

What Does I Corinthians 11:1-17 Teach?

Introduction. The head covering question. I Corinthians 11:1-17

I. How Do Brethren Interpret This Passage?

- A. The Spiritual Gifts Position. — *Since Spiritual gifts have ceased the regulation is no longer in effect.*
- B. The Long Hair Position. — *The regulation is still in effect. Hair is the covering. Woman must be covered by long hair. Men must be uncovered by short hair.*
- C. The Headship Position. — *The regulation is still in effect but the covering figuratively demonstrates failing to acknowledge Headship.*
- D. The Command Position. — *Men are to be uncovered. Women are to be covered with an artificial covering.*
- E. The Custom Position. — *The principle is still in effect but the specific application varies within different cultures.*

II. Different Views Examined.

- A. The Spiritual Gifts Position. I Corinthians 14:33-35 / 11:5,6
- B. The Long Hair Position. I Corinthians 11:6
 - "shaved" - *xurao* (ξυράω) - "(From *xuron* a 'razor'...) *To shear, shave:* Middle - *to get one's self shaved* " (Thayer, p. 432).
 - "shorn" - *keiro* (κείρω) - "*To shear:* Middle - *to get or let be shorn:* Absolutely of *shearing* or *cutting short* the hair of the head" (Thayer, p. 343).
- C. The Headship Position. I Corinthians 11:14,15 / 11:13 / Esther 6:12
- D. The Command Position. I Corinthians 11:4,5 / John 3:16 / Mark 16:16
 - 1. *What is the context?* I Corinthians 8-10 & 12-14
 - 2. *Does Paul assume their knowledge of some points?* I Corinthians 11:6,11 Numbers 6:1-21 / I Corinthians 11:15, 5
 - 3. *What is left to "judgment" ?* I Corinthians 11:13
 - 4. *How are we to understand the appeal to "nature" ?* I Corinthians 11:14,15 Ephesians 2:1-3 "Nature" *phusis* (φύσις) - "*Nature. A. The nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature, natural sense, native conviction or knowledge...B. Birth, physical origin... C. A mode of feeling and acting which BY LONG HABIT HAS BECOME NATURE. D. The sum of innate properties and powers by which one person differs from others*" (Thayer, p. 660-61).
 - 5. *Does Paul call this a "custom" ?* I Corinthians 11:16 / John 18:39 I Corinthians 8:7
- E. The Custom Position. I Timothy 2:8-14

Conclusion. Let us all continue to study this issue and strive to apply both its principles and binding regulations to the very best of our understanding.

Key Words Found in First Corinthians 11:1-17

“Dishonor” (vss. 4,5) – *kataischuno* (καταισχύνω)

“1. To dishonor, disgrace: 2. To put to shame, make ashamed: Passive - To be ashamed, blush with shame: By Hebrew usage one is said to be put to shame who suffers a repulse or who some hope has deceived” (Thayer, p. 331). “1. Dishonor, disgrace, disfigure. 2. Put to shame someone. Passive - be put to shame, be humiliated, also be ashamed - humiliate. 3. Of the shame and disappointment that come to one whose faith or hope is shown to be in vain...” (BAG, p. 410). “To shame down, i.e. disgrace or (by implication) to put to the blush: - confound, dishonor, shame” (Strong’s #2618). ☞ “Dishonor” - KJV, ASV, NKJV, RSV, NIV. “Disgrace” - NASB.

“Uncovered” (vss. 5,13) – *akatakaluptos* (ἀκατακάλυπτος)

“Not covered, unveiled” (Thayer, p.21). “Uncovered, with uncovered head, a women without a head covering” (BAG, p.29). “Unveiled: - uncovered” (Strong’s #177). ☞ “Uncovered” - KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, RSV². “Unveiled” - ASV, RSV¹.

“Covered” (vss. 6,7) – *katakalupto* (κατακαλύπτω)

“To cover up; to veil or cover one’s self” (Thayer, p.21). “Cover, veil. 1. Active and passive of a young woman covered or veiled to the forehead... 2. Middle - Cover oneself with a veil... of Theban women... the covering of the clothes on the head is of such a kind that the whole face seems to be covered as with a mask” (BAG, p.411). “To cover wholly, i.e. veil:- cover, hide” (Strong’s #2619). ☞ “Cover” - KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV. “Veil” - ASV, RSV.

“Shaved” (vss. 5,6) – *xurao* (ξυράω)

“(From *xuron* a ‘razor’...) To shear, shave: Middle - To get one’s self shaved” (Thayer, p.432). “Middle - have oneself shaved; have one’s head shaved: Passive - a woman who is shaved” (BAG, p.549). ☞ “Shaven” - KJV, ASV, RSV. “Shaved” - NKJV, NASB, NIV.

“Shorn” (vs. 6) – *keiro* (κείρω)

“To shear: Middle - to get or let be shorn: Absolutely of shearing or cutting short the hair of the head” (Thayer, p. 343). “Shear: the shearer. Middle - to cut one’s hair or have one’s hair cut” (BAG, p. 427). “To shear:- shearer” (Strong’s #2751). ☞ “Shorn” - KJV, ASV, NKJV, RSV². “Hair cut off” - NASB, NIV, RSV¹.

“Proper” (vs. 13) – *prepo* (πρέπω)

“1. To stand out, to be conspicuous, to be eminent; 2. To be becoming, seemly, fit” (Thayer, p.535). “Be fitting, be seemly or suitable...pleasing...proper, right” (BAG, p. 699). “To tower up (be conspicuous), i.e. (by implication) be suitable or proper...fit, or right:- become, comely” (Strong’s #4241). ☞ “Comely” - KJV. “Seemly” - ASV. “Proper” - NKJV, NASB, RSV, NIV.

“Nature” (vs. 14) – *phusis* (φύσις)

“Nature. a. The nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature, natural sense, native conviction

or knowledge... b. Birth, physical origin... c. A mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature. d. The sum of innate properties and powers by which one person differs from others" (Thayer, p. 660-61). "Nature. 1. Natural endowment or condition... 2. Natural characteristics or disposition... 3. Nature as the regular natural order... 4. Natural being, product of nature, creature" (BAG, p. 869-870). "Growth (by germination or expansion), i.e. (by implication) natural production (lineal descent); by extension a genus or sort; figuratively native disposition, constitution or usage:- mankind, natural" (Strong's #5449). ☞ **"Nature"** - KJV, ASV, NKJV, NASB, RSV. **"Nature of things"** - NIV.

"Dishonor" (vs. 14) – *atimia* (ἀτιμία)

"Dishonor, ignominy, disgrace... by way of disparagement" (Thayer, p. 83). "Dishonor, disgrace, shame... humiliation" (BAG, p. 120). "Infamy,... indignity, disgrace:- dishonour, reproach, shame, vile" (Strong's #319). ☞ **"Shame"** - KJV. **"Dishonor"** - ASV, NKJV, NASB. **"Degrading"** - RSV. **"Disgrace"** - NIV.

"Covering" (vs. 15) – *peribolaion* (περιβόλαιον)

"Properly a covering thrown around, a wrapper; in the N.T. 1. A mantle 2. A veil" (Thayer p. 502). "Covering, wrap, cloak, robe" (BAG, p. 646). "Something thrown around one, i.e. a mantle, veil:- covering, vesture" (Strong's #4018). ☞ **"Covering"** - KJV, ASV, NKJV, NASB, RSV, NIV.

"Custom" (vs. 16) – *sunetheia* (συνήθεια)

"1. Intercourse (with one), intimacy. 2. Custom. 3. A being used to... the object to which one is accustomed" (Thayer, p. 604). "1. Friendship, fellowship, intimacy with someone. 2. Habit, custom, being or becoming accustomed: a. Subjectively being accustomed, b. Objectively - custom, habit, usage" (BAG, p.789). "Mutual habituation, i.e. usage:- custom" (Strong's #4914). ☞ **"Custom"** - KJV, ASV, NKJV. **"Practice"** - NASB, RSV, NIV.

Works Cited:

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament by Joseph Henry Thayer.

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature by Walter Bauer, William Arnt and F. Wilbur Gingrich.

A Concise Dictionary of the Greek Testament by James Strong.

Customs Related to **First Corinthians 11:1-17**

Covering The Head:

☞ Pagan Romans Worshipped With Heads Covered –

Virgil (Roman Poet - c. 70 BC.)-

"Our heads are shrouded before the altar with a Phrygian vestment."

(*The Aeneid*, Bk. 3, 545)

☞ Pagan Greeks Worshipped With Heads Uncovered –

“Among Greeks the habit was to offer worship with head uncovered. Reading for instance in Macrobius Ambrosius’ *Saturnalia Convivia* Bk. 1, 8, there the Greek manner of worship occurs with head uncovered.”

(*Alford’s Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 564)

☞ Jewish Men Worshipped Both Covered And Uncovered –

The Jewish Talmud (c. 200-500 AD.) -

“Men sometimes cover their heads and sometimes not; but woman’s hair is always covered, and children are always bareheaded.”

(*Nedarim*, 30b)

“Artistic representation, such as Egyptian and Babylonian tablets or the synagogue at Dura Europos, generally depict Israelites (and later Jews) without head covering... According to the Talmud (Ned. 30b), it was optional and a matter of custom for men to cover their heads.”

(*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 8, p. 16)

“An example of a custom that assumed the status of law... is the requirement that Jewish men always keep their heads covered. This began as the personal practice of some of the scholars in Babylonia, who considered covering the head a sign of humility. It spread from them to the Jews of Spain and from there to other communities in Europe during the Middle Ages.”

(*The Concise Guide to Judaism*, by Roy A. Rosenberg, p. 125)

☞ Jewish Men Worshipped Both Covered And Uncovered –

The Jewish Talmud (c. 200-500 AD.) -

“What is the Jewish law? Let not a woman go with head uncovered. This is founded in the Law, for it is said (of the suspected wife) ‘*the priest shall uncover her head*’ Numbers 5:18.”

(*Chetubb.*, fol. 72.1)

Tertullian (Latin Theologian - c. 160-225 AD.) -

“Among the Jews, so usual is it for their women to have the head veiled, that they may thereby be recognized.”

(*De Corona*, ch. 4)

☞ Corinthian Synagogues Were Not Segregated –

“In the 1st Century AD synagogues appear to have been deliberately made inconspicuous. Each one was headed by an *archisynagogos* (‘ruler of the synagogue’ Acts 18:8, 17), and inscriptions indicate that this and other important functions were fulfilled by women... Women were not segregated in worship.”

(*St. Paul’s Corinth*, by Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, 1983, p.80)

The Shaving of Women:

☞ Slaves Were Shaved –

The Law of Moses (c. 1490 BC.) -

“When you go to war against your enemies... and you take them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and desire her and would take her for your wife, then you shall bring her to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails.”

(Deuteronomy 21:10-12)

Acilles Tacitus (Alexandrian Rhetorician - c. 300 AD.) of a woman sold into slavery -
"She was sold for a slave, she dug in the ground, and her hair being shorn off her head was deprived of its ornament."

(*Leucippe and Clitophon*, Bk. 8, Ch. 5)

☞ Hair Was Shaved In Mourning –

Euripedes (Greek Poet - c. 485 BC.) -

"I order a general mourning for this woman! Let the hair be shorn off and a black garment put on."

(*Alcestis*, verse 426)

☞ It Was A Dishonor For A Woman To Be Shaved –

Cornelius Tacitus (Roman Historian - born 55 BC.) of an adulteress -

"Having cut off her hair, and stripped her before her relatives, her husband turned her out of doors."

(*Germania*, 19)

Women Uncovered:

☞ It Was Considered A Shame For A Woman To Be Uncovered –

The Apocrypha (c. 1st -3rd century BC.) -

"Now Susanna was a very delicate woman, and beauteous to behold. And these wicked men commanded her to uncover her face that they might be filled with her beauty. Therefore her friends who saw her wept."

(The History of Susanna 31-33 KJV)

☞ Reputable Women Were Seldom In Public Unveiled –

"In New Testament time, however, among both Greeks and Romans reputable women wore a veil in public (Plutarch Roman Questions, 14) and to appear without it was an act of bravado (or worse)..."

(*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* by James Orr, Vol. 5, p. 3047)

Plutarch (Greek Essayist and Biographer - c. 46-126 AD.) -

"Why do sons cover their heads when they escort parents to the grave while daughters go with uncovered heads and hair unbound?...is it because the unusual is proper in mourning, and it is more usual for women to go forth in public with their heads covered and men with their heads uncovered?"

(*Moralia- Roman Questions*, 14)

☞ Harlots Were Unveiled –

"Among the Greeks only the *hetairai* [shrine prostitutes] so numerous in Corinth, went about unveiled..."

(*Word Pictures in the New Testament* by A.T. Robertson, Vol. 4, p. 160)

"In general one may say that etiquette as regards the veil becomes stricter the more one moves east. This rule is brought out clearly by the provisions of an old Assyrian code. Women and widows must be veiled in public places. On the other hand, the head of the harlot, here equated with a slave must remain unveiled under threat of severe penalties."

(*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* by Gerhard Kittel, Vol. 3, p. 563)

NOTE: The Old Testament account of Tamar is certainly an exception to this. There she was identified as a harlot because of her veil (see Genesis 38:1-30).

The Nature of Coverings:

☞ The Women of Tarsus Were Fully Covered –

Dio Chrysostom (Greek Orator - 1st Century AD) addressing an audience in Tarsus -
“Among these is the convention regarding feminine attire, a convention which pre-
scribes that women should be arrayed and should so deport themselves when in the
street that no body could see any part of them, neither the face nor the rest of the
body... Therefore while they have their faces covered while they walk...”

(Thirty Third Discourse, 48,49)

☞ Early Christians Believed In Women Being Fully Covered –

Clement of Alexandria (Greek Theologian - c. 150-215 AD.) -

“Let her be fully covered, unless she happen to be at home.”

(*The Instructor*, Bk. 3, Ch. 2)

John Chrysostom (Greek Theologian - c. 347-407 AD) commenting on I Corinthians 11 -

“For he said not merely covered but ‘covered over’, meaning she must be carefully
wrapped on every side.”

(Sermon 26 on I Corinthians 11:2-16)

Early Christian Practice:

☞ Women Were Fully Covered At All Times When In Public –

Clement of Alexandria (Greek Theologian - c. 150-215 AD) -

“Women and men are to go to church decently attired, with natural step, embracing
silence, possessing unfeigned love, pure in body, pure in heart, fit to pray to God. Let
the women observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be
at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects her from being gazed at. And she
will never fail 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 to pray veiled.”

(*The Instructor*, Bk. 3, Ch. 2)

Note To The Reader: ☞ The unquestioned standard for all conduct among Christians is the Word of God as revealed in the pages of Scripture. As a result any decisions made about proper conduct in worship to God *MUST* be made based upon what God reveals to us in Scripture. This collection of historical witnesses is offered simply to assist the student in understanding the setting into which the instructions of I Corinthians 11:1-17 were given. May God bless the manner in which it is used.