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A1237 – September 9, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 11:13-16
Argument From Nature & Universal Practice

We are studying 1 Cor 11, the head coverings passage and for the sake of those who have not been gathered with us I find it my responsibility to open this section once more with a statement of the position, namely, that the head coverings instruction was not in the formal assembly but in an informal assembly. The primary interest of Paul is that the women in these informal gatherings wear the appropriate symbol communicating to all subordination to male authority. The position is not novel to me, it's been held by several commentators, not the least of whom was W. E. Vine who you may know as the author of *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. He says, "the idea that the occasions of gatherings of the assembly are here in view is ruled out by the command in 14:34 that women are to be silent in the church gathering (the reference is not to chattering, the word is the same as in vv. 28 and 30 of that chapter). However the words of this statement may be understood, no explanation can be admitted that violates the fundamental rule that "a plain Scripture may not be set aside because of another not so easily understood." The meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34 is quite unmistakable. Therefore this statement cannot refer to the gatherings of an assembly. There are other occasions than that of an assembly gathering when a woman can exercise the oral ministry of prayer or testimony."ⁱ As well, consider the great Lutheran commentator R. C. H. Lenski who wrote, "Paul is said to contradict himself when he forbids the women to prophesy in 14:34-36. The matter becomes clear when we observe that from 11:17 onward until the end of chapter 14, Paul deals with the gatherings of the congregation for public worship and with regulations pertaining to public assemblies. The transition is decidedly marked: "that ye come together," i.e., for public worship, v. 17; "when ye come together in church" (ἐκκλησία, no article), v. 18; and again: "when ye assemble together, "i.e., for public worship, v. 20." As well you find this perspective in the great Plymouth Brethren leader, John

Nelson Darby who says simply, “We are not as yet come to the order in the assembly. That commences with verse 17.”ⁱⁱ So, I highlight these commentators to point out that this position is not unheard of in church history.

However, there are criticisms of the view and I’ll share a few of those with you. The first of which, and most common is the charge of expediency, that this position is taken for the sake of expediency, so as to resolve the apparent contradiction with 1 Cor 14:34-35. My response to this is while it does resolve the apparent contradiction, that was only a result of contextual exegesis; the interpretation was arrived at simply because the immediate context of 1 Cor 11:17 and 18 demands it as well as 1 Cor 14:34. Another criticism is that 1 Cor 11:5 is clearly in the context of the formal assembly because it mentions praying and prophesying, activities that occur in the formal assembly. However, to this I respond, is the formal assembly the only place these activities occur? I find it strange indeed if they are. And if they are then I now must confess to know the reason for the degraded state of the church today. The third criticism is that we are imposing a 21st century phenomena of informal meetings on 1st century situation. To this I respond, I have seen no evidence put forth that 1st century Christians did not meet informally as well as formally. A simple statement that they did not is no evidence, I need evidence not blanket statements. What is in evidence is that the formal assembly is not considered until verse 17. A fourth criticism is that Paul in verse 16 says this was the practice in all the Churches. However, it is clear that Paul means by “the churches of God” the churches in all the various cities where churches had been planted; the church of Galatia, the church of Philippi, the church of Berea, the church of Thessalonica, et. al.

So then my take is that 1 Cor 11:2-16 teaches that women in 1st century Corinth should wear head coverings during informal gatherings when they either pray or prophesy. The head covering signified to the culture subordination to male authority. To take it off would signify insubordination and would be an offense that would hinder the gospel progress. In the formal assembly such head coverings were not necessary because the formal assemblies were male led and women were not permitted to speak at all. There could be no offense.

Now I've taken you through vv 2-12. I want to review those arguments briefly and cover the last two arguments. Then we'll take a look at some related passages and then turn to the situation in the American Church today and how this passage and the others we'll look at help us analyze the modern situation. Now it's evident in verse 2 and 3 that Paul partially praises them, he praises them for two things in verse 2 but in verse 3 he does not praise them in one thing, namely, the doctrine of headship and this is the first argument for head coverings, the Argument from Headship. **But I want you to understand**, applicational knowledge, **that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.** By "head" Paul is referring to the authority in the chain of command. And the chain of command is God is the authority of Christ, there is subordination of role within the Trinity. It's not saying Christ is less than God, it's saying that Christ takes a subordinate role in the Trinity and this comes out of His constitution. Then we have in the chain of command Christ as the authority of every man and the man is the authority of a woman. Again, in the man-woman chain of command it's not saying a woman is less than a man; it's saying that a woman takes a subordinate role in the marriage and this comes out of her constitution as some of the other arguments in the passage show. Verse 4, **Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.** By the way, I haven't commented much on the man side, but isn't it interesting that this is more of a culturally accepted custom than women wearing head coverings? If men bow their head in prayer at a football game what do all the men do? Take off their hats. Why do they do that? Because it's a sign of respect, of authority. So since this custom has continued in our culture and it still has meaning then I think we have to perpetuate that, I don't think we men should start praying with our hats on and I think if we did people in the culture would say, hey, take your hat off. Maybe I'm wrong and we're farther gone than I think, but that's what I think. But verse 5, **every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head**, she disgraces her husband since he is her head. Why? **for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.** That's what the prostitutes did in the ancient world to identify themselves to their customers, they'd shave their heads and that way they could be easily identified. So a woman should have her head covered, the covering was a symbol that communicated to everyone respect for her husband. And to take it off would be just as offensive as a man praying with his hat on today, just a slap in the

face. Now verse 6 more explanation, **For if a woman does not cover her head let her also have her hair cut off** or short, technically it's short, which shows you the head covering here is not the hair, otherwise he couldn't say cover it or else cut your hair short. Middle of the verse, **but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved,** and it was, **let her cover her head.** Alright, there's no escaping Paul's instruction. As hard as this passage is for Christians today to understand this was no problem for the Corinthians, they knew exactly what Paul was instructing, and I think deep down we really do too. I think the only difference is that in their culture a head covering had a meaning imputed to it, everyone knew what it meant, like everyone in our culture knows what it is to remove your hat during prayer. But in our culture not everyone knows what a head covering means on a woman, that is not a culturally accepted symbol. Then it was so they needed to keep the custom, keep communicating the meaning. So that's the Argument from Headship.

Now let's turn to the Argument from Creation. Verse 7, **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.** This has to do with the order of creation in Genesis that is described in verse 8. **For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;** remember, Adam was created out of the dust of the earth and God breathed into him the breath of life and he became a living soul. He was androgynous, he the full image and glory of God, male and female in one person, but then the woman was taken out of the man, all of her, both body and spirit which constitutes a living soul was split off of androgynous Adam. So Paul argues, the very fact of this order of creation argues for male authority and female subordination to that authority. That's not talking about inferiority. The woman is not inferior to the man. The woman is equal in essence and distinct in role. It just happens to be that the way God created the human race made the man the authority and the woman subordinate to his authority. Now if you say that today people will go to pieces. I don't know why they go to pieces. Someone has to be the authority; you can't have order and stability without authority. If we don't have authority roles then armies won't have generals, children won't have parents, societies won't have governments and the whole fabric of society will fall apart at the seams. Imagine an army where every soldier was his own authority and did whatever he wanted to do; they'd all be killed in five minutes. It's the fact of authority and rank in the army that keeps men

alive. At the same time, does that make the general more of a human being than a lieutenant? Of course not. They are both equally human, but they do have distinct roles. So obviously this is not denigrating women. I'll tell you what denigrates women if you really want to know, trying to make them men!

Do you know what the highest calling of a woman is? I'll tell you right now it's not to be in the workplace. It's to be in the home, to be a homemaker. That is the highest calling a woman can have. So to trade it in to go into the workplace would be like trading a Rolls Royce for a Pinto. And I'm not exaggerating. I'm dead serious, no hyperbole. There is no higher calling than a woman who makes her home. Just to bring it home, do you think Mary, the mother of Jesus worked down at the local chariot dealer? Give me a break. And if it was good enough for Mary, maybe you ought to consider whether it's good enough for you!

Now verse 9, **for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.** Catch that, modern people don't like that, but what they mean is they don't like God. And I think if the world could have it the way they want it every woman would have their husbands follow them around like little puppy dogs at their beck and call. It wouldn't be male and female equality it would be feminine rule. Now wouldn't that be a grand picture. And by the way, that's not my opinion; I got it from Gen 3:16, the woman's desire to master her husband. But man was not created for woman but the woman for the man. Now this reaches back to Genesis where God said, it was not good for Adam to be alone, meaning he needed a helper. So God created Steve to solve the problem? Wrong. God created a woman. What this verse is all about is a very special moment. Man could not complete his dominion task. Let's say it this way, he could carry the kitchen table into the house but he couldn't laden it with a fine dining experience. So you see, when God created the woman out of the man it was a very special moment. He created them to complement one another, to be something beautiful together; a fantastic design. So for this reason Paul says, don't you think that a woman ought to wear a head covering to symbolize that she recognizes that she was made for his sake? I hope you see it.

Verse 10, **Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.** That blows every commentator for a

loop but Paul is simply saying she ought to wear the head covering to signify subordination to her authority, the man and for the angels because angels are organized in rank, they are an army and they know rank and they don't break rank, its offensive to break rank. That's what the fallen angels did - they tried to move up on the ranking scale, they tried to become God himself, whom they could never become because of the Creator-creature distinction. So when a woman tries to break the chain of command and control a man or be equal to a man that's a picture of Satan trying to become God. Hopefully that gives you a sense for how offended the angels are by insubordinate women.

But verses 11-12 bring balance, right in the heart of the arguments female subordination to male authority he places an Argument for Interdependence in order to warn the men against taking their authority and running with it to its logical end, which is totalitarian despotism, a tendency of fallen man. **However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.** How is that? Because the first woman was created out of the androgynous man and now every man comes into this world through a woman. That truth brings balance. Verse 12, **For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.**

Now verse 13 and this is new material, the Argument from Nature or Design. **Judge for yourselves** Paul says, he's appealing to common sense here, not your common sense as a 21st century American but that of the 1st century Corinthian's. **Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?** And obviously the answer was no, may it never be. And they all knew this; Jews knew it, Greeks knew it, Romans knew it. A woman ought to pray to God with her head covered. Common sense told them this. And as Vincent reports, "In the catacombs the women have a close-fitting head-dress, while the men have the hair short." So of course they were to cover their heads.

Now he argues, verse 14, **Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, 15but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her.** Here we have the long-hair/short-hair distinction between women and men to argue for the woman having a head covering. Again the long-hair/short-hair distinction is put out there as an argument for

a woman to cover her head with some external cover. He's not arguing that women should have long hair, that much even nature teaches you he says.

But let's think about this. Just from this verse do you think Jesus had long hair or short hair? It was the custom of the day for men to have short hair. The only Jews that grew their hair long were those who were Nazirites or under Nazirite vows. So I'd say Jesus had short hair and not long as he's been painted. Actually Jesus has been painted with long hair, with short hair, red and yellow black and white. Every culture paints Him in terms of their culture. But the text of Scripture indicates that all we know about his physical appearance was He was not something good to look upon, he had short hair, he had a beard and he was a Jew. So, I take it from this verse Jesus had short hair, it's not natural for a man to have long hair, it's a dishonor to him and I can't conclude that Jesus Christ would dishonor himself.

Now there is something interesting about these two verses, they are 3rd class conditions, meaning maybe, maybe not. Notice verse 14, **if a man has long hair**, maybe he does, maybe he doesn't, but condition fulfilled, **it is a dishonor to him**. Jesus couldn't have had long hair from this verse. We're supposed to know this from **nature** Paul says, which is a way of saying from design, from constitution, men by design should not have long hair and if they do it's a dishonor to him. Now the Romans wore their hair short, so did the Greeks and the Jews, except the Nazirites, but then you have those men such as the Spartans who wore long hair. So understand some cultures in some times have reversed what nature teaches. It's a **dishonor**, I just mention it for interest.

But, verse 15, **if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her**, it is a reflective radiance, it enhances her beauty, this is what nature teaches you, it adorns her, that's the point and I think you see that.

Now what lengths of hair are we talking about here? Honestly I don't think that's the point, I think you know in a culture when a woman is trying to look more masculine. In fact, this word for **long hair**, *koma* may refer to the way the hair is done up, fixing it in an effeminate manner. But I think you know it when you see it. And if even nature teaches you this distinction in hair then shouldn't women wear a head covering? That's Paul's argument.

Middle of verse 15, and this is the verse some imply nullifies everything that's been said up to this point because they say if a woman has long hair then that is her covering, therefore she has no need to wear an external covering. **For her hair is given to her for a covering.** The proponents of the hair is the head covering say it should be translated, "For her hair is given to her *in place of* a covering." The debate is over the preposition *anti* and whether it should be translated "instead of" such that the long hair would replace the need for a head covering, or whether it should be translated "as" which would not make that indication.

The debate is solved by the earlier verses 5-6. As most people observe, the covering in verses 5 and 6 can't be long hair because Paul instructs a woman who does not cover her head to cut her hair short and says she is no different than a woman who has her hair cut short or shaves her head. So there is no way Paul is completely negating all his prior arguments. As Bruce Waltke says, "When Paul says that a woman's hair "is given her for ($\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota$) a covering," he cannot mean "in place of" a covering, but rather "asking for" a covering. Although the Greek preposition frequently implies substitution, that is not its sense here, for such a meaning would render the rest of the argument, especially that in verses 5–6, nonsensical."ⁱⁱⁱ I couldn't agree more, the argument is plain. Paul is arguing for an external covering in this passage. From what we know of the culture of those times women wore external head coverings over their hair to symbolize respect for male authority. Since these Christian women were throwing them off Paul is arguing they need to put it back on, at least in the informal gatherings when they prayed or prophesied so as not to offend and hinder the gospel.

Finally verse 16, a final argument, the Argument for Universal Practice, **But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.** He appeals to the universal practice of churches in various cities throughout the Mediterranean world and thereby pushes them to get back in line with the universal practice. So there are your five arguments, the Argument from Headship, the Argument from Creation, the Argument from Angels, the Argument from Design and the Argument from Universal Practice.

But what about today? Should women wear head coverings in informal gatherings for prayer and Bible study today? I don't think so. And I don't think I'm dodging the text either. I think it's irrelevant as a symbol in our culture since it doesn't communicate what it did to the Corinthian culture, namely, subordination to male authority. However, if there was a commonly accepted article of clothing that communicated that in a culture then I most definitely think women should wear them in such gatherings. And I think Paul's bottom line is don't rub the culture the wrong way over a non-gospel issue, don't do something abnormal that makes you stick out like a sore thumb and hinders the gospel message. And to tell women in American churches they need to wear a head covering would turn Paul's teaching on its head. It would make them stick out like a sore thumb. As Paul's principle later will illustrate, what will people think if they come in and they see women with head coverings on? They won't understand what you are doing. It is nonsensical to them. It doesn't do anything but make people think you are a weirdo. But if you lived in Iran or Egypt where women traditionally wear head coverings and you went on a short term mission trip or you were a Christian who lived in that country, I most definitely think you should adhere to that cultural custom. To do otherwise would be offensive. But the bottom line is don't do anything that is offensive to a culture; such things only hinder the proclamation of the gospel.

I perused four more theological journal articles this week, three of which came to the same essential conclusion I've just given, namely, that the principle of subordination to male authority is transferrable to our day, but the wearing of a head covering is not simply because there is no cultural equivalent. And if you ask me how is a woman to show subordination to male authority today I will tell you that is a very good question. I've been trying to think about it. Some of the ideas I've come up with are 1) taking vows that reflect subordination. Too many times the man and woman take identical vows, just exchanging the name, but promising to do the exact same things for one another. This does not reflect the biblical role distinctions. The husband is not commanded to do the same things for his wife as the wife is commanded to do for the husband. The husband is to love and cherish and nourish and live with his wife in an understanding way. The wife is to submit to and respect her husband. And I think the vows you take when you marry should reflect God's ideas in the Bible and not man's ideas, no matter how pretty it might sound; make them different to reflect the Bible. 2) Taking

your husband's last name; women increasingly are choosing not to take their husband's last name. This clearly amounts to saying I am not identified with you, I am a separate identity. I think it also communicates insubordination to the husband. So in order to subordinate herself to her husband she should take his last name and recognize they are a new family unit under his family name. 3) Not requiring a pre-nuptial agreement when you get married, a pre-nup is a blatant statement that I have my assets and you have yours and I don't trust you. Which, if that's the case, why are you marrying them? But nonetheless, that is blatant insubordination, a refusal to come under the authority of another. So the wedding vows, the taking of the husband's last name and not requiring a pre-nuptial agreement in our society all communicate the woman's subordination to her husband. If you have more ideas, let me know. But within the woman shows subordination to her husband by keeping the vows, submitting to and respecting her husband's authority.

Let's turn our attention to another passage. 1 Tim 2:11-15 and then we'll turn to the modern situation in the West. 1 Tim 2 refers to conduct within the church where there are role distinctions. Observe 1 Tim 2:11. "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." That's proper conduct in the house of God. Women should be quiet and receive instruction. It's not denigrating women; it's simply stating their role in the assembly. The Church must be male led. So is a woman who teaches a mixed group of men and women violating Scripture? Yes. Is she justified by faith just as a man? Yes. But not one passage overrides and interprets the other. They both fit harmoniously together. There's no contradiction. Can women have the gift of teacher? Yes. And women can teach other women and children, indeed they are told to in Tit 2. But they can't exercise the gift over men. That's forbidden. So a woman cannot teach in the church or exercise authority over men. And to do so is a violation of Scripture. In verse 13 Paul bases his argument on the created order, not culture, not a situation in a local church, but creation. "For it was Adam who was first created and then Eve." He says the very order of God's creation of Adam from the dust and then Eve from Adam implies this order in the church. And then verse 14, he bases it on the Fall, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." It was the woman that was deceived, not Adam, Adam overtly disobeyed (Gen 3:17). He had full knowledge of what

he was doing, Eve was deceived. And it's true in God's word as a generality that women are more prone to deception but don't forget that the Scriptures teach that men are more prone to overt rebellion. And God says with those two tendencies I'd rather have men who are rebellious leading the Church than women who are deceived. That's God's idea, not mine, not Paul's, but the idea of the infinite omniscient God. Does that deny the fact that we are all justified the same way, by grace through faith? No. There's no contradiction. One is the truth about how to enter the church and the other is the truth about how to order our lives within the church. There's no contradiction at all.

1 Cor 14:34. We're coming to this passage in a few weeks but want to comment a bit on it up front. You've seen it because of the apparent contradiction. This is in the formal assembly. So there was no head covering required in here since the assembly was male led. But apparently they had a problem at Corinth with disorder. There are several people in this chapter that must remain silent, so it's not just women. Notice verse 34, "The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says." Now I take it this is an outright denial of speaking in the assembly just like the outright denials of the other five groups in the chapter. Verse 35, "If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church." In other words, Paul is saying, it's good to have theological questions, just follow the lines of authority and ask your husband at home. That way you're giving him the opportunity to lead spiritually, you're respecting him and he is stimulated to stay on top of his spiritual game. Verse 36, "Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only?" No, it came through men, so men must lead, women must remain silent in the formal assembly, if they have a question, they can ask their husband at home, if they don't have a husband they can ask the pastor or an elder at some other time.

Now with 1 Cor 11, 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2 in view, let's analyze the modern situation in the American Church. You judge for yourselves. What do you think? Is the Church in America better off than the Church at Corinth? Or worse? If they had Christian women taking off their head coverings showing insubordination to male authority in informal gatherings and we have denomination after denomination ordaining women to preach and teach men

in the formal assembly, which is worse? Don't you think we are in a far worse condition than the Corinthians? You judge for yourselves how bad it really is. I'm going to go through a series of denominations that affirm the ordination of women and a series of denominations that deny the ordination of women and I'll make comments along the way as to the way they're framing the argument. This is a large divide today and it's not without its effects on the doctrine of the Trinity and the Son's subordination to the Father, on the doctrine of Creation and whether God created in the literal way described in Gen 1-2 or whether God used evolution to create and on the Fall and whether that was a historical fall or just a myth. So as I go through understand there are repercussion to this.

Ordain Women	Do Not Ordain Women
Mennonite Church USA	Evangelical Mennonite Conference
Episcopal Church in the USA	Christian Episcopal Church
Alliance of Baptists	Presbyterian Church in America
American Baptist Churches USA	Southern Baptist Convention (though some churches in the SBC have ordained women)
Vineyard Movement	Pentecostal Church of God
Evangelical Catholic Church	Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)	Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ	Concordia Lutheran Conference
The Free Methodist Church – North America	Evangelical Free Church of America (women may be granted “Christian Ministry License”)
United Methodist Church	
Wesleyan Reform Union	
Evangelical Covenant Church in America	
International Pentecostal Holiness Church	
Presbyterian Church (USA)	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
Christian Reformed Church in North America	Presbyterian Church of America

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)	
United Church of Christ	
North American Baptist Conference	American Baptist Association
Alliance of Baptists	
National Baptist Convention	
Progressive National Baptist Convention	

So with that said, I think we are in a situation far worse than that of Corinth. Alright, next week we'll move along to the Lord's Supper.

ⁱ Vine, W. E. (1996). *Collected writings of W.E. Vine*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

ⁱⁱ Darby, J. N. (2008). *Synopsis of the books of the Bible: Acts to Philipians*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

ⁱⁱⁱ . *Vol. 135: Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 135*. 1978 (537) (55). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary.

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