

Pleasing God – The Glory of a Woman

The pastor looked up from his desk and glanced out the window. A cardinal was pecking at seeds in the birdfeeder. *It's amazing how many birds have found that feeder since Karen put it out there yesterday*, he thought.

There was a knock on the office door and Karen came in holding some papers. She hadn't been his secretary long, but she was the most efficient one he had ever had.

"More autographs?" he asked wearily. Karen laughed as she put the papers on his desk.

"Seems the building commission can't get enough of them," she replied.

The church was adding several rooms to the back of the main sanctuary, and he had been signing papers and wading through red tape since they began. Karen sat down in a chair near the window as he reached for his pen.

"I see our feeder has a visitor," she said, looking outside.

"That's the sixth one I've seen this morning," replied the pastor. "I can't believe how many birds have found it already."

"That's what Nancy said when she told me about hers. She put one outside her kitchen window and the next morning there were about ten or eleven birds on it."

"Are she and Steve coming for their appointment this morning?"

"Yes, they should be here any minute," Karen said. "Isn't it wonderful how much they've grown spiritually since they got saved? They're so eager to learn." The pastor signed the last of the papers and handed them to her.

"It is refreshing," he agreed. "Many of the people I try to disciple aren't willing to really study the Word. Steve and Nancy have a love of the truth that's hard to find."

"There they are," Karen said in answer to a chime from the outer office. She left the room with the papers, and a moment later Steve and Nancy walked in. They sat down in the chairs in front of the pastor's desk.

"How's the week been?" asked the pastor, leaning back in his chair.

"Not bad," replied Steve. "And you?"

"Oh, I'm still signing papers for the building commission. I didn't realize how much red tape I'd have to cut through when we started. It'll be worth it once we finish all the rooms, though. We really need the space."

The pastor opened his notebook and flipped through the pages.

"Well, any questions before we start today's lesson?" he asked.

"I have one," said Nancy, "But it's not about what we've been studying."

"No problem. What's on your mind?"

"Ever since Steve and I started attending church here, I've noticed that most of the women don't cut their hair. At first I thought it was a coincidence, but now I'm curious—is there some reason the women don't cut their hair?"

"I'm glad you asked," said the pastor. "This is a good opportunity teach you guys about the authority structure of the church."

Nancy stared at him in surprise. “What does hair have to do with the authority structure of the church?” she asked. The pastor smiled.

“Turn to 1 Corinthians and I’ll show you.” Intrigued, Steve and Nancy opened their Bibles and got out their notepads.

“In his second letter¹ to the Corinthians,” the pastor said, “Paul dealt with several issues that were creating division within the church. He also answered a few questions the Corinthians had sent him. The section we’ll be studying, chapter eleven, is found after Paul’s reply to a question about meat offered to idols. Let’s start with verse two.”

“Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you” (1 Corinthians 11:2, *NASB*).²

“Notice that Paul began by praising the Corinthians. This is typical of Paul—he often used praise to soften any criticism that followed.³ The phrase ‘you remember me in everything’ means that whenever a problem came up, they thought of Paul and did their best to remember what he had taught them.”

Steve looked at the verse thoughtfully. “What does Paul mean by the word ‘traditions’? Is he talking about cultural traditions?”

“Good question. It’s important to understand what Paul means by this word. The word translated ‘traditions’ is *paradoseis*, and in this context it refers to both Paul’s oral and written teachings. When Paul uses this term in reference to his own teaching, it refers not to cultural customs or traditions, but to the divine revelation God communicated through him. Turn over to Galatians and you can read what Paul said about what he taught.”

“For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:11–12).

“Paul did not preach the traditions of man,” said the pastor. “He only preached what was revealed to him by God. Paul also commanded the Thessalonians to exercise church discipline on those who refused to abide by the ‘tradition’ (*paradosin*) he had given them.”⁴

“So what Paul meant when he said *paradoseis* is not what we normally mean when we say ‘traditions,’” commented Steve.

“Exactly,” replied the pastor. “Now, after Paul praised the Corinthians for their obedience, he introduced the main theme of this section: the authority structure of the church.”

¹ First Corinthians was the second letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians. The first letter, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11, has never been found.

² Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* version, The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

³ Paul’s criticism begins in 11:17 and relates to abuses of the Lord’s table.

⁴ 2 Thess 3:6 (see also 2 Thess 2:15).

“But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:3).

“What does the word ‘head’ mean?” asked Nancy.

“In this context, it means ‘authority over.’⁵ When you are the ‘head,’ you exercise authority over those under you. They are to submit to you and follow your leadership.”

Steve made a note of this on his pad and then looked up. “What’s the significance of God being the head of Christ? Does that affect their equality?”

“No. Remember that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are different persons within a single godhead. God the Father has authority over God the Son, but this in no way detracts from the divinity of the Son—both Father and Son are still God.”

“So when Jesus was here on earth,” added Nancy thoughtfully, “even though He was God, He was under the authority of the Father, right?”

“Yes. Consider, for example, John 5:30.”

“I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30).

“Throughout his entire ministry, Jesus submitted himself to the Father’s headship. If you have some time this week, you might also want to look up John 4:34 and John 6:38.” Steve and Nancy jotted down the references.

“I want you to note the authority structure that is described in verse three,” continued the pastor. “At the top we have the Father’s authority over the Son. Under the Son is man, and under the man is woman.”

Steve winked at the pastor and nudged Nancy. “Did you hear that?” he asked. “The wife is to submit to her husband.” Nancy gave him a withering look.

“Sorry,” said the pastor with a chuckle. “This passage isn’t talking about a husband and wife relationship.”

“It’s not?” Steve said in surprise. “How so?”

“The word ‘man’ is *anēr* and it refers specifically to males. Although *anēr* can mean both ‘man’ and ‘husband,’ the normal use of the term is ‘man.’ Look at the first part of verse three and notice the word ‘every.’”

“I see what you mean,” nodded Steve. “This is talking about all men, not just husbands.”

“Right. If we take out the word ‘man’ and put in ‘husband,’ anyone who is single is excluded. That doesn’t make sense contextually. Verse four is the same way.”

⁵ The traditional view of 1 Corinthians 11:3, since the time of the church fathers, understands *kephalē* in the metaphorical sense of “ruler or authority over.” For citations of church fathers who interpret “head” in this fashion, see Ruth A. Tucker, “Response,” in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen, pp. 111–117. Wayne Grudem and Joseph Fitzmyer, working independently, are the primary scholars who argue that one of the metaphorical senses of *kephalē* is “ruler or authority over,” and that this sense best fits the context of 1 Corinthians 11.

“You can apply the same logic to verse five,” added Nancy. “Instead of ‘every man,’ it’s ‘every woman.’ If we put in ‘wife,’ the same thing happens.”

“Look also at verses seven through eleven where Paul talked about the creation of man and woman. This stresses men and women in general, not just husbands and wives.”

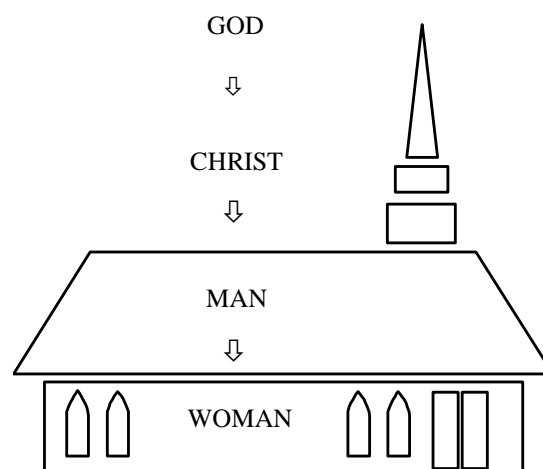
Steve leaned forward in his chair and read the verses quickly. “The word ‘husband’ makes less sense here than it did earlier,” he commented. “Verses eight and nine especially.”

“Verses thirteen through sixteen are the same way,” said the pastor. “Paul makes some observations from nature, and once again he emphasized men and women in general.”

Steve checked the passage and nodded in agreement.

“Well, we’ve covered a lot of ground,” said the pastor. “Let’s have a quick review before we go on to verses four and five. Let me borrow one of your notepads, and I’ll draw a picture for you.”

Nancy handed him her pad, and he shifted his chair around so they could watch him draw.



“This is the authority structure of the church. God has authority over Christ, and Christ has authority over the church. Both men and women are to submit to Him and obey Him. Within the church, man has authority over the woman. Part of a woman’s submission to Christ is her submission to the man.”

Nancy frowned. “Does this mean that I have to submit to any man’s authority, no matter who he is?”

“No,” said the pastor. “The context here is the local church.⁶ The woman is to come under the man’s authority within that specific setting. They are not to take positions of power or

⁶ There are several reasons for understanding this passage within the context of the local church: a) 1 Corinthians 11:16, the last verse of this paragraph, relates the teaching of the previous verses to that of the local “churches of God,” b) the following paragraph, 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, which deals with the conduct of believers at the Lord’s table, specifically states, “...when you come together as a church,” as do chapters 12–14, c) the very practice of prophecy as Paul defines it in 14:3–5 demands the context of the local church, not a private gathering, d) as noted above, 1 Corinthians 14:34–36 does not forbid women from any form of speaking in the church, but most likely forbids them from participating in the evaluating of prophecies given in the congregation.

authority that God designed for the man to fill. Paul's letters to Timothy deal with some of these roles. Maybe next week we can go over some of them."⁷

The pastor handed the pad back to Nancy and reached for his Bible. "Let's move on to verses four and five."

"Every man who has *something*⁸ on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved" (1 Corinthians 11:4–5).

"In verse four, Paul introduced another meaning of the term 'head.' He adds the meaning 'physical head.' The 'head' that is covered or uncovered refers to the physical head, while the 'head' that is dishonored is the authoritative head. As we just learned, the authoritative head of the man is Christ, and the authoritative head of the woman is the man."

Nancy stared at the verses with a puzzled expression. "What does Paul mean when he says 'something on his head' and 'her head uncovered'?"

"It must be referring to a material covering of some sort," suggested Steve. "Probably a veil or something."

"It certainly seems that way at first glance," replied the pastor. "But let's take a closer look and see if you're correct."

Steve raised an eyebrow in surprise and read the verses again. "What else could it be?" he asked.

"Well, it's obvious that if a person's head is covered, then there must be something that is covering it. However, there is nothing in verses four and five that indicates what the covering actually is. Take a closer look at the two phrases 'something on his head,' and 'her head uncovered.' The first, *kata kephalēs echōn*, literally reads 'down head having.' The second, *akatakalyptos te kephalē*, literally reads 'uncovered with the head.' You can see that the words themselves give no indication as to the nature of the covering. Although it is natural to think of a covering as a material object, such as a veil, we have no way of determining that from these verses."

"Then how do we determine what the covering is?" asked Nancy.

"The context," said the pastor. "As you know, words can have many different meanings. We depend on the context in which a word is used to point us to the meaning which makes the most sense. For example, the word 'trunk' can mean a large chest, the main body of a tree, or a

⁷ Just as God the Father's headship of Christ reflects the reality of the economic Trinity and in no way detracts from their ontological equality, the fact that the man is the "head of" (the authority over) the woman in the local church does not imply ontological superiority. Nor does this passage imply that any man in a local congregation is the authoritative head of any woman. This passage simply states that women (regardless of age) are to be under the authority of male leadership within a local church. This is in harmony with parallel teaching of 1 Timothy 2:12–15 which prohibits a woman from teaching or exercising authority over a man in the local church.

⁸ Italics are used in the text of the New American Standard version to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

compartment in the rear of a car. If I said to you, 'Please get the trunk down from the attic,' the context of the sentence indicates that I'm talking about a large chest, not a tree or a car. In our case, the verses themselves don't give us enough information to determine what the covering is. We'll have to examine the large context in order to reach a conclusion. Start with verse six and read all the way to verse sixteen. Try to determine from the context what the covering is."

Nancy and Steve put down their pens and began to read. After a moment, Steve looked up.

"I think I found it," he said. "The last part of verse fifteen says, 'For her hair is given to her for a covering.'"

"Excellent," replied the pastor. "Verse fifteen provides us with a contextual indication of the nature of the covering. Notice the ending phrase, 'for a covering.' The word 'for' is *anti* and in this context means 'instead of, in place of.' The word 'covering' is *peribolaïou* and refers to a 'mantle, cloak, or material covering.' Paul's point is that instead of giving the woman a physical covering like a veil, God gave the woman her hair as a covering. The hair itself *is the covering*."

"I'm still confused," Nancy said. "If hair is the covering, then what makes a person's head covered or uncovered?"

"Read verses fourteen and fifteen again. What does Paul say is dishonorable?"

"Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering" (1 Corinthians 11:14–15).

"Oh, I see," replied Nancy. "Long hair. That means that a man's head is covered if his hair is long and a woman's head is uncovered if her hair is short."

"Correct," said the pastor. "Now let's review what we've learned. We determined from the context that the covering is hair. Verses four, five, fourteen, and fifteen show us how hair serves as a covering. If a man has long hair, then his physical head is covered and he dishonors his authoritative head, Christ. If a woman has short hair, then her physical head is uncovered and she dishonors her authoritative head, the man."

"What's the significance of dishonoring your authoritative head?" asked Steve.

"Think of the authority structure described in verse three," responded the pastor. "God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. Verses four and five show us how this authority structure is visibly represented in the church. When a man has short hair, he honors his authoritative head, Jesus Christ. In the same way, when a woman has long hair, she honors her authoritative head, the man. From this relationship, we can see that hair is a symbol of submission. Short hair symbolizes the man's submission to Christ. Long hair symbolizes the woman's submission to the man, and through him, to Christ. When a man has long hair or a woman has short hair, they shame Jesus Christ and violate 1 Corinthians 10:31 which tells us to do everything to the glory of God."⁹

"So that's why you said my question was a good opportunity to teach us about the authority structure of the church," Nancy said. "I see how it fits together now. This is fascinating."

⁹ See the Appendix for a discussion of the Nazirite vow described in Numbers 6.

“Wait a minute,” said Steve. “There’s still a problem with all this. How long is ‘long hair’ and how short is ‘short hair’? Who’s to say what’s long and what’s short when everyone’s hair grows to different lengths?”

“That’s a fair question,” replied the pastor. “I asked myself the same thing when I studied this passage. My first step was to examine the word *komē* (‘long hair’) in the last part of verse fifteen to see if its meaning gave me any clues. When I did a word study of *komē* in the New Testament, I discovered that it occurred only in 1 Corinthians 11:15. That wasn’t much help, so I also investigated its use in the Septuagint and first century Greek literature.”

“What’s the Septuagint?” asked Nancy.

“It’s a Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic. Around the second century BC, a group of Jewish scholars translated it into Greek. The Septuagint is a major source of information about the common Greek of that period.”

“How is it helpful in word studies?” Steve asked.

“Think back to my illustration of the word ‘trunk.’ Suppose I said something like, “Get the spare tire out of the trunk.” If you didn’t know what ‘trunk’ meant, you could tell from the context of the sentence that it had something to do with a vehicle. And what if a little later I said, “Nail this sign to the trunk of that tree?”

“I’d realize that ‘trunk’ had more than one meaning,” replied Steve. “And the more you used the word, the better idea I would have of its various meanings.”

“Exactly. The word *komē* is used eleven times in the Septuagint.¹⁰ By studying its usage there, as well as its usage in first century Greek literature¹¹, I gained a better understanding of its various meanings.”

“What did you learn?” Nancy asked.

“I found that the word *komē* could refer to hair, either a man’s or a woman’s, long or feminine-length hair, or uncut hair. What I did next was to determine which meaning made the most sense in the context of 1 Corinthians 11. So, I went back to verses five and six.”

“But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.

¹⁰ *Komē* refers to uncut hair twice (the Nazirite vow in Num 6:5 and regulations for the priests’ hair in Ezek 44:20). In Leviticus 19:27, Israelite men were prohibited from making “a round cutting of the hair” of their head. Job 1:20 describes Job as rising and shaving “the hair of his head” (ἐκείρατο τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς). 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 Mac 1:18; 4:6).

¹¹ *Komē* (κόμη) occurs 19 times in Josephus, 18 times in reference to hair, and once in reference to hyssop bunches. Josephus uses *komē* 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 *komē* 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 ἀνείττο; *Ant.* 5.347). Absalom’s *komē* supposedly grew at such a rapid rate that, according to Josephus, it needed to be cut every 8th day (*Ant.* 7.189, 239). While David was fleeing Absalom, Mephibosheth didn’t cut his *komē* (*Ant.* 7.267).

For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head” (1 Corinthians 11:5–6).

“The last part of verse five tells us that in God’s eyes, a woman who has short hair (her head is ‘uncovered’) is the same as a woman whose head is shaved. Verse six continues this thought by adding that since it is a shame for a woman to have a shaved head, she should ‘cover her head’ (have long hair).”

“What’s the difference between ‘cut off’ and ‘shaved’ in verse six?” asked Nancy.

“The words are synonyms. ‘Cut off,’ *keiro*, means ‘to cut short.’¹² The word ‘shaved,’ *xurao*, means to ‘shave with a razor.’¹³

“And what’s the connection between a woman with short hair (v. 5a) and a woman whose hair is ‘cut off,’ or ‘shaved’ (v. 6b)?” asked Steve.

“Think about it,” said the pastor. “If *xurao*, ‘shaved,’ and *keiro*, ‘cut off,’ are two extreme cases of short hair (of being ‘uncovered’), then what does it mean to have short hair?”

Steve looked down at the verses for a moment and then snapped his fingers.

“I see it,” he said excitedly. “A woman with short hair is a woman whose hair is cut!”

“Exactly,” said the pastor. “In these verses, Paul stated that a woman who cuts her hair, that is, a woman whose head is ‘uncovered,’ is the same as a woman who crops it short or shaves her head. Both are shameful.”

“It’s obvious now which definition of *komē* makes the most sense in this passage,” said Steve. “A woman’s covering is her long, uncut hair. If she cuts her hair, she becomes uncovered and brings dishonor on the man.”

“Right. We now have an answer to your earlier question about how long is long and how short is short. Long hair is uncut hair and short hair is cut hair. A man’s cut hair visibly shows his submission to Christ. A woman’s uncut hair visibly shows her submission to the man, and through him, to Christ. Notice how verse seven completes this train of thought.”

“For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man” (1 Corinthians 11:7).

Nancy nodded as she read the verse. “This is what you were telling us earlier about dishonoring your head. God’s glory is at stake.”

“Yes,” replied the pastor. “This verse also supports our contextual definition of the covering as long, uncut hair and not a material covering.”

“How’s that?” asked Steve.

¹² The word occurs four times in the New Testament: twice in verse six, once in reference to Paul cutting off his hair (Acts 18:18), and once when speaking of a ‘shearer’ of sheep (Acts 8:32). It is used much more in the Septuagint, again in reference to shearing sheep, and its normal meaning is ‘to cut short.’

¹³ The word occurs three times in the New Testament: once in verse five, once in verse six, and once in Acts 21:24. It is used more frequently in the Septuagint, usually in reference to shaving off a person’s hair or beard.

“We know that man has been ‘the image and glory of God’ since creation. Yet we find in the Old Testament that God commanded the priests to wear a cloth head-covering when they ministered before the Lord.¹⁴ If verse seven is teaching that a man should not wear a material head covering because man is the glory of God, then the priests should not have worn them either. Since God required His priests to wear them, Paul must be referring to something other than a material head covering.”¹⁵

“That makes sense,” said Steve, thoughtfully. “I think I’m starting to understand what Paul is getting at here. Man is the glory of God, and what man does brings honor or dishonor to God.”

The pastor nodded in agreement. “The theme of glory and shame is woven throughout Paul’s whole discussion. Notice the last part of verse seven: ‘the woman is the glory of the man.’ What she does also brings honor or dishonor to the man.”

“There’s one thing that still bothers me,” said Nancy, “Why did God put women under the authority of men?”

The pastor smiled wryly. “Well, I certainly understand why you would ask that question—especially in light of today’s society. Fortunately, Paul discussed this in the next few verses. Let’s begin by reading verses eight, nine, and ten.”

“For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake. Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority* on her head, because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:8–10).

“Verse eight explains how the woman is the glory of the man and why the man is given the position of authority. The woman was made from the man, and she brings glory to him. She is also under his authority because he was created before her and she was created from his body.”

“Verse nine gives a second reason for man’s headship,” said Steve. “The woman was made specifically for the man. She was designed to be his helper and to accept his leadership.”

“Correct,” replied the pastor.

¹⁴ Part of the garments that God designed and required both for priests and the high priest was a material head-covering. For the High Priest it was a linen turban called a “mitre” (Exod 28:4, 37, 39; 29:6; 39:28, 31; Lev 8:9; 16:4). The regular priests, on the other hand, wore “bonnets” or “caps” (Exod 28:40; 29:9; 39:28; Lev 8:13). These head-coverings were not reserved for special occasions but were the normal garb for all priestly functions.

¹⁵ Since the transition between the covenants did not affect man’s status as the image and glory of God, it appears to have no bearing on the application of that status to worship. It has been suggested that Paul is instituting a new worship regulation that supersedes the OT pattern. It is true that we see instances in which OT regulations were replaced or removed (e.g., clean and unclean food laws; Mark 7:19). However, there are no examples where a practice based upon man’s created status is superseded. Man’s created status as the glory of God has remained constant from Eden to the present. Further, Paul argues that when a male covers his head he dishonors his authoritative head, Christ, and thereby dishonors God who established the headship structure. One must conclude then that whatever it was that violated man’s created status and dishonored God in the Corinthians’ worship would have always violated that status and dishonored God.

Nancy shook her head slowly. “I understand what you’re saying, but this certainly wouldn’t go over very well with most of my friends. I even have a hard time accepting it. I guess I’m just used to thinking that men and women are equal before God.”

“They *are* equal before God,” replied the pastor. “Equality is not the issue here—authority is. Remember Steve’s question about God being the head of Christ? God the Father has authority over the God the Son, but both of them are equal. They’re both God. Paul isn’t saying that women are inferior to men. He’s simply saying that the woman is under the man’s authority within the church. In fact, he goes on in verses eleven and twelve to emphasize that both men and women are dependent on each other within the body of Christ. No part of the body functions properly without the other parts of the body.”

“However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God” (1 Corinthians 11:11–12).

“I see,” said Nancy, reading the verses. “Verse twelve means that just as the woman needed the man to begin her existence, so the man needed the woman to perpetuate his existence. And both the man and the woman have God as their ultimate source.”

“Yes. The truth that men and women need each other and are dependent on each other balances the truth that the woman is under the man’s authority. We now come to Paul’s concluding statements. In verse thirteen he returned to his main theme by asking the Corinthians to use their common sense about the difference between a man’s hair and a woman’s hair.”

“Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:13–15).

“It seems to me,” said Steve, “that he’s pointing out that long hair is naturally thought of as womanly or feminine. If a man lets his hair grow long, it’s generally thought to be unnatural and shameful. Most men want to be seen as manly, not womanly, and so they keep their hair cut.”

“Right,” the pastor nodded. “And what does Paul say about a woman’s hair?”

“It is her glory,” said Steve. “I see the connection now. The glory of the man is the woman, and the glory of the woman is her long, uncut hair.”

“Exactly,” said the pastor. “Paul wants us to realize that the natural order of things is for women to have long hair and men to have short hair. He concluded his discussion with verse sixteen.”

“But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16).

“Paul’s first words, ‘But if one is inclined to be contentious,’ show that he expected opposition to what he was saying. The word ‘contentious’ indicates a person who loves strife. It’s someone who battles over the meanings of words and likes to prolong an argument. Notice how Paul dealt with such a person. He said that his teaching on this matter is followed by all the churches of God—there is no other ‘practice’ or way of dealing with this issue apart from his instruction.”

“So this is a basic principle that applies to everyone, not just the Corinthians,” remarked Steve.

“Right. The whole focus and theme of the passage is the authority structure of the church. That means it’s true for you and me today.”

Nancy looked over at Steve and smiled ruefully. “So much for my trip to the beauty salon this afternoon.”

Steve chuckled and leaned back in his chair. “Just think of all the money we’ll save.”

“I know that caring for long, uncut hair isn’t easy,” said the pastor. “Why don’t you talk to my wife—she’ll be glad to show you how to care for and style your hair tastefully.” Nancy smiled gratefully.

“Before you go,” said the pastor, “let me ask you some questions as a review. You can use your notes if you need to. First, what’s the theme of this passage?”

“The authority structure of the church,” answered Steve. “God has authority over Christ, Christ has authority over the man, and the man has authority over the woman.”

“What’s the context of this authority structure?”

“The local church,” said Nancy. “Women are to submit to the leadership of the man within the church. They should not take positions of authority that God designed for the man to fill.”

“What is the visible symbol of the man’s and woman’s submission?”

“Their hair,” replied Steve. “The man should keep his hair cut, and the woman should leave her hair uncut.”

“What happens if they violate this command?”

“They shame their authoritative head. The man dishonors Christ, and the woman dishonors the man.”

“Why does that happen?”

“Because man is the glory of God, and woman is the glory of the man,” said Nancy. “When they disobey God, they bring shame to themselves and reflect that shame unto the person they should glorify.”

“What reasons does Paul give for the man being in authority over the woman?”

“The first is man’s priority in creation. The woman was made from the man. The second was that the woman was made to be man’s helper. She was made for him.”

“How does Paul balance this truth?”

“He goes on to say that men and women need each other and depend on each other,” said Steve. “Woman was created from the man, but man needs the woman to continue his existence.”

“And is all this relevant to us today?”

“Yes,” answered Nancy. “Verse sixteen makes it clear that this was not just for the Corinthians. The authority structure of the church and its visible representation through our hair is just as true for us as it was for them.”

“Fantastic,” smiled the pastor. “You guys are great students. I’m really appreciate your interest as we worked through these verses. Let’s have a word of prayer before you go.”

Appendix

1) Nazirite Vow.

- a) An objection to the understanding that a man's long, uncut hair brings disgrace to Christ is the Nazirite vow described in Numbers chapter six. The details of the vow are as follows:¹⁶
- i) The vow could be made by a man or a woman (Numbers 6:2).
 - ii) The vow was unique—the result of an extraordinary zeal and desire serve Yahweh (6:2).
 - iii) The term 'Nazirite' comes from *nazir* meaning 'to separate,' denoting someone dedicated or consecrated to God (6:2).
 - iv) The vow could be initiated at the discretion of the individual—no priest was needed. During the tenure of the vow, the individual was under his own heart's supervision in keeping the terms of the vow (6:2).
 - v) The individual was to abstain from grapes and any product derived from grapes (6:3–4).
 - vi) The individual was to let their hair grow without cutting it in any way. The long hair that grew was called the 'separation to God ... on his head' (6:7) and 'dedicated head of hair' (6:9). The uncut hair was the symbol of the individual's consecration (6:5).
 - vii) The individual was not to make themselves unclean by touching a dead body. Special provision is made in case of an accident (6:6–12).
 - viii) The vow lasted for a certain limited period of time (6:13). Samuel and Samson are exceptions to this rule in that their vow was to be for their entire life (1 Sam 1:11; Judg 13:5; 16:17).
 - ix) At the end of the vow, the individual offered a burnt offering, a sin offering, a peace offering, a grain offering and a drink offering (6:13–17).
 - x) The individual then shaved their head completely and placed the hair into the fire of the peace offering (6:18–19).
 - xi) The ceremony concluded with a wave offering. After this, the individual could return to normal life (6:19–21).
- b) In the OT, only two individuals are specifically said to have been under the vow: Samuel and Samson. In both cases, their parents initiated the vow on their behalf before birth. However, the silence in the OT regarding those who took the Nazirite vow should not be taken as an indication that it never happened. Amos 2:11–12 specifically affirms that the vow was practiced throughout Israel's history.
- c) In the NT, John the Baptist is often considered to be a Nazirite because of the angelic command to Zacharias in Luke 1:15. However, only wine and strong drink are mentioned—there is no specific mention of a vow. Jesus, who drank wine, was clearly not under the vow.

¹⁶ James McLeish, "The Nazirite Vow," *Central Bible Quarterly*, CENQ 20:2 (Summer 1977).

- d) The actions of Paul in Acts 18:18 and 21:23–27 are debated as to their Nazirite element. The former, shaving his head at Cenchrea was most likely not a Nazirite act per se, although it may have been a derivative, The latter, where Paul exercised his love and expediency to show his regard for Jewish customs by identifying with four men in Jerusalem, seems likely to have been a Nazirite vow. He stayed with the four Nazirites for their seven-day period of purification and paid for their sacrifices.
- e) The Nazirite vow was part of the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant passed away and was replaced by the ‘better’ covenant of Christ (Hebrews 8). The stipulations required of those taking the vow are not relevant for us today (although the basic concept of special consecration is still relevant). However, the question remains: if long, uncut hair is shameful based on the created order, why would God institute a vow with such conditions?
- f) The answer to this question lies in the nature of the Nazirite vow. It was deliberately designed by God to be unique and exceptional. The individual involved was to refrain from doing the most normal of activities. In the case of a man, allowing the hair to grow long was a visible indication of the vow which had been made. In the case of a woman, shaving the hair at the end of the vow was a visible indication of the vow which had been taken. Long hair on a man and short hair on a woman, while normally shameful, may be used by God for a specific religious purpose without that special action nullifying God’s normal order for things.¹⁷ Thus the Nazirite vow is the exception that proves the rule.

¹⁷ George W. Knight III, “A Response to Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent,” *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, p. 250. It can be demonstrated that God’s commands may be based on different grounds: 1) His character – establishes inherently moral norms, no exceptions, reversals or changes (e.g., love God, love others), 2) His creative activity – establishes fiat norms, exceptions possible (e.g., celibacy, Nazirite vow), no reversals or changes, 3) His will for our good – establishes legal norms, exceptions possible, reversals and changes possible (e.g., unclean foods), 4) His permissive will – establishes minimal legal norms that fall below God’s desired will (e.g., a bill of divorcement).