

A Survey of the History of the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16
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This essay examines two aspects of the history of how 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 has been interpreted:¹ (1) What did Paul mean when he said men should not be covered and women should be covered when praying or prophesying, and (2) What do Paul's requirements regarding men's and women's hair mean.

The aims of this survey are, first, to orient the interpreter to the ways in which this passage has been understood, thereby guarding against an interpretation uninformed by church history. Second, it will demonstrate that the church has historically understood Paul to teach that women should have long hair and men should not. Third, it will provide what I hope is a plausible explanation for how the dominant understanding of this passage developed, that is, that Paul requires women's heads to be covered with both hair and a material head-covering.

The history of interpretation divides naturally into three periods: early and medieval interpretation (AD 120-1500), reformation, post-reformation, and Wesleyan interpretation (AD 1500-1850), and modern interpretation (AD 1850-present). In each period, the identity, setting, and views of the major interpretive figures are discussed, and the distinctive characteristics of that period are summarized.

Early and Medieval Interpretation (A.D. 120–1500)

The majority of extant commentators from the early and medieval periods identified the covering Paul requires in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as a material veil of some sort. These same commentators also understood Paul to teach that a woman was to have long hair and that a man was not.

AD 100-200: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian

Irenaeus is the earliest church father to comment on 1 Cor. 11, though he does so only in passing.² In his treatise refuting Valentinian gnosticism,³ he notes that the Valentinians appeal to

¹ At present, the only history of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 published is Linda A. Mercadante's *From Hierarchy to Equality: A Comparison of Past and Present Interpretations of 1 Cor 11:2-16 in Relation to the Changing Status of Women in Society* (Vancouver: G-M-H Books, 1978). Mercadante, however, begins her analysis with Calvin. Ralph N. V. Schutt, "A History of the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16" (M.A. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), covered only two church fathers—Tertullian and Chrysostom—and then jumps to Calvin, his only representative from the 16th century. Both Gerald Bray, ed., *1-2 Corinthians* in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 7:106-109, and Judith L. Kovacs, *1 Corinthians: Interpreted By Early Christian Commentators* in *The Church's Bible*, ed. Robert Louis Wilken (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 179-184, provide citations of various father's views on specific verses, but they do not seek to provide a survey of the history of interpretation.

² Irenaeus lived c. A.D. 120-202, was bishop of Lyons (France) and a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of the Apostle John.

³ Valentinian Gnosticism, one of the most influential forms of Gnosticism, taught that Jesus gave his disciples secret knowledge (gnosis) without which one cannot properly interpret Scripture. Only the spiritual mature can appreciate this knowledge. For details, consult Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians"* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

1 Cor. 11:10 as a proof text: “in the same Epistle, ... [Paul] says, ‘A woman ought to have a veil upon her head, because of the angels.’”⁴

Since Irenaeus does not dispute the Valentinians’ claim that Paul said this and does not argue contrary to this understanding of Paul, it seems likely that he understood Paul to require women to be veiled in 1 Cor. 11:10. This quotation from Irenaeus also makes it likely that early in the transmission of 1 Corinthians 11, verse 10 was miscopied so that it read “a woman ought to have a veil [κάλυμμα] on her head” instead of reading “a woman ought to have authority [ἐξουσία] on her head.” This may provide a significant clue to why the veil view gained such dominance in the early church.

Clement of Alexandria, Egypt (A.D. 153-217) is the second church father whose extant comments are relevant to 1 Cor. 11:2-16. In his work *The Instructor*,⁵ he writes concerning the way in which women should go to church:

Let the woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.⁶

Regarding men and women’s hair, Clement instructs men to cut their hair short enough that it doesn’t appear feminine, and women not to cut their hair, but to put it up in a simple style:

Let the head of men be [bare], unless it has curly hair. ... But let not twisted locks hang far down from the head, gliding into womanish ringlets. ... It is enough for women to protect their locks, and bind up their hair simply along the neck with a plain hair-pin, nourishing chaste locks with simple care to true beauty. For meretricious plaiting of the hair, and putting it up in tresses, cutting the hair (κόπτουσι τὰς τρίχας) and plucking off it those treacherous braidings, contribute to make them look ugly.⁷

⁴ *Against Heresies*, Book 1, ch. 8.2, in Philip Schaff, et al., eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885. BibleWorks, v.8), vol. 1, p. 327; so also Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*. Vol. 55, *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 43. The Greek text of Irenaeus’ statement reads: Τὴν τε μετὰ τῶν ἡλικιωτῶν τοῦ Σωτῆρος παρουσίαν πρὸς τὴν Ἀχαμῶθ, ὁμοίως πεφανερῶκεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἐπιστολῇ, εἰπόντα· Δεῖ τὴν γυναῖκα κάλυμμα ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους. W. W. Harvey, *Sancti Irenaei episcopi Lugdunensis libri quinque adversus haereses*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1857. Bruce M. Metzger notes, in the second edition of *A Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament*, that “veil” also occurs in Latin texts of Irenaeus’ writings (New York: United Bible Societies, 2002), 495.

⁵ *The Instructor* was written to provide “a guide for the formation and development of Christian character and for living a Christian life.” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 167.

⁶ *The Instructor* 3.11 s.v., “Going to Church,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 290. Greek text: Πλεῖον τοῦτο ἐχέτω ἡ γυνή· κεκαλύφθω τὰ πάντα, πλὴν εἰ μὴ οἴκοι τύχοι· σεμνὸν γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ ἀκατάσκοπον· καὶ οὐποτε αὐτὴ σφαλῆσεται πρὸ τῶν ὀμμάτων τὴν αἰδῶ καὶ τὴν ἀμπεχόνην θεμένη οὐδὲ ἄλλον εἰς ὄλισθον ἀμαρτίας ἐκκαλέσεται τὸ πρόσωπον ἀπογυμνουμένη. Τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ λόγος βούλεται, ἐπεὶ πρέπον αὐτῇ ἐγκεκαλυμμένη προσεύχεσθαι. *Paedagogus*, 3.11.79.3-5 from C. Mondésert, C. Matray, and H.-I. Marrou, *Clément d’Alexandrie. Le pédagogue*, 3 vols. (*Sources chrétiennes* 158. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970).

⁷ *The Instructor* 3.11 s.v., “The Hair,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 286. Greek text: Πλεῖον ψιλὴ μὲν ἡ τῶν ἀνδρῶν κεφαλὴ, πλὴν εἰ μὴ οὐλας ἔχοι τὰς τρίχας, λάσιον δὲ τὸ γένειον, αἱ δὲ συνεστραμμένα τῶν τριχῶν ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς μὴ καθικέσθωσαν ἄγαν εἰς πλοκάμους κατολισθαίνουσαι γυναικειούς ... Ταῖς γυναῖξι δὲ ἀπόχρη μαλάσσειν τὰς τρίχας καὶ ἀναδεῖσθαι τὴν κόμην εὐτελεῶς περόνη τινὶ λιτῇ παρὰ τὸν αὐχένα, ἀφελεῖ θεραπεία συναυξούσας εἰς κάλλος

A few decades later, **Tertullian** (c. A.D. 160-220), a theologian in Carthage, N. Africa, wrote a tract⁸ entitled “On the Veiling of Virgins,” in which he addresses both the issue of veiling and hair length:

Next we turn to the examination of the reasons themselves which lead the apostle to teach that the female ought to be veiled, (to see) whether the self-same (reasons) apply to virgins likewise; ... (let the world, the rival of God, see to it, if it asserts that close-cut hair is graceful to a virgin in like manner as that flowing hair is to a boy.) To her, then, to whom it is equally unbecoming to be shaven or shorn, it is equally becoming to be covered. ... a man is not to cover his head: to wit, because he has not by nature been gifted with excess of hair; because to be shaven or shorn is not shameful to him; ... Accordingly, since the apostle is treating of man and woman – why the latter ought to be veiled, but the former not ... In fact, at this day the Corinthians do veil their virgins. What the apostles taught, their disciples approve.⁹

Tertullian also argues extensively that all women, not just married women, are to be veiled based on 1 Cor. 11:5f.¹⁰ He also implicitly argues that women are to have long hair: “[Paul] says that ‘nature herself,’ ... has assigned hair as a [covering] and ornament to women, ... If ‘it is shameful’ for a woman to be shorn it is similarly so to a virgin too.”¹¹

In sum, by the early third century AD, it was a common practice throughout the churches for married women to wear veils in church, if not everywhere in public. The arguments adduced for this practice were primarily arguments from modesty and avoiding causing men to stumble. But clearly, Clement and Tertullian appeal to 1 Cor. 11 as well to support this requirement. The concurrent expectation that women were not to cut their hair and men were to cut theirs received less attention at this time because, at least from these interpreter’s perspective, it was not the primary problem. It would receive more attention in the next century as monasticism gained traction in Christianity.

γνήσιον τὰς σώφρονας κόμας. Καὶ γὰρ αἱ περιπλοκαὶ τῶν τριχῶν αἱ ἑταιρικαὶ καὶ αἱ τῶν σειρῶν ἀναδέσεις πρὸς τῷ εἰδεχθεῖς αὐτὰς δεικνύουσι κόπτουσι τὰς τρίχας. *Paedagogus*, 3.11.60.2 and 62.2-3. Mondésert, *Clément d’Alexandrie. Le pédagogue (Sources chrétiennes 158. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970).*

⁸ All of Tertullian’s extant works were written in Latin.

⁹ *On the Veiling of Virgins*, chs. 7-8, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, pp. 31-33. So also Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004), 106-107. Tertullian’s statement “What the apostles taught, their disciples approve,” may be a case of the “after-that-therefore-because-of-that” (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*) fallacy. Just because an event follows another event does not mean the first even caused the second event. However, it does appear to be true that the veiling of virgins was a customs observed by Corinthian virgins. For example, Hippolytus of Rome’s (A.D. 170-236) account of a virtuous Christian Corinthian maiden rescued from a brothel where she had been unjustly sentenced. He remarks, “The Corinthian maiden was accustomed to be veiled (as Tertullian intimates), and was taught alike to cherish her own purity and to have no share in affording occasion of sin to others.” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, pp. 240-42. Whether the Corinthian customs was a consequence of Paul’s teaching or conformity to cultural expectations for modesty cannot be determined given the extant data.

¹⁰ Tertullian makes similar comments regarding veiling in *Against Marcion*: “In precisely the same manner, when enjoining on women silence in the church, that they speak not for the mere sake of learning (although that even they have the right of prophesying, [Paul] has already shown when he covers the woman that prophesies with a veil) ...” *Against Marcion*, book 5, chapter 8, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, p. 446. See also *On Prayer*, chs. 21-22, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, pp. 687-89.

¹¹ *On Prayer*, ch. 22, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, p. 688.

AD 300-400s: Epiphanius, Chryostom, Basil, and Augustine on Men

As the early church's emphasis on virginity and purity fostered asceticism and monasticism, a recurring issue was ascetic men wearing long hair as a sign of their supposed holiness and commitment to God. Fourth and fifth century commentators utilized 1 Cor. 11 to address this problem. Two positions emerge from the data: (1) Paul is forbidding men to wear long hair (Epiphanius), (2) Paul is forbidding men to wear either long hair or a veil (Chrysostom, Basil, Augustine).

Epiphanius (c. A.D. 315-403), Bishop of Salamis, stands out from other ancient Christian writers because he understood the covering forbidden to men to be long hair. He cites 1 Cor. 11:7 in five different contexts in his polemical work *Panarion*. In each case, he cites the verse as: "A man ought not to wear long hair [κομᾶν] because he is the image and glory of God."¹² For example, he cites 1 Cor. 11:7 in addressing Manicheism's misunderstanding of the value of the body:

And once more, the same apostle says in another passage, "A man ought not to have long hair forasmuch as he is the glory and image of God." And you see how he called hair the glory of God, though it is grown on the body and not in the soul.¹³

There is no manuscript or versional evidence for this rendering of verse seven. It seems most likely, therefore, that it reflects Epiphanius's understanding of verse 7 that "to be covered" (κατακαλύπτεσθαι) refers to "having long hair" (κομᾶν).

Commenting on the practice of some "esteemed brethren" in the cloisters of Mesopotamia, Epiphanius notes that they:

have been detected in another form [of error], that of deliberately having their hair long like a woman's and wearing sackcloth openly. ... Visible sackcloth is out of place in the catholic church, as is uncut hair, because of the apostle's injunction, "A man ought not to have long hair, inasmuch as he is the image of God."¹⁴

¹² ἀνὴρ, γὰρ φησιν, οὐκ ὀφείλει κομᾶν, εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων. K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion* in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922, 1933), vol. 2, pp. 122, 167; vol. 3, pp. 91, 236, 492. Epiphanius also quotes this verse in the same way in his letter to John of Jerusalem. However, the Greek text of Epiphanius's letter is fragmentary and does not contain this excerpt. P. Maas, "Die ikonoklastische Episode in dem Brief des Epiphanius an Johannes," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929-1930): 281-283. Fortunately, Epiphanius asked Jerome to translate the letter into Latin, and we have a copy of the entire letter through Jerome. "Letter LI. From Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, in Cyprus, to John, Bishop of Jerusalem" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 6, p. 88.

¹³ Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Books II and III (Sects 47-80, De Fide)*, trans. by Frank Williams, *Nag Hammadi Studies*, 36 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987), 271. Greek text: ὁ αὐτὸς ἀπόστολος «ἀνὴρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κομᾶν, δόξα καὶ εἰκὼν θεοῦ ὑπάρχων». καὶ ὁρᾷς ὡς δόξαν θεοῦ ἔφη τὴν κόμην, ἐπὶ σώματος φερομένην καὶ οὐκ ἐν ψυχῇ; ... καὶ μάτην οὗτος κομποποιεῖ, μᾶλλον δὲ χλεύην ὑφίσταται παρὰ τοῖς τὴν τελείαν φρόνησιν κεκτημένοις. K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion*, vol. 3, p. 91.

¹⁴ Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 634. Greek text: οἱ κατὰ Μεσοποταμίαν ἐν μοναστηρίοις ὑπάρχοντες εἶπουν μάνδραις καλουμέναις, κόμαις γυναικικαῖς <χρῆσθαι> προβαλλόμενοι καὶ σάκκω προφανεῖ ἐπερειδόμενοι. ... ἀλλότριον γὰρ ἐστὶ τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας σάκκος προφανῆς καὶ κόμη <μῆ> ἐκτεμνομένη ἀπὸ τοῦ κηρύγματος τῶν ἀποστόλων. «ἀνὴρ, γὰρ φησιν, οὐκ ὀφείλει κομᾶν, εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων». K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion*, vol. 3, p. 492.

Epiphanius continues his argument by addressing the issue of the Nazirites' long hair.¹⁵ He argues that “long hair was proper only for Nazirites” and, citing 1 Cor. 11:14, that it is a shame for Christian men to wear long hair.¹⁶ Since the ascetics were appealing to the OT Nazirite vow, it is clear that they were allowing their hair to grow uncut. This means Epiphanius' use of “to have long hair” (κομᾶν) necessarily refers to wearing long, uncut hair.

John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407), the prince of preachers in the early church and archbishop of Constantinople, preached a series of expository sermons through 1 Corinthians and devoted an entire sermon to 1 Cor. 11:2-16. In reference to men Chrysostom understood 11:4 to be addressing men who were wearing long hair and were covering their heads when praying.¹⁷

In his view Paul is forbidding both: men must not wear long hair and must not cover their heads when praying or prophesying, though they may cover their heads at other times: “But with regard to the man, it is no longer about covering but about wearing long hair, that he so forms his discourse. To be covered he then only forbids, when a man is praying; but the wearing long hair he discourages at all times.”¹⁸

Basil the Great (A.D. 330-379), Archbishop of Caesarea and one of the three “Cappadocian Fathers” along with Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa, wrote a letter to the clergy at Neocaesarea in which he apparently understands Paul to be forbidding men to be covered with a material covering:

Gregory did not cover his head at prayer. How could he? He was a true disciple of the Apostle who says, “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.” And “a man indeed ought not to cover his head forasmuch as he is the image of God.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Apparently certain ascetics extended this appeal claiming that Jesus was a Nazirite. In a work we possess only in fragmentary form, Epiphanius refutes the claim that Jesus was a Nazirite and thus wore long hair: “For they write that the savior had long hair based on the hypothesis that because he was called a Nazoraion, since the Nazirites have long hair, but they are [wrong] for the savior drank wine, but the Nazirites did not drink it” (author's translation). Greek text: κόμην γὰρ ἔχοντα τὸν σωτῆρα γράφουσιν ἐξ ὑπονοίας διὰ τὸ Ναζωραῖον αὐτὸν καλεῖσθαι, ἐπεὶ περ οἱ Ναζιραῖοι κόμας ἔχουσιν. σφάλλονται δὲ οἱ τοὺς τύπους αὐτῶ συνάπτειν πειρώμενοι· οἶνον γὰρ ἔπινεν ὁ σωτῆρ, ὃν οἱ Ναζιραῖοι οὐκ ἔπινον. “Epistula ad Theodosium imperatorem” (fragment 24) in Karl Holl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928; repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964): 361.

¹⁶ Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 635. His citation of 1 Cor. 11:14 in the context of discussing the Nazirites' uncut hair demonstrates that κομάω could refer to uncut hair.

¹⁷ “...the men went so far as to wear long hair as having spent their time in philosophy, and covered their heads when praying and prophesying, each of which was a Grecian custom.” *Homily 26* (11:2-16), under verse 2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 12, p. 149. Greek text: οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες καὶ ἐκόμων, ἅτε ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίψαντες, καὶ περιεβάλλοντο τὰς κεφαλὰς εὐχόμενοι καὶ προφητεύοντες· ὅπερ ἐκάτερον Ἑλληνικοῦ νόμου ἦν. In *epistulam i ad Corinthios* in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)*, vol. 61, p. 213.

¹⁸ *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. In *epistulam i ad Corinthios* in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)*, vol. 61, p. 217.

¹⁹ Letter CCVII, “To the Clergy at Neocaesarea” in Philip Schaff, et al., eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 8 (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885. BibleWorks, v.8), pp. 247-248. Greek text: Γρηγόριος οὐ κατεκαλύπτετο ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν. Πῶς γάρ; ὁ γε τοῦ Ἀποστόλου γνήσιος μαθητῆς τοῦ

In his treatise *On Baptism*, Basil cites 1 Cor. 11:14-15 in answer to the question “[Is] the work enjoined by the command acceptable to God if the manner of performing it is not in conformity with the divine ordinance?” His conclusion is that good works performed in a manner that is contrary to God’s word are not acceptable. Therefore, when praying and prophesying, men should not have long hair and that women should:

The Apostle, using a familiar example in order to present his point in a more lucid manner and to assist his hearers toward an understanding of the properties of the devout life, says: "Does not even nature itself teach you that a man, indeed, if he has long hair, it is a shame to him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her," and so on. Properly, then, we should follow the customary ways of nature as regards the necessities of this life.²⁰

Augustine (A.D. 354-430), the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, comments on this passage in several places. In his treatise *Of the Work of Monks*, he argues that Paul prohibits men from having long hair or wearing a veil:

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 simulated humility, to the end that under cover of it they may carry on their trade of self-importance. Just as if the Apostle were teaching pride when he says, “Every man praying or prophesying with veiled head shameth his head;” and, “A man ought not to veil his head, forsomuch as he is the image and glory of God.”²¹

AD 300-400s: Chrysostom, Severian of Gabala, Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine on Women

Although not apparently as common as the problem of ascetic men wearing long hair, the opposite problem also existed: female ascetics cutting off their hair. The **Synod of Gangra** (c. 340), whose canons were later ratified at the Council of Chalcedon (451), met to condemn the ascetic heresies of Eustathius, who was teaching among other things that married persons could not be saved. Following his teaching, some women had abandoned their husbands and cut off their hair, which they regarded as a sign of submission to their husbands. The Council condemned this behavior with the following: “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.”²²

εἰπόντος, πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ· καὶ, ἀνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca) (MPG)* (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), vol. 30, p. 765.

²⁰ Basil, *Ascetical Works*, trans. by M. Monica Wagner (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 408. Greek text: Τοῦ Ἀποστόλου τοίνυν τοῖς ἐν τῇ συνθηεῖα κεκρατημένοις χρησαμένου εἰς σαφεστέραν παράστασιν καὶ βοήθειαν τοῖς ἀκούουσι τῶν τῇ εὐσεβείᾳ πρεπόντων, ἐν τῷ εἰπεῖν· «Ἡ οὔτε αὐτὴ ἢ φύσις διδάσκει ὑμᾶς, ὅτι ἀνὴρ μὲν, ἐὰν κομᾷ, ἀτιμία αὐτῷ ἐστὶ, γυνὴ δὲ ἐὰν κομᾷ, δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστὶ;» καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς· ἀκόλουθον ἂν εἶη καὶ ἡμᾶς τοῖς ἐν τῇ φύσει κεκρατημένοις πρὸς τὰ ἀναγκαῖα τῆς παρουσίας ζωῆς χρῆσασθαι. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca) (MPG)* (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), vol. 31, p. 1600.

²¹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 3, p. 522-23.

²² “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.

Chrysostom preached that God had given women long hair as a covering in order to teach them to wear a material covering at all times.

...after saying, “but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven,” [Paul] states in what follows his own conclusion, saying, “let her be covered.” He did not say, “let her have long hair,” but, “let her be covered,” ordaining both these to be one, and establishing them both ways, from what was customary and from their contraries: in that he both affirms the covering and the hair to be one, and also that she again who is shaven is the same with her whose head is bare. “For it is one and the same thing,” saith he, “as if she were shaven.”

But if any say, “And how is it one, if this woman have the covering of nature, but the other who is shaven have not even this?” we answer, that as far as her will goes, she threw that off likewise by having the head bare. And if it be not bare of tresses, that is nature’s doing, not her own. So that as she who is shaven hath her head bare, so this woman in like manner. For this cause He left it to nature to provide her with a covering, that even of it she might learn this lesson and veil herself.²³

Severian of Gabala (d. 408), a rival of Chrysostom’s and the one responsible for his exile, concludes that women should be covered out of respect for the angels, which he identifies as bishops, and notes that “it has always been forbidden for women to shear their hair.”²⁴

Similarly, **Ambrosiaster** (mid-late 300s), a Latin commentator whose identity is uncertain at present,²⁵ taught that women must be veiled when praying or prophesying:

The veil signifies power, and the angels are bishops ... A woman therefore ought to cover her head because she is not the likeness of God but is under subjection. Because transgression began

²³ *Homily 26* (11:2-16), under verse 6, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 12, pp. 152-53. Greek text: καὶ εἰπὼν, «Εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ κείρεσθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι,» τίθησι τὸ παρ’ ἑαυτοῦ λοιπὸν λέγων, «Κατακαλυπτέσθω.» Καὶ οὐκ εἶπε, Κομάτω, ἀλλὰ, «Κατακαλυπτέσθω,» ἀμφοτέρωτα ταῦτα ἐν εἶναι νομοθετῶν, καὶ ἑκατέρωθεν αὐτὰ κατασκευάζων, ἀπὸ τε τῶν νενομισμένων, ἀπὸ τε τῶν ἐναντίων. Τὴν τε γὰρ περιβολὴν καὶ τὴν κόμην ἐν εἶναι φησι. τὴν τε ἐξυρημένην καὶ τὴν γυμνὴν ἔχουσιν κεφαλὴν, τὸ αὐτὸ πάλιν. «Ἐν γὰρ ἐστὶν, φησί, καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῆ ἐξυρημένη.» Εἰ δὲ λέγοι τις, Καὶ πῶς ἐστὶν ἐν, εἴ γε αὕτη μὲν τὸ κάλυμμα τῆς φύσεως ἔχει, ἐκείνη δὲ ἡ ἐξυρημένη οὐδὲ τοῦτο; ἐροῦμεν ὅτι τῆ προαιρέσει κάκεινο ἔρριψε τῷ γυμνῇ ἔχει τὴν κεφαλὴν. εἰ δὲ μὴ γυμνῇ τῶν τριχῶν, τοῦτο τῆς φύσεώς ἐστὶν, οὐκ ἐκείνης. Ὡστε καὶ ἡ ἐξυρημένη γυμνῇ ἔχει τὴν κεφαλὴν, κάκεινη ὁμοίως. Διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο τῆ φύσει ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτὴν σκεπάσαι, ἵνα καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης τοῦτο μαθοῦσα καλύπτηται. Migne, *PG*, p. 217.

²⁴ “...since women also were prophesying by the Holy Spirit. And when the Spirit is at work, it is an absolute necessity for ministering angels to be present. And for this reason women ought to be covered. [Paul] determined this, not from an ancient custom but from their situation. 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” (author’s translation). Greek text: ...ἐπειδὴ καὶ γυναῖκες προεφήτευσον 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 ἐδοκίμασε τοῦτο. καὶ οἱ κομῶντες τὸ παλαιὸν ἐκ μέρους ἀποκείροντες ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἢ ἔδει κομῶντες, γυναικὶ δὲ αἰεὶ τὸ κείρεσθαι ἀπεδοκίμασθη. “*Fragmenta in epistulam i ad Corinthios*” in K. Staab, *Pauluskommentar aus der griechischen Kirche aus Katenenhandschriften gesammelt* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933), p. 262.

²⁵ For a discussion of the various theories, see the translator’s introduction in *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians: Ambrosiaster*, trans. and ed. by Gerald Lewis Bray, *Ancient Christian Texts* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), p. xvi.

with her, she ought to indicate this by covering her head in church out of reverence for the bishop.²⁶

In a fascinating aside, **Jerome** (A.D. 345-429), translator of the Latin Vulgate, states that it was common for monastic women to shave their heads, signifying they had renounced the world and its pleasures.²⁷ He justifies the practice by noting:

not that afterwards they go about with heads uncovered in defiance of the apostle's command, for they wear a close-fitting cap and a veil.²⁸

Augustine argues that women must cover their heads in his treatise *On the Holy Trinity*:

the man is the image of God, and on that account removes the covering from his head, which he warns the woman to use ... why is the woman also not the image of God? For she is instructed for this very reason to cover her head, which he is forbidden to do because he is the image of God.²⁹

Augustine extends this requirement to married women as well: "it is not becoming even in married women to uncover their hair, since the apostle commands women to keep their heads covered."³⁰

The picture that emerges from this data is helpful for several reasons. First, it demonstrates that even native Greek speakers could understand Paul's directions to men differently. Second, it reveals that long hair and veils were the only options being considered by the early church. Third, there is no evidence for the common modern view that this passage addresses a cultural practice relevant only to 1st century Corinth. All commentators understood it to be universally authoritative and normative. Fourth, it clarifies that the words "wear long hair" (*κομάω*) and "long hair" (*κόμη*), in this passage, were understood to refer to long, uncut hair. When the topic is discussed, there is no evidence that a distinction between cutting and trimming was ever made.

Other early writers and medieval commentators

Other early writers whose comments on this text are extant include Ambrose (339-397), Pelagius (355-435),³¹ Theodoret of Cyrus (393-457),³² and an anonymous dialogue between a

²⁶ Ambrosiaster and Bray, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians: Ambrosiaster*, 172. Migne, *PL*, 17:240C-D: "Potestatem velamen significavit, angelos episcopos dicit ... Mulier ergo idcirco debet velare caput; quia non est imago Dei, sed ut ostendatur subjecta. Et quia praevaricatio per illam inchoata est, hoc signum debet habere; ut in Ecclesia propter reverentiam episcopalem non habeat caput liberum."

²⁷ "It is usual in the monasteries of Egypt and Syria for virgins and widows who have vowed themselves to God and have renounced the world and have trodden under foot its pleasures, to ask the mothers of their communities to cut their hair ..." "Letter 147. To Sabinianus" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 6, p. 292.

²⁸ "Letter 147. To Sabinianus" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 6, p. 292.

²⁹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 3, p. 158.

³⁰ Letter 245, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 1, p. 588.

³¹ For a selection of quotations from Ambrose and Pelagius, see Gerald Bray, *1-2 Corinthians* in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 7:106-109, and Judith Kovacs, *1 Corinthians: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators*, 179-184. References to the primary sources for these early church commentators are provided by Bray.

Montanist and an Orthodox Christian (c. 4th c.).³³ None of these early writers, however, offer anything substantially different from the common interpretation of the passage cited above. Since the western medieval commentators relied heavily upon the early church fathers, it is not surprising to find them offering no alternative interpretation of this passage.

In the eastern church the standard positions identified above continued to be taught. For example, John of Damascus (676-749) summarizes 1 Cor. 11:2-16 with “women are not permitted to pray or prophesy uncovered, and the men may not wear long hair,” and explains that the woman is to be covered as a symbol of submission, but the man is to have his head bare as a symbol of authority.³⁴ Similarly, Photius (820-886) and Theophylact (1100s) understand the covering to be a veil.³⁵

Reformation, Post-Reformation, and Wesleyan Interpretation (A.D. 1500–1850)

No essential change in the understanding of this passage is evident in major Reformation, Post-Reformation, or Wesleyan commentators: the covering is a material covering and men are not to have long hair and women are to have long hair.³⁶

³² Theodoret of Cyrus wrote very brief comments on 1 Cor. 11:3-8. With regard to verse 4 he mentions that men were wearing long hair and covering their heads: “For according to the Greek custom [the Corinthian men] were also wearing long hair, and having their heads covered they were praying to God. Author’s translation. Greek text: Κατὰ γὰρ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἔθος καὶ κόμας εἶχον, καὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς κεκαλυμμένας ἔχοντες προσήυχοντο τῷ Θεῷ. *Interpretatio in xiv epistulas sancti Pauli* in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca) (MPG)* 82 (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), p. 312. The syntax of this sentence could possibly be construed to indicate that “wearing long hair” was the means by which their heads were covered. However, the rendering given above seems to fit best both syntax and the known interpretive tendencies of the time better.

With regard to verses 5-6 he wrote only one sentence: “[Paul] demonstrated sufficiently from [her] long hair that being covered is fitting for the woman” (author’s translation.) Greek text: Ἀποχρώντως ἔδειξεν ἀπὸ τῆς κόμης ἀρόμττον τῇ γυναικί τὸ καλύπτεσθαι. Ibid. What Theodoret meant by this statement is not entirely clear since verses five and six do not mention “long hair.” Possibly, he was inferring from Paul’s statements that, since it is a shame for a woman to shave or cut her hair short, she must have long hair, and, following what had become a standard line of argument, that a woman’s long hair was a sign that she should wear an additional material covering when praying or prophesying.

³³ Ficker, Gerhard. “Widerlegung Eines Montanisten.” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 26 (1905): 458-63. See Kovacs, *1 Corinthians*, 180-82, for an English translation of the dialogue section relevant to 1 Cor. 11.

³⁴ τὸ μὴ τὰς γυναῖκας ἀκατακαλύπτως εὔχεσθαι, ἢ προφητεύειν, καὶ τὸ μὴ τοὺς ἀνδρας κομᾶν. ... Σύμβολα δέδοται ἀνδρὶ καὶ γυναικί, πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἕτερα· τῷ μὲν τῆς ἀρχῆς, τῇ δὲ τῆς ὑποταγῆς. Μετὰ δὲ ἐκείνων καὶ τοῦτο, τὸ ταύτην μὲν κατακαλύπτεσθαι, τοῦτον δὲ γυμνήν ἔχειν τὴν κεφαλὴν. *Commentarii in epistulas Pauli* in Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus (series Graeca)* (Paris: Migne, 1857-1866), vol. 95, p. 683.

³⁵ Photius: καὶ τῆς ὑποταγῆς σύμβολα τὸ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς κάλυμμα φέρειν “to wear a veil upon the head is a symbol of submission” B. Laourdas and L.G. Westerink, eds., *Photii patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, in *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983-1985), Letter 210. Theophylact, according to Adam Clarke, notes “τὸ τοῦ ἐξουσιάζεσθαι σύμβολον, τουτέστι, τὸ κάλυμμα, the symbol of being under power, that is, a veil, or covering.” *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1838), p. 132.

³⁶ For substantial bibliographies covering Latin, German, French, and English commentaries from 1500 to 1800, see William Smith and John Mee Fuller, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, part 1 (London: John Murray, 1893), 656, 658-59; and Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*

Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) lectured on 1 Corinthians at the University of Wittenberg in the summer and fall of 1521. Luther published his lectures as *Annotations on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* the following year. Melanchthon had only brief comments on 11:2 and 11:7. Regarding the point of the passage, he writes, “But this is the point of the argument: a woman is a servant, therefore she should cover her head, but a man has no need to since he is free.”³⁷

Martin Luther (1483-1546) did not give any extended treatment to the first half of 1 Corinthians 11 (vv. 2-16), though he often comments on the latter half of the chapter. His one passing reference to 1 Cor. 11:5³⁸ and his gloss on Gen. 3:16³⁹ indicate that he regarded Paul as requiring a material head covering.

John Calvin (1509-1564), in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:6, writes:

If anyone should now raise the objection that her hair, being her natural covering, is therefore all that is needed, Paul says that it is not, for it is a covering of such a kind that it requires another one to cover it! And from this we can hazard the likely conjecture that women, who had lovely hair, were in the habit of doing without any covering in order to show off its beauty. Therefore Paul intentionally remedies this fault, by bringing forward a view quite the opposite to theirs, that, instead of this making them attractive to men, and awakening men’s lust, it only makes themselves spectacles of unseemliness.⁴⁰

John Lightfoot (1602-1675), a rabbinical scholar and vice-chancellor of the University of Cambridge, in his *Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, concludes that Paul was addressing the Jewish custom of men veiling and women unveiling themselves when praying.⁴¹

Men therefore veiled themselves when they prayed, partly, for a sign of reverence towards God, partly, to show themselves ashamed before God, and unworthy to look upon him. In which thing that these Corinthians did yet Judaize, although now converted to Christianity, appears sufficiently from the correction of the apostle.

on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, 2nd ed., *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), pp. lxvii-lxxx.

³⁷ Philipp Melanchthon, *Annotations on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Patrick Donnelly (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995), p. 117. Latin text: Haec autem argumenti summa est: Mulier serva est, debet igitur operire caput, vir contra non debet, cum sit liber (p. 116). Melanchthon wrote a second Latin commentary on 1 Corinthians in 1559: *Argumentum et brevis explicatio prioris epistolae ad Corinthios*, in *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke, 1848), vol. 15. Unfortunately, it has not been translated into English.

³⁸ Helmut T. Lehmann, ed., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 36 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958), p. 152.

³⁹ “That is the veil or covering by which one may see that she is under her husband’s authority.” Quoted in Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians*, trans. by D. Douglas Bannerman (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), p. 251.

⁴⁰ Jean Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. by John W. Fraser, ed. by David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 231. So also, apparently, Theodore Beza in *The Bible, That Is, the Holy Scriptures Contained in the Olde and Newe Testament, Translated According to the Ebrew and Greeke, and Conferred With the Best Translations in Divers Languages. With Most Profitable Annotations Upon All the Hard Places*, trans. by Laurence Tomson (London: Deputies of C. Barker, 1599), *ad loc.* The annotations were written without attribution by Beza, Ioac Camer., P. Loseler Villerius.

⁴¹ John Lightfoot, *Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* in *Horæ Hebraicæ et Talmudicæ*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), pp. 231-41.

John Collings (1623-1690), a non-conformist English Presbyterian, wrote the comments on 1 Corinthians in Matthew Poole's well-known *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*.⁴² He understood Paul to forbid an external covering to men and to forbid women from praying or prophesying with loose, disheveled hair or without a veil:

by the uncovered head in this verse, is not only to be understood uncovered with some other covering besides her hair, but with her hair dishevelled, hanging loose at its length, for else it is not all one to have the head uncovered with a hat, or hood, or quouif, and to be shaven.⁴³

John Wesley (1703-1791), in his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, seems to regard the covering which is prohibited to men as including either a veil or long hair:

Covered—either with a veil or with long hair. Dishonoureth his head—St. Paul seems to mean, As in these eastern nations veiling the head is a badge of subjection, so a man who prays or prophesies with a veil on his head, reflects a dishonour on Christ, whose representative he is.”⁴⁴

Wesley takes 11:5 to refer to a woman who prays or prophesies without her face veiled.⁴⁵

Adam Clarke (1762-1832), in his commentary on the New Testament, assumes the standard position and regards a veil as the covering forbidden to men and required of women. He also concludes that this passage teaches that men are not to have long hair and that woman should.⁴⁶

Nature certainly teaches us, by bestowing it, that it is proper for women to have long hair; and it is not so with men. The hair of the male rarely grows like that of a female, unless art is used, and even then it bears but a scanty proportion to the former. Hence it is truly womanish to have long hair, and it is a shame to the man who affects it.

Other contemporary Methodist commentators reflect the same position.⁴⁷

⁴² Matthew Poole, who died in 1679, had completed his annotations up through Isaiah. The various other authors who finished the commentary are noted in John Lewis, *A Complete History of the Several Translations of the Holy Bible and New Testament Into English*, 3rd ed. (London: Printed for W. Baynes, 1818), p. 346.

⁴³ John Collings in Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, vol. 3 (orig., 1680; New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1863), 577. Collings inclined toward the veil view, but consistently introduced the possibility of ‘uncovered’ being loose, disheveled hair throughout his comments.

⁴⁴ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, vol. 2 (orig. 1754; London: Thomas Cordeux, 1813), p. 431.

⁴⁵ “[a woman who] under the immediate impulse of the Spirit ... prays or prophesies without a veil on her face, as it were disclaims subjection, and reflects dishonour on man, her head. For it is the same, in effect, as if she cut her hair short, and wore it in the distinguishing form of the men. In those ages, men wore their hair exceeding short, as appears from the ancient statues and pictures.: *Explanatory Notes*, p. 431. Similar comments may be found in contemporary non-Wesleyan commentators such as Simon Browne, who wrote the commentary on 1 Corinthians found in Matthew Henry's *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (1708–1710), Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor*, vol. 4 (London: John Wilson, 1739), pp. 298-301, and Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, trans. by Charlton Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent, vol. 2 (orig. 1742; reprint, Philadelphia: Perkinpine & Higgins, 1862), pp. 223-27.

⁴⁶ Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1838), p. 133. Similarly, Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*, trans. by John Edmund Cox. (orig. 1830-32; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1855), pp. 174-175; Albert Barnes, *Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), pp. 219-220.

Modern Interpretation (A.D. 1850–present)

On the whole, modern interpreters deviated little from identifying the covering Paul requires as a veil or material headdress until the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁸ Although the view that the covering Paul required or forbade was itself long hair had been held popularly by various groups throughout the 20th century, Abel Isaakson was the first to offer the scholarly community an extended argument for this position in print.⁴⁹

More recently, a growing number of scholars have come to the same conclusion, though often independently of Isaakson.⁵⁰ In a recent article on this passage, Francis Watson remarks

⁴⁷ Thomas Coke, *A Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 6 (New York: Paul & Thomas, 1812), pp. 160, 240-41. Joseph Sutcliffe, *A Commentary on the New Testament*, vol. 2-B (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1835), pp. 639-40. Joseph Benson, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments (According to the Present Authorized Version) With Critical, Explanatory, and Practical Notes*, vol. 2 (New York: Lane & Tippet, 1839), pp. 177-79. Electronic searches in *The Arminian Magazine*, *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, *Methodist Review* and other Methodist periodical literature prior to 1850 disclose no substantive articles on the exegesis of this passage.

⁴⁸ For example, Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: R. Carter, 1857), p. 207; H. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (orig. 1869; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1890), p. 248; A. R. Faussett in *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2 (Hartford: S. S. Scranton, 1871), pp. 283-85; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. 2 (Boston: Lee, Shepard, and Dillingham, 1873), p. 566. See Mercandante and Schutt for surveys of additional 19th and 20th century commentators.

⁴⁹ Abel Isaakson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple. A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19:3-12 and 1 Cor. 11:3-16* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1965), esp. 166-68. Isaakson offered five arguments in favor of his position: (1) “Contemporary Judaism knew nothing of any prohibition against a man having his head covered at public worship. On the contrary, there were in the sacred writings specific ordinances that the priests should wear different kinds of headgear at public worship (see, for example, Exod. 28:36-40; Ezek. 44:18)”; (2) “the Greek phrase ἀκατακάλυπτω τῆ κεφαλῆ corresponds to the Hebrew phrase ראש מנולה or ראש פרוע = (having loose hair hanging down). This can be seen from the fact that the LXX uses the same Greek phrase to render this Hebrew expression [in Lev. 13:45 and Num. 5:18]”; (3) “Since the whole passage deals with the question of men’s and women’s hair, when they appear at public worship, the missing object of ἔχων must be τῆν κόμην, which can easily be supplemented from the context (cf. vv. 14-15); (4) “In v. 14 it is the man’s long hair in particular which is degrading to him; (5) Paul clearly chose this unusual expression for long hair bearing in mind the part the word κεφαλῆ plays in his exposition. In 1947, Stefan Lösch made a similar argument in “Christliche Frauen in Corinth (1 Cor. 11.2-16): Ein neuer Lösungsversuch,” *ThQ* 127 (1947) 216-61. However, it received little attention.

⁵⁰ Philip B. Payne, “Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Priscilla Papers* 20, no. 3 (2006): 9-18; Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, ed. Grant R. Osborne, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004); Giancarlo Biguzzi, *Velo e silenzio. Paolo e la donna in 1Cor 11,2-16 e 14,33b-36* (SupplRivBib, 37; Bologna, 2001); Marlis Gielen, “Beten und Prophezeien mit unverhülltem Kopf? Die Kontroverse zwischen Paulus und der korinthischen Gemeinde um die Wahrung der Geschlechtsrollensymbolik in 1 Kor 11,2-16,” *ZNW* 90.3-4 (1999): 220-249; Raymond Collins, *First Corinthians (Sacra Pagina Series 7; Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999)*; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 590-91; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 153-54; David E. Blattenberger III, *Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 Through Archaeological and Moral-rhetorical Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1997). Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul’s Theological Method,” in *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 151-71; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther (1 Kor 6,12-11,16)*, 491-94; Alan Padgett, “The Significance of ἀντί in 1 Corinthians 11:15,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994): 181-7; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 265-74; “Sex and Logic in

that this understanding is beginning to acquire the status of “a broad consensus in recent scholarship.”⁵¹ One may further subdivide this position into those who regard Paul’s concern as one of hair style on both men and women,⁵² or those who regard hair condition—men must not have long hair, which is feminine, and women must not allow their hair to hang loose, but put it up on their heads—as the issue at stake.⁵³ On the other hand, the traditional way of reading this passage as dealing with a material head-covering of some sort continues to have its contemporary supporters.⁵⁴

An Interpretation of the History of Interpretation

Given the broad consensus of the history of interpretation on this passage, how does one justify the assertion that hair alone is the covering at issue? This is certainly a fair question, and one that should be addressed directly.

First, it is important to realize that the “hair-only” position is not an abandonment of the church’s historic understanding of this passage. The church fathers and early commentators surveyed above consistently understood that Paul, and thus God, forbade men to have long hair

1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *CBQ* 42 (1980): 482-500; J. Keir Howard, “Neither Male nor Female: An Examination of the Status of Women in the New Testament,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 31-42; Stephen A. Reynolds, “Colloquium,” *WTJ* 36 (1973): 90-91; James B. Hurley, “Did Paul require Veils or the Silence of Women: A Consideration of 1 Cor 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36,” *WTJ* 35 (1973): 190-220; William J. Martin, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation,” in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. Gasque-Martin (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 231-41. For others holding this view, see Jason David BeDuhn, “‘Because of the Angels’: Unveiling Paul’s Anthropology in 1 Corinthians 11,” *JBL* 118 (1999): 296 n. 7.

⁵¹ Francis Watson, “The Authority of the Voice: A Theological Reading of 1 Cor 11.2-16,” *NTS* 46 (2000): 534 n. 20. The fact that Preston Massey’s 2007 *NTS* article focuses on refuting this position suggests the strength it has gained in recent scholarship. 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.

⁵² Payne, “Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16”; Johnson, *1 Corinthians*; Gundry-Volf, “Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16”; Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*; Howard, “Neither Male nor Female”; Hurley, “Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women”; Isaakson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple*.

⁵³ Specifically, men must not let their hair grow uncut, and women should not cut their hair, which is their covering, but let it grow long. Raymond Collins, *First Corinthians*, 407; Marlis Gielen, “Beten und Prophezeien mit unverhülltem Kopf?”; Reynolds, “Colloquium”; Blattenberger, *Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11.2-16* (with some hesitation between the long hair and hairstyle views); W. J. Martin, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation.” Although the emphasis of Martin’s article is that the woman is not to cut her hair, he qualifies this by asserting there just needs to be an unambiguous distinction between the gender’s hair (239, fn. 19). Linda Belleville analyzes these authors similarly, including them under the view she describes as “The Corinthian men were letting their hair grow long, while the women were cutting theirs into boyishly short, unruly locks.” “*Κεφαλή* and the Thorny Issue of Headcovering in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 217.

⁵⁴ Among the most recent advocates of this view are Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 232; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 506. Although Anthony C. Thiselton considers the evidence strong that Paul’s concern is long hair on men and unloosed hair on women, he, nonetheless, regards the material head-covering view as “more probable.” *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 825.

and expected it of women. The position espoused here stands in continuity with this aspect of church's historic position, while dissenting from the common understanding that an additional covering (the veil) is also in view.

Second, several factors provide a plausible explanation for what I regard as a misunderstanding of Paul's language regarding a covering: (1) the ambiguity of Paul's language, (2) the Mediterranean cultural ethos, (3) early glosses in Greek manuscripts and early translations of the passage in Latin and Coptic, (4) the influence of Irenaeus and Tertullian, and (5) inattention to Paul's theological argumentation in 1 Cor. 11:7.

The Ambiguity of Paul's language

The language Paul uses is unusual in some places and ambiguous in others. For example, the phrase in v. 4 "having on/down head" (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) lacks an explicit direct object to identify what is "down from the head." Since this is the only occurrence of this phrase without an explicit direct object in all extant Greek literature up to and including the first century A.D.,⁵⁵ it is not a simple matter to determine its meaning.

The fact that Basil and Chrysostom, both native Greek speakers, understood this phrase differently attests to its ambiguity. In addition, the language Paul uses, although admittedly ambiguous, readily lends itself to being understood in reference to a material covering. As Preston Massey and others have demonstrated, the καλύπτω word group was commonly used in reference to material coverings being on or not on the head.⁵⁶ The absence of any information regarding the precise nature of what was going on in Corinth compounds the difficulty of understanding Paul's language.

The Mediterranean cultural ethos

Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultures all supported the use of a veil for feminine modesty.⁵⁷ Although not universally required, when modesty was a consideration, the veil was almost universally considered appropriate.⁵⁸ Precisely who was to wear one (virgin or married), and where it should be worn (in public only or both in public and in private) were matters of cultural diversity.

⁵⁵ A TLG morphological search (performed in October 2011) for any form of ἔχω within one line of the phrase κατὰ κεφαλῆς in any text from the 8th c. B.C. through 1st c. AD returned no relevant examples from the extant texts of 1344 authors.

⁵⁶ Massey, "The Meaning of κατακαλύπτω and κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων in 1 Corinthians 11.2–16," 502-523. See also, Witherington, 233;

⁵⁷ For an extended demonstration of Greek use of the veil in pre-classical, classical, and post-classical periods of Greek culture, see Preston Massey, "The Veil and the Voice: A Study of Female Beauty and Male Attraction in Ancient Greece" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2006), pp. 202-51; Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece* (Oakville, CT: David Brown Book Co., 2003), esp. 55-80. See also, Blattenberger, *Rethinking 1 Corinthians 11.2-16*.

⁵⁸ Massey's analysis of Greek literature up to the first century A.D. identifies seven different meanings which may attach to the wearing of a veil (1) a veil symbolizes a woman is married, (2) a veil maintains a woman's modesty, (3) a veil communicates marital fidelity, (4) a veil protects a woman from undesired gazes, (5) a veil may be used to show respect to a man, (6) a veil functioned as a gender-distinguishing piece of clothing, and (7) a veil may be used to adorn or beautify. The non-use of the veil could signal grief at a death, disrespect to a man, or promiscuous availability and was considered shameful. "The Veil and the Voice," pp. 252-80.

Further, it has become increasingly well-documented that it was a common 1st c. Roman practice for men to veil their heads when worshipping.⁵⁹ Although the evidence for the precise origin of the use of the *tallith* by Jews is inconclusive, the OT practice by priests certainly creates a background amenable to the practice, and the Talmud may well have canonized practices whose origin dates well before the 3rd century AD. The use of some form of head-covering for various purposes throughout the Roman Empire in combination with the common usage of elements of Paul's language provides a plausible setting in which Paul's instructions could fairly easily be construed to be addressing veiling concerns.

Early Glosses and Translations of 1 Cor. 11:10

As noted previously, Irenaeus (c. 120-202) cites 1 Cor. 11:10 as “A woman ought to have a veil upon her head, because of the angels.”⁶⁰ If Irenaeus were simply quoting the text the way the Valentinians did, he might be expected to point out their error. Since he does not, as noted in Schaff and also suggested by Dillon and Unger,⁶¹ this may indicate that an early marginal gloss (explanation) for the word “authority” (ἐξουσίαν) actually made it into the text of some early copies of Paul's letter to the Corinthians.⁶² Given the way Irenaeus cites this verse, it is possible that his copy of 1 Corinthians had been corrupted and read “veil” (κάλυμμα) instead of “authority” (ἐξουσίαν) in 11:10.

There are currently no extant copies of 1 Corinthians in Greek that have “veil” (κάλυμμα) in verse 10.⁶³ This fact suggests perhaps that the dispersal of such copies was not wide spread. There are, however, early translations that have the word *veil* instead of *authority* in verse 10. Adam Clarke notes that “some copies of the Itala (Old Latin) have also *velamen*, a veil. ... and in an ancient edition of the Vulgate, ... the verse stands thus: *Ideo debet mulier velamen habere*

⁵⁹ David W. J. Gill, “The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1990): 245-260; Richard Oster, “Use, Misuse and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians (1Cor 7,1-5; 8,10; 11,2-16; 12,14-26).” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83 (1992): 52-73; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶⁰ Interestingly, Epiphanius quotes Irenaeus extensively in his *Panarion* and preserves Irenaeus' quotation of 1 Cor. 11:10 precisely as found in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*: δεῑ την̄ γυναῖκᾱ κάλυμμᾱ ἔχειν̄ ἐπὶ τῆς̄ κεφαλῆς̄ διὰ τοὺς̄ ἀγγέλους̄. K. Holl, *Epiphanius, Ancoratus und Panarion in Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915), vol. 1, p. 423.

⁶¹ Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, p. 327. Unger and Dillon confirm that Irenaeus's text reads *kalumma* at this point. They conclude that *kalumma* “must have been in the Western text that the Gnostics used, or they changed from power to veil according to the sense of the symbol to fit their purpose.” *St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies*, 173-74.

⁶² Just as we make marginal notes in books today, it was not unusual for early Christians to make marginal comments in their copies of New Testament manuscripts. When these manuscripts were copied later, sometimes the copyist would mistake a marginal note for a marginal correction, and insert into the text or replace the original text with the marginal text. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 194-95.

⁶³ Reuben J. Swanson, ed., *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: 1 Corinthians* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003), 165. So also NA²⁷. Swanson does note four manuscripts that have *κάλυμμα* in v. 4; however, all of these mss date from 9th c. or later.

super caput suum: et propter angelos.”⁶⁴ As noted in the UBS⁴ apparatus, part of the Bohairic Coptic tradition reads *veil* as well.⁶⁵ Given the relative literalness of this translation, it is likely that the Greek manuscript(s) used to produce these translations had *κάλυμμα* in verse 10.

If Greek manuscripts were circulating which read *κάλυμμα*, *veil*, instead of *ἐξουσίαν*, *authority*, such manuscripts would have effectively rendered any other interpretive options impossible for those who read them. Should anyone have suggested a different understanding of this passage, the response would have been, “Paul says ‘veil,’ so it has to be about veils.”

The Influence of Irenaeus and Tertullian

Both Irenaeus and Tertullian exercised considerable influence over Christian interpretive consensus as it developed in the 3rd century, particularly in the West. The influence of both men is evident in the frequency with which they are cited by contemporary and subsequent church fathers and in church councils. Tertullian in particular was very vocal in insisting that women be veiled at all times, not merely when worshipping. The forcefulness of their writings as well as the breadth of their influence were factors contributing to the dominance of the material-covering view.

Inattention to Paul’s Theological Argumentation

An exploration of extant ancient Christian commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:7 discovers extended discussions of what it means for men to be in the image of God, whether women share the image of God, what the image and glory of God are and how man is the glory of God. What is missing from ancient commentaries is consideration of how verse seven supports and relates to Paul’s theological argument within the passage as a whole. Specifically, it appears that no attention was given to the theological implications of Paul’s argument in 1 Cor. 11:7 for the divinely required practice of priests wearing a material head-covering (Exod. 28:4, 40).⁶⁶ Paul’s argument that man’s status as the glory of God obligates him to pray and prophesy with an uncovered head flies directly in the face of God’s design of caps and turbans for those leading His people in worship—if the covering to which Paul refers is a material head covering.

The implications of Paul’s statement for Exodus 28:4, 40 appears to have been in ancient commentators’ “blindspot” as they traveled through this text. Potential explanations for this oversight include the (1) de-emphasis on the OT that resulted from hostility between the synagogue and the church in first and second centuries,⁶⁷ (2) the early rise of allegorical readings of Scripture, and the OT especially, that minimized attention to the literal meaning of the text,

⁶⁴ Clarke, *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, 132. The quality of Old Latin translations was sufficiently varied that Jerome was commissioned to produce a faithful translation into Latin. Jerome’s translation is known as the Vulgate.

⁶⁵ Aland, Barbara, et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Westphalia: United Bible Societies, 2001), 592.

⁶⁶ Almost all the discussion of 1 Cor. 11:7 revolves around the significance of the man as the image and glory of God and woman as the glory of man. For example, see Chrysostom, *Homily 26* (11:2-16), under verse 7, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 1, vol. 12, p. 153.

⁶⁷ For further discussion, see Craig A. Evans, “Christianity and Judaism: Parting of the Ways,” in *The Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1997), pp. 159-170, and Philip S. Alexander, “‘The Parting of the Ways’ from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism,” in *Parting of the Ways: Jews and Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 1-26.

and (3) theological issues relating to Christology and the meaning of man as the image of God that obscured the implications of Exodus 28 for this text. The reasons for lack of attention to this issue probably varied from person to person. Regardless, this absence of wholistic attention to the way in which Paul develops his theological argument made it easier to read the text as requiring a material covering.

Conclusion

The momentum of the Mediterranean cultural ethos in combination with Paul's ambiguous language would have been strongly in the direction of a material head-covering. Factoring in the additional possibility that the word *veil* was mistakenly introduced into early copies of 1 Corinthians, the influence of Irenaeus and Tertullian on the early church's understanding of this passage, and the general inattention to Paul's theological argumentation, it is hardly surprising that the history of interpretation is what it is. What is interesting is evidence in Epiphanius and Chrysostom that elements of the passage were understood by some in the way I am arguing. Taken together these factors provide a plausible explanation for the development of the dominant understanding of this passage.