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 87; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 506-7.

supplies an explicit object ‘toga’ (ἱμάτιον) for ‘covering’ (ἔχων), whereas Paul does not. In other words, Plutarch’s line explicitly identifies that a garment was covering Scipio’s head.

(2) In his *Lives*, Pompey 640C, Plutarch describes Demetrius as: ‘that fellow would be already reclining at table in great state, having the hood of his toga drawn down behind his ears.’¹² Again, in contrast with Paul’s language, the verb ‘having’ (ἔχων) has ‘toga’ (τὸ ἱμάτιον) as its explicit direct object.

(3) In his *Lives*, Caesar 739D, Plutarch describes Caesar’s reaction when he realized Brutus was against him: ‘but when he saw Brutus with his sword drawn in his hand, then he pulled his garment over his head, and made no more resistance.’¹³ In this instance, again notice that the verb ‘pulled’ (ἐφειλκύσατο) has ‘garment’ (τὸ ἱμάτιον) as its explicit direct object.

(4) In his *Roman Questions* 267C, Plutarch recounts the supposed reasons why the first three divorces in Roman history took place: ‘the second was Supicius Gallus, because he saw his wife pull her cloak over her head.’¹⁴ As in the previous example, ‘cloak’ (τὸ ἱμάτιον) is the explicit direct object of ‘pull’ (ἐφέλω).

In each of the four examples above, the construction *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) is not used by itself to indicate something resting on the head as was claimed.¹⁵ Rather it is used to indicate *where* the person’s toga was being worn. In every case the verbs ‘to have’ (ἔχω) and ‘to draw’ (ἐφέλω) had ‘toga, garment’ (ἱμάτιον) as their explicit direct object which identified what was being worn on or drawn over the head.

Third, Witherington does not inform his reader that the phrase *katá tés kephalés* (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς) by itself has a wide range of usages, many of them having nothing to do with material head coverings or even ‘something resting on the head.’¹⁶ For example, it may mean ‘at the head’ as in ‘he killed his brother in a match by throwing a discus at his head.’¹⁷ It may mean ‘headlong, head first’ as in ‘[Gaius] might be cast down headlong.’¹⁸ Or, it may mean ‘on the head’ as

¹² *Pompeius* 640C: ἐκεῖνος ἤδη κατέκειτο σοβαρός, ἔχων δι’ ὠτων κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον. Translation adapted from Pompey 40.4.6-7 in *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), vol. 5, p. 218-19.

¹³ *Caesar* 739D: ὅτε Βροῦτον εἶδεν ἐσπασμένον τὸ ξίφος, ἐφειλκύσατο κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ παρήκεν ἑαυτόν. *Caesar* 66.7.1 in *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), vol. 7, p. 598-99.

¹⁴ *Aitia Romana* 267C: δεύτερος δὲ Σουπίκιος Γάλλος ἐφελκυσμένην ἰδὼν κατὰ κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον. *Plutarch’s Moralia*, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), vol. 4, pp. 26-27. This exact same statement may be found in Posidonius (c. 135-51 B.C.), *Testimonia et fragmenta*. Plutarch may be quoting Posidonius or both may be dependent on a common source.

¹⁵ Witherington, *Conflict & Community*, 233.

¹⁶ *Conflict & Community*, 233. Witherington’s assertion, ‘the discussions by Murpy-O’Connor, Hurley, Padgett, and others of hair and hairstyles are quite beside the point. The issue is headcoverings,’ appears to reflect his personal certainty more than it does the nature of the available evidence.

¹⁷ Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Library and Epitome*, 3.12.6: συγγυμναζόμενον αὐτὸν βαλὼν δίσκῳ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς κτείνει.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19.71: διαρριπτοῦντα ὧσαι κατὰ κεφαλῆς.

in “I would take pickle sauce and go [and] pour it on his head”).¹⁹ The fact that *katá tés kephalés* is used in a broad variety of contexts is significant because it undermines the claim that this phrase transparently refers to a material head-covering.

Finally, it is particularly noteworthy that in Plutarch’s discussion of why Romans cover their heads when worshipping²⁰ and why Roman sons cover their heads but daughter go with uncovered heads when escorting their dead parents to the grave,²¹ the phrase *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) with or without “having” (ἔχων) is entirely absent.²² In these contexts, to denote a covered head, Plutarch uses terms for being covered or veiled: “veil completely” (συγκεκαλυμμένοι), “cover over, shroud,” (ἐπικαλύπτεισθαι), “veil, wrap up” (ἐγκεκαλύμμεναις), or the expression “pulling the toga up to the ears” (ἄχρι τῶν ὠτων ἀνελάμβανον τὸ ἱμάτιον). To denote an uncovered head he uses the following terms: naked (γυμναῖς), uncovered (ἀκαλύπτοις, ἀπαρακαλύπτω), or to uncover (ἀποκαλύπτονται). Strikingly, none of this specific vocabulary occurs in 1 Cor. 11. In other words, in the very context in which it would be most natural to use *katá kephalés* if it normally referred to a head covered with something material, Plutarch does not use the phrase.

Data Advanced by Preston Massey

In his 2007 article, under his section “The Meaning of *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων*,” Preston Massey asserts that *katá kephalés échon* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) “though generally used with an object (but understood without the object), always implies some kind of garment or cloth coming down from the head.”²³ He then footnotes (n. 71) the following statement:

Besides the references already cited, *κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον* (a covering down from the head) may be found in the following texts: Dionysius of Halicarnassus *The Roman Antiquities* III.71, VI.3.3, XI.26.4, XII.16.4, XV.9.7, XIX.8.3; Plutarch *Pompey* XL.4; *Caesar* LXVI.12 The Sayings of the Romans 200F; The Roman Questions 266C and 267C; Fortune of the Romans 319C (which has the similar ἀφεῖλεν ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον; and Josephus, *Ant.* III.270.²⁴

Contrary to Massey’s claim, as noted before,²⁵ the phrase *katá kephalés échon* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) does not occur in the extant literature unless it has an explicit direct object. It is, therefore, illegitimate for him to claim that it is “understood without the object” to always imply

¹⁹ Epictetus, *Discourse*, 2.20.29: ἔβαλον ἂν γάριον καὶ ἀπελθὼν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦς κατέχεον. For other uses of this phrase, see Josephus who uses phrase *κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς* three times to refer to something happening to someone’s head and none of them have anything to do with veils or hair (*Antiquities*, 1.50.4; 2.252.2; 13.117.5).

²⁰ *Moralia* 266C-E.

²¹ *Moralia* 267A-B.

²² As noted before, the phrase does occur in *Moralia* 267C in his parenthetical remark about divorce, but that has no direct bearing on why Roman sons escort their parents to their grave bare headed.

²³ Preston T. Massey, “The Meaning of *κατακαλύπτω* and *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* in 1 Corinthians 11.2–16,” *New Testament Studies*, 53.4 (2007): 522. This article developed from Massey’s dissertation, “The Veil and the Voice: A Study of Female Beauty and Male Attraction in Ancient Greece” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2006).

²⁴ Massey, “The Meaning of *κατακαλύπτω* and *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* in 1 Corinthians 11.2–16,” 522.

²⁵ See footnote 6 above.

‘some kind of garment or clothe coming down from the head.’ Nonetheless, Massey’s footnote appears to be an impressive list of citations supporting his conclusion that *katá kephalés échon* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) refers to a material covering.

Upon inspection, however, two major problems appear. First, three of the six references to Dionysius of Halicarnassus do not contain the phrase *katá té s kephalés tó himátion* (κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον) as was claimed. In fact, they have nothing to do with head coverings. Specifically, in *Roman Antiquities*, VI.3.3, Dionysius refers to Postumius “setting up camp high above” (lit. on the head of; *κατὰ κεφαλῆς*) his enemies; *Roman Antiquities*, XI.26.4, line 6, describes how Siccus’ enemies got above him (*κατὰ κεφαλῆς*) and rolled stones on him, killing him; and *Roman Antiquities*, XIX.8.3, line 6, describes Meton being thrown out of the theater head first (*κατὰ κεφαλῆς*).²⁶

The second problem is that citing texts that contain terms such as *toga* (*ἱμάτιον*) or garment/mantle (*περιβολήν*) does nothing to prove that the phrase *katá kephalés échon* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων), which does not contain such terms, refers to a material covering. That is similar to saying that since the phrase “with a hat on his head” occurs frequently in English literature, the blank in the phrase “with _____ on his head” must refer to a hat.

Less significant, but still noteworthy, the other texts Massey cites do not contain the exact phrase *κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον* but use language similar to that found in the Plutarch examples previously discussed.²⁷

(5) In *Roman Antiquities* 3.71.5, Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes a statue as: “This statue . . . was shorter than a man of average stature, having a mantle over the head.”²⁸ Here “mantle” (*περιβολήν*), a cognate of the term “covering” used in 1 Cor. 11:15 (*περιβόλαιον*), is used rather than “toga” (*ἱμάτιον*). As noted regarding the previous examples in Plutarch, the author supplied an explicit direct object for “having” (*ἔχουσα*), indicating what is on the head of the statue.

(6) In *Roman Antiquities* 12.16.4, Dionysius describes Camillos who was preparing to depart after praying: “Camillos . . . since he had prayed and had drawn his garment over his head, desired to turn. . . .”²⁹ Here the verb “had drawn” (*ἔλκω*) has “garment” (*ἱμάτιον*) as its explicit direct object and “over the head” (*κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς*) indicates where Camillos drew his garment.

(7) In *Roman Antiquities* 15.9.7, Dionysius describes a Roman praying: “When he was about to depart, he drew his garment over his head and held up his hand to the sky, as the

²⁶ This is not simply a case of citing the wrong reference in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, since a Perseus search of Dionysius’ works turns up no other instances of this phrase.

²⁷ Plutarch’s *The Roman Questions* 266C reads “having a toga on their head” (*ἐπὶ [not κατὰ] τῆς κεφαλῆς ἔχοντες τὸ ἱμάτιον*), a similar phrase but one in which, as has been noted in all the previous examples, the direct object of *ἔχοντες* is explicit unlike the situation in 1 Cor. 11:4.

²⁸ *εἰκόνα ... ἐλάττων ἀνδρὸς μετρίου τὴν περιβολήν ἔχουσα κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς*. Author’s translation. Cf. *The Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus*, trans. by Earnest Cary, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 2, pp. 254-55.

²⁹ *ὁ Κάμιλλος ... ἐπειδὴ τὴν εὐχὴν ἐποίησατο καὶ κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς εἴλκυσε τὸ ἱμάτιον, ἐβούλετο μὲν στραφῆναι ... Ibid.*

custom is, and made prayer to the gods.³⁰ Once again the direct object “garment” (περιβολήν) of the verb “drew” (ἔλκω) is explicit.

From all the foregoing evidence, it should be clear that *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) is the natural phrase that would be used to describe where a person would wear a veil or mantle “on the head.” On the other hand, where else but “on the head” (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) would one wear long hair? The fact that Hellenistic writers regularly make use of this phrase in non-veiling contexts,³¹ without any qualification to indicate that a material covering is not in view, provides solid evidence that the phrase *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) does not normally denote or connote a condition of having the head covered with anything. Massey, therefore, is incorrect when he states that *katá kephalés échon* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) “always implies some kind of garment or cloth coming down from the head.”

κατὰ κεφαλῆς in the LXX

The one occurrence of the phrase *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) as a description of a covered head is found in Est. 6:12 in the Septuagint. In Esther 6:12, Haman is described as hurrying home mourning, with his head covered. The LXX translates the Hebrew phrase שָׂרַף יָבִיבִי “head being covered” with *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς).

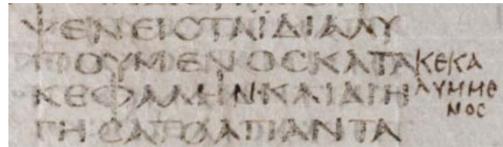


Figure 1: Esther 6:12 in Sinaiticus

Several items are noteworthy here. First, the phrase *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) was not used with the verb *echo* (ἔχω) as in 1 Cor. 11:4. Second, the fact that Sinaiticus has a scribal correction which corrects *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) to *katakekalúmmenos kephalés* “having an covered head” (κατακεκαλύμμενος κεφαλῆν; see Figure 1) suggests that at least one Greek scribe felt that *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) was too ambiguous a rendering and changed it to a more explicit construction. In other words, this text suggests that *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) may be used to refer to “a covered head.” However, in light of all the foregoing evidence, “a covered head” is neither the necessary meaning nor the normal usage of this phrase. Further, it is illegitimate to isolate the investigation of *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) from its syntactical relationship to the verb *echo* (ἔχω).³²

In both Classical and Hellenistic Greek the verb “have” (ἔχω) regularly takes “long hair” (κόμην) as a direct object to describe a person who has let their hair grow long. For example, in his play, *Birds*, Aristophanes writes: “Since then you are a slave, [how is that] you have long

³⁰ Μέλλων δ’ ἀπιέναι τήν τε περιβολήν κατὰ κεφαλῆς εἴλκυσε καὶ τὰς χεῖρας ἀνασχών εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, ὡς ἔθος ἐστίν, ἀρὰς ἐποιήσατο τοῖς θεοῖς. Author’s translation.

³¹ Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities*, VI.3.3; XI.26.4, line 6; XIX.8.3, line 6; Plutarch, *Vitae Decem Oratorae* 842B; *Pyrrhus* 399B; *Les Papyrus Fouad I* 29.11; *P.Oxy.* 33.2672dupl, lines 15-18; Josephus, *Antiquities*, 1.50.4; 2.252.2; 13.117.5.

³² For an explanation of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships of words or phrases within the context of a sentence, see Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, 155-61, 188-89.

hair?³³ In another play, *Clouds*, Aristophanes has a father lament that he is being ruined by his son who “has long hair [and] races horses and chariots.”³⁴ In “Proverbs which Alexandreus Used” Plutarch includes the following description: “Concerning the long-haired one in Samos: A certain Samian became a boxer, who...since he was wearing long hair.”³⁵ These examples demonstrate that it is not impossible or even unlikely that “having” (ἔχων) in the phrase “having on his head” (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) could be understood as having “long hair” (κόμην) as its unstated object. This data leads me to note a respected church father who understood this phrase as having κόμην as one of its implicit objects.

Chrysostom on the meaning of κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων

In contrast to the view that Paul is talking about a material covering in 1 Cor. 11:4, Chrysostom,³⁶ in his expository sermon on 1 Cor. 11:2-16, argues that Paul is talking about men wearing long hair:

Now regarding the man, it is no longer about a covering but about wearing long hair, that [Paul] forms his discourse. To be covered then [Paul] only forbids, when a man is praying; but wearing long hair he discourages at all times. ... For this reason also [Paul] said at the beginning, “Every man praying or prophesying, having any thing on his head, dishonoreth his head.” He did not say, “covered,” but “having any thing on his head;” signifying that even if a man should pray with a bare head, yet if he have long hair, he is like one who is covered [with a material covering]. “For the hair,” says [Paul], “is given for a covering.”³⁷

Three aspects of Chrysostom’s explanation of verse four are particularly noteworthy. First, He contrasts the phrase “having on his head” (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) with “being covered” (κεκαλυμμένος)—a verb that he uses repeatedly in the sermon to refer to being veiled—and he explicitly denies that *katá kephalés échon* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) means “being covered” (κεκαλυμμένος) with a material veil.

Second, he affirms that Paul used the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων in order to show that even if a man prays with a bare head, but had long hair, it is the same as if his head were covered. In other words, Chrysostom understands Paul to mean something like “a man may not pray or prophesy with anything on his head,” excluding both long hair and a material covering.

³³ Aristophanes, *Birds*, line 911: ἔπειτα δῆτα δοῦλος ὦν κόμην ἔχεις; Aristophanes lived c. 446–386 BC and was a comic playwright in ancient Athens.

³⁴ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, line 14: ... διὰ τουτονὶ τὸν υἷόν. ὁ δὲ κόμην ἔχων ἱπάζεται τε καὶ ξυνωρικεύεται ὀνειροπολεῖ θ’ ἵππους.

³⁵ Τὸν ἐν Σάμῳ κομήτην: Σάμιός τις ἐγένετο πύκτης, ὃς ... ἐπειδὴ κόμας εἶχεν. Παροιμίαι αἷς Ἀλεξανδρεῖς ἐχρῶντο. Centuria 2.8.2 in F.G. Schneidewin and E.L. von Leutsch, *Corpus paroemiographorum Graecorum*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1839; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1965): 337.

³⁶ John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) was an elder at the church in Antioch where he earned a reputation as a “golden-mouthed” preacher. He was later appointed, against his will, archbishop of Constantinople.

³⁷ Translation adapted from *Homily 26* (11:2-16), under verse 4, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 12, p. 152. Greek text: ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὐκέτι τὸν τοῦ καλύμματος, ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς κόμης οὕτω γυμνάζει λόγον· καλύπτεσθαι μὲν γὰρ τότε μόνον κωλύει, ὅταν εὐχῆται, κομᾶν δὲ αἰεὶ ἀποτρέπει. ... οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς, ὅτι «ἐὰν κομᾶ, ἀτιμία αὐτῷ ἐστίν». οὐκ εἶπεν, ἐὰν καλύπτηται, ἀλλ’ «ἐὰν κομᾶ». διὸ καὶ ἀρχόμενος ἔλεγε· «πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων, κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων». οὐκ εἶπε, κεκαλυμμένος, ἀλλὰ, «κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων», δεικνὺς ὅτι κἂν γυμνῇ εὐχῆται τῇ κεφαλῇ, κόμην δὲ ἔχῃ, ἴσος ἐστὶ τῷ κεκαλυμμένῳ. ἢ γὰρ «κόμη», φησὶν, «ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται». In *epistulam i ad Corinthios* in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)*, vol. 61, p. 217.

Third, Chrysostom uses the phrase “has long hair” (κόμην ἔχει), implying that he regards “long hair” (κόμην) as a legitimate implicit object of “having” (ἔχειν) in the phrase “having on his head” (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) in verse four.

The purpose of looking at Chrysostom is not to appeal to his exegesis as authoritative. Rather, the purpose is to note that a well-educated, native Greek speaker 250 years after Paul did not understand the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων to be necessarily or naturally referring to a material head-covering. Rather he took it as a generic phrase meaning “having anything on his head” which prohibited both a veil and long hair.

Conclusion regarding κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων

What should we conclude from the foregoing analysis? First, it is clear that the precise phrase Paul used is unusual.³⁸ Second, as Esther 6:12 shows, the phrase *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς) without the verb “have” (ἔχω) could be used to refer to a covered head. However, since Paul does not use this phrase by itself, the parallel while suggestive is not conclusive. Third, in regard to the examples found in Plutarch and Dionysius, in each case where ἔχω, ἔλκω, or ἐφέλλω occur with *katá kephalés* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς), they *invariably* have an explicit object. Paul, on the other hand, does not supply an explicit object for ἔχων.

Finally, since the ultimate arbiter of meaning is always context, the interpreter should return to the context of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 to seek for the implied object. If nothing in the context argued for a covering other than a garment (ἱμάτιον) as the object of ἔχων, this would be a legitimate inference to draw from the evidence. However, as I have argued before, there are several significant contextual reasons that support the conclusion that Paul intends the Corinthians to identify the implicit object of ἔχων as long hair (κόμην) and not a material covering. Specifically, Paul’s argument from man’s created status as the glory of God implies that whatever practice would dishonor man’s head (Christ) would always dishonor his head. Since it is unlikely that God would require OT priests do something that would dishonor him (wear a material head-covering when performing their mediatorial office), it is unlikely that Paul has wearing material head-coverings in view. Rather the connections created between vv. 4-7 and 13-15 by Paul’s glory-shame motif suggest that the covering he has in mind is *kóme* (κόμη). Which leads us to the second question I want to address.

Meaning of κομάω and κόμη in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

In order to answer the question whether Paul’s language supports the conclusion that women are not to cut their hair at all, I investigated biblical as well as extra-biblical literature for the use of the two key terms *komáo* (κομάω) and *kóme* (κόμη) as well as the Greek terminology for cutting.³⁹

³⁸ For a similar conclusion, see Blattenberger, *Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11:2-16*, 36.

³⁹ TLG and Perseus were my primary tools for accessing extra-biblical literature, though I also used BibleWorks 9.

“To have long hair” (κομάω) in Biblical and Extra-biblical Literature

The verb *komáo* (κομάω), “wear/have long hair,” occurs in the NT only in 1 Corinthians 11:13-14. It does not occur in the Septuagint. It occurs only once in Josephus where he is describing the practice of Nazirites who “allow their hair to grow long.”⁴⁰ It occurs once in Pseudo-Phocylides: “Long hair is not proper for boys, but for youthful women.”⁴¹ Philo uses *komáo* metaphorically with the sense “plume oneself, give oneself airs”⁴² and appears to be making something of a play on words since he quotes a phrase from Num. 6:5 in the LXX “nourishes the hair of his head” (τρέφοντα κόμην τρίχα κεφαλῆς) and then interprets it to indicate that “he is holy who promotes the growth in the principal portion of himself of the principal shoots of the doctrines of virtue, and who in a manner prides himself [κομώντα] and takes delight in these doctrines.”⁴³

Plutarch uses the verb *komáo* (κομάω) to describe the following:⁴⁴ the practice of the Spartans who wore their hair and beards long (*Sayings of the Spartans* 230B⁴⁵ 232D⁴⁶); allowing the hair of the beard to grow long enough to be seen by its wearer (232E.⁴⁷); the practice of Greek men letting their hair grow long when misfortune comes (such as a death), in contrast to the women who cut off their hair in such situations (267B⁴⁸); the customary practice of women to grow long hair as opposed to men who normally have their hair cut (267B⁴⁹); wearing long

⁴⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities* 4.72: ναζιραῖοι δὲ οὗτοι καλοῦνται κομώντες.

⁴¹ Pseudo-Phocylides, line 212: ἄρσεσιν οὐκ ἐπέοικε κομᾶν, χλιδαναῖς δὲ γυναιξίν. This is an apocryphal work that appears to have been written between 100 BC – AD 100. Pieter van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (SVTP 4; Leiden: Brill, 1978).

⁴² LSJM, s.v. κομάω, sense 2.

⁴³ Philo, *Quod deus sit immutabilis* 1.88. *The Works of Philo Judaeus, the Contemporary of Josephus*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854-55), 4 vols. A similar metaphorical usage occurs in *Sibylline Oracle* 11:82.

⁴⁴ Most of the following English translations are taken from or adapted from *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), vols. 1-15.

⁴⁵ The Latin title for *Sayings of the Spartans* is *Apophthegmata Laconica*. “Why do [the Spartans] wear long hair and grow long beards?” διὰ τί κομᾶσι καὶ πωγωνοτροφοῦσιν. See also *Life of Lysander* 1.1: “a statue of Lysander, wearing his hair and beard long, in the ancient fashion” Λυσάνδρου δὲ ἐστὶν εἰκονικός, εὖ μάλα κομώντος ἔθει τῷ παλαιῷ καὶ πώγωνα καθειμένου γενναῖον.

⁴⁶ “Why do they wear their hair long? He said because this is the (most) natural and inexpensive of ornaments.” διὰ τί κομᾶσιν εἶπεν ὅτι τῶν κόσμων ὁ φυσικὸς καὶ ἀδάπανος οὗτός ἐστι. See also Plutarch, *Sayings of the King* 189F.

⁴⁷ “A Spartan, being asked why he grew the hair of his beard so very long, said, ‘So that I may see my grey hairs and do nothing unworthy of them.’” Λάκων ἐρωτηθεὶς, δι’ ἣν αἰτίαν τὰς τοῦ πώγωνος τρίχας ἐπὶ πολὺ κομᾶ, εἶπεν ἵνα βλέπων τὰς πολιὰς μηδὲν ἀνάξιον αὐτῶν πράττω.

⁴⁸ “So in Greece, whenever any misfortune comes, the women cut off their hair and the men let it grow” καὶ γὰρ παρ’ Ἑλληνισιν ὅταν δυστυχία τις γένηται, κείρονται μὲν αἱ γυναῖκες κομᾶσι δ’ οἱ ἄνδρες.

⁴⁹ “...for it is usual for men to have their hair cut and for women to let it grow.” ὅτι τοῖς μὲν τὸ κείρεσθαι ταῖς δὲ τὸ κομᾶν σύνηθές ἐστιν.

hair as the special function of a Roman archon (*Roman and Greek Questions* 274B⁵⁰); the Parthian practice of wearing long bushy hair to make themselves appear more formidable (*Life of Crassus* 24.2⁵¹); Caius Marius wearing long hair from the day of his exile until his return at the age of more than 70 years (*Life of Caius Marius* 41.6⁵²); a man having a head of much long curly hair (*Life of Cimon* 5.2⁵³); male show-offs who wore long hair and talked big (*De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1038C⁵⁴); of a Greek despot, Lykurgus, who made boys wear long hair and girls cut their hair and wear boys' clothes (*Virtues of Women* 261F⁵⁵); of Greek youths who wore their hair long because they were not yet men (*Virtues of Women* 261E⁵⁶); of Greek young men who let their hair grow long after the age of puberty (*Lycurgus* 22⁵⁷); of an army of young men who escort Cicero with their hair let loose as a sign of their distress and desire to entreat mercy (*Cicero* 31⁵⁸).

Although *κομάω* can be used with various metaphorical senses (e.g., to have loose, unkempt hair, or putting on airs), the normal meaning of the word throughout Koine literature is “to allow the hair to grow long by not cutting it, wear long hair.”

“Long hair” (κόμη) in Biblical and extra-biblical Literature

Kóme, “long hair” (κόμη), occurs in the NT only in 1 Cor. 11:15. It occurs eleven times in the Septuagint. Of those 11x, it refers to uncut hair twice (nazirite vow-Num. 6:5; regulations for

⁵⁰ “Therefore also with us ... to wear long hair ... is the special function of an archon.” διὸ καὶ παρ’ ἡμῶν τὸ μὲν ... *κομᾶν* ... ἴδια λειτουργήματα τοῦ ἀρχοντός ἐστι (Latin title: *Aetia Romana et Graeca*)

⁵¹ “...the rest of the Parthians, still keeping to the Scythian fashion, wore their hair long and bushy to make themselves more formidable.” τῶν ἄλλων Πάρθων ἔτι Σκυθικῶς ἐπὶ τὸ φοβερόν τῷ ἀνασίλλῳ *κομώντων*. See also Plutarch, *Sayings of the King* 189E.

⁵² “[Marius] with his hair uncut from the day that he had been an exile, and now above seventy years of age” *κομῶν* ἀφ’ ἧς ἔφυγεν ἡμέρας, ὑπὲρ ἑβδομήκοντα γεγονώς ἔτη

⁵³ “He was not an ill-looking man, as Ion the poet says, but tall, and with a thick curly head of hair.” ἦν δὲ καὶ τὴν ἰδέαν οὐ μεμπτός, ὡς Ἴων ὁ ποιητής φησιν, ἀλλὰ μέγας, οὖλη καὶ πολλῇ τριχὶ *κομῶν* τὴν κεφαλὴν.

⁵⁴ ὑψαυχενεῖν καὶ κομᾶν καὶ μεγαληγορεῖν. See also Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1036C.

⁵⁵ Latin title: *Mulierum virtutes*. “In fact it is recorded in history that he imposed on the boys the custom of wearing long hair and golden ornaments, and the girls he compelled to cut their hair and to wear boys’ clothes and the short undergarment.” ἱστοροῦνται γάρ, ὅτι τοὺς μὲν ἀρρενας παῖδας ἤσκει *κομᾶν* καὶ χρυσοφορεῖν, τὰς δὲ θηλείας ἠνάγκαζε περιτρόχαλα κείρεσθαι καὶ φορεῖν ἐφηβικὰς χλαμύδας κατὰ τῶν ἀνακῶλων χιτωνίσκων. See also *Life of Lysander* 1.1-2.

⁵⁶ “when he was a mere youth with others of his age who were still wearing their hair long (whom they called ‘harassers,’ from their long hair presumably)” ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἀντίπαις, ὅτι μειράκιον ὦν παντάπασι μετὰ τῶν ἡλικίων ἔτι *κομώντων* (οὓς κορωνιστὰς ὡς ἔοικεν ἀπὸ τῆς κόμης ὠνόμαζον)

⁵⁷ “For this reason, although they all let their hair grow long after the age of puberty” διὸ *κομώντες* εὐθύς ἐκ τῆς τῶν ἐφήβων ἡλικίας

⁵⁸ “as many as twenty thousand young men escorted him with their hair untrimmed and joined in his suppliant entreaties to the people.” καὶ δισμυρίων οὐκ ἐλάττους νέων παρηκολούθουν *κομώντες* καὶ συνικετεύοντες

priests' hair (Eze 44:20).⁵⁹ In Lev. 19:27 Israelite men are prohibited from making “a round cutting of the hair” of their head.⁶⁰ Job 1:20 describes Job as rising and shaving “the hair of his head” (ἐκέειρατο τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς).⁶¹ The remaining canonical occurrences are metaphorical uses (Job 16:12; 38:32) or mistranslations (Ezek. 24:23). Four occurrences are found in apocryphal books, two of which refer to men's hair (Jdt. 13:7; Bel. 1:36) and two to women's hair (3 Ma. 1:18; 4:6).

Kóme (κόμη) occurs 19 times in Josephus, 18 times reference to hair, and once in reference to hyssop bunches. Josephus uses *kóme* to denote Samson's hair which was not to be cut as a Nazirite (*Ant.* 5.278, 311-14). After Samson's hair was shaved, Josephus notes that “in the process of time Samson's *kóme* grew again (*Ant.* 5.314). According to Josephus, the prophet Samuel was a Nazirite whose hair was permitted to grow long (κόμη τε οὖν αὐτῷ ἀνείτο; *Ant.* 5.347). Absalom's *kóme* supposedly grew at such a rapid rate that, according to Josephus, it needed to be cut every 8th day (*Ant.* 7.189, 239).⁶² While David was fleeing Absalom, Mephibosheth didn't cut his *kóme* (*Ant.* 7.267).

This survey of the uses of *kóme* in Koine literature indicates that *kóme* does not necessarily denote uncut hair, though it may if the context makes it clear. It may refer to the hair of men or women and is typically used to denote long or feminine-length hair, or hair arranged like a woman's.

Greek Terminology for Cutting Hair

The terms used by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:5-6 for cutting, *xuróo* (ξυρόω) and *keíro* (κείρω), mean “shave” and “shear, cut short” respectively. It appears that the standard word for cutting that did not involve the removal of a large quantity of hair was *apokeíro* (ἀποκείρω), though *keíro* (κείρω) could also be used.⁶³ For example, in Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates strokes the hair (τρίχας) at the back of Phaedo's neck and says, “Tomorrow, perhaps, Phaedo, you will cut off [ἀποκερῆ] this beautiful hair.”⁶⁴ In Josephus's account of the Samson narrative, the angel tells his mother “not to cut his hair” (τὰς κόμας αὐτῷ μὴ ἀποκείρειν; *Ant.* 5.278). According to Josephus, Absalom's hair was so thick and fast-growing that his hair (κόμη) had to be cut (ἀποκείρειν) every 8 days! Philo describes young male slaves who “have very long hair, being either completely unshorn (μὴ

⁵⁹ In both of these references it translates the word פְּרָעַת (HALOT: “loosely hanging and unplaited hair on the head”). Both these contexts make it explicitly clear that the hair is uncut by prohibiting a razor from touch the hair (Num. 6:5) or by forbidding the hair to be uncut and requiring it to be cut (Ezek. 44:20).

⁶⁰ Here the Hebrew reads “do not round off the corner of your head” (לֹא תִקַּפוּ פְּאַת רִאשְׁכֶּם).

⁶¹ Here the Hebrew reads “and he shaved his head” and does not have a word for “hair” (וַיִּגַּז אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ).

⁶² Contrast this to the biblical account in 2 Sam. 14:26 where Absalom cut his hair once a year.

⁶³ For example, in Plutarch's *Moralia*, “Sayings of Kings,” 177: A barber asks how shall I cut your hair? (πῶς σε κείρω). *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 3. p. 38-39. In Plutarch, “Bravery of Women, 261F: Aristodemos forced boys to wear long hair (κομᾶν) and girls to cut (κείρεσθαι) their hair. *Ibid.*, p. 573-74.

⁶⁴ Αὔριον δὴ, ἔφη, ἴσως, ὃ Φαίδων, τὰς καλὰς ταύτας κόμας ἀποκερῆ. J. Burnet, *Platonis opera*, vol. 1 (repr. 1967; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900): 89, section b, line 5.

χειρόμενοι), or else having only the hair on their foreheads evened at the end so as to make them of an equal length all round.⁶⁵

My best efforts, which are admittedly limited, to turn up any discussion in Classical or Koine literature in which a distinction is made between cutting and trimming hair have failed. My review of all the cognate forms of *keíro* (κείρω) in LSJM (απο-, περι-, κατα-, αμφι-, κτλ) found none of them having the sense of cut a small amount of hair, equivalent to our “trim.” The noun *κουρά*, which refers to “cropping of the hair,” does not denote anything more specific than cutting, without reference to the amount cut.⁶⁶ My current conclusion then is that there is no basis to believe that Paul would have distinguished between cutting and trimming as is often done in English.

The Early Church’s Interpretation of Paul’s use of *κόμη* and *κομάω*

The early church’s interpretation regarding Paul’s use of *komáo* (κομάω) and *kóme* (κόμη) is remarkably uniform. In no case are these words taken to refer to hair that is long and yet cut. The consistent understanding that emerges from the extant record is that men are not to have uncut hair and women are to have uncut hair. Examples of this understanding include:

The Synod of Gangra: “If any woman from pretended asceticism shall cut off her hair, which God gave her as the reminder of her subjection, thus annulling as it were the ordinance of subjection, let her be anathema.”⁶⁷

Severian of Gabala: And although the men who wore long hair in ancient times cut off part of it, [they still] wore it longer than was necessary; however, it was always forbidden for a woman to shear her hair”⁶⁸

Augustine, in *Of the Work of Monks*, who argues that Paul prohibits men from having long hair: “For the same Apostle saith, that long hair is also instead of a veil: by whose authority these men are hard pressed. Seeing he saith openly, “If a man wear long hair, it is a disgrace to him.” “The very disgrace,” say they, “we take upon us, for desert of our sins:” holding out a screen of

⁶⁵ Philo, *The Contemplative Life*, 1.51: βαθυχαῖται γάρ εἰσιν ἢ μὴ χειρόμενοι τὸ παράπαν ἢ τὰς προμετωπίδους αὐτὸ μόνον ἐξ ἄκρων εἰς ἐπανίσωσιν καὶ γραμμῆς κυκλοτεροῦς ἠκριβωμένον σχῆμα. L. Cohn and S. Reiter, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, vol. 6. (repr. De Gruyter, 1962; Berlin: Reimer, 1915).

⁶⁶ This is an area where more research is needed. Specifically, corpus-wide searches for the *κόπτω* and *τέμνω* word groups should be conducted to ascertain if and how they interact with the Greek vocabulary in the semantic domain of hair.

⁶⁷ “Canon XVII” in Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 14, p. 99. Greek text: εἴ τις γυναικῶν διὰ νομιζομένην ἄσκησιν ἀποκείροιτο τὰς κόμας, ἃς ἔδωκεν ὁ Θεὸς εἰς ὑπόμνησιν τῆς ὑποταγῆς, ὡς παραλύουσα τὸ πρόσταγμα τῆς ὑποταγῆς, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω. <http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_0340-0340_Concilium_Gangrense_Canones_GR.pdf.html> Accessed online 10/8/2011. So also Karl Joseph von Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church, from the Original Documents* (T. & T. Clark, 1876), 333-34.

⁶⁸ (author’s translation). Greek text: ...ἐπειδὴ καὶ γυναῖκες προεφήτευσαν ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου. τοῦ δὲ πνεύματος ἐνεργοῦντος πᾶσα ἀνάγκη τοὺς λειτουργοὺς ἀγγέλους παρεῖναι, καὶ δεῖ διὰ τοῦτο κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν γυναῖκα. Οὐκ ἀπὸ τοῦ παλαιοῦ ἔθους ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τοῦ κατ’ αὐτοὺς ἔδοκίμασε τοῦτο. καὶ οἱ κομῶντες τὸ παλαιὸν ἐκ μέρους ἀποκείροντες ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἢ ἔδει κομῶντες, γυναικὶ δὲ αἰεὶ τὸ κείρεσθαι ἀπεδοκιμάσθη. “Fragmenta in epistulam i ad Corinthios” in K. Staab, *Pauluskommentar aus der griechischen Kirche aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933), p. 262.

simulated humility, to the end that under cover of it they may carry on their trade of self-importance.”⁶⁹

Epiphanius of Salamis is particularly noteworthy. He describes Mesopotamian monks as having “womanish hair” (κόμαις γυναικικαῖς) and two lines later further describes is as “uncut hair” (κόμη μὴ ἐκτεμνομένη).⁷⁰ He then quotes 1 Cor. 11:7 to demonstrate that this is contrary to Paul’s instructions: “A man indeed ought not to have long hair because he is the image and glory of God.”⁷¹ What is unmistakable from Epiphanius’s use of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is that he understood it to forbid men from wearing uncut hair. On the other hand, it appears that he expected women to have uncut hair.

Although I have been unable to find any extant comments by Epiphanius on 1 Cor. 11:5-6, precisely the same verb that occurs in v. 7 (κατακαλύπτεσθαι) also occurs twice in v. 6 (κατακαλύπτεται and κατακαλυπτέσθω). If Epiphanius understood “to be covered” (κατακαλύπτεσθαι) in v. 7 to mean “to wear uncut hair” (κομᾶν), then it is most likely that he would have understood the same verb in v. 6 to have that meaning as well. Given that understanding the verse would read, “If a woman does not have uncut hair, then let her shear the rest off; but since it is a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her allow her hair to grow uncut.”⁷²

Conclusion

Contemporary logic argues, “Paul said it was a shame for a woman to shave or shear her hair. He didn’t say she couldn’t trim it. Since trimming hair is cutting off less hair than shaving or shearing or “cutting,” it is not prohibited by this passage.” This argument stands if (1) it is true that Koine Greek supports a distinction between cutting hair and trimming it, and (2) Paul intended to make this distinction in 1 Cor. 11. Since I can find no such distinction in Koine literature, in the early church’s understanding of this passage, or in Paul, I conclude that the argument is not legitimate. Paul’s expectation was that women would have uncut hair that grows however long nature has determined, and that men would have cut hair that did not “cover” their heads and thus is distinctly masculine.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 3, p. 522-23.

⁷⁰ K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion* in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922, 1933), vol. 3, p. 492.

⁷¹ «ἀνὴρ, γὰρ φησιν, οὐκ ὀφείλει κομᾶν, εἰκῶν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων». K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion*, vol. 3, p. 492.

⁷² εἰ γὰρ οὐ κατακαλύπτεται [=κομᾶ] γυνή, καὶ κειράσθω· εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι, κατακαλυπτέσθω [=κομάτω].

⁷³ Precisely what constitutes “masculine” hair length seems to be a function of culture. As long as culture makes a distinction, Scripture provides no specific guidelines for masculine hair length other than indicating it should not cover the head.