


*The Theology of the Unseen Realm:  
How God Uses Angels, Demons and the Holy Assembly*

“Solving the Puzzle of I Corinthians 11:1-16”

I. Why the confusion?

A. There is confusion over Paul’s command to have women wear a covering while in worship. What was the meaning for the original audience?

1. Text: I Corinthians 11:1-16



“<sup>1</sup> Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. <sup>2</sup> Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup> for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake. <sup>10</sup> Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup> For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. <sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, <sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup> But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.”

2. Many scholars find Paul’s reasoning as convoluted and confusing.

a. Most Evangelical commentators hold that there was a cultural protocol for women wearing head coverings, perhaps due to the practice of prostitution. This view has similarities with Muslims of today.

b. However, Gordon Fee states that there is no evidence for such a protocol in antiquity. He writes: “This is true and discounts the contention that uncovered women in Corinth were prostitutes.” – Gordon D. Fee, *The International Commentary on the New Testament, First Corinthians*, p. 521. See pages 498-526 for a complete discussion.

c. Two non-Evangelical comments.

1. Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 77:

“There is no doubt that Paul also means to provide a theological basis for his instruction about the hairstyle of women who pray or prophecy, but in this case his argument is obscure, at least to modern interpreters, and it may well have seemed unsatisfactory even to the Apostle Paul himself.”

2. Marion L. Soards, *I Corinthians*, p. 221-224:

“One hopes that the Corinthians had an easier time following Paul’s logic than do modern readers.”

3. Additional Evangelical comments on Paul’s reasoning are similar.

a. A Gospel Coalition writer remarks:

“The transcultural truth that undergirded Paul’s admonition, however, this applies for us today. Women are different from men, and this distinction must be maintained in the church.” – Benjamin L. Merkle, “Should Women Wear Head Coverings.” [Thegospelcoalition.org](http://Thegospelcoalition.org).

1. It must be conceded that Paul’s meaning in the specific case of Corinth is difficult to determine, but the main emphasis is that women should submit to men and that in some way angels (perhaps responsible for local

churches – Rev. 2:1) are offended by the absence of the sign of subordination.

2. Others hold that head coverings are not necessary today because of a different modern cultural context. “No one comes down on this subject the same,” Pastor Jason Steele. “When You Come Together: Honor” Sermon, Community EPC, Sept. 11, 2022.

B. Yet, there is another view, largely unknown, that accounts for the cultural context as well as rational why this practice is not required today. The key is to determine Paul’s argument from nature, and why angels are mentioned as a concern.

1. Note Troy W. Martin, Professor of Religious Studies, Saint Xavier University.



- a. Relevant article – *Journal for Biblical Literacy*, “Paul’s Argument from Nature for the Veil in I Corinthians 11:13-15, a Testicle Instead of a Head Covering.” *JBL* 123/1 (2004) 75ff.
- b. A Rebuttal was offered by Mark Goodacre who is in the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University, “Does *Peribolaion* mean Testicle in I Corinthians 11:15?” *JBL* 130/2 (2011): 391-396.
- c. Martin responded in a compelling rebuttal to Goodacre in another article “*Parabolaion* as Another Testicle in I Corinthians 11:15: A Response to Mark Goodacre.” *JBL* 132, No. 2 (2013): 453-465.
  1. All three articles are located in Appendix A.
  2. See Also Loren T. Stukenbruck, “Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels?” *Stone Campbell Journal* 4 (Fall 2001): 205-234.

## II. Sorting out the puzzle pieces

- A. Examining the argument from nature.



1. I Corinthians 11:13-15

“<sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, <sup>15</sup> but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.”

2. The key word in this text is the Greek term *Peribolaion* (“covering”). This is the only Greek term translated as “covering” in the entire text of I Corinthians 11:3-15. The other English occurrences of “cover”, “covering” etc. are all translated from a different Greek term. *Peribolaion* is routinely referred to in lexicons as “robe” or an “article of clothing.”



3. Martin maintains that *peribolaion* is the keyword for understanding Paul’s argument from nature.

4. “Robe” or “article of clothing” is the dominant semantic domain of the word.

Nonetheless, the term has a broader semantic range.

5. Paul’s instruction was obvious from nature (I Cor. 11:13). On this point, Pratt notes:



“This section begins with an unusual expression: judge for yourselves. By these words Paul did not encourage the Corinthians to ignore his instructions. Rather, he meant that they should not blindly obey his directives. They were to think through the issue. Paul said this because he was convinced the believers in Corinth had the ability to think properly on this issue. He hoped they would reason through issues with him and see how he came to his conclusions. In fact, since this was an area in which he knew the church was following his instructions, he probably expected the majority of his readers to agree with his position. ... He appealed to the Corinthian’s own notions. Knowing their worldview, he expected strong agreement with his position. [Emphasis mine]

– Richard Pratt, *Holman New Testament Commentary, I & II Corinthians*, p. 187.

a. The Corinthians understood!

6. In clarifying the first century context, Martin begins his argument with two references to ancient playwrights.

- a. Euripides (Herc Fur 1269). He uses *parabolaion* as a body part. Euripides (480 – 406 BC) was a playwright reported to have written 92 plays of which 17 tragedies and 1 satire have survived. “*Hercules Furens*” was performed in 416 BC.
- b. Achilles Tattius (Leve. Clit 1.15.2). He was from Alexandria and was a Roman Era Greek writer of the second century A.D. His only surviving work is an ancient Greek novel (romance) entitled “*The Adventures of Leippe and Clitophon*”.
- c. Both writers use the term *parabolaion* (Paul’s term in I Corinthians 11:15 “covering”) to refer to male and female sexual organs. For Euripides, the term refers to testicles, while Achilles Tattius uses the same term for male testicles and equates female hair as the male counterpart.
  - 1. This is Martin’s translation in both cases.
  - 2. Within the ancient medical field, female hair and male hair are the main sex organs (additional to the brain) for reproduction,



B. Ancient medical scientific understanding of male and female reproduction documentation.

- 1. The following description regarding male and female reproduction in the ancient world is documented in the following sources.
  - a. Hippocrates. The Greek physician considered as one of the most outstanding figures in the history of medicine (450-370 BC).
  - b. Numerous Hippocratic authors from the same period of time.
  - c. Aristotle. The Greek philosopher (384-322 BC). Numerous citations are given.
  - d. Tertullian. Church father (155-220 AD) known as the father of Latin Christianity.
    - 1 I will quote him later.
- 2. The following scholars attest to Martin’s conclusions.



- a. Lesley Dean-Jones. *Women's bodies in Classical Greek Science*. Oxford: Claredon, 1994. p. 83-85.
- b. Plato, Diocles, Praxagoras, Democritus. Philip J. Vander Eijk, translator. *Diocles of Carystus: A Collection of Fragments with Translation and Commentary*. Vol. 1. Text and translation "Ancient Studies in Medicine 22"; Leiden: Brill, 2000, pg. 85. Note that Aristotle affirmed that the brain is the organ of reproductive fluid.
- c. Hippocratic writings. New York: Penquin Books, 1978. p. 317-318.
- d. Dale B. Martin. *The Corinthian Body*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, 230-231. Notes women's bodies cooler than men.
- e. Dean-Jones. *Woman's Bodies*, 56. – *Soranus Gyn*, 1.9 [34-35]. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1956, 34. Women's bodies similar to the whole body.
- f. Paul Potter, *Hippocrates, Vol. VIII CLCL*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995, 124-125.
- g. R. G. Ussher. *Aristophanes Ecclesiazusae*. Edited with Introduction and Commentary. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, 148. The test for fertility.

III. Martin's application of ancient fertility to Paul's argument (I Cor. 11). Once again, everything I am about to say is documented in first century sources.

#### A. Men's Hair

1. Hair only grows on the head of prepubescent humans because semen is stored in the brain. The channels of the body have not yet become large enough for reproductive fluid to travel throughout the body.
2. At puberty, secondary hair growth in the pubic area marks the moment of reproductive fluid from the brain to the rest of the body. Women have less hair

because they have less semen and their cooler bodies do not froth the semen. This is because their bodies are cooler – the ends of their hair reduce semen evaporation.

3. Men have more body hair because they have more semen, and their hotter bodies froth the semen more easily throughout their entire bodies. The nature of man is to eject semen. During intercourse semen has to fill all of the hollow hairs on its way from the brain to the genital area.
4. Typically, men have more hair on the face, chest and stomach. Men with hair on their back reverses the dynamics for the usual position for intercourse. A man with long hair retains much or all of his semen. Long hair draws the semen toward the head area and away from his genital area. This is why it is a shame for a man to have long hair since his nature is to eject semen (I Cor. 11:14).

#### B. Women's Hair

1. It is the nature of women to draw up semen and congeal it into a fetus. The function of women's glands is similar to her hair. Glands absorb excess body fluid and her hair collects and froths the fluid. In a sense, the woman is a large gland designed to absorb male reproductive fluid. Long hair assists the process by increasing the suction power of her hollow uterus. One ancient writer remarked, "Long hair is not fit for males, but for voluptuous women," Pseudo-Phocylides [Emphasis Mine].
2. Note preferred Hippocratic test for infertility in women. A doctor inserts a scented suppository in the woman's uterus and then examines her mouth the following day to determine if he can smell the scent. If he smells the scent , he diagnoses her as fertile. If no smell, the channels connecting the uterus to her head are blocked, causing infertility. Fertile women who engaged in illicit intercourse ate garlic to mask any scent in the mouth.



3. A chill in the air often results in raised hair on the skin and inhibits the reproductive process. Hippocratic authors recommended that a woman neither bathe nor allow her hair to become wet after intercourse if she desires to retain a man's semen.  
The role of the woman's anatomy is to cool hot semen and congeal it into a fetus.
4. Hair removal: Greco/Roman women often removed pubic hair to enhance attractiveness to males (plucking, singeing, or caustic resins were used). Singeing was considered best to enhance fertility. Depilation effectively removes the suction power of the pubic hair. This facilitates the hair on the head to draw semen upward to the brain where fertilization occurs.
5. Pubescent girls were not required to wear a veil because their hair was not functioning genitalia. The church father Tertullian remarked, "Let her whose lower parts are not bare have her upper likewise covered." (reference given later.) He clearly understands that the young woman's hair functions as a part of her genitalia.

C. Male testicle function: Testicular function as a counterpart to long feminine hair.

Aristotle called the testicles weights which keep the channels taut and not kinked. Their function is to facilitate the drawing of semen downward from the brain in order to be ejaculated. The testicles also perform the final frothing in order to transmit heat for ejaculation. The female has no such weights, but instead develops a hollow uterus in drawing the male semen upward and inward. Testicles within the man are connected to the brain by two channels in order to draw semen downward from the brain and outward.

#### IV. The Argument

##### A. Paul's argument from nature.

1. The ancient physiological conception of hair is the premise for Paul's appeal to nature (I Cor. 11:13-15). He uses a form of "street Greek" (*peribolarion*), not vulgarity, to further grab the Corinthians' attention.





2. He is contrasting women's long hair with testicles in men, appropriate to nature, a woman is not given external testicles (*peribolarion*, I Cor. 11:15b) but instead long hair. Her hair is her glory (I Cor. 11:15) because it enhances her female reproductive ability which is to draw in and retain semen for fertility.



3. Since female hair is part of the female genitalia, Paul asks, "Judge for yourselves whether it is proper for a woman to display her genitalia when praying to God (I Cor. 11:13).

a. Note that priests in service to Yahweh received special instructions regarding nakedness to not be visible while at the altar.



1. Exodus 20:26

"<sup>26</sup> And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it."

b. While in the tent of meeting, the priests needed to wear "linen breeches" to cover their flesh. ("Flesh" is often a euphemism for genitals.)



1. Exodus 28:42-43

"<sup>42</sup> You shall make for them linen breeches to cover their bare flesh; they shall reach from the loins even to the thighs. <sup>43</sup> They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him."

c. The breeches were a glory and beauty for the priests while exposed genitals were a cause of guilt and death.



1. Exodus 28:40,43

"<sup>40</sup> For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics; you shall also make sashes for them, and you shall make caps for them, for glory and for beauty."

"<sup>43</sup> They shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. It shall be a statute forever to him and to his descendants after him."



4. Consequently, Paul intends women in service to God to cover their hair since it is part of the female genitalia. Both men and women may prophecy in worship only when properly attired. **Since we now know more informed reproductive physiology, there is no need for women to have hair covered**.

B. Paul's logic is not convoluted! First century philosophy and physiology demonstrate that Paul and the Corinthians comprehended quite well the argument from nature and why veiling women was necessary.

## V. What about the angels?

### A. Paul's reason



#### 1. I Corinthians 11:10

“<sup>10</sup> Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”

2. This is the interface with the supernatural worldview of Genesis 6:1-4.

### B. Paul's concern



1. Because there was more than one divine sexual rebellion in the past, he does not want a repeat among Yahweh's people who are especially in worship.
2. Loose morals in Corinth (Temple to Aphrodite) probably contributed to his concern. Sexual promiscuity must not infiltrate the church.
3. The powers of darkness are on notice that the church's women are indeed spoken for and submitted to their husbands.

C. Paul's argument is strange to our ears, but nonetheless exhibits his concern for proper sexual decorum and not allowing any possibility for lesser *elohim* promiscuity.

## VI. Afterthoughts

A. Note Tertullian's case for head coverings and the reason why.



### 1. Tertullian (155-220 AD) – on the veiling of virgins

Because of the Angels

If “the woman ought to have power upon her head” even more should the virgin. For it is particularly virgins who have need for such “power upon the head.” For “on account of the angels” refers to these angels that fell from God and heaven because of lust for females. And surely these angels did not lust after females whose bodies were already defiled. They did not lust after those women who were relics of someone else’s human lust. Instead, isn’t it more likely that they were inflamed for virgins, whose bloom also is used as an excuse for human lust? The Scripture itself suggests this understanding ... (Gen. 6:1,2) ... “daughters of men” obviously refers to virgins.

[Rainham.org/Tertullian-veiling-of-virgins/](http://Rainham.org/Tertullian-veiling-of-virgins/)

2. He also noted that prepubescent young girls need not wear the “power” on their heads because they are immature and infertile.

### B. Men and head coverings

1. See I Corinthians 11:4,7

“<sup>4</sup> Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. . . . <sup>7</sup> 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.”

2. Reasons for no head covering for males.

- a. Male short head hair is not reproductive.
- b. Covering of the head for males may have caused confusion over gender roles between the two sexes.
- c. An uncovered head was also a sign of respect in the company of a superior.

JBL adds in Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, Bible Commentary,

[BibleHub.com/commentaries/1\\_Corinthians/11-4.htm](http://BibleHub.com/commentaries/1_Corinthians/11-4.htm):

“Man should not cover the head ‘because Christ is not seen: the man is seen; so the covering of him who is under Christ is not seen; of her is under the man, is seen.’”



C. Troy W. Martin:

“The answer to your second question is a hearty YES, most definitely. The sin of the angels in Gen. 6 is the most reasonable explanation for Paul’s concern with women not covering their hair in a worship service when angels are likely in attendance.”

– In response to an email from Dr. Galardi.

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