

# Hair Length, Head Covering, and the Silencing of Women

## Definitions:

- **Continuity and Discontinuity:** discerning what precepts (commands) from the Old Covenant or Old Testament “continue” in the New Covenant and which “discontinue,” in addition to those in the New Testament that are not binding for us in precept, though still in principle.
- **Orthodoxy** (what we believe).
- **Orthopraxy** (what we do and how we behave).
- **Regulative Principles:** worship expressly prescribed in Scripture and forbidding everything not prescribed.
- **Normative Principles:** that which is not forbidden in Scripture is permitted.

## Principles for Navigating Continuity and Discontinuity Between Testaments and Covenants:

- Is this a positive command for me? Is there a principle that doesn’t take away from a command? How does the NT author treat the OT text? Does he quote it verbatim, include only part, or re-word it?
- In some cases, the literal meaning has taken on a different meaning. In other cases, the literal meaning remains literal, and the positive law is no longer binding since it was given in the context of the culture in which it was written and the people to whom it was written. Sometimes, the precept is no longer binding, but the principle remains.
- What did it mean when it was written? Who was it written to? Is it written for us?
- Is this an imperative (command) that has changed to an indicative (fact)? Is this prescriptive or descriptive?
- Has the meaning been filled or fulfilled?

**Should women wear head coverings? Can women have short hair? Can men have long hair? Are women allowed to talk in the assembly of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35; 1 Tim. 8-14; 1 Pet. 1-6). Three questions to consider concerning continuity and discontinuity:**

1. **What is the immediate context in the church of Corinth, and what did it mean when it was written?**

## Spiritual gifts that accompany Pentecost and limited during the age of the apostles (1<sup>st</sup> century):

- Two predominant gifts were causing discord, chaos, and confusion in the church in Corinth: prophesy and tongues. Women were prophesying in the Church in Corinth (1 Cor. 14:29-30).
- Whether women were graced with the gift of tongues and prophesy (Acts 2:17) or were usurping the leadership of men pretending to possess it, commentators are divided.
- Women were allowed to pray during the public gathering, though not in the same manner as pastoral prayer at CrossWay church.
- Women interrupted the church service with prayers, tongues, and prophetic utterances. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth (and Ephesus) to set matters straight.

## Veils, Hair, and Head Coverings were worn in the first century (1 Cor. 11:2-12; 14:33-35):

- In Greco-Roman culture, a woman’s hair supposedly reflected her reproductive system. Women with long, thick hair were associated with virtues like purity, marital fidelity, and modesty, which were signs of a woman’s ability to bear children.
- A woman’s hair length was linked to perceived reproductive capabilities.
  - Grecian women grew long hair and were known for excessive jewelry and “posh” hairstyles.
  - Jewish women typically wore their hair high, tight, and in a bun.
- Hair length in this culture was viewed as a woman’s glory. Gender and modesty were reflective of hair length and style.
- Jewish and Greco-Roman women generally wore veils. A veil typically covered the head and draped down over the shoulders and was a symbol of being under authority.

## *The Temple of Aphrodite (Corinth):*

- Prostitutes, both in the temple and in the streets, wore “short” or “shaved” hair with no head coverings.
  - Women in the church of Corinth prayed and prophesied with no head covering. Those who were married were dishonoring their husbands and usurping leadership roles within the church.
    - Paul rebukes the women interrupting services with uncovered heads who removed themselves from their authority (husbands) by calling attention to themselves.
    - Culturally, this would have been disruptive and provocative. Veils were outward symbols of submission, humility, and comeliness.
    - With the removal of the veil and the exposing of the hair, women would be shamefully catching the eye of onlookers.
  - Paul wanted to remind the Corinthian church of God’s design and order by protecting these women in a shame-dominated culture by appealing not only to cultural standards but also to God’s creation and the consequences of the Fall.
2. **Does the author refer to or infer prior revelation, either in the Old or New Testament?**
    - Paul’s reference to headship (11:1-3) is apparent: Christ is the Head of every man, the head of a wife is the husband, and the Head of Christ is God.
    - 1 Cor. 11:7-12, 14:33-36, and 1 Tim. 2:11-14 focuses on creation, design, and the Fall.

## Helper v. Headship:

- Paul mentioned Law (14:34) to point his readers not only to the Mosaic law generally (Gen. 24:65; Num. 6:21-21; Deut. 21:12) but more specifically to Creation.
- Eve was created as Adam’s helper and functioned more egalitarian before the Fall than afterward (Gen. 2:18-19).
- Paul bases his argument for headship in creation and, as a result, in the Fall (1 Tim. 2:11-14).
- In creation, Adam and Eve related to one another in the same “sphere.” After the Fall, they operate in different “hemispheres” within the sphere.
- Because Eve was deceived, she would now take on a more submissive role (Gen. 3:16).
- The “quietness and all submissiveness” (1 Cor. 14:35; 1 Tim. 2:11-14) is not silence (no speaking) but a prohibition of teaching in the assembly of the church. The Greek word for “submissive” is about function and rank, not essence, honor, integrity, or worth. While male and female are image-bearers, they have different functions within the church and home life.

3. **What does this mean for today? Is hair length, covering, and “silence in the church” binding?**
  - Neither Paul or any other writer of the Old or New Testament explain what a head covering is (size, length, color, etc), nor what constitutes “short” or “long” hair.
  - Paul grounds headship and leadership in creation and the Fall (continuity) while leaving hair length and covering reflective of the culture (discontinuity).
    - However, Paul seems to indicate that the feminine and masculine distinctions concerning hair lengths are obvious through nature (1 Cor. 11:14).
    - Fundamental and orthodox approaches observe more continuity than discontinuity (hair, style, length, clothing, etc). Liberal approaches see no distinction (discontinuity).

## Questions women may have:

- What if my husband is an unbeliever? What if I am unmarried? What if my husband demands me to submit to him? What if my husband is not leading me (and my family)? Can I ask a question during ABF? Can I wear a head covering? How should I view cultural matters concerning hair? How should I conduct myself during Sunday morning worship? What is CrossWay’s view towards the regulative and normative principles?

The wife should ask her husband two questions: Do I honor you? How can I improve?

The husband should ask his wife two questions: Do I lead you? How can I improve?