

## VEILS – LONG HAIR – SHORT HAIR – SHAME?

### 1 Corinthians chapter 11

1 Corinthians 11:4 says:



*“Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.”*

“Every man” refers back to verse 3 where Paul said that Christ is the head of “every man”. Since Christ is the one who is the head of “every man”, Christ is the one who is shamed when men wear a head covering during the time that they are praying or prophesying. Notice that it isn’t just anytime that a man wears a head covering that Christ is shamed. It is only during the time that he is praying or prophesying.

Why would Christ be shamed if a man prays and prophesies with his head covered? The reason is found in both the historical meaning of the head covering and also in Paul’s reference to honor in verse 7. John Lightfoot a Hebrew Scholar (1602-1675 AD) explains the historical reason for the head covering during worship and prayer. For the Jews, the covering symbolized their unworthiness to look upon God because it symbolized the shame of their sin. Are we unworthy to look upon God and are we to wear something that symbolizes the shame of our sin? Paul says no way. In 1 Corinthians 11:7, Paul says:

*“For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God...”*

The reason is simple – we are to reflect the glory of God not the shame of our sin. If men continue to wear the sign of the shame of their sin, they are dishonoring Christ who died for our sins. Keeping a sign of the shame of our sin during worship shames Christ because it puts the emphasis on sin instead of our reconciliation with Christ. A man who wears a symbol of the shame of his sin shames Christ by holding onto a symbol of what was done away with in Christ when he should be bringing honor to Christ by reflecting the glory of his and head which is Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says:

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

Our purpose is to reflect the glory of the Lord, not hold onto the shame that has been removed in Christ. Reflecting the glory of the Lord brings Jesus honor and “every man” is to bring honor to their “head”.

**The Reason Why a Woman Without Her Head Covering Shamed Her Head (husband).**



1 Corinthians 11:4, 5

*Every man who has something 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 as the woman whose head is shaved.*

It would be a disgrace for a man to cover his head because it would not be Christ honoring because of what it *symbolized*. The man covering his head was not honoring Christ. The emphasis was on sin and not Christ who has cleansed us and freed us from all sin.

Paul also identified the woman's head was the man. When she prayed and prophesied with her head uncovered she shamed her head which is her husband (see verse 3). Paul doesn't say *why* going without a head covering shamed the woman's husband since the Corinthians would have understood the cultural reason. So let's look at the **cultural** reason of why a husband would experience shame when his wife exposed her head in public.

Both the Greek women and the Jewish women wore head coverings in that day but the Jewish women had a *stricter standard* that punished them if they were caught without their head covering. John Lightfoot gives us a glimpse into the mindset of the Jewish culture of that day. Lightfoot was a Hebrew Scholar who lived from 1602 to 1675 and during his day there was a revival of the study of the Hebrew Bible as well as other Jewish works. Lightfoot's scholarly writings produced several volumes called "Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica". In these volumes Lightfoot discusses the reasons why married women wore the head covering.

On page 231 of Vol. 4 Lightfoot writes:

"It was the custom of the women and that prescribed them under severe canons, that they should not go abroad but with their face veiled. If a woman do these things, she transgresseth the Jewish law; if she go out into the street, or into an open porch, and there be not a veil upon her as upon all women..."

On a woman's wedding day she was required to veil herself. The Jewish law was that women who were married were required to cover their hair. The Talmud interprets this custom as a sign of a woman's shame – guilt for Eve's sin. Lightfoot elaborates:

"And they fetched the shame of the woman thence that she first brought sin into the world."

That was their view – that the woman brought sin into the world and her veiling at her marriage was a sign of shame, because they said the woman led the man into sin. The Talmud said that as a result of Eve’s curse, women must go about covered as mourners. In the Jewish culture when a woman got married, from that day on she was under compulsion to veil herself and if found in public without her veil, the Talmud prescribed strict consequences.

If she was found without the veil in public her husband could divorce her without payment of her dowry. Without her dowry she would be destitute.

The Talmud explains the reason for the shame of an uncovered head. The husband considered the hair on a woman’s head to be part of her sexuality so the public viewing of her hair was a great shame.

“Some rabbis considered the exposure of a married woman’s hair to the exposure of her private parts since they felt that a woman’s hair could be used for erotic excitement. They forbid the reciting of any blessings in the presence of a bare headed woman.”

Lightfoot goes on to explain that although women wore a veil in public, they unveiled for worship.

“But however women were veiled in the streets, yet when they resorted unto holy service they took off their veils and exposed their naked faces; and that not out of lightness, but out of religion.” Vol. 4 pg 231

Wouldn’t this have shamed their husbands by exposing their hair publicly? No, because no man would have seen them because in the synagogue the women were kept separate. Lightfoot continues:

“...that women should sit by themselves, divided from the men, where they might hear and see what is done in the synagogue, yet they themselves remain out of sight...when the women therefore did thus meet apart, it is no wonder if they took off the veils from their faces, when they were now out of sight of men, and the cause of their veiling being removed, which indeed was that they might not be seen by men.”

So the veiling was a sign of shame before men but worshipping before God she was to go with a bare face.

In Paul’s writings we find that Christians are meant to reflect the glory of God. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18

*“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with unveiled face, beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”*

Men and women were both meant to reflect the glory of God and both were to come with unveiled face before in worship. Yet for those Jewish women whose husbands were not yet saved and who had not yet come to understand the glorious liberty we have in Christ, these women were in a predicament, which Paul knew. The problem came when Christians met in homes where the men and women were together. If a Jewish woman whose husband was not a Christian found out that she had unveiled in public, he could divorce her, often at the insistence of his family for her public shame.

Continuing:

*“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.” (v.6)*

If the woman had the freedom to appear in the worship without her head covering, Paul said she is also free from the custom of long hair. Paul uses the words of permission (“let her”). Let her have the veil or let her have her hair cut. Paul is giving permission, not restriction.

Paul does not say a woman must cover her head. Paul said the covering of the head shamed Christ. Wearing a head covering that symbolized shame for sin is not a believer’s custom. On the other hand, Paul could not tell a woman they must not uncover their head. That would violate the sanctity of many of the marriages. Because of the customs of that day, the women were really in a dilemma. Paul respected the women and the position they were in. It would be wonderful if all women could follow in the uncovering of their heads and honor Christ, but many couldn’t at that time. Paul had respect for the women and the custom of that day that stopped them from having full freedom of an unveiled head in Christ. We don’t have these cultural mandates, but there are woman who must honor her family and her culture.

Women whose husbands are Christians and who understand the women’s freedom in Christ to reveal the glory of the Lord just as men reveal the glory of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18) will have no reason to insist their wives cover themselves because of man’s tradition. So Paul says that “if a woman does not cover her head” then “let her also have her hair cut off”. Here Paul is talking about a woman’s freedom to have her hair cut.

Is it wrong for a woman to get a hair cut? Is it wrong for her to have short hair? Paul says the tradition of not cutting one’s hair is in the same category as the tradition that women must wear a head covering.

In the Jewish culture, the covering of a woman’s head symbolized both modesty and shame.

Paul is setting free the women held to the man made tradition of her having to cover her head and the tradition that she must always have long hair. If a woman cuts her hair, she is not breaking any of God’s law. A woman having to keep her hair long is not a tradition of God. Does God ever forbid a woman to cut her hair? Does God forbid a man to have long hair? We

will see there is nothing of the sort because when it comes to the Nazirite vow, both men and women were required to grow their hair, and when the vow was finished both men and women were to shave their head.

If a Jewish woman who had become a Christian wanted to take a Nazirite vow, when the vow was finished, she would be required by God to shave off her hair. If a woman who had shaved off her hair was in the congregation without a head covering, she may experience shame because she had no hair. Paul made *allowance* for this “shame” and he said that if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut or her hair shaved off, then she was allowed to cover her head if she had a bald head or her hair had not yet grown out. Paul gives her permission to cover her head by saying “let her cover her head”. Paul never demands that she cover, he just gives her a choice to cover.

Again, Paul is placing permission, not restrictions.

Paul at one time took a Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18). The rules for the Nazirite vow are in Numbers chapter 6.

*Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, (Numbers 6:2)*

*All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long. (Numbers 6:5)*

*Now this is the law of the Nazirite when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring the offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting. (Numbers 6:13)*

*The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head of hair at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings. (Numbers 6:18)*

The man or woman who had taken a Nazirite vow was required to shave off their hair and put it on the fire as a sacrifice. Both men and women then who had taken this vow would be bald. Men would not experience shame from being bald, but many women would experience shame from their baldness.

Paul allows a woman who has a bald head to cover her head if she would experience shame.

Paul has given two reasons for shame in chapter 11 that a woman may want to continue to wear a head covering.

1. She may bring her non-Christian husband shame if she is caught in public without her head covering, since he may divorce her *for defying the cultural tradition* of the head covering.
2. Is because of her own shame. If she were bald from having to shave her head because of the Nazirite vow, she was given permission to veil her head.

Paul's purpose in the discussion of the head covering is to bring Christians to a biblical view of our reflected glory and to *discard the faulty cultural view of shame*. Paul shows us in 2 Corinthians 3:18 the importance of the unveiled face:

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

There are many men who use 1 Corinthians 11 as a mandate for women to wear a veil. It seems the men mostly have the problem and fight amongst themselves whether the veil is in view here or the woman's long hair. In other words, some men will agree among themselves that it's okay for a woman to be in a gathering as long as she wears something over her head. Other men will say it's okay for women to be in a gathering without a veil, but should have long hair. It would be better to listen to what Paul has to say.

Paul shows that it is God's will that glory is to be uncovered not hidden, and man's tradition of forcing the woman to be covered because her uncovering shamed him is the complete opposite of what God teaches. The woman is the man's glory not his shame. And as the man's glory she is to be revealed not hidden.

### **Paul rejects the cultural sign of shame.**

1 Corinthians 11:7 we read:

*"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."*

Do you see that? The woman is the GLORY of man. As his glory she brings him honor. As his glory she needs to be uncovered so she can shine forth his glory. Just as the man is to shine forth the glory of God, so she is to be allowed to shine forth the glory of man. Do you see that Paul is dispelling the myth that the woman is the shame of the man? Do you see that Paul is dispelling the myth that the woman is to be hidden and kept away from the congregation and hidden and kept away from men? Paul is telling the men that the woman, his wife, is to be his glory. He is not to be ashamed of her. She is not his competitor, she is not to reflect shame – she is to be his glory!

Have you ever wondered why there are Christian women who are not convicted to wear a head covering or about their hair length? Now you know.

## Only Men Made in the Image of God?

*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. (v.7)*

By going to 1 Corinthians 11, men will go so far as to teach and prove that women are not made in the image of God and appeal to the above verse as their proof text! We are all made in the image of God; it is not limited to men only. The woman's first glory is that of God as she is made in the image of God. Her second glory is that she was made from the man and he can glory and he can glory in her.

Because of the head covering dilemma that has to do with the social obligation for a certain modesty requirement of married women only, Paul put focus on the men. Just because Paul omits women from the passage does not mean she is not made in God's image. What is implied in 1 Corinthians 11 is that the woman has to consider both her heads when making a decision.

Paul then explains the natural order of creation.

*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. 1 Cor. 11:8-9*

The origin of the woman is through the man and she was made for the man to compliment him and complete him and to *rule with him*. That was God's original plan and is still His plan.

Now we come to verse 10:

*Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 1 Cor. 11:10*

This is hard to understand because people do not what understand what Paul is getting at in this verse. Let's study this verse more carefully. The word "symbol of" is not found in the Greek. The original says the woman has authority over her head. Young's literal translation reads:

*"because of this the woman ought to have [a token of] authority upon the head, because of the messengers;"*

Read what Lightfoot says:

"That which commonly here obtains is that by power, is understood a veil, a sign of power above her head, or of her subjection. But it is to be inquired whether to have power does not properly, yes, always denote to have power in one's own hand, not a power above one..."

The power of authority is in the woman's hands. Nowhere else is the word authority used as a symbol of a veil. Paul is not talking about the veil in this verse, but the right or authority of a person to do something. The veil is never a sign of subjection.

Lightfoot says,

"Where, I beseech you, is a veil propounded as a sign of such subjection? But it is indeed as a sign of true modesty, Gen. 24:65 and of dissembled modesty; Gen. 34:18: but where is it used as a sign of subjection?"

Paul says a woman has authority over her head to make a decision whether she wears a veil or not. She has a right to cut her hair or not to shave her hair or leave her hair long. Paul lets us know she has the right to make a decision over her own head because of the angels.

Now many have speculated what Paul means "because of the angels." Instead of going by man's speculation, we need to go back to Paul's letter. In chapter 5 Paul talks extensively about judging in the body of Christ. We must be able to make righteous judgments.

*For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?*

Paul continues about righteous judgment in chapter 6.

*Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? 2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? **Do you not know that we will judge angels?** How much more matters of this life? (vss. 1-3)*

In essence Paul is telling us we need to grow up and learn how to judge for ourselves. In the next stage of life we will be judging the world and the angels.

So the reference to the angels is about judgment. This information must be put in the proper context of 1 Corinthians 11. Paul is saying the women have the authority to make their own decisions as to what they do or do not wear on their head because in the next stage they will be judging the world and the angels. If we are going to judge the world and angels in the next stage, surely we must be able to make our own decisions on this little matter of head covering.

Even though the woman has the authority to make her own decision and will be judging the world and angels in the next stage of life, Paul says the woman is not independent of the man.

*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.*

Why does Paul mention women first? Because he just told us that the woman has the authority to make her own decisions. Yet, in the Lord, there is *equality and independence*. What started out with the preeminence of the man being the origin of the woman, moved to the importance of the woman as the origin of all men, but ultimately have their beginning with their origin in God so all are equal in the Lord.

Now Paul tells the Corinthians to make up their own minds from the example he has just said.

*Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*

At this point in his argument they should be able to judge for themselves and she has the right to go without a veil because her sins are forgiven just as well as the male has his sins forgiven.

### **Another Judgment Call**

*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 Cor. 11:14-15*

The Greek was written without punctuation. The International Standard Version reads:

*Nature itself teaches you neither that it is disgraceful for a man to have long hair nor that hair is a woman's glory, since hair is given as a substitute for coverings.*

If we look at nature, it can teach us a lot of things. However, can nature teach you the standard for length of hair for a man or a woman? Does nature teach you there is one standard for a man and another for a woman? Let's look at one example.

What does nature teach us about the hair on our arms? We can observe that the hair will grow to a certain length and then stop on both male and female. If we compare our arm hair to our head hair, does nature teach us there is a difference?

When it comes to the hair on our head, it teaches us that it was designed to keep on growing until we cut it. The hair on our arms was designed to grow a certain length and then stop.

If we were to look at the head of hair between a male and a female, is there a difference? No. Both have hair that grows. Does nature teach you there is a difference with the hair of a male and that of a female that necessitates a rule that one can cut their hair and the other can't? Does it stop at a certain length for men and a certain length for women? No. Because even nature teaches us there is not a difference.

Paul wants us to reason. Many will say it's a shame for a man to have long hair and a woman to have short hair. The Scriptures do not teach this. How can man say it's a shame for men to have long hair when God Himself required some men to have their hair long? Those who took a

Nazirite vow did not cut his hair. Orthodox Jews today do not cut the sides of their hair. The longer their hair, the more spiritual they are considered.

Paul himself would have had to have long hair at one time because he took the Nazirite vow. Since Paul had to let his hair grow because of the Nazirite vow, how could he tell the Corinthians that it was a shame for a man to have long hair? The basic message from Paul is that the custom about hair is not of God. *We can't appeal to nature for the custom because nature does not distinguish between male and female when it comes to hair.* You can't appeal to shame because God required both male and female to grow their hair when taking the Nazirite vow and then later to *shave their heads*.

The custom surrounding hair is not God's custom, they are man's.

### **Paul Gives another Argument**

*but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (v 15)*

In the Greek, it does not say "given to her" but given to one's own self. (#846 autos...the reflexive pronoun *self*). Nature has provided hair for all of us for a covering.

What must also be noted is that there is nothing about a hierarchical order, nor does it imply rulership. The head covering was not a sign of subjection, but of modesty and humility because of the shame of sin. For a man to wear a head covering does not show subjection and honor, but the opposite. It showed dishonor.

Lightfoot, an expert in Jewish history said the head covering was never a symbol of subjection. In the chapter there is not one verse or anything implied about Christ authority over the male. Don't you find this odd for passages that are *supposed* to be about levels of authority? There is nothing in the text that says anything about the authority of men over women. The only mention of authority is in verse 10 where Paul says the woman herself has the authority over her own head. Strange for a passage that is supposed to be discussing authority and subjection has nothing to say about authority or subjection. What we do find in the passages is:

1. Making wise decisions
2. One's own authority over their own head
3. Source or origin
4. And our independent equality.

There are many who will teach and force a woman to wear a head covering or keep her hair long. There was no such rule in the family of God. Many women would be led to believe it is a shame for her to have short hair or that she is in rebellion if she has short hair. They put shame on her where there should be none. Many will quarrel about *hair length*, which the Bible does not address. Woman with short hair will be frowned upon, just as men with long hair will be

frowned upon, as though others who toll the perfect line know the standard measurement of what hair length one should have. They can't even agree among themselves if her hair is allowed to be above the ears, or that her hair must at least cover her neck, or must be below the shoulders, or allowed to be a little above the shoulders, etc. etc.. The bickering never ends about this matter.

Spirituality is not measured by one's hair length. To have short hair and no veil is either a shame or it is not a shame. What does one do with women who are cancer victims who have lost all their hair through medical treatment? What about women with illnesses that cause them to lose most of their hair or thinning hair as they get older? Does the length of a woman's hair prove her spirituality; will her veil prove how spiritual she is? What is sad is that there are women who are puffed up with pride because of their hair length. "Look at me because I have long hair and I am more spiritual than you are." They may not come right out and say it, but the message is there.

Whether one agrees with this article or not, when people would bring up this issue about hair and head covering, I always remember what Paul ends with in that chapter.

*But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. 1 Cor. 11:16*

For more info see:

["What's With Paul and Women?"](#)  
[Women in Ministry – Silenced or Set Free](#)