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# Exposed heads and exposed motives: Coverings as a means to unity at Corinth

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GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

EXPOSED HEADS AND EXPOSED MOTIVES:  
COVERINGS AS A MEANS TO UNITY AT CORINTH

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO DR. JAMES MCCONNELL

IN FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY

BY

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This thesis has been examined and approved.

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## Abstract

This thesis argues that in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Paul asserts most centrally that women should wear head coverings while praying and prophesying in the Corinthian Christian assembly. I examine the honor and shame value system of the Greco-Roman world, both generally and in specific reference to head adornment, since head coverings and hairstyles were connected to honor and status. Then I look at Paul's treatment of honor and shame throughout 1 Corinthians, which denounces the worldly value system of status seeking in favor of the value system of the cross. Paul's stance leads him to subject cultural norms to gospel values in the advice he gives the Corinthians. Turning to 1 Cor 11:2-16, I argue that Paul's advice that the women cover their heads comes out of his concern for the gospel value of unity among believers. By covering their heads, the women will avoid self-promotion, acknowledge the value of their male human counterpart, and honor God. Once I establish this thrust of 1 Cor 11:2-16, I demonstrate how the passage fits into the theme of 1 Corinthians and the flow of the letter.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul's concern is for men and women in the church at Corinth to be in unity with one another and God while praying and prophesying during corporate worship gatherings. This unity is grounded most significantly in the truth that all people—men and women alike—belong to God. For Paul, in this particular situation, such unity is best accomplished by adherence to culturally standard dress for females in worship (i.e., what is honoring) *because in this case the cultural norm avoids self-promotion and reminds the people of their connectedness to God*, not because cultural norms are final. In fact, throughout 1 Corinthians Paul's response to cultural norms, including those of honor and shame, is to subject them to the scrutiny of the gospel. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, he advises and exhorts them in accordance with gospel values concerning various community situations. The overarching gospel value Paul consistently addresses in his letter is unity in the community of believers at Corinth. This concern for unity is the theme of 1 Corinthians as well as the focus of 1 Cor 11:2-16.

As will become clear throughout this argument, the cultural standard of differentiation in dress is not, for Paul, an indication of *subordination* for women, since (1) all things, including people, come from God and (2) the Corinthian women are given the exact same function as men in regard to praying and prophesying. Rather, differentiation is retained among the Corinthians because it is a way for the women to show honor to the men as their human counterparts and spiritual brothers.

In what follows, I explore the various facets of 1 Cor 11:2-16 as I argue that this passage reflects Paul's concern for unity among the Corinthians. In chapter two I include



a literature review highlighting the major voices contributing to those topics covered in chapters 3-6. The literature review generally follows the order of the material in chapters 3-6, with the exception that some exegetical issues are discussed at the outset of the literature review. Any relevant issues pertaining directly to the exegesis of 1 Cor 11:2-16 will be readdressed in chapter five. Topics mentioned in the remainder of chapter two are also addressed in their respective chapters as relevant to the arguments made therein.

Chapters 3-6 proceed as follows. In chapter three, I take up the value system of Mediterranean honor and shame. First, I address modern Mediterranean honor-shame, since research done in the field of social science paved the way for honor-shame models in the field of biblical studies. Second, I discuss a model for Greco-Roman honor and shame and key adaptations to that model. Finally, I turn to the specific topic of Roman head coverings and adornment in liturgical and mundane settings for both men and women. This background knowledge in Greco-Roman honor and shame aids in the interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16, since the passage is heavily nuanced with language and concepts of honor and shame.

In chapter four I focus on honor as it directly relates to Corinth, Corinthian Christians, and Paul. After the Corinthians' preoccupation with honor and status is demonstrated, focus shifts to Paul's response to and reversal of this desire for worldly status. Finally, I note the relationship between cultural norms and gospel norms in Paul's advice to the Corinthians, namely, that cultural norms are not uniformly abandoned but rather are subjected to gospel values.

In chapter five I examine 1 Cor 11:2-16 itself, arguing that Paul's advice to the women is based on the gospel value of unity, a value that comes from Christ and ought to

be exhibited in the lives of believers. Paul interprets the honor system of the Greco-Roman world in light of gospel values in order to advise the Corinthian women and, less centrally, the men concerning liturgical head coverings. I begin by discussing aspects of the passage's language and structure, and then I move into an exegetical analysis of the passage. Finally, I offer conclusions about the overall thrust of the passage.

In chapter six I discuss the theme of 1 Corinthians, which itself is unity. Providing a discussion of how Paul develops this theme throughout the letter, I also indicate how 1 Cor 11:2-16 fits into the letter's flow. Finally, in chapter seven I offer concluding remarks concerning my argument and look forward to further development of the topic.

Before moving forward, it should be noted that this work assumes the integrity of 1 Corinthians. In chapter six, I make reference to the various theories scholars have put forth positing multiple letters within 1 Corinthians. Both in chapter two and in chapter five, I mention interpolation theories specifically concerning 1 Cor 11:2-16. While many of these theories are worthwhile, in my estimation notable scholars have sufficiently argued that 1 Corinthians is a single letter and that 1 Cor 11:2-16 was written by Paul with the rest of the letter. For example, Anthony C. Thiselton and Margaret Mitchell have argued for the integrity of 1 Corinthians,<sup>1</sup> and on multiple occasions Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has argued against interpolation theories concerning 1 Cor 11:2-16.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 36-39; and Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991). Although Mitchell first asserts her argument on page 1, the entire work is dedicated to showing both that 1 Corinthians is a unified letter and that it is a kind of deliberative rhetoric intended to exhort the Corinthians toward unity.

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Non-Pauline Character of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 615-21. See also Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting Major Issues* (2009, repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 257-87; see 262-65.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

A cursory reading of 1 Cor 11:2-16 might deceptively lead one to believe that this passage, even if controversial for some in the twenty-first century, is relatively straightforward: while praying or prophesying in corporate worship, because of the natural, created order, women should have their heads dressed and men should not. It takes only a slightly closer reading to discover apparent inconsistencies and ambiguities in the passage. One question arising from the ambiguities might be, for instance, *Why does the woman have to wear a covering while prophesying if, as 11:15 indicates, her hair is given to her as a covering?* The discovery of an intentionally close reading is that 1 Cor 11:2-16 is a difficult passage to interpret for a variety of reasons, and many questions about it are difficult to answer. Commentators and scholars alike have struggled to find consensus not only in regard to issues such as structure, language, and cultural context, but also in regard to the broader focus and argument of the passage itself.

What follows is an overview of the major conversations in scholarship concerning 1 Cor 11:2-16. Topics addressed include: (1) specific issues pertaining to and point of the passage; (2) the concept of Greco-Roman honor and shame; (3) the general Corinthian attitude toward honor; (4) how Paul uses honor and shame in his writings; (5) intimations of honor in 1 Cor 11:2-16 and the meaning of κεφαλή as it relates to honor; and (6) 1 Cor 11:2-16 as part of the entire letter, with consideration of the letter's overall theme.

## Overview of Scholarship on General Issues

Gordon D. Fee lists three especially problematic aspects of 1 Cor 11:2-16: the logical flow of the argument; the ambiguity of several of the key terms in the passage; and uncertainty about cultural norms both within and without the church at that time. One particular cultural phenomenon that Fee asserts to be uncertain is that of head coverings on males, although he is in the minority on this point. Fee even claims that “almost no evidence” exists for male head coverings in Greek, Roman, or Jewish culture.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Richard E. Oster deals with the topic in detail and determines that evidence abounds for male head coverings in both sacred and mundane settings.<sup>2</sup> Ben Witherington appeals to literary evidence to assert that it was common in Roman culture for both men and women to cover their heads while actively participating in sacrifice or prophecy at religious gatherings.<sup>3</sup> Mark Finney argues that archeological and literary evidence for males wearing head coverings is “unmistakably clear” but that such evidence for female head coverings as a requirement in Roman culture is ambiguous. While it seems to have been common, there were times when it may have been optional.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars do not all agree that 1 Cor 11:2-16 speaks of head coverings, in large part due to the very issues Fee mentions (logic, terminology, culture). Some maintain that the passage concerns hairstyles. For instance, Philip B. Payne argues that, for both Greco-

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 492, 507-8.

<sup>2</sup> Richard E. Oster, “When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11:4,” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 481-505; see 494-502. Richard E. Oster, “Use, Misuse and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 7,1-5, 8,10, 11,2-16, 12,14-26),” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 83 (1992): 52-73; see 67-69.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 233-34.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Finney, “Honour, Head-Coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 in Its Social Context,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (2010): 31-58; see 36-41.

Roman women and men, head coverings were standard and not shame inducing. On the other hand, asserts Payne, long, effeminate hair was disgraceful for men, suggesting homosexuality. Loose, free-flowing hair was disgraceful for women because it suggested untamed sexuality. Hence, in 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul argues against inappropriate hairstyles for men and women.<sup>5</sup> Payne's stance is not unlike that of Murphy-O'Connor, who argued some twenty-five years prior to Payne that Paul opposes long, effeminate hairstyles for men that suggest homosexuality and free-flowing, unkempt hair for women that suggest disorder.<sup>6</sup> Other significant voices holding that 1 Cor 11:2-16 refers to hairstyles include Alan Padgett and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.<sup>7</sup>

Jorunn Økland offers the perspective that Paul's advice includes both head coverings and hairstyles. Økland maintains that Paul wants the women to be covered regardless of whether the covering is hair or a veil; it may very well be both. Men ought not be covered, and this means by extension that their hair should be short.<sup>8</sup> The majority of scholars simply contend, however, that the passage refers to head coverings.<sup>9</sup> Thiselton takes up the conversation and responds specifically to Murphy-O'Connor's argument.

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<sup>5</sup> Philip B. Payne, "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Priscilla Papers* 20 (2006): 8-18; see 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2-16," in *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting Major Issues* (2009; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142-58; see 145-47.

<sup>7</sup> Alan Padgett, "Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984): 69-86; see 70; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 227.

<sup>8</sup> Jorunn Økland, *Women in Their Place: Paul and the Corinthian Discourse of Gender and Sanctuary Space*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 269 (London & New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 190-91.

<sup>9</sup> Among the scholars who hold that the reference is to head coverings are: Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians, A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 67-68; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 406; Finney, 33-34; Troy W. Martin, "Paul's Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11:13-15: A Testicle Instead of a Head Covering," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 75-84; see 84; J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," *Acts, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Romans, 1 Corinthians*, vol. X of The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 771-1003; see 927.

Although he concedes that Murphy-O'Connor's case is strong, Thiselton finds that the archaeological and lexicographical evidence concerning head coverings makes the head-covering argument stronger.<sup>10</sup> Fee allows for either possibility, but his exegesis more predominately discusses the passage as if it deals with head coverings.<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally, 1 Cor 11:2-16 has been understood to say that, while men and women alike can pray and prophesy in corporate worship, women's heads should be covered with a garment, and men's should be uncovered. The main problem in the congregation, and the problem to which Paul responds in this passage, is with the women or a group of women who are praying and prophesying without head coverings.<sup>12</sup> Fee has attempted to demonstrate that the argument's structure reveals the emphasis to lie more clearly on women than on men.<sup>13</sup> Padgett also holds that the passage is focused on female attire, and he asserts that Paul is correcting some Corinthians who believe that women are inferior to men. According to Padgett, Paul's point in 1 Cor 11:2-16 is to explain that women and men are equal to one another.<sup>14</sup>

Some scholars disagree with the notions that Paul is addressing women only and that he mentions male dress simply for the sake of argument. These scholars hold, instead, that Paul is just as concerned with male attire as with female attire. Both Payne and Murphy-O'Connor fall within this group.<sup>15</sup> Finney argues that Paul is reversing a male custom and reinforcing a female custom in order to promote culturally sensitive

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<sup>10</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 823-26.

<sup>11</sup> Fee, 496-97.

<sup>12</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 506.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, 493-95.

<sup>14</sup> Padgett, "Paul on Women in the Church," 76-83.

<sup>15</sup> Payne, 9; Murphy O'Connor, "Sex and Logic," in *Keys to 1 Corinthians*, 142-43.

gospel values for both genders.<sup>16</sup> Thiselton holds that Paul wants both men and women to respect the “otherness of the other” in public worship by retaining gender distinctions.<sup>17</sup> Witherington contends that Paul addresses men and women in order to reiterate and celebrate gender distinctions.<sup>18</sup> Økland interprets 1 Cor 11:2-16 as pertaining to gendered “space” and argues that Paul admonishes both male and female Corinthians to stay in their gendered space during worship by means of attire; to dress as the opposite gender would violate such boundaries of space and is shameful. Økland suggests that, in reference to men, Paul might be curtailing any trace of homosexuality by asserting that the men are entering female space when they veil themselves.<sup>19</sup>

The traditionalist explanation of Paul’s rationale for why women’s heads must be covered and men’s heads must be uncovered has often claimed that 11:2-16 presents a hierarchy of the created order: woman was created being subordinate to man and must submit to him. According to traditionalists, Paul is attempting to check the growing feminism in the congregation and to reorient the mindset of the women away from a misguided insistence on equality. Those who adopt this perspective include Jean Héring, Robert D. Culver, and C. K. Barrett.<sup>20</sup> Linda Mercadante offers a thorough treatment of the traditional interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16 as well as variations thereof.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Finney, 47.

<sup>17</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 805.

<sup>18</sup> Witherington, 231-32, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Økland, 168-95; see specifically 191.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 102-3. See also Robert D. Culver, “A Traditional View: Let Your Women Keep Silence,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 25-52; see 27-32; and C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 249.

<sup>21</sup> Linda A. Mercadante, *From Hierarchy to Equality: A Comparison of Past and Present Interpretations of 1 Cor 11:2-16 in Relation to the Changing Status of Women in Society* (Vancouver BC: GMH Books, 1978), 15-103.

More recently, Økland has reasserted that the concept of hierarchy is central to interpreting 1 Cor 11:2-16, in which Paul is reinforcing his convictions about hierarchy even to the point that he does not directly address the Corinthian women. Paul refers to male and female not on the individual but rather on the cosmological level, however. Woman is at the bottom of the hierarchy and ought to comport herself as such, but this does not indicate that a woman cannot participate in *ekklesia* life on an individual level.<sup>22</sup>

Scholars on all sides of the abovementioned debates hold various opinions concerning Paul's point in the passage; some adhere to the traditional understanding of Paul's point, while others do not. Some believe the passage to be uncharacteristic of Paul and oddly located in the flow of the letter; they argue these verses to be an interpolation. William O. Walker has suggested that 1 Cor 11:2-16 departs from its literary context: the topic of food and drink covered in chapters 8-11, excluding 11:2-16.<sup>23</sup> It is widely accepted that Murphy-O'Connor has refuted Walker's argument.<sup>24</sup> Lamar Cope has responded to Murphy-O'Connor's refutation, arguing yet again for an interpolation,<sup>25</sup> but Murphy-O'Connor points out that Cope proves only the logical *possibility* of removing the passage from the text.<sup>26</sup>

Garry W. Trompf has asserted that the letter flows more smoothly if 11:3-16 is removed; that the language and flow of the argument suggest a deutero-Pauline author; and that the appeals to nature and culture depart from Paul's tendency to point toward

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<sup>22</sup> Økland, 176-78.

<sup>23</sup> William O. Walker, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 94-110; see 97-99.

<sup>24</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Non-Pauline Character of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 (1976): 615-21.

<sup>25</sup> Lamar Cope, "1 Cor 11:2-16: One Step Further," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 435-36; see 435.

<sup>26</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," in *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting Major Issues* (2009, repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 257-87; see 262-65.



himself as an example.<sup>27</sup> Murphy-O'Connor has refuted Trompf's article as well.<sup>28</sup> More recently, Christopher N. Mount claimed that 11:2-16 is an interpolation because it departs from Paul's typical appeal to Spirit possession as authority,<sup>29</sup> but Mount himself concedes that there is no textual evidence to support an interpolation theory.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the scholars who analyze 1 Cor 11:2-16 dialogue with the notion of Greco-Roman honor and shame. The work of honor and shame in relation to biblical studies stands on the shoulders of work done by scholars such as John G. Peristiany and Julian Alfred Pitt-Rivers in the field of social anthropology.<sup>31</sup> Notably, Bruce Malina has developed a model of honor and shame for biblical studies in which he describes honor as both a claim to worth or status—based on a combination of power, sexual status, and religion—and a public acknowledgement of that claim. This claim and affirmation could be based on either ascribed honor, given at birth, or acquired honor, earned in daily interactions with others.<sup>32</sup>

Ascribed honor could be maintained in several ways, as scholars such as Jerome H. Neyrey and Carolyn Osiek explain in their works.<sup>33</sup> One significant way ascribed

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<sup>27</sup> Garry W. Trompf, "On Attitudes toward Women in Paul and Paulinist Literature: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and Its Context," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 196-215; see 198.

<sup>28</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," in *Keys to First Corinthians*, 264.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher N. Mount, "1 Corinthians 11:3-16: Spirit Possession and Authority in a Non-Pauline Interpolation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124 (2005): 313-40; see 314-16.

<sup>30</sup> Mount, 315.

<sup>31</sup> So see, John G. Peristiany, "Introduction," in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 7-18; Julian Alfred Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 19-77.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 26-29. Cf. Bruce J. Malina, "Honor/Shame," in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 106-15. Malina clarifies that honor and shame, though experienced by individuals, were collective in Greco-Roman society.

<sup>33</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family, Loss of Honor: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q," in *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey and Eric C. Stewart (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 87-102; see 88-90; and

honor was maintained and negative shame avoided was through cooperation with socially expected roles, especially as this pertained to gender.<sup>34</sup> Susan A. Brayford uses the example of the Sarah/Hagar story as it develops from the Hebrew text to the LXX in order to evaluate notions of male/female honor and shame in the Greco-Roman era. Of particular interest to some interpreters of 1 Cor 11:2-16 (which is not Brayford's focus) is this particular argument that, during the later-Hellenistic period, part of a woman's expected role was her concern for her husband's honor. She was esteemed for how well she ensured her husband's honor, among other criteria.<sup>35</sup>

In his model Malina holds that a woman could not possess honor on an individual level and instead was supposed to be the embodiment of positive shame.<sup>36</sup> Scholars including Zeba Crook and F. Gerald Downing have argued to the contrary and have sufficiently shown that, regardless of whether or not it was positively received in every sphere, females could and did compete for and possess personal honor.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Unni Wikan, in speaking of modern honor and shame in the Mediterranean and responding to arguments by Malina, has asked, "Would anyone seriously maintain that a woman cannot gain value in her own and others' eyes, and that this is a male prerogative?"<sup>38</sup>

Louise Joy Lawrence has sought to differentiate in the honor/shame conversation between honor precedence (honor in the public sphere) and honor virtue (honor before

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Carolyn Osiek, *What Are They Saying about the Social Setting of the New Testament?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>34</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 27-28, 42-43.

<sup>35</sup> Susan A. Brayford, "To Shame or Not to Shame: Sexuality in the Mediterranean Diaspora," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 163-76.

<sup>36</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 45-46. Cf. Ritva H. Williams, "Lifting the Veil: A Social-Science Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Consensus* 23 (1997): 53-60; see 57-58.

<sup>37</sup> Zeba A. Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 591-611; see 605-9; and F. Gerald Downing, "'Honor' among Exegetes," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 53-73; see 58. Cf. Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 19, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Unni Wikan, "Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair," *Man* 19 (1984): 635-52; see 639.

self and God), especially among Jews and Christians during the Greco-Roman era. Pitt-Rivers was the first to make the distinction between honor precedence and honor virtue,<sup>39</sup> and Lawrence draws from his description to argue that the gospel of Matthew repeatedly emphasizes a shift from preoccupation with honor precedence toward preoccupation with honor virtue. In fact, Lawrence understands Matthew's gospel to claim that concern for honor precedence actually dishonors God.<sup>40</sup> Crook disagrees with Lawrence that a difference exists between honor precedence and the supposed "honor virtue." Instead, he asserts that the shift is the audience and awarder of honor: this audience is now God in situations Lawrence is describing as honor-virtue situations.<sup>41</sup>

In 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul relates head coverings in worship to the concept of honor and shame. Finney asserts that, both for the men and the women, head attire was linked either to personal honor/dignity or honoring the gods. For females specifically, a woman's attire made a statement about her respectability and, by extension, the honor of males in her family.<sup>42</sup>

Witherington argues that Corinth was a place preoccupied with honor and shame, especially as individuals found opportunities for self-promotion. He notes that, in writing to the Corinthians, Paul repeatedly brings up issues pertaining to their boasting, pride, and claims to entitlement.<sup>43</sup> Wayne A. Meeks has shown that many of Paul's converts, likely including the Corinthians, enjoyed significant opportunities for social climbing but

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<sup>39</sup> Julian Alfred Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem: or The Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 14-15; and Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *The Values of Mediterranean Society*, 42. See also Louise Joy Lawrence, "'For Truly, I Tell You, They Have Received Their Reward' (Matt 6:2): Investigating Honor Precedence and Honor Virtue," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 687-702; see 690.

<sup>40</sup> Lawrence, 690, 692-94, 702.

<sup>41</sup> Crook, 598-99.

<sup>42</sup> Finney, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Witherington, 8, 21. See also Garland, 6-7.

often achieved what he terms *status inconsistency*. That is, they were able to achieve prestige in one area but were not necessarily given power or status across the board.<sup>44</sup>

Robert Jewett has demonstrated that, despite the standard Greco-Roman perceptions of honor and shame, Paul often subverts honor and shame in his letters to the churches. Jewett draws from examples in Romans, Galatians, Philippians, as well as 1 Corinthians. For instance, In 1 Cor 1-2 Paul speaks out against the factionalism going on in the Corinthian community. Instead of choosing leaders with whom loyalty can be claimed, the people are only to boast in one person: the Lord. Interestingly, boasting in Christ means accepting as a way of life humiliation and weakness. In Christ the humble and lowly are exalted, and those having high status are no longer considered superior.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Thiselton points out that in 1 Cor 4 Paul describes his own apostolicity not in terms of high status and glory, although he *could* make those claims, but as a form of solidarity with the lowliness of the cross and the dishonor that accompanies it.<sup>46</sup>

Paul's subversion of honor and shame goes hand in hand with his attitude about the Corinthians' connection to surrounding culture. Richard Horsley claims that in 1 Corinthians Paul is interested in establishing an alternative society characterized by a new age inaugurated with the cross. Whereas the surrounding culture in Corinth views the cross as foolish and weak, the cross itself serves to shame those who seek their own power, wisdom, recognition, and the like (1 Cor 1-2). Paul asserts the autonomy of the community of believers in relation to the functioning of the surrounding culture (1 Cor 5-6). Additionally, he protects the unity and solidarity of the community from the social

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<sup>44</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 54, 72-73. Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 12-13.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Jewett, "Paul, Shame, and Honor," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 551-74; see 557-65.

<sup>46</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 24.

networking and status climbing so characteristic of sacrificial banquets (1 Cor 8-10).<sup>47</sup>

Paul calls the Corinthians to a counter-cultural approach to life, but this does not always mean that cultural norms are abandoned. In fact, in his explanation of 1 Cor 10, Thiselton interprets Paul to indicate that the believer's freedom from the judgments of others should be subjected to the consideration of the others' best interest.<sup>48</sup>

How has the notion of honor and shame as it relates to culture come into play for interpreters of 1 Cor 11:2-16? Margaret Y. MacDonald understands the abandonment of the covering to be a rejection of inferior status and a claim to a new status in Christ.<sup>49</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett argues that women are praying and prophesying without head coverings as an expression of their newfound "sexual liberation and equality." Derrett goes on to say that hair signified sexual attractiveness, and for a woman to be in a church assembly praying and prophesying uncovered meant that she was "shameless." In doing so and being such, she dishonored her husband.<sup>50</sup> Finney holds that, according to Paul's understanding, the female who is uncovered in the presence of strangers dishonors her male kin, which in turn prevents the male from honoring his god.<sup>51</sup>

Much attention has also been given to Paul's use of the term κεφαλή in 1 Cor 11:2-16, and noteworthy arguments have linked the term to the concept of honor. Wayne Grudem and Joseph A. Fitzmyer have argued that Paul's intended meaning for κεφαλή is

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<sup>47</sup> Richard A. Horsley, "1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul's Assembly As an Alternative Society," in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, ed. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 227-37; see 229-31, 234.

<sup>48</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 792-93.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Y. Macdonald, "Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1990): 161-81; see 166.

<sup>50</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Religious Hair," *Studies in the New Testament, Volume 1: Glimpses of the Legal and Social Presuppositions of the Authors* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 170-75; see 171-72.

<sup>51</sup> Finney, 50-51.

“authority,” or “leader.”<sup>52</sup> Other significant voices have argued for the meaning “source.”

For instance, Payne argues that most scholars have adopted “source” as the definition for the term, and he provides fourteen reasons why “source” is the correct meaning.<sup>53</sup>

Charles H. Talbert and Schüssler Fiorenza also espouse this meaning for κεφαλή.<sup>54</sup>

A third line of thinking for the meaning of κεφαλή is “prominence,” “honor,” or “preeminence.” Among those who espouse this meaning are Richard Cervin and Alan Johnson.<sup>55</sup> Especially as expounded upon by Johnson, who in his article provides a thorough history of scholarship for understanding the meaning of κεφαλή, this viewpoint attempts to combine some of the connotations of “authority over” and “source” but to abandon the primary connotation of each as Paul’s intended use in 1 Cor 11:2-16. Johnson demonstrates that neither “authority over” nor “source” fully captures the meaning of κεφαλή and argues that the idea of preeminence is intended in κεφαλή.<sup>56</sup>

David Garland also promotes this definition for κεφαλή, which he associates with order and prominence but not with any form of subordination for the female, whose order in the male/female human relationship is second. The idea is that the way females dress their literal heads while leading in worship says something about their willingness to honor the other, the “other” in this case being their preeminent human partner. The issue is not simply about the females giving honor to the males in the congregation; it is just as

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<sup>52</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, “Does *Kephalē* (‘Head’) Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority over’ in Greek Literature: A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985): 38-59; and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in I Corinthians 11:3,” *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52-59. See also, Wayne A. Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 25-65.

<sup>53</sup> Payne, 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> Talbert, 86; Schüssler Fiorenza, 229.

<sup>55</sup> Richard S. Cervin, “Does *Kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority over’ in Greek Literature: A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989): 85-112; see Cervin’s conclusions on 112. See also, Alan F. Johnson, “A Review of the Scholarly Debate on the Meaning of ‘Head’ (kephale) in Paul’s Writings,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 41 (2009): 35-57; see 52-53.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, 52-53.

much about the women *not shaming* the men by dismissive dress.<sup>57</sup> Birgitte Graakjær Hjort addresses the *κεφαλή* relationships mentioned in 11:3 and asserts that Paul is not reaffirming a notion of female inferiority or of general subordination. Rather, Paul has in mind a specifically religious and not a general relationship between man and woman; the situation has to do with idols and a Corinthian attempt to eliminate gender distinctions.<sup>58</sup>

Murphy-O'Connor has helped demonstrate that *κεφαλή* is not only used in 1 Cor 11:2-16 to reference the honor due to another; it also is used to point to one's own personal honor. Although in 11:3 Paul asserts that the man is the woman's head, Murphy-O'Connor understands the dishonoring of the woman's *κεφαλή* in 11:5 to be a reference to her literal head, so in having unkempt hair the woman dishonors *herself*. This is not, says Murphy-O'Connor, a reference to female homosexuality in the same way he believes the passage addresses male sexuality; it is simply that the woman's hair is supposed to bring her honor and cannot when it is disheveled.<sup>59</sup> Fee's outline of the passage suggests a double entendre in 11:5 so that the woman's being uncovered shames both the males around her and herself, but his exegesis of 11:5 focuses heavily on how the woman's *κεφαλή* is a husband or other males in the congregation.<sup>60</sup>

Paul's argument in 1 Cor 11:2-16 utilizes both the concept of honor and the concept of solidarity to urge the Corinthians to be a unified body. Thiselton sees the thrust of the argument in 1 Cor 11:2-16 as a concern for a mutual respect among men and women "for the otherness of the other in public worship," which leads to unity in the

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<sup>57</sup> Garland, 516.

<sup>58</sup> Birgitte Graakjær Hjort, "Gender Hierarchy or Religious Androgyny? Male-Female Interaction in the Corinthian Community – A Reading of 1 Cor. 11,2-16," *Studia Theologica* 55 (2001): 58-80; see 64, 74-75.

<sup>59</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic," in *Keys to First Corinthians*, 146-48.

<sup>60</sup> Fee, 493, 509-10.

body.<sup>61</sup> Raymond F. Collins understands the passage to be an entreaty for unity within the Corinthian community, which is cultivated through order and serves to provide a positive impression to outsiders.<sup>62</sup> Mitchell asserts that Paul calls for women to remain covered while prophesying or praying in worship in order to avoid contentiousness in the community.<sup>63</sup> Witherington also contends that unity is important in these verses. He asserts that Paul's argument here is (1) against divisiveness that may have taken root in the community over different cultural or religious customs and (2) for an orderliness of the assembly based in God's original creation and new creation in Christ.<sup>64</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza has a similar take on the situation and Paul's intention: she asserts that Paul is preoccupied with women's hairstyles because of the disorder associated with women prophesying in Isis cults.<sup>65</sup>

The theme of 1 Cor 11:2-16 is related to the theme of the entire letter. Although Fee does not offer one central theme for 1 Corinthians as a whole, he highlights three theological emphases of the letter: eschatology as both an "already" and a "not yet"; the gospel as inherently leading to a certain type of ethical life; and the nature of the church as both countercultural and a unified body that necessarily includes healthy diversity.<sup>66</sup> Although Garland characterizes 1 Corinthians as a warning from Paul concerning *various* problems to which the Corinthians are susceptible, the first of the problems Garland lists is, notably, division into factions.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 805.

<sup>62</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, vol. 7 of Sacra Pagina Series, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 404.

<sup>63</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 262-63.

<sup>64</sup> Witherington, 236.

<sup>65</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, 227.

<sup>66</sup> Fee, 16-19.

<sup>67</sup> Garland, 20-21.



Other scholars are more direct in asserting that unity is the central focus of the letter. Collins understands the purpose of 1 Corinthians to be an appeal to unity for a community that has found itself divided into factions.<sup>68</sup> In recent years Thiselton has revised his earliest claim about the central issue in 1 Corinthians from an emphasis on over-realized eschatology to an emphasis on a value and status system that magnifies respect for the other over self-promotion.<sup>69</sup> Dale B. Martin, drawing from Mitchell's argument that 1 Corinthians can be categorized as deliberative rhetoric, asserts that the *prothesis* of the letter is found in 1:10. This theme is explicitly and implicitly carried out throughout the letter in Paul's comments to the Corinthians, and the unity to which Paul exhorts the Corinthians is founded in the concept that they are one body, *Christ's* body.<sup>70</sup>

How, then, does 1 Cor 11:2-16 function within the letter? Hjort divides 1 Corinthians into six sections: introduction (1:1-9); dealings with divisions in the church (1:10-4:21); dealings with moral issues within the church (5:1-6:20); responses to the various questions (7:1-14:40); discussion of the resurrection (15:1-58); and postscript (16:1-24). Hjort, who argues that 1 Cor 11:2-16 is a continuation of the discussion on idols from 1 Cor 8-10, holds that the major emphasis in Paul's warnings against idols is the concern for others and therefore the health and unity of the *one body* of believers.<sup>71</sup>

John Ruef asserts that 1 Cor 11:2-16 begins a shift in focus away from Christian attitudes concerning pagan worship (1 Cor 8-10) to appropriate behavior and mindsets in Christian worship (beginning in 1 Cor 11).<sup>72</sup> Mitchell also holds that 11:2-16 marks the

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<sup>68</sup> Collins, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: The University Press, 1995), 38-39. See also Mitchell, 20-64.

<sup>71</sup> Hjort, 60-63.

<sup>72</sup> John Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries, ed. D. E. Nineham (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 107.

transition from a focus on the Corinthian congregation as it relates to outsiders toward a focus on the Corinthians Christians' gatherings. Mitchell outlines the letter according to deliberative rhetoric and specifies four sections of proof against factionalism: (1) 1:18-4:21, the first discussion of factionalism, a metaphor for building toward harmony, and an appeal to Paul's example; (2) 5:1-11:1, internal community integrity in relation to outsiders; (3) 11:2-14:40, internal community integrity in relation to church gatherings; and (4) 15:1-57, a look at resurrection as the end goal.<sup>73</sup> Mitchell maintains that the entire letter consists of *topoi* and language against factionalism and for church unity.<sup>74</sup>

### **Moving Forward**

In chapters 3-6 my argument follows in large part the basic progression of the material presented herein. I begin with a discussion of Greco-Roman honor and shame, including a look at head attire and adornment as it relates to the topic. Next, I move into Paul's perspective on honor and shame as the topic relates to cultural values, gospel values, and the intersection of the two. Then, I turn to 1 Cor 11:2-16 itself and argue that Paul uses notions of honor and shame to appeal for unity in the Corinthian congregation. Finally, I use the theme of 1 Corinthians, which is also unity, to demonstrate how Paul's appeal for unity in 11:2-16 fits into the message and flow of the letter. In that my purpose throughout this work is to show that in 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul is exhorting the Corinthians to unity by utilizing a "gospelized" interpretation of honor and shame, I develop my argument out of the material that is relevant to it.

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<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, 184-85.

<sup>74</sup> Mitchell, 65-67, 296-97.

## Chapter 3

### Honor, Shame, and Head Adornment in the Greco-Roman World

Since the mid-twentieth century, social science and biblical scholarship have taken an interest in the concepts of honor and shame as they pertain to the Mediterranean world, past and present. Much has been asserted, and, from the work done in both fields, Bruce Malina constructed a model for biblical scholarship that is still being used today, even if the model has not gone without valid criticisms and revisions. What follows is a summary of the original emphases in Mediterranean honor/shame research, an overview of Greco-Roman honor/shame that takes into account Malina's model and refinements of it, and a final emphasis on honor and shame in relation to head coverings and adornment for both men and women. Understanding how honor and shame impacted Greco-Roman life in Paul's day and taking note of the ways this played out in relation to head coverings or adornment will shed light on the language and logic Paul uses in 1 Cor 11:2-16.

#### A Conversation Starter

In 1966 John Peristiany edited a work entitled *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*. It is a collection of studies done on six different Mediterranean societies, especially as those societies seem to be fundamentally concerned with the evaluative concepts of honor and shame.<sup>1</sup> Peristiany's work is one of the earliest of its kind.<sup>2</sup> Peristiany himself asserts that this collaborative effort to show honor and shame as

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<sup>1</sup> John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> So see Carolyn Osiek, "Women, Honor, and Context in Mediterranean Antiquity," *HTS* 64 (2008): 323-37; see 326.

centrally part of Mediterranean thinking is the most persuasive to date.<sup>3</sup> In his comments on and conclusions from the studies, Peristiany by no means claims that honor and shame are important concepts *only* in Mediterranean societies; instead, he calls them “universal aspects of social evaluations,” something all societies have. That being said, among Mediterranean societies there is a *common* and *constant* concern with honor and shame as values that are used to evaluate behavior of oneself and one’s peers.<sup>4</sup>

The smallest units within such societies, families or clans, experience a sense of internal stability. Individuals’ roles within these family/clan units are distinct and established. In the broader society, however, individuals always have to vie for honor, assert it, and prove to be worthy of keeping it. Typically, an individual represents the larger groups of which s/he is part, be it a family, clan, or ethnic group. Honor is all too easily lost if that person does not guard it according to the evaluative standards of the public. This places significant power in the hands of the public, and an individual’s participation in this system acknowledges that power.<sup>5</sup>

One of the most widely cited contributions to Peristiany’s work is the study done by Julian Pitt-Rivers, who carefully articulates honor and shame, especially as related to the Andalusian society of Spain. Honor is “the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgment of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to

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<sup>3</sup> Peristiany, “Introduction,” in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 7-18; see 9. This claim was made, of course, almost sixty years ago, but Peristiany’s work is still significant today. It marks the beginning of a half-century’s worth of study, conversation, and debate on the topic. Pertinent conversation, exploration, and debate have developed into tangentially related topics; conversation has not ceased and will likely not do so anytime soon.

<sup>4</sup> Peristiany, “Introduction,” in *Honor and Shame*, 11, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Peristiany, “Introduction,” in *Honor and Shame*, 11. It is possible for someone to be only self-representing if that person has accomplished some sort of distinct personality.

pride.”<sup>6</sup> Honor reflects not only how a person behaves in order to comply with societal standards, but also the status and respectful treatment accorded that person in return for such patterns of behavior.<sup>7</sup> Another word to describe it is esteem. In one sense, shame is synonymous with honor and can be called *honor-shame*. Shame is “a concern for repute, both as a sentiment and also as the public recognition of that sentiment.”<sup>8</sup> When a person is of good repute, that person *has* both honor and shame. When a person is of bad repute, that person *lacks* both honor and shame. In their realm of synonymy, these concepts reflect virtue. Having honor and shame reveals a person to be of high moral standard.<sup>9</sup>

In Pitt-Rivers’s description, shame can also carry a negative connotation. Shame can be given to an individual and received by him or her. Shame is really only possible in regard to repute, because to be given shame, and so to accept it, requires a person to recognize the need for it. To be shamed is to be humiliated and to lose one’s honor. This necessarily indicates that shame was previously absent. If the individual already possessed shame, s/he would not have faced humiliation because s/he would have already

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<sup>6</sup> Julian Alfred Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 19-77; see 21.

<sup>7</sup> Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” in *Honor and Shame*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” in *Honor and Shame*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” in *Honor and Shame*, 42-43. According to Pitt-Rivers, the meanings of *honor* and *shame* go further. There is another sense in which these terms are connected explicitly with gender; honor is paired with males and shame with females. In these expressions honor and shame become disconnected from virtue and are connected merely with behaviors appropriate to roles. Pitt-Rivers understands them as opposites, for the very behavior of one sex becomes taboo for the other. For men, honor becomes seeking precedence and insulting other men. For women, shame becomes a sense of timidity and blushing. It is inappropriate for a man to blush, so blushing leads to being ridiculed. Likewise, it is inappropriate for a woman to become physically abrasive, domineering, or sexually liberal; such behaviors are incompatible with her shame. It should be noted that, while certain behaviors might be seen as inappropriate for women, this does not mean that women cannot receive honor. Studies done concerning the contemporary world of West Bank Palestine show that the very behaviors Pitt-Rivers associates with a woman’s shame are understood to bring her honor. For instance, a female’s sexual comportment may affect or reflect the honor of her male family members, but it also impacts her own honor. Honor can accrue to women who are “obedient daughters, accommodating sisters, supportive wives, reliable and devoted mothers, good housekeepers and cooks, reasonable (though the bar for women is much lower . . .), and hospitable.” See Diane Baxter, “Honor Thy Sister: Selfhood, Gender, and Agency in Palestinian Culture,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 80 (2007): 737-75; see 748.

had an appropriate concern for reputation. Therefore, to be given shame is to be dishonored and is, in a very important way, a public action.<sup>10</sup> It makes little sense for an individual to be given shame by and in front of no one, or even to be given shame privately by an individual. Shame, like honor, is linked to reputation.

Pitt-Rivers offers a key summarization of positive honor and negative shame.

*Vergüenza* is the term Pitt-Rivers translates as *shame*:

Honour is the aspiration to status and the validation of status, while *vergüenza*, opposed to honour, is the restraint of such an aspiration (timidity) and also the recognition of the loss of status. Thus, just as honour is at the same time honour felt, honour claimed, and honour paid, so *vergüenza* is dishonour imposed, accepted and finally felt. Honour originates in the individual breast and comes to triumph in the social realm, *vergüenza* in this sense originates in the actions of others as the denial of honour, and is borne home in the individual. The concepts of honour and shame are therefore either, according to context, synonymous as virtue or contraries as precedence or humiliation.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, to be shamed might entail humiliation, and humiliation might be undesirable, but in the eyes of the public there is something even worse than being shamed: being *shameless*. Shamelessness is the refusal to accept or feel shame for one's behavior. Therefore, a shameless person repeatedly engages in actions and behaviors that are dishonorable and permanently loses any regard from the public. These people are considered amoral *and* actually are amoral, since they refuse to participate in the social definitions of right and wrong. It is in this sense that these people cannot be shamed; they refuse to be shamed into changing their behavior, even as they accept the mistreatment given to them for their behavior. These people are completely dishonorable.<sup>12</sup>

In his descriptions of honor and shame as they are distinct and interrelated, Pitt-Rivers is specifically describing the cultural values of twentieth-century Andalusia. He

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<sup>10</sup> Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honor and Shame*, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honor and Shame*, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honor and Shame*, 41.

does not claim to be describing worldwide concepts of honor and shame (although Peristiany's work as a whole is aiming to describe honor and shame across the Mediterranean), nor does he claim to be describing timeless concepts of honor and shame. Nevertheless, Pitt-Rivers's research has been used as a model for studying Mediterranean cultures of the past, especially in the field of biblical scholarship. It is to that topic we now turn.

### **Greco-Roman Honor and Shame**

Today, many scholars understand that honor not only is a centrally significant concept in current Mediterranean societies but also was a pivotal value in the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>13</sup> Honor was considered so important that it was preferable over wealth or, at times, even life.<sup>14</sup> Although the details of how honor and shame functioned are worth debating and examining,<sup>15</sup> research done by scholars has sufficiently shown that honor and shame were then and are now pivotal values in the Mediterranean.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of family, Loss of Honor: The Cultural Context of the Original Makarisms in Q," in *The Social World of the New Testament: Insights and Models*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey and Eric C. Stewart (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 87-102; see 88.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Osiek, *What Are They Saying about the Social Setting of the New Testament?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 27.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Rosemary J. Coombe, "Barren Ground: Re-Conceiving Honour and Shame in the Field of Mediterranean Ethnography," *Anthropologica* 32 (1990): 221-38; see 234-35. Coombe evaluates the work done in Mediterranean anthropology in general. She criticizes the oversimplified and static understanding of honor/shame, especially when honor and shame have been talked about as if they are the only values of Mediterranean culture. E.g., see Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press), 30, "Nearly every interaction with non-family members has undertones of a challenge to honor." Coombe believes that the more established, traditional tendencies of these societies (as they pertain to honor/shame) should be held in balance with the changing nature of culture. She also believes that the values of honor and shame should be examined closely within specific cultures. Surely concerns like those of Coombe are valid and should be kept in mind when studying honor and shame. Such concerns do not mean, however, that general statements cannot be made about the ways in which honor and shame affect and have affected Mediterranean culture. Indeed, the models developed will not be completely encompassing of all circumstances but will reflect tendencies.

<sup>16</sup> Zeba A. Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009): 591-611; see 591. Among those Crook cites as having established this claim are Carlin Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 13; Peregrine

Malina has constructed a model of honor and shame for first-century Greco-Roman culture based on work done by Pitt-Rivers. Certain aspects of Malina's model have survived criticisms and offer valuable insights for understanding Mediterranean culture, especially as honor and shame played out in the Greco-Roman world of the first century and, consequently, in the New Testament world. Malina's model and its use by other biblical scholars create potential for significant breakthroughs in understanding and interpreting biblical material. That being said, Malina's model has not gone unchallenged, nor should it stand completely unrevised. The following explanation of Greco-Roman honor and shame takes into account Malina's model as well as the criticisms and changes scholarship has since offered.

In social constructions humans draw imagined lines that create appropriate boundaries for people, things, and events. These lines serve to show when the person, thing, or event in question is out of place or is in its socially acceptable and designated place. There were three sets of boundaries in the first century Greco-Roman world that contributed to evaluations of honor: those of "power, sexual status, and religion," because, "where they come together, what they mark off, is something called *honor*."<sup>17</sup> Power refers to the ability to control others through authority or sway. A person who was able to ascertain obedience effectively from subordinates had honor that was recognized by the wider society. Sexual status refers to the roles and expected treatment of males and females. When a person fulfilled his or her gender-designated role, that person gained the approval of the public and was recognized as having gender-related honor. Religion is

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Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Ina-Maria Greverus, Regina Römheld, and Gisela Welz, eds., *The Mediterraneans: Reworking the Past, Shaping the Present, Considering the Future*, Anthropological Journal of European Cultures 10 (Münster: Lit, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 26.



about behavioral expectations enforced by society but perceived as being ultimately determined by that society's God/gods.<sup>18</sup>

To be more precise, first-century Greco-Roman honor was the “socially proper attitudes and behavior” in the intersection of these three boundaries. Malina's description of honor reiterates those notions put forth by Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers:

Honor is the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) *plus* that person's value in the eyes of his or her social group. Honor is a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgment of worth. Society shares the sets of meanings and feelings bound up in the symbols of power, sexual status, and religion. . . . When you lay claim to a certain status as embodied by your power and in your sexual role, you are claiming honor.<sup>19</sup>

Again, talking about honor is a way of talking about the value of an individual as perceived by the public. That being said, it must be remembered that the individual is sharing in the honor the public assigns to the particular groups of which that individual is a part. When a person earns honor, it is earned for some group.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, when a person makes a claim to honor, that honor is not considered real until the public has validated it.<sup>21</sup> A person who *has honor*, then, has “publically acknowledged worth,” and

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<sup>18</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> See Malina, *The New Testament World*, 27, 45-46. Malina's model goes on to suggest that certain behaviors equal honor. Contra Malina, honor is something that is *gained through* socially appropriate behaviors, not something equated with them. Honor is best understood as an ideology, something that is “a set of expectations about the appropriate ways for men and women to ‘be’ in the world. Being honorable means demonstrating (at least partial) abidance to what I broadly believed to be the moral/ethical/right mode of living.” See Baxter, 746. Baxter is arguing for honor as it is understood in contemporary West Bank Palestine, but the definition she gives for honor coincides with the honor of the Greco-Roman world as we come to a better understanding of it in its complexity.

<sup>20</sup> So see Bruce J. Malina, “Honor/Shame,” in *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, ed. John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 106-15; see 107. Honor assigned to an individual, then, should not be understood as a reflection of an *individualistic* society, as the 1<sup>st</sup> century Mediterranean world was collectivistic. See also Bruce J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 19-20. The social systems of the first-century Greco-Roman world favor the good of the group over that of the individual and even closely connect the identity of individuals with the group itself.

<sup>21</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 28.

when a person *is honored* that person is either given worth by the public or recognized for already established worth.<sup>22</sup>

### Ways to Receive Honor

Broadly speaking, in the first-century Mediterranean region, people received honor in one of two ways: it was either *attributed* to them or *distributed* to them.<sup>23</sup>

Attributed honor was unearned by a person's behavior or success. Honor could be attributed to someone simply for being born into a particular family or ethnic group or in relation to one's sex. Such prestige was generally received at birth.<sup>24</sup> Inasmuch as this honor was based on lineage and other factors not easily changeable, attributed honor tended to be secure. It could be lost, but not easily.<sup>25</sup>

If a family's honor were based on wealth, it would be displayed through adornment and dining practices. Although at that time wealth was rooted in land,<sup>26</sup> wealth was often put on display by the wearing of jewelry. For men such displays included signet rings; for women it included bracelets, pendants, hairpieces, and earrings.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Malina, "Honor/Shame," in *Handbook*, 106-7.

<sup>23</sup> See Crook, 610. Crook has coined the terms *attributed honor* and *distributed honor*, which are adaptations of the terms *ascribed honor* and *acquired honor*. Malina popularized the terms *ascribed honor* and *acquired honor*. See Malina, *The New Testament World*, 29. Crook's terminology more clearly emphasizes the limited nature of honor and the social nature of honor. As for the social nature of honor, the public court of reputation (PCR) played a significant role in assigning honor. The collectivistic nature of Mediterranean society gave emphasis and primacy to the group's perception of the individual over the individual's perception of him or herself. Halvor Moxnes explains that honor, though "an inner quality, [that is,] the value of a person in his or her own eyes," was ultimately dependent upon the willingness of the group to affirm or deny it. See Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 23 (1993): 167-76; see 168. Likewise, Malina describes honor as one's self-perception of worth *combined* with the amount of worth others perceived him or her to have. See Malina, *The New Testament World*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 29. Not surprisingly, males received more honor at birth.

<sup>25</sup> Osiek, *What Are They Saying*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of family, Loss of Honor," in *The Social World of the New Testament*, 88-89.

<sup>27</sup> Alicia J. Batten, "Clothing and Adornment," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 40, no. 3 (August 2010): 148-59; see 154.

Although the father or another family member from an earlier generation might have earned the wealth, other members of the family, especially sons, shared in the family's honor.<sup>28</sup> Attributed honor could also be based on the earned reputation of earlier generations; this was the honor generally associated with clan or even ethnicity.<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned above, one key way attributed honor was maintained was through the cooperation of an individual with the socially expected roles he or she fulfilled. The contingency of attributed honor on conformity to social expectation was true in general, but it was particularly true as attributed honor related to sex and gender roles.<sup>30</sup>

Attributed honor, being derived from a group (family, clan) or an individual's expected role in a group, also impacted the groups to which that individual belonged. When one member of a family lost honor, the whole family did.<sup>31</sup>

Malina speaks of honor as it relates to males and females, but only in a collective sense. Once one moves past the areas of "common humanity," into one's "daily concrete behavior," honor is no longer common to both sexes. At this point, Malina holds that honor is something exclusive to males, and that males are representative of honor itself; likewise, positive shame is something exclusive to females, and females are representative of shame.<sup>32</sup> Women could embody honor, however. In fact, fulfilling

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<sup>28</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 37C of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Neyrey, "Loss of Wealth, Loss of Family, Loss of Honor," in *The Social World of the New Testament*, 89-90.

<sup>30</sup> See Malina, *The New Testament World*, 42-43. A man proved himself an honorable man through "manliness, courage, authority over family, willingness to defend one's reputation, and refusal to submit to humiliation." A woman generally showed herself to be honorable through "female sexual exclusiveness, discretion, shyness, restraint, and timidity." A highly important aspect of this was the female's commitment to her chastity and the male's responsibility to protect her chastity. If the female remained chaste, the male and the female retained their honor, and each was understood to have fulfilled his/her respective role.

<sup>31</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 45-46. Malina's model is inconsistent on this point, however; that is, the same characteristics he uses to describe a female's honor, Malina later clarifies to be

expected female gender roles *was* a key way women actually embodied honor, not merely represented it on an abstract level.<sup>33</sup> Women may have typically been expected to fulfill different roles than men and even may have been expected by many to stay in the private sphere, but it was neither unheard of nor a mere anomaly for a woman to be praised, or honored, for meeting such expectations.<sup>34</sup>

While attributed honor tended to be inherited, *distributed honor* was earned honor.<sup>35</sup> People earned this honor through great achievements or acts of benefaction,

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her positive shame. So see Malina, *The New Testament World*, 43, 45. If Malina is asserting that a woman cannot actually have honor and in no way embodies it even in the explicitly female role she assumes in society, then he is defining honor incorrectly. And if Malina is not asserting this, his model is unclear. Cf. Unni Wikan, "Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair," *Man* 19 (1984): 635-52; see 639. Responding to Malina's model but examining more modern Mediterranean societies, Wikan argues that women, too, can embody honor.

<sup>33</sup> Women were considered to have more value, and thus more honor, as they were able to accomplish what was expected of them. Such expectations included childbearing, maintaining sexual purity before and during marriage, and fulfilling general duties of wife and mother. Of these and other socially expected behaviors, the most valued behavior for females was chastity. Plautus's character Alcmena in the play *Amphitryon* is a representation of the Roman attitude toward female chastity: "Personally I do not feel that my dowry is that which people call a dowry, but purity and honour and self-control, fear of God, love of parents, and affection for my family, and being a dutiful wife to you, sir, lavish of loving-kindness and helpful through honest service. (*Amphitryon* II.839-842)" So see Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 80-81. See also Bonnie Thurston, *Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 24. A woman's honor was closely connected to her purity and self-control; as she lived out the societal expectation of chastity, she gained and maintained honor. Poor and wealthy women alike were praised on their tombstones for upholding family duties and for only being married once. See again, Stagg and Stagg, 96-98. Even Ovid, who tends to focus on the maintenance of women's physical beauty, speaks about the comportment of women as something that ought to ultimately serve to laud them, saying, "Think first, ye women, to look to your behaviour. The face pleases when character commends." In describing Ovid's *The Heroides*, Stagg and Stagg comment on its reflection of the lives of Roman women: The work does reflect significant attitudes, status, and behavior patterns relating to women. There is some familiar stereotype of both sexes, traces of a double standard, and also strong evidence for considerable freedom and influence enjoyed by woman. In all these poems woman's normal role is seen as being that of lover or wife. She is for the most part self-respectful, self-reliant, often seizing the initiative in her own affairs, and both bold and articulate in speaking out for herself. What is significant about this is that the literature about women builds up the public view of them inasmuch as they are fulfilling these standard roles and even doing so with a strong presence.

<sup>34</sup> To be sure, there was not undivided agreement on this. E.g., Jerome H. Neyrey, "What's Wrong with This Picture? John 4, Cultural Stereotypes of Women, and Public and Private Space," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 24 (1994): 77-91; see 81. While Plutarch wrote that a woman should be known for her fame and should be praised at her death, during her life he believed even her character ought not be known outside the home.

<sup>35</sup> Crook, 610; Malina, *The New Testament World*, 29-30. Again, the term "distributed honor" reiterates the active participation and power of the public sphere in determining winners and losers. Whereas the public sphere was willing to give out some amount of honor to the individual at birth, the

although many lived without opportunity ever to achieve anything great.<sup>36</sup> Far more often people earned or lost honor on a daily basis through something resembling an honor “transaction.” These transactions amounted to a social game of sorts, in which people vied for each other’s honor.<sup>37</sup>

The key element of this game was that one individual or group always issued a challenge for honor to another in a public setting. The Greco-Roman world viewed honor as a limited good, so the challenger was either aiming to gain a “share” of the opponent’s social space, a form of social networking, or to oust the opponent from a “space” of honor and replace the opponent in it. The former would be issued through the giving of a gift or compliment, the latter could entail insult or attack.<sup>38</sup> Most competitions had displacement rather than honor-sharing as their aim.<sup>39</sup> Honor challenges were zero-sum. They always had a winner and a loser; the winner would acquire the honor taken from the loser, and the loser would be deprived of some amount of honor, either through honor-sharing or by being demoted in the public perception for failing to defend honor appropriately.<sup>40</sup> People could vie for honor through various avenues and means, some

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power of the group to recognize honor meant that even this attributed honor could be trumped. The PCR could be influenced by the participants’ attributed honor but could also choose to ignore attributed honor if the interaction of the “underdog” was impressive enough.

<sup>36</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 4-5.

<sup>37</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 29. The consequences, however, could and did far surpass those of a mere game. See also S. Scott Bartchy, “The Historical Jesus and Honor Reversal at the Table,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 175-83; see 178. To participate in honor challenges was both a responsibility and an expectation for adults as a means of earning more honor for themselves and their families. Thus, these honor transactions were prevalent in the Greco-Roman world.

<sup>38</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 29-30. It was also possible for these honor challenges to take place between groups.

<sup>39</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 217.

<sup>40</sup> Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 5. Winning and losing honor challenges would have likely affected one’s family since the honor of one person also related to the whole family’s honor. Of course, not just any insignificant contest of honor would destroy an individual and family’s reputation in the community. There seems to have been a certain amount of leeway before one’s standing (and therefore the standing of the family) was seriously damaged, either in the frequency of the shaming or in its intensity. Peristiany notes

formal and some informal.<sup>41</sup> Informal honor/shame transactions were prevalent, since they could occur simply through a conversation in which a statement or action sought to provoke a response from another in order to humiliate that person.<sup>42</sup> Certainly, these challenges to honor were intended to demote another person and promote oneself.<sup>43</sup>

Malina holds that these transactions could only take place between males who were social equals; while a challenge from an unequal might be issued by someone of higher or lower status, it should not be accepted because of inequality.<sup>44</sup> To the contrary, honor transactions could occur between people of unequal status, and females could publically vie for honor. Examples of competitions between unequals appear in the NT gospels when Jesus, who either by historical standards ranks lower than some of his opponents or by literary standards outranks them, is judged by crowds as he enters into discussions with scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, among others.<sup>45</sup> Cassius Dio considered it a virtue to forgive an offense from a person of higher status and a folly to forgive one from someone of lower status. If honor challenges could only take place

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this leeway in his descriptions of modern Mediterranean culture. Members of society who uphold the most important aspects of honor will be forgiven for any number of smaller grievances without losing their overall societal standing. So see Peristiany, "Introduction," *Honor and Shame*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Jewett, "Paul, Shame, and Honor," in *Paul in Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 551-74; see 552. Formal competitions included the areas of "education, oratory, politics, poetry, music, athletics, and war."

<sup>42</sup> Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, 217.

<sup>43</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 30. Honor transactions often took place through a "challenge and riposte" process. See Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," *BTB*, 168. Malina outlines three steps to this process: (1) challenger issues a challenge; (2) public and opponent recognize that a challenge has been issued; (3) opponent responds and public decides on a winner. Malina, *The New Testament World*, 30. Cf. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 5. Neyrey outlines four basic steps to the process: "(1) claim to honor or precedence, (2) challenge, (3) riposte of the challenge, and (4) public verdict." The differences between the two lists are noteworthy but do not reflect fundamentally different understandings of the process.

<sup>44</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 30-32.

<sup>45</sup> Crook, 601-2. While not every conflict occurring between persons of differing status was necessarily a status exchange, some certainly were. See also, F. Gerald Downing, "'Honor' among Exegetes," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 53-73; see 61. Also, Jesus and his disciples, who are of differing statuses, have conversations that follow the challenge and riposte structure (so see Matt 14:13-21).

between social equals, attacks on one's honor from someone of a lower social status would not be threatening. Cassius Dio's perspective indicates the contrary, however.<sup>46</sup>

There are also multiple examples as evidence that women vied publically for honor. Plutarch writes of Peiria of Myus and Polycrite of Naxos, both women who showed bravery and loyalty to their states and were in turn publicly honored. Then there was Aretaphila, who freed her people and was subsequently offered various honors and praises and then was offered a government position. Aretaphila declined in order to remain in her private home. Perhaps Aretaphila preferred the private life and may have even thought it more suitable for a woman, but her people apparently had no qualms with instating her as a leader.<sup>47</sup> As Crook summarizes, "women *did* participate in public life, *did* compete for honor, *could* have greater honor than their husbands, *did* act as benefactors, and *were* given crowns, statues, and seats of honor."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Crook, 600. See also Ramsay MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 194. To ignore an insult from someone of lower status meant that "you lost face. That was serious. You became Nothing—as even an emperor might."

<sup>47</sup> Crook, 605-6. There are several other examples of women who participated in public life, defended themselves or others in court, were aggressive, and competed for honor with males. In the records of these instances, the male writers who mention the events are not always in support of the females' actions. For example, Valerius Maximus writes about three women who spoke in court to defend themselves or others. Of one (Maisea), he has both words of commendation and contempt; of the second (Carfania), he has even stronger condemnation; of the third (Hortensis), he has words of praise that are accompanied by words of dishonor for her brothers. For women to take on such key public roles, then, may not have been absolutely standard or noncontroversial, but neither was it always completely unacceptable. Literary examples of women who publically vied for honor include *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, in which Thecla publicly shames the aristocrat Alexander, and the biblical story of the Syrophonecian woman who challenges Jesus to heal her daughter. The multitude of examples shows that Malina's model contains a disconnect between the ideal and reality. There may have been traditional societal limitations on female behavior, but it was clearly possible for women to vie for public honor through actions and qualities Malina reserves exclusively for men. These women were often *not* considered to be deviants but instead were praised and honored for their behavior. Cf. Downing, 58; Thurston, 19-22. Downing and Thurston provide additional examples of women who were able to take office, acquire wealth, be granted citizenship, or become prominent members of society. Thurston does point out that in Roman society these achievements were probably available mostly for elite women.

<sup>48</sup> Crook, 609.

## Shame

While honor is a person's value, related to and reflective of a group, as perceived by that person and by the group, Malina most clearly defines positive shame as concern for reputation.<sup>49</sup> A person's loss of an honor challenge led to his or her dishonor, which is also referred to as (negative) shame. More specifically, someone who lost honor in one of these interactions was *shamed*.<sup>50</sup> Someone who was shamed had publically made a claim to worth and had subsequently been denied that honor by the PCR.<sup>51</sup>

There were also other ways of being shamed that could happen to men or women. Someone could be shamed when s/he was publicly degraded,<sup>52</sup> did not fulfill a socially designated role—often as that role pertained to the others in his family (e.g., obedience from children and faithfulness/chastity from wife),<sup>53</sup> or, for females, failed to protect sexual exclusiveness.<sup>54</sup> Again, being shamed was negative for both genders and implied something very important: in these situations the person in question did not already have shame. Here, shame itself was something positive, but that it was lacking was quite negative; after all, persons should already possess a sense of shame and should not have

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<sup>49</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 44-45.

<sup>50</sup> Malina, "Honor/Shame," in *Handbook*, 107. See also Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude*, 6. Cf. Malina, *The New Testament World*, 46. Here Malina refers to it as "getting shamed." See also, Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, ed. Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 19-40; see 21. Moxnes refers to it as "experiencing shame." Finally, it is also possible to talk about it as being given shame. See Malina, *The New Testament World*, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Malina, "Honor/Shame," in *Handbook*, 107.

<sup>52</sup> One extreme example of shaming someone would have been crucifixion. Crucifixion included several steps, all intended to bring shame upon the condemned: public trials as means of status degradation, flogging and torture, confiscation of clothing, public denuding, mutilation and physical loss of power, mocking, and refusal of burial. So see Jerome H. Neyrey, "Despising the Shame of the Cross: Honor and Shame in the Johannine Passion Narrative," *Semeia* 68 (1994): 113-37; see 113-14. In the Greco-Roman world, suffering and death could either bring honor *or* shame to a person, family, or group depending on the particular circumstances. For instance, warriors who endured suffering were seen as courageous, and those who underwent torture in silence earned honor. Such prestige may have only accompanied those in the warrior class, but, even if so, suffering was not indiscriminately interpreted as shameful.

<sup>53</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 46, 27-28.

<sup>54</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 40.



to be given it.<sup>55</sup> For a person to be truly shamed, s/he had to acknowledge being shamed. The recognition of being shamed was what caused a person to *feel* shame.<sup>56</sup>

### Honor Precedence or Honor Virtue?

Although it is assumed above that there is only one honor and different ways of receiving it, Pitt-Rivers and, later, Lawrence have explicitly argued that there are actually two different kinds of honor in the Mediterranean world. The first is honor as precedence and includes attributed and distributed honor, and the second is honor as virtue.<sup>57</sup> As Lawrence explains, honor precedence is that honor which is received or validated through societal systems of evaluation. On the other hand, honor virtue “concentrates on the state of the individual conscience and relates to intentions rather than objective consequences. . . . [It is] gained before one’s own inner being or before an omniscient divine figure, from whom nothing can be hidden and in whose eyes honor is ultimately vindicated.”<sup>58</sup>

Lawrence holds that honor virtue has been largely overlooked in treatments of honor and shame in the Mediterranean world. She provides examples of it in Jewish

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<sup>55</sup> Malina holds that shame was also something that could be exclusive to women. Just like honor on the concrete level belonged only to men, shame, says Malina, belonged only to women. The specific characteristics of female shame, which Malina deems irretrievable once lost, are: sexual exclusivity; “submission to authority; unwillingness to risk; . . . shyness; deference; passivity; timid[ity]; restraint.” Malina, *The New Testament World*, 48, 45. As with honor, Malina goes wrong with shame when he equates shame with a woman’s concrete behaviors and asserts that it is something only she can embody. To have shame, for either gender, meant to be concerned with protecting the honor of oneself and one’s family members. This might have been generally lived out through different behaviors, but it is the same overarching principle nonetheless.

<sup>56</sup> Malina, *The New Testament World*, 46. Failure to recognize and accept the shame equals shamelessness, as Pitt-Rivers also contends (see above). Here again, Malina’s explanation of the different nuances of shame closely resembles that of Pitt-Rivers concerning the Andalusian society in Spain. Unlike Pitt-Rivers, Malina does not claim that honor and shame are *synonymous*, but he understands them to be closely related.

<sup>57</sup> Julian Alfred Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem: or The Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 14-15. See also Pitt-Rivers, “Honor and Social Status,” in *Honor and Shame*, 42.

<sup>58</sup> Louise Joy Lawrence, “‘For Truly, I Tell You, They Have Received Their Reward’ (Matt 6:2): Investigating Honor Precedence and Honor Virtue,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64 (2002): 687-702; see 690.

tradition, from Old Testament scriptures to the writings of Josephus and Philo. These writings reflect a sentiment that shows honor being earned not from a public court of opinion but from a divine court, that is, not from honor precedence but from honor virtue.<sup>59</sup> Moving into the Greco-Roman world of Jesus and his followers, Lawrence traces this idea of honor virtue, claiming that it permeates interactions between Jesus and society as portrayed in the Gospel of Matthew. This sentiment is evident, for instance, in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus discourages hostile and competitive treatment of others and encourages an altruistic disposition.<sup>60</sup> Also in Matthew, Jesus repeatedly critiques hypocrites, those who are "play-acting" certain ways of life in order to gain honor from society. The implication is that people should look only to God for honor. In fact, looking to society for honor and prestige actually dishonors God. According to Lawrence, what Jesus promotes is honor virtue instead of honor precedence.<sup>61</sup>

Lawrence and Pitt-Rivers still only describe one concept of honor, however, not two. There is a shift in focus from outward acts to inward dispositions, but this is because Jewish tradition, Jesus, and NT writers are making the claim that it is not society but God who determines a person's honor. Unlike society, God understands inward motives. Furthermore, those who look to God for honor become critics of the ways in which society strives to receive honor. Therefore, they participate in an altered version of the honor and shame paradigm. Crook explains this altered paradigm, characterized by the shift in the identity of the public court of reputation away from society to something else:

Cynics shift the PCR toward God and their community, which knows the truth about human enslavement to convention. Judeans all over the Mediterranean shift the PCR toward God and Torah, while Jesus followers shift it toward God and

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<sup>59</sup> Lawrence, 692-94.

<sup>60</sup> Lawrence, 699.

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence, 700-2. See, e.g., Matt 7:5; 15:7; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 23, 27, 29, 51.

Jesus. But they all participate in a *contest* over what comprises truly honorable and truly shameful behavior; their claims to virtue are fully embedded within an agonistic system of Honor Precedence.<sup>62</sup>

What Lawrence and Pitt-Rivers describe is honor precedence with a new audience. For Christians this audience is the God revealed in Jesus. True honor comes from God.

## Head Adornment and Honor/Shame

### For Men

In the Roman world, contra the Greek world, clothing was symbolic of one's social rank, therefore reflecting personal or corporate honor. Oster asserts, in speaking of sacred and mundane settings, "The Greeks' self-identity arose more from their speech and education, while a Roman often distinguished himself by what he wore."<sup>63</sup> Although purposes for head coverings were sometimes just as practical (guarding against weather, hiding one's face from looming death) as they were symbolic (showing respect and subservience, aiding in religious expression), the coverings often connoted honor.<sup>64</sup>

Evidence abounds for "widespread" Roman use of liturgical head coverings on males.<sup>65</sup> Men were often portrayed wearing head coverings at sacrifices if they were

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<sup>62</sup> Crook, 598.

<sup>63</sup> Richard E. Oster, "When Men Wore Veils to Worship: The Historical Context of 1 Corinthians 11:4," *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 481-505; see 493-94. Although Oster mentions that apparel was significant in both sacred and mundane settings, he focuses mainly on the worship setting. But cf. Mark Finney, "Honour, Head-Coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 in its Social Context," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (2010): 31-58; see 35. Head attired did not always reflect status in mundane public settings, in which men of differing statuses would wear the toga partially over their ears.

<sup>64</sup> Oster, "When Men Wore Veils to Worship," 495. See also Craig S. Keener *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 25-26. Another purpose for covering one's head was mourning. Evidence suggests that mourning women wore head coverings, although in the funeral procession it was sons who covered their heads while the daughters uncovered theirs.

<sup>65</sup> Richard E. Oster, "Use, Misuse and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 7,1-5, 8,10, 11,2-16, 12,14-26)," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 83 (1992): 52-73; see 67-69. Oster does not comment on the status of the men portrayed wearing head coverings.

taking an active role in the sacrifice. This role in the ritual setting was reserved mainly for priests, who tended to come from among the socially elite. David W. J. Gill argues that the wearing of the toga was associated both with the typical status of those men who became priests and with the exclusive role of priests in the religious setting. It served as a key marker of this status and exclusivity, a display of honor.<sup>66</sup> In certain situations laypeople could perform priestly duties, and while doing so they too would wear *capite velato*, a garment or part of a garment that would be pulled up to cover the back of the head and the ears.<sup>67</sup> Although those pictured wearing head coverings were often offering sacrifices, the coverings would have also been worn during prophetic readings of entrails<sup>68</sup> and the ritual prayers of the sacrifice.<sup>69</sup>

Like Gill, Finney also argues that it was the elite men who covered their heads in liturgical settings, both as a sign of status and a sign of considerable piety.<sup>70</sup> Plutarch indicates that covering the head could be a sign of concealment before a deity, giving appropriate honor to the deity over the self. The covering was to be removed from the head when men encountered men of greater status than themselves; such removal was an attempt to avoid showing the same honor to one's social superiors as to one's god. This was both an act of reverence and of self-preservation, the latter because the goal was to

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<sup>66</sup> David W. J. Gill, "The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990): 245-60; see 247-51. Gill is specifically referencing portraiture and inscriptions from Corinth in much of this section.

<sup>67</sup> Oster, "When Men Wore Veils to Worship," 496. Here Oster does not suggest only the elite covered their heads. It is unclear how much he connects the covering with status, even though his earlier comments (493-94) indicate some sort of connection between attire and status. Regardless, the wearing of the covering still sets the participants off as privileged over non-participants.

<sup>68</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 233-34. It is Livy who makes this indication.

<sup>69</sup> Oster, "When Men Wore Veils to Worship," 503.

<sup>70</sup> Finney, 35, 45-46. See also, 39. In the setting of household worship, the *paterfamilias* functioned as a priest and wore a head covering as a demarcation of social and religious importance and status. The wife may have been uncovered since this was a private setting.

prevent divine jealousy.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, a covering could signify the honor of another (a deity or another person) as well as the distinguished status of the one wearing it.

Men's hairstyles were also connected to their honor. For men long hair was perceived as "effeminate and shameful."<sup>72</sup> Circa 30 BCE-40 CE Pseudo-Phocylides wrote to a Hellenistic Jewish audience, "If a child is a boy, do not let locks grow on his head. Braid not his crown nor make cross-knots on the top of his head. Long hair is not fit for men, but for voluptuous women. . . . Guard the youthful beauty of a comely boy, because many rage for intercourse with a man."<sup>73</sup> Pseudo-Phocylides's instructions move from the proper care of a boy's hair to a boy's need for protection; this suggests a connection between long hair and homosexuality. Philo also issues a polemic against male homosexuals by criticizing their suggestive hairstyles.<sup>74</sup> The Roman poet Horace disparages a young man who wears long hair tied in a knot, and Juvenal writes critically of a group of men who all have long hair.<sup>75</sup>

### For Women

Dress and adornment were also significant marks of honor for females, and in more than one way. In general, the way women dressed or adorned themselves said something about their societal status or their aspirations thereof. Although in the Greco-

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<sup>71</sup> Finney, 40. That is, the man's attire in the company of high-status humans should not be identical to the man's attire put on to honor his god.

<sup>72</sup> J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Religious Hair," *Studies in the New Testament, Volume 1: Glimpses of the Legal and Social Presuppositions of the Authors* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 170-75; see 171. Derrett contends that this stigma made the Nazirite vow of even greater consequence. Cf. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: The University Press, 1995), 33. Martin, in discussing other effeminate features of some men, asserts that in the Greco-Roman context effeminacy was unrelated to homosexuality.

<sup>73</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2-16," in *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting Major Issues* (2009, repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142-58; see 144-45.

<sup>74</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic," in *Keys to First Corinthians*, 145.

<sup>75</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 825.

Roman world women could inherit and own property at times and could gain significant amounts of social power, in areas such as politics or the military women often were unable to achieve equal status with men. Being unable to achieve equal status did not mean, however, that women had no status, were unconcerned with their status, or did not find alternative avenues for status. Instead, affluent women often used “beauty, elegance, good taste and graceful manner . . . to assert and express their status within society.”<sup>76</sup> Poorer women who could not afford upscale items would often imitate the adornment of the high-status women by using less expensive fabrics and wearing costume jewelry. Thus, women could gain and display status through their dress and hairstyles, which showed them to be sophisticated, women of good taste.<sup>77</sup>

Extant writings from Pliny the Elder, Juvenal, and Martial all criticize women for adorning themselves so. Pliny even accuses women’s adornment of being a type of *luxuria*. It seems that the adornment became unacceptable when the public or the writers perceived it as being over the top, and *luxuria* could be connected with a lack of shame and social propriety. Livy, however, describes women’s types of adornment as their “badges of honor.” The abundance of jewelry that has been found by archaeologists indicates that female adornment was not always taboo, especially if worn in good taste.<sup>78</sup>

The way a woman dressed may have been a claim to prestige, or it may have alluded to her comportment, another aspect of marking one’s honor. Women in the first-century (CE) Greco-Roman world would typically cover their heads when going outside the home. Finney even asserts that for women to have uncovered heads in public was a sign of shaming (not of *shame*). It could suggest “masculinity, lesbianism, adultery or

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<sup>76</sup> Batten, 154-55.

<sup>77</sup> Batten, 154-55.

<sup>78</sup> Batten, 154.

prostitution. In short, the wearing of the veil/head-covering said something explicit about a woman's position in society."<sup>79</sup> This is interesting in light of Witherington's assertion that, "Existing public portraits of women (presumably well-to-do women) from Roman Corinth often show them bareheaded." Witherington disassociates this with any sense of humiliation.<sup>80</sup> It seems, however, that public art does not serve as the best indicator of what was standard or acceptable for female attire. Lucian writes in the second century CE about a statue he is planning to construct, which reflects the styles and techniques of various fifth-century BCE sculptors. The statue is a woman who is beautiful yet modest, even though her head is uncovered. Lucian indicates that the statue will conflict with cultural standards, but he asks for the pardon of his readers for the sake of beauty.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps the absence of a covering in public did not always speak negatively of the woman's character, but the presence of a covering seems to have been a claim to dignity. This claim not only affected the woman herself; it also impacted the reputation of her male relatives since the woman's comportment was a statement about the honor of the men in her family.<sup>82</sup> Hair could be associated with sexual attractiveness, so the garment not only generally covered a woman's head but also specifically covered her hair.<sup>83</sup>

A woman *could* leave her head uncovered in public if her head was shaved, as this was a sign of a vow, although a married woman needed her husband's consent for the

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<sup>79</sup> Finney, 35-36.

<sup>80</sup> Witherington, 234-35. Cf. Keener, 30-31. Keener explains this apparent discrepancy when he asserts that upper class women were more concerned with fashion and lower class women were more concerned with modesty. Both can be associated with honor. This may not have been across the board, however. See Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 80.

<sup>81</sup> Preston T. Massey, "The Meaning of *κατακαλυπτω* and *κατα κεφαλῆς εχων* in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16," *New Testament Studies* 53 (2007): 502-23; see 517-18.

<sup>82</sup> Finney, 40-41.

<sup>83</sup> Derrett, 171-72. For a Hebrew woman to leave her hair exposed and free flowing was an indication of her own shamelessness, and a wife's shamelessness brought shame upon her husband.

vow and the shaved head.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, a shaved head could signify humility, since Plutarch suggests that it is a response to misfortune. Additionally, Dio Chrysostom writes that a shaved head is a sign of humiliation, indicating adultery.<sup>85</sup> Tacitus, too, claims that, if a wife commits adultery, her husband removes her clothing, cuts off her hair, and shuts her out of the house. These actions, humiliating in themselves, shame the woman by making her an outcast.<sup>86</sup>

As for female head coverings in liturgical settings, the evidence is somewhat unclear. Depictions sometimes show women covered while participating in religious functions, especially elite women actively involved in sacrifice.<sup>87</sup> A frieze carved into the altar of Consul Domitius Ahenobarbus contains a portrayal of a woman who wears a head covering while offering a sacrifice. Both Varro and Juvenal attest to the use of liturgical head coverings by women.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes women were depicted uncovered in liturgical contexts, however. The setting—including the extent of its public nature and whether or not male kin were present—was probably a major determining factor for female attire. As with male attire, the female head covering carried connotations of honor, both the honor of the woman herself and the honor of the men to whom she was related or connected.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Derrett, 171-72.

<sup>85</sup> Gill, 256.

<sup>86</sup> Garland, 520. Cf. Derrett, 171-72. Derrett disassociates the shaving of a woman's head with punishment for misconduct—at least for this context. He says it is a Western idea that is “irrelevant.” Surely Tacitus and Dio Chrysostom would not be too Western to be relevant, however.

<sup>87</sup> Finney, 38.

<sup>88</sup> Witherington, 233-34. The altar of Consul Domitius Ahenobarbus was not erected until the end of the second century CE. See also Winter, 80-90. Winter argues that married women *must* have covered their heads in worship settings, since this was outside the home (and therefore public). The cover was, by Roman law and custom, a sign of their respectability. Even if this was generally true, it was not exclusively true. There is evidence both in liturgical and mundane settings that women could go uncovered.

<sup>89</sup> Finney, 38, 41.



### **Greco-Roman Honor and Shame and 1 Cor 11:2-16**

This chapter has aimed to show that, in the Greco-Roman world, notions of honor and shame were ingrained into many aspects of daily life. For both males and females, honor could be assigned at birth or earned throughout one's lifetime. Honor could also be lost. The public played a large role in the perception of a person's amount of honor and positive or negative shame. It was possible to think of honor in a religious context, and in this case the gods/God became the PCR; from a religious perspective this could be the most important evaluation of one's honor. Finally, how a person dressed his or her head or wore his or her hair could speak to that person's status, reflect that person's honor, or speak to the honor of those around him or her. Head dressings and hairstyles could also speak to comportment or, potentially, sexuality.

This discussion of honor and shame sets important groundwork for understanding Paul's language and logic in 1 Cor 11:2-16, especially as honor and shame relate to hairstyles and head coverings. How men and women adorned their heads made statements, even in religious settings, about their own statuses and their relatedness to one another. This sense of honor or shame that could be derived from head adornment drives Paul to exhort the Corinthian women to adorn themselves mindfully of the men in their congregation, especially while they are participating in corporate prayer or prophecy. In chapter five I discuss in greater detail Paul's emphasis on Corinthian head adornment as it relates to honor and shame, but first in chapter four I discuss the Corinthian concern for honor as well as Paul's response to this concern.

## Chapter 4

### Paul's Application of Honor/Shame and Attitude toward Culture in 1 Corinthians

Honor and shame were important concepts across the Greco-Roman world, with status being a constant preoccupation. First-century Corinth was no exception. Because of the city's newness, in Corinth there were significant opportunities for status gain, so seeking, asserting, and protecting status were part of the Corinthian way. This concern for status was prevalent even among the Corinthian Christians, whom Paul rebukes for adhering to worldly rather than gospel values. In 1 Corinthians Paul repeatedly addresses the Corinthian obsession with honor and reiterates the new value system by which the believers in Corinth ought to be living. This new value system is based on the cross and subverts honor and shame as understood by the dominant culture. Again and again, Paul insists that the gospel's value system leads to humility and selflessness rather than pride and self-promotion. In espousing the value system of the gospel and rejecting that of the world, however, Paul does not totally abandon cultural norms. Rather, in admonishing the Corinthians, Paul subjects cultural norms to the scrutiny of gospel values.

#### **Corinthian Success: Status Inconsistency and Self-Promotion**

Although Greek Corinth was destroyed by Consul Lucius Mummius in 146 BCE, approximately one hundred years later (44 BCE) Julius Caesar ordered it to be rebuilt.<sup>1</sup>

As a Roman city, Corinth was likely poor, originally (re)populated in large part by

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 5-6. See also David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1. Although ancient writings may have been exaggerated, reports claim that the Corinthian men were killed, the women and children were sold as slaves, and the city was pillaged.

freedmen and veterans.<sup>2</sup> Laborers and tradespeople were also part of the early population.<sup>3</sup> Especially during its first one hundred years under Rome, though, Corinth would become a great Roman city.<sup>4</sup> The location of Corinth set it up for success: it was naturally fortified and contained two important harbors for commerce. Additionally, the Isthmian games were held there even once the city came under Rome, so Corinth's cultural significance was strong.<sup>5</sup> In 27 BCE Corinth became the capital of the province of Achaia.<sup>6</sup> As Roman Corinth was being reconstructed during its early years, the city was changing and developing, and, along with its buildings, its renown grew as well.<sup>7</sup>

The inhabitants of Corinth were afforded realizable opportunities for attaining wealth, establishing repute, and therefore gaining social status that may not have been possible elsewhere and under different circumstances. The newness of the Corinthian society meant there was not a deep-rooted aristocracy that had a monopoly on high status. It *did not* mean that everyone was of equal status or that everyone had the same, easy chance at high status. Rather, the dust had not yet settled in the social hierarchy of Corinth, and determined, socially and economically vigorous inhabitants could push their way into some kind of esteem, especially if they gained the financial backing to buy social support.<sup>8</sup> Even the wealthy were not too established to recall their families' own

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<sup>2</sup> Garland, 2. Cf. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Corinth That Saint Paul Saw," *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (1984): 147-59; see 148. The earliest inhabitants of repopulated Corinth relied on grave robbing.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Witherington, 5-6, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Garland, 2.

struggles to rise to the top and would not have taken aristocracy for granted.<sup>9</sup> Many Corinthians would actually remain among the poor; in fact, a majority were slaves and artisans.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, many others achieved the success for which they strived.

Commerce was undoubtedly significant in Corinth, and the entrepreneurial world was a key to social success. As Thiselton explains, “the core community and core tradition of the city culture were those of trade, business, and entrepreneurial pragmatism in the pursuit of success, even if some paid a heavy price for business failures or for the lack of the right contacts or the right opportunities.”<sup>11</sup> These opportunities afforded to the Corinthians created a city in which former slaves, veterans, merchants, and artisans could be—and, in fact, were—among the elite. Business successes led to wealth and influence, and social networking solidified newly achieved status; for those who worked hard at it, social climbing sometimes became a reality.<sup>12</sup>

As the city flourished, Corinth’s inhabitants exhibited a sense of confidence not only in their community but also in themselves for belonging and, when applicable, succeeding. Corinth abounded with inscriptions written in honor of Corinthian people. Witherington notes that many of the inscriptions were “paid for and erected by and for themselves . . . [and] describe their contributions to building projects or their status in clubs (*collegia*).”<sup>13</sup> The Corinthian people were not overly modest.

What might at first appear to be an exceeding amount of confidence was likely rooted in the insecurities of these individuals’ status, however, either in their own

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<sup>9</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, “The Corinth That Saint Paul Saw,” 148.

<sup>10</sup> Fee, 2. It is likely, however, that even Corinth’s poor experienced the overflow benefits of the city’s wealth.

<sup>11</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Witherington, 23-24.

<sup>13</sup> Witherington, 8.

perceptions or in the larger group or societal perceptions. For example, there are two inscriptions from ancient Corinth on a monument erected, according to the inscriptions, at the expense of Gnaeus Babbius Philinus. Both read, “Gnaeus Babbius Philinus, aedile and pontifex, had this monument erected at his own expense, and he approved it in his official capacity of duovir.”<sup>14</sup> The office of duovir, which Babbius held, could be taken up by freedmen, people who were on the rise socially. That someone in the position of duovir would need to insist on his own influence and generosity twice on the same monument suggests a motivation of insecurity, and in Babbius’s case this probably arose from something called *status inconsistency*.<sup>15</sup>

To say that many Corinthians achieved economic success and wealth is only to speak to one aspect of social measures. Meeks draws on the work of sociologists in order to speak about social stratification in the world of the early Christians. He explains that status is never based solely on one factor; instead, in the Roman world, social rankings could occur in the areas of “ethnic origins, *ordo* [rank, class], citizenship, personal liberty, wealth, occupation, age, sex, and public offices or honors.”<sup>16</sup> A person’s status is interpreted, then, in light of a variety of factors, and, while it may be possible to gain status in one or more areas, this often leads to an imbalance called status inconsistency. That is, when a person’s rank or honor in one particular area, likely earned through some achievement, differs from that person’s rank in other key areas, his or her status becomes

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<sup>14</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8. The reconstruction of these inscriptions comes from John H. Kent, *Corinth VIII, iii: The Inscriptions, 1926-1950* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1966), 73 (no. 155 and plate 14); 102 (no. 241, plate 19).

<sup>15</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 8. Cf. Murphy-O’Connor, “The Corinth That Saint Paul Saw,” 155. Another inscription, found on the limestone pavement near the main entrance of the city (during Paul’s day) reads, “[ ] Erastus in return for his aedileship laid (the pavement) at his own expense.” This is yet another example of self-promotion, and in this case the Erastus mentioned in the inscription may have been one of Paul’s converts.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 53-55.

inconsistent. The conflicting statuses held by one person create a kind of instability and uncertainty and often lead to insecurity in the individual.<sup>17</sup>

In general, there was in Corinth “an obsessive concern to win reputation and status in the eyes of others; self-promotion to gain applause and influence; ambition to succeed often by manipulating networks of power; and above all an emphasis on autonomy and ‘rights.’”<sup>18</sup> The Corinthians *had* to assert their own status and prestige continuously; keeping up appearances reminded the public who had earned status and also deserved to keep it. The Corinthians were constantly insisting they were worthy of their statuses in particular areas and demanding they be treated with respect and honor. The honor and shame culture that dominated in Corinth allowed people to vie for honor but required them to guard it carefully. If a person’s reputation suffered in one or more areas, his or her status suffered. Naturally, people would be all the more intentional to make sure their reputations were good and all the less likely to rest in past accomplishments or to trust others to remember those past accomplishments without being reminded.<sup>19</sup> Status ambiguities in larger groups would have created a greater self-consciousness about how one measured up to a particular group. Status inconsistency also would likely have created dissatisfaction with one’s current status/honor; this would play out either by constantly insisting on one’s achieved status or by constantly striving to gain more status. In both cases was a constant need for recognition and affirmation.<sup>20</sup>

Status inconsistency would have been a plight of many within communities of Paul’s converts in addition to the broader society. The status inconsistencies in

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<sup>17</sup> Meeks, 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Witherington, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Garland, 5.

individuals were very likely in Corinth, since the freedmen suddenly enjoyed a new, higher status and the tradespeople were able to earn wealth without a noble trade. These would have been the people of the Corinthian church congregation. Furthermore, there would have been status ambiguity for the larger groups within this Corinthian Christian community, since the community was comprised of people from differing social groups who themselves probably experienced status inconsistencies.<sup>21</sup>

As for the inconsistencies within the Corinthian Christian community itself, one need only look to 1 Cor 1:26, “not many were of noble birth”; 7:17-18, references to the circumcised and uncircumcised; 7:21, reference to slaves in the congregation; 11:21-22, in which better-off members of the community are gorging themselves on the Lord’s Supper and leaving the less fortunate hungry; and 12:22-25, in which Paul speaks about those who are more and less highly esteemed. All these verses indicate that there were people of differing statuses, in one sense or another, in the Corinthian Christian community. Most within the congregation were neither in the upper class nor completely destitute but were somewhere in the middle.<sup>22</sup> There were some upper-class members of the Corinthian church, and though they constituted a minority of the congregation, it was a powerful one.<sup>23</sup> These better-off members, who were striving to gain a following, dominated the entire congregation.<sup>24</sup> They probably influenced the attitudes of others who were preoccupied with status, even if those others did not have much status.

The Corinthian Christians, including those of all statuses, likely experienced personal status inconsistency and the desire for greater honor; furthermore, as a group,

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<sup>21</sup> Meeks, 72-73. Cf. 55-72. Meeks gives examples of status inconsistency in Pauline communities.

<sup>22</sup> Talbert, xvii.

<sup>23</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 71-73. See also Meeks, 73.

<sup>24</sup> Garland, 6.

the believers certainly had status ambiguity. Therefore, the members of the congregation of Christians at Corinth would have been susceptible to the same insecurities found in society at large, bred both from opportunities and uncertainties in Corinth.

### **Paul's References to Self-Promotion in 1 Corinthians**

As mentioned above, the Christians at Corinth were not unaffected by culture in their attitudes concerning self-promotion and honor.<sup>25</sup> Upon entering the Christian community, the believers at Corinth brought their cultural predispositions with them, *especially* in relation to honor. This is evident in Paul's extant letters to the Corinthians, "where boasting, preening, false pride, and the like are topics that the apostle addresses repeatedly."<sup>26</sup> John M. G. Barclay has argued that the religious value system of the Corinthians did not require them to abandon their prior social and moral perspectives; rather, they understood their faith experiences to be highly spirit-filled but limited in overall life significance. Church gatherings included "spiritual insight and exaltation," but the everyday applicability of these insights was not even considered. For many, this Christian faith simply would not have been relevant to all aspects of life.<sup>27</sup> While Barclay's estimation of the situation may be too strong, it is worth noting that the Corinthians seemed not to understand their faith to extend across all areas of life in a transformational way, even if they did apply spiritual insights to some areas.

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<sup>25</sup> Garland, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Witherington, 8.

<sup>27</sup> John M. G. Barclay, "Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 47 (1992): 49-74; see 70-71. See also 65. It is not that the Corinthians were hypocritical in their spiritual claims but that they simply did not seem to understand that this gospel is a radical reorientation of both the present and the future.



Not understanding faith to encompass all of life, the Corinthians would have few qualms about maintaining their preexisting cultural perspectives, including that of self-promotion. Many in the Corinthian body were well integrated into the cultural identity of Corinth and found themselves in good favor with society at large: at least some were willing to trust the legal system with their disputes (6:1-6), were hosted by non-believers at meals (10:27), or even participated in parties held at temples. They would not have been interested in jeopardizing their existing cultural connections by adopting new behaviors; perhaps more importantly, they would not have seen a reason to do so.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout 1 Corinthians Paul's several references to the Corinthian preoccupation with self-promotion make it clear that it was a significant issue for the people in the church at Corinth. A clear example of this comes at the immediate outset of the letter. In 1 Cor 1:12, Paul speaks of divisions and quarrels among the believers in Corinth, saying, "What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.'" These statements are not only about divisions in the church but are also claims to honor. The Corinthians are boasting in their "party allegiance," each group claiming to be superior to the others, with even the claim to belong to Christ being used as a trump card rather than an appeal to unity.<sup>29</sup>

In 3:1-9, 21-22 Paul once more brings up this issue of party allegiance in the Corinthian body. He asserts that the Corinthians are not ready for "solid" spiritual food and instead still need "milk." His main reason for this is the presence of quarreling and jealousy within their body, and he ties this in with their division into followers of Paul and Apollos. The behavior Paul is pointing out is rivalry; the Corinthian believers are

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<sup>28</sup> Barclay, 58.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Jewett, "Paul, Shame, and Honor," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 551-74; see 557. Cf. Garland, 48.

pitting themselves against one another, each claiming to be better than the other. This is the behavior of “mere humans,” those who buy into the value system of the world.<sup>30</sup>

Again in 4:6-7 the Corinthians are boasting in their leaders as a means of self-promotion. Talbert suggests that the slogan mentioned in 4:6, “Not beyond what has been written,” is a reference to schoolchildren learning to write. They are to imitate what they see, writing letters that are neither too small nor too large. In this way, the Corinthians are to copy the behavior of their leaders without “being puffed up in favor of one minister against another.”<sup>31</sup> Then, in 4:8, 10, and 18-20, Paul speaks of the Corinthians boasting in themselves as wise, strong, and honorable over against their leaders, the apostles. Even though some have been claiming to “belong to Paul,” the Corinthians seem to have been treating Paul with condescension and contempt. This is because they are filled with pride. They perceive themselves as being honorable through their own system of values and place expectations on Paul to seek the same kinds of honor.<sup>32</sup>

In 1 Cor 5:2, 6 the Corinthians are boasting again, and this time it is in light of a man who is living an immoral lifestyle. It is difficult to say whether Paul is chastising the Corinthians for boasting about their supreme spirituality while something like this is going on in their congregation or if Paul is chastising them for being proud that this man is acting so. Either way, the Corinthians’ pride is another example of their arrogance and self-promotion, even when Paul sees something blatantly wrong in the congregation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fee, 126-28.

<sup>31</sup> Talbert, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Fee, 165.

<sup>33</sup> Fee, 201-2. Cf. Talbert, 15. Talbert asserts that the reference to pride means the Corinthians are proud to condone this man’s behavior; they believe it to be an expression of freedom and have discerned such through their enlightenment in the Spirit. Their boasting is in their own spirituality. If Talbert is correct, in this situation the self-promotion is of those who are “enlightened” against those who are not enlightened enough to accept the man’s behavior.

In several other parts of 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses problems that relate to the sentiment of self-promotion. The need to take other believers to court (6:1-11) reflects a desire to increase one's own status and degrade others, and in a formal setting at that. That some of the believers want to eat meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1) has to do with fully participating in the Corinthian society, a way to ensure status. The wealthy members of the community are willing to shame the poor members at the Lord's Supper by eating first and most in order to assert their own superiority (11:17-34). Some of the believers are concerned with having superior spiritual gifts and boasting about them (12:1-14:40).<sup>34</sup>

MacDonald has argued that the female behavior in 1 Cor 7, which emphasizes a sexless state beyond the material world, rejects sexual activity as part of an ongoing expression of the women's new, higher status in Christ.<sup>35</sup> MacDonald's argument highlights the way in which even spirituality served as an avenue to status for the Corinthians. The Corinthians do not view the non-believing world as inherently evil or as some sort of enemy, likely because the close connections the Corinthian believers maintain with the outside world give them positive relationships with non-Christians. Still, the Corinthians seem to understand themselves to be *better than* non-believers. They see themselves as superior and more privileged because they possess the Spirit. Their very faith sets them apart—although not for a holy life but for a greater sense of esteem in comparison to their non-Christian Corinthian denizens.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Garland, 6-7. Garland even mentions the issue of head coverings in 11:2-16 as a culturally influenced attempt to gain or flaunt prestige. Concerning 12:1-14:40, see also Dale B. Martin, "Tongues of Angels and Other Status Indicators," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (1991): 547-89. Martin argues that glossolalia was a high-status symbol in the Greco-Roman world, and its use in the church was a cause of division between those of higher status and those of lower status.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7," *New Testament Studies* 2 (1990): 161-81; see 169-70. MacDonald also links the behavior in 1 Cor 11 to this thought process.

<sup>36</sup> Barclay, 69-70.

### **Subversion of Honor/Shame and Relationship with Outside Culture**

Whereas the Corinthian attitude is one of self-promotion, Paul sees this honor-seeking mentality as counter to the values of the gospel.<sup>37</sup> The work of God on the cross calls for humility, not boasting. Through Christ, God made the Exalted One lowly by allowing him to go through the degradation of crucifixion, which meant “weakness, humiliation, defeat.”<sup>38</sup> Then, through the apostle’s preaching, God extended the invitation of the gospel to those who would have been its most unlikely recipients according to the world’s standards—the Corinthians being among that group.<sup>39</sup> The way of the cross is what the dominant culture considers shameful. Paul expects his converts’ daily interactions with each other and the world to be informed by humility and selflessness. Instead of always seeking their own interests, the believers ought to be setting aside their preferences and rights, including rights to honor, for the sake of those around them. This is the result of the cross of the Messiah.<sup>40</sup>

Paul’s subversion of the typical values of honor and shame becomes evident at the very beginning of 1 Corinthians. As Jewett correctly asserts, Paul’s response to the “I belong to X” boasts (1:12) is to insist that the only appropriate form of boasting is in the Lord (1:31). Such boasting in the Lord is different even from the “I belong to Christ” statement in 1:12, which is itself still about self-promotion and the denigration of others. Boasting in the Lord moves the focus away from one’s own accomplishments to the work of God in the cross. Boasting in the Lord also recognizes that God has undermined the

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<sup>37</sup> Garland, 5, 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> Fee, 67, 75.

<sup>39</sup> Fee, 67. The unlikeliness of the Corinthian inclusion into the gospel can either be affiliated with the relatively low social status of many of the converts or with their status as Gentiles, outsiders to a Jewish God.

<sup>40</sup> Talbert, 7.

worldly system of honor and shame by shaming the wise and exalting the lowly and weak (1:18-29). In these verses, Paul is insisting that the cross “contradicts every human system of seeking superior status and gaining honor through religious and philosophical practice.”<sup>41</sup> In the gospel system, no longer is worldly honor the key to one’s value, and no longer are those who fail to earn worldly honor considered worthless or shameful.<sup>42</sup>

Horsley has also argued that Paul understands the gospel to subvert the value system of the world. Paul sees the cross and the resurrection as the foundation for an alternative society, which is part of a new age. All believers are to participate in it. Not only does this new system offer honor to the lowly, it actually shames those who are actively seeking after “power, wealth, wisdom, noble birth, and honorific public office (1.21-23, 26-29; 4.18, 10)” as a means to status.<sup>43</sup>

Paul’s own occupation and role as apostle serves as an example of the way honor and shame are subverted in the gospel. While the position of apostle should be noteworthy and respectable, Paul cares not for the status and entitlement that come along with being an apostle. Neither does he care that his education and Roman citizenship could also work in his favor.<sup>44</sup> In 1 Cor 4:9-13 Paul speaks of the life of an apostle as a lowly one; being an apostle of Christ makes Paul a fool and a spectacle. He and the other apostles are held in disrepute, considered weak, and are the “rubbish of the world.” They

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<sup>41</sup> Jewett, 557-58.

<sup>42</sup> Jewett, 558. For other examples of Paul’s attitude toward honor and shame in light of the gospel beyond what is found in 1 Corinthians, see the entire chapter (551-74). See also Arthur J. Dewey, “A Matter of Honor: A Social-Historical Analysis of 2 Corinthians 10,” *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 209-17; Halvor Moxnes, “Honour and Righteousness in Romans,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (1988): 61-77.

<sup>43</sup> Richard A. Horsley, “1 Corinthians: A Case Study of Paul’s Assembly as an Alternative Society,” in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, ed. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 227-37; see 229-30. Horsley links this new order specifically with the downfall of Roman imperial rule. His assertion is perhaps extreme, but his point that this new age of the cross does not hold the same values as the ruling world powers is relevant.

<sup>44</sup> Witherington, 20-21. See also Gal 1:14 and Phil 3:4-6; prior to his Damascus-Road experience, Paul did take great pride in his accomplishments.

are mistreated, reviled, persecuted, and slandered, and all the while they are working hard. To make matters worse, Paul is treated poorly by the Corinthians themselves for not living up to their standards of prestige!<sup>45</sup>

Although Paul receives such treatment from some, as an apostle he is entitled to certain rights and much better treatment.<sup>46</sup> This he makes clear in 1 Cor 9:1-7. Paul is not concerned with demanding that he receives the honor owed to him as an apostle, however (9:15-23). Instead, when mistreated, he and his fellow apostles bless, endure, and speak kindly (4:12-13). Paul believes his calling is not a guarantee of status or honor, except the honor of sharing in Christ's sufferings. If God's own self-revelation to the world came by way of shame and humiliation, the task of the apostle is to suffer shame and humiliation gladly.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Paul wants the economic attitude of the Corinthian Christians to reflect the gospel values of humility, unity, and servanthood. Paul's refusal to take financial help from the Corinthians is in order to challenge the patron-based pride the Corinthians want to get from supporting him. Indeed, his lowly trade is a source of shame for the Corinthians, and they likely want to improve their image, his image, and their ability to control the relationship between them with their financial gifts.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Fee, 165.

<sup>46</sup> But cf. Witherington, 20-21. Whereas in some ways Paul would have been a respected person of fairly high status, in other ways his approach to his entitlements called that into question. For instance, Paul chose to become a tradesperson instead of primarily being a teacher or philosopher who received patronage for his role. Paul could have but did not become susceptible to the insecurities of status inconsistency. Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 24. During Paul's stay in Corinth, his converts may have wanted him to have a profession that was more prestigious than his tent-making occupation. Thiselton maintains, "Paul became aware that some status-seeking people who became believers found Paul's status an embarrassment, even after they had come to faith." Even so, although Paul himself describes his living situation as meager, it is important to note that he likely did not live in extreme poverty, just as it is unlikely that he lived in relative affluence. For these two views, cf. Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); and Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), respectively.

<sup>47</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Horsley, 235-36.

Because believers are no longer members of the worldly system of values, they should not look to the world for their system of ethics, their decisions about discipline, or their attempts to settle disputes, hence Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 5-6.<sup>49</sup> Instead, Paul wants the Corinthian believers to experience solidarity as a society based on Christian values. Although they should not be concerned with social networking, as some of them were before becoming believers, some still are. The food offered to idols mentioned in 1 Cor 10 would be part of banquets attended by the elite, and Corinthian believers attending such banquets have opportunity for maintaining strong social connections. Paul discourages this social networking with the outside world. Horsley explains:

For Paul the sharing of 'food offered to idols' was not an issue of ethics, but of the integrity and survival of the Corinthians' assembly as an exclusive alternative community to the dominant society and its social networks. In his concern to 'build up' the assembly of saints over against the networks of power relations by which the imperial society was constituted, he could not allow those who had joined the assembly to participate in the sacrificial banquets by which those social relations were routinely established.<sup>50</sup>

It is true that Paul's explicit focus in chapter ten is not on the social connections the Corinthians are making but on idolatry. That being said, Paul closes out the chapter with a reminder that the Corinthians are not to preoccupy themselves with what is advantageous for themselves but should act in a way that benefits the consciences of others (10:24, 33).<sup>51</sup> Christian values also mean that the Corinthians should be looking out for the best interests of their fellow believers in their decision-making. Instead of attending these banquets because they are permitted to do so and want to boost their

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<sup>49</sup> Horsley, 231-32.

<sup>50</sup> Horsley, 234.

<sup>51</sup> In 10:33 Paul states that he does what is beneficial to others, not himself. The word Paul uses for beneficial is *συμφέρος*, meaning "beneficial, advantageous, profitable." See Walter Bauer, et al., "*συμφέρος*," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 960.

status, the Corinthians should be taking into consideration how their actions affect the spiritual lives of other believers. Every action is ultimately for God's glory (1 Cor 10:31), which takes away obsession with one's own interest and moves it outward by asking the question, *How do my actions glorify God, and how do they benefit others?*<sup>52</sup>

The discussion about glossolalia in 1 Cor 12-14 also revolves around the idea of honor and status. The ability to speak in tongues would have been a sign of spiritual status in the Greco-Roman world, given only to the elite. Paul makes reference to the members of the human body in 1 Cor 12 in a way that would be familiar to Greco-Roman ears. He speaks of the hierarchy of greater and lesser members of the body, but then he flips the hierarchy upside down. Those parts that are beautiful and are granted more honor are, argues Paul, actually subservient to the lower-status, ugly parts. This is because the ugly parts are the more important ones. In this analogy, Paul is comparing speaking in tongues (highly regarded) to prophecy (more lowly regarded).<sup>53</sup> In doing this, he challenges the value system that praises what is showy and extravagant and instead promotes the values of the cross, which praises what benefits the community.

It is important to reiterate that the Corinthians are not experiencing persecution from their surrounding culture; even Paul appears not to have been given much trouble during his time there.<sup>54</sup> For Paul, this did not lead to a sense of solidarity with the values of the world, but the Corinthians are interpreting their situation differently. Barclay explains that, "In the Corinthians' easy dealings with the world Paul detects a failure to comprehend the counter-cultural impact of the message of the cross (1.18-2.5); the

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<sup>52</sup> John Navone, "'Glory' in Pauline and Johannine Thought," *Worship* 42 (1968): 48-52; see 48-49.

<sup>53</sup> Martin, "Tongues of Angels," 568-69.

<sup>54</sup> Barclay, 69.



wisdom of the world to which they are so attracted is, he insists, a dangerous enemy of the gospel.”<sup>55</sup> Garland also notes that the worldly values present in the church at Corinth “played havoc on Paul’s attempt to build a community based on love, selflessness, and the equal worth of every member.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Cultural Norms Subservient to Gospel Norms**

Paul’s letter to the Corinthians makes it clear that he intends to correct their self-promoting attitudes and efforts to solidify social relationships with the world. Paul expects that the believers at Corinth be more intimately connected to and invested in their relationships with other believers than with people outside the church. This is not to say that the Corinthians should shun non-believers. Paul is clear in avoiding that implication (so see 9:19-23; 10:32-33; 10:25-27; 7:2-16; 5:9-10).<sup>57</sup> It does indicate, though, that Paul expects the believers to find their strongest sense of identity and their value system from the gospel and the community of gospel followers.<sup>58</sup>

Just as Paul does not expect the believers to shun non-believers and avoid all contact with those outside the church, neither does he expect that all cultural norms will be abandoned entirely. Rather, Paul’s approach is to examine cultural values in light of gospel values. For instance, in 1 Cor 10:23-33 Paul explains that it is not wrong to eat meat served by unbelievers, but a believer should not eat meat that s/he is told has been sacrificed to an idol. This is for the sake of “the other’s conscience,” whether the other is another believer who is trying to warn the first or the other is an unbeliever who might

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<sup>55</sup> Barclay, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Garland, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Barclay, 58-60. See also, Horsley, 232-33.

<sup>58</sup> Barclay, 60.

call into question the ethics of Christians if the believer partakes.<sup>59</sup> As long as the believer has not been told that the meat has been sacrificed to idols, it is acceptable to partake alongside the non-believer. This is the freedom afforded to believers in Christ, but the freedom is both to be *able to eat* and to be *able not to eat*. The question at hand is: *What is beneficial?* Thiselton explains:

At one level the Christian is free: it is not other people's judgments, as such, which should determine one's own. On the other hand, always to ask about the impact or effect of these things on the self-awareness (confidence, vulnerability, insecurity, negative reaction) of *the other* must play a part in the believer's decision about how the *freedom* which God has granted is to be *constructively used*.<sup>60</sup>

How a believer participates in activities connected to the larger society is determined by the gospel value of concern for the other over against one's self.

Similarly, simply because Paul is not inclined to conform to mainstream cultural perspectives in Corinth or the Roman Empire at large, this does not mean he has no concern for how outsiders perceive the Christian communities to which he ministers or never takes into account the inevitable effect of culture on believers. On the contrary, at times Paul's advice takes culture specifically and seriously into account. For instance, Paul's advice on marriage and celibacy in 1 Cor 7 is partially impacted by the convictions of the larger society on the topic. As MacDonald asserts, "The Apostle cannot ignore the difficulties faced by celibate believers in a society where marriage, the virtue of women, and the stability of the state are seen as interrelated."<sup>61</sup> Paul's concern in his advice is, on the one hand, to favor and further a sense of order within the Corinthian Christian

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<sup>59</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 787-88.

<sup>60</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 792-93. Italics original. Cf. 790. In 10:30, Paul asks, "If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?" The Greek word for "denounced" is *βλασφημουμαι*, meaning "to suffer defamation of character." The idea is that one's actions are connected to reputation, whether this is in the community of believers or in society. The concept of honor and shame matters, even if it has been redefined according to different standards.

<sup>61</sup> MacDonald, 179.

community and, on the other hand, to uphold order within the larger society by offering advice that would not completely disrupt the general social order or cause the believers to come under unnecessary scrutiny from the larger society.<sup>62</sup>

Paul is aware that the cultural norms of the day will be a legitimate factor in the believers' comportment at times, and he is willing to take those norms into account. This consideration of societal norms is secondary to the gospel principles that are to inform believers' daily lives. When it is beneficial or harmless, Paul allows cultural norms to be employed or considered. When it is detrimental or contrary to the gospel, Paul does not want believers to bother themselves with cultural norms or be subjected to them.

### **Looking Ahead: Gospel Subversion of Honor and Shame in 1 Cor 11:2-16**

Paul urges the Corinthians to adopt the value system of the gospel throughout 1 Corinthians. This value system opposes the self-promoting, power-seeking attitude of the day that has manifested in the city of Corinth. Paul explains that those who participate in the new society of believers may appear to be weak or lowly in the eyes of the world, but the gospel values to which believers now adhere have subverted the world's value system. Throughout the letter as Paul reiterates this switch in value systems, he addresses different cultural norms in Corinth not by rejecting them outright but by making them subservient to the ways of the gospel. This subversion of honor and shame and subjection of cultural norms to gospel values becomes important as Paul moves into his discussion in 1 Cor 11:2-16. The advice he gives in these verses concerning head coverings is directly related to Paul's interpretation of gospel values and the unity that directly results from the respect for the other that the gospel necessarily entails.

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<sup>62</sup> MacDonald, 179.

## Chapter 5

### Paul's Exhortation to Corinthian Women: Using Honor and Shame to Appeal for Unity

Thus far it has been demonstrated that honor and shame were prevalent, influential concepts in the Greco-Roman world, impacting the daily lives and reputations of all kinds of people in many different ways. In particular, Corinth, a true “Greco-Roman” city during Paul’s day, had a notable preoccupation with gaining honor and status. Paul was aware of this preoccupation in Corinth and sought to correct it with a new sense of honor and status that comes not from worldly values but from gospel values. This correction comes into play in 1 Cor 11:2-16, in which Paul calls upon the Corinthian women to relinquish their venture for gaining honor in order to promote a gospel-inspired sense of unity among the Corinthian believers.

### Language, Structure, and Emphasis

Paul’s emphasis on honor and shame as it plays out in the body of believers is of great importance in understanding 1 Cor 11:2-16. The passage contains multiple key terms that reference the concept. For example, the verb *καταισχύνω*, appearing in 11:4, 5 means “dishonor, disgrace”; “put to shame”; or “disappoint.”<sup>1</sup> A related noun, *αἰσχρότης*, is used in 11:6 and means “pert[aining] to being socially or morally unacceptable, *shameful, base*.”<sup>2</sup> In 1:14 Paul also uses the word *ἀτιμία*, meaning “a state of dishonor or disrespect, *dishonor*.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Walter Bauer, et al. assert that an opposite of

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Bauer, et al., “*καταισχύνω*,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 517.

<sup>2</sup> BDAG, “*αἰσχρότης*,” 29.

<sup>3</sup> BDAG, “*ἀτιμία*,” 149.

ἀτιμία is δόξα,<sup>4</sup> which sometimes means “the condition of being bright or shining, *brightness, splendor, radiance*,” but also refers to greatness or can mean “honor as enhancement or recognition of status or performance, *fame, recognition, renown, honor, prestige*.” Δόξα appears in 11:7 (twice) and 11:15. Finally, the participle for πρέπω, “be fitting, be seemly/suitable,”<sup>5</sup> appears in 11:13 and suggests that which is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Though not directly denoting honor or shame, πρέπω falls in a similar category.

Clearly, the language that appears in 1 Cor 11:2-16 reveals Paul’s interest in honor and shame throughout the passage. It is not just the presence of this language, however, but also the importance of these particular terms in the overall argument that makes the connection to honor and shame so central to the meaning and thrust of the passage. Analysis of the structure of 1 Cor 11:2-16 emphasizes this. References to the “traditions,” or kinds of behavior Paul has passed along to the Corinthians serve as bookends to the passage (11:2, 16) and the outer limits of a chiastic structure for the entire passage (A and A’). B (11:3-6) and B’ (11:13-15) address the ways that the interrelatedness of male, female, and God affect head attire in worship, with B’ bringing hairstyles specifically into focus as well. The climactic portion of the passage, C (11:7-12) itself contains a chiasm. These verses discuss in greater detail the interconnectedness of men and women, both in creation and in the Lord, in order to implore the women to choose respectful behavior. Verse seven contains an introductory A-B pattern related to glory, then 11:8-9 connects woman to man (a). The chiasm climaxes with Paul’s

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<sup>4</sup> BDAG, “ἀτιμία,” 149.

<sup>5</sup> BDAG, “πρέπω,” 861.

exhortation for respect in 11:10 (b), and then ends in 11:11-12 with man's connectedness to woman (a'). The structure can be outlined as follows:

**A. 11:2 Opening Appeal to Tradition (Sets the Stage for Compliance)**

**B. 11:3-6 Male and Female Dress Connected to Honor and Shame**

11:3 Interrelationships: "Heads" Should Be Honored

11:4 A Covered Praying/Prophecy Man Dishonors His Head

11:5-6 An Uncovered Praying/Prophecy Woman Dishonors Her Head

11:6a No Cover, No Hair

11:6b Yes to Hair Because of Shame? Yes to Cover

**C. 11:7-12 Interconnectedness of Man and Woman Calls for Woman's Controlled, Respectful Dress**

11:7a Man is Uncovered, Each Is God's Image and Glory

11:7b [Woman Is Covered,] Connected to Man as "Glory"

11:8 Woman Made from Man at Creation [by God]

11:9 Woman Is Man's Impressive Counterpart

11:10 The Balance of Freedom and Control: Respect

11:11 Man, too, Interdependent with Woman

11:12 Man Is Born through Woman and Everything Comes from God

**B'. 11:13-15 Male and Female Hair Connected to Honor and Shame**

11:13 Woman Praying to God: God Should Be Honored [and She Covered]

11:14 Long Hair Is Shameful for Man

11:15 Long Hair Is Glorifying for Woman

**A'. 11:16 Closing Appeal to Tradition (Custom of Harmoniousness)**

The honor/shame language and the structure of the passage reveal that Paul is calling for behavior from the Corinthian women that honors the men in the congregation.<sup>6</sup> He wants to remind the men and women of their fundamental interdependence with one another, first in God's creation of the world and second in the body of Christ, as a basis for this expectation. This emphasis becomes clearer upon more thorough investigation of the passage.

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<sup>6</sup> And Paul would expect a change in behavior from anyone treating others dismissively.

### The Relationship of God, Man, and Woman

At the outset of 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul briefly praises the Corinthians for remembering him and keeping the traditions he has passed on to them (11:2).<sup>7</sup> Next, in 11:3 he asserts not only the connectedness of man and woman but also humanity's greater connection to God. Paul addresses these relationships from a standpoint of honor and shame and ultimately asserts that each person's behavior ought to be behavior that honors the "other," especially the other who is one's "head." Although the terminology Paul uses for men and women in these verses could refer generally to men in women or more specifically to husbands and wives, Paul uses the terms generally.<sup>8</sup> While Paul's words likely pertain to some husbands and wives, his correction also applies to some who are not married at all or not married to someone in the congregation because, as is shown below, Paul's concern is with the fundamental connection between men and women, not solely their connection to one another in marriage.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The import of 11:2 is not fully apparent until the conclusion of the passage and is addressed below.

<sup>8</sup> Scholars disagree as to whether Paul is speaking of men and women in general or of husbands and their wives, although the majority of scholars now assert the former. Those who interpret the reference as being to husbands/wives include David W. J. Gill, "The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990): 245-60; see 254; Ritva H. Williams, "Lifting the Veil: A Social-Science Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *Consensus* 23 (1997): 53-60; see 56-57. On the other hand for examples of those who believe the passage deals with males and females, not just husbands and wives, see: David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 514; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 822; Ben Witherington, III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 235; Philip B. Payne, "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Corinthians," *Priscilla Papers* 20 (2006): 8-18; see 10-11. John Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries, ed. D. E. Nineham (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 109.

<sup>9</sup> It is clear from 1 Cor 7 that not all in the congregation attend with a spouse. Cf. Mark Finney, "Honour, Head-Coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 in its Social Context," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (2010): 31-58; see 50-51. Finney holds that the female who is uncovered in the presence of strangers dishonors her male *kin*, which in turn prevents the male from honoring his god. Finney does allow that this also may apply to fictive kin, not just the woman's male relatives.

### Understanding 11:3-6

1 Corinthians 11:3 starts off with an overview of the head relationships between and among human and divine: Christ is the head of every man, man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Christ. One of the crucial terms in 1 Cor 11:2-16 that reoccurs throughout the passage is *κεφαλή*, first appearing in 11:3.<sup>10</sup> The meaning of this term has been a central topic of debate among those who have sought to interpret 1 Cor 11:2-16. Literally meaning “head,” *κεφαλή* references the body part that sits on top of the neck.<sup>11</sup> Paul makes use of this meaning as he progresses through his argument, but in 11:3 he uses the term metaphorically. In fact, Paul utilizes the metaphorical sense of *κεφαλή* repeatedly in 1 Cor 11:2-16, sometimes employing a double entendre that suggests both the literal and the metaphorical sense of *κεφαλή*.

Metaphorically, *κεφαλή* has often been interpreted to connote authority, rendering the idea of a ruler or authority figure over someone else. Therefore, in 1 Cor 11:3, in which man is said to be the head of woman, it is implied that he is her ruler or authority figure. Some scholars, including Grudem and Fitzmyer, have argued that this is the appropriate understanding of *κεφαλή*.<sup>12</sup> Fitzmyer concedes that *κεφαλή* can and does mean “source” in certain instances, namely *Orphic Fragment* 21A, excerpts from Philo, *Testament of Reuben* 2:2, Artemidorus Daldianus’s *Oneirocriticon*, and *Life of Adam and Eve* 19:3. He also admits that a significant number of lexicons have not listed “ruler” and

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<sup>10</sup> Although *κεφαλή* appears throughout the passage, it reoccurs eight times in 11:3-6 and only three other times in the rest of the passage (11:7, 10, 13). Thus, the term is treated in this section.

<sup>11</sup> BDAG, “*κεφαλή*,” 541-42.

<sup>12</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, “Does *Kephalē* (“Head”) Mean “Source” or “Authority over” in Greek Literature: A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *Trinity Journal* 6 (1985): 38-59. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in I Corinthians 11:3,” *Interpretation* 47 (1993): 52-59. This definition fits in well with both the traditional and complementarian views of the relationship between men and women.



“leader” as possible definitions for κεφαλή.<sup>13</sup> Fitzmyer is not phased by these difficulties, however, and gathers support for his conclusion from uses in Plato, the LXX, Philo, Josephus, Pastor Hermae, Plutarch, and Libanius.<sup>14</sup> At the conclusion of his article, Fitzmyer contends that the burden of proof is on the person who sets out to show that κεφαλή is intended to mean “source” in 1 Cor 11:2-16.<sup>15</sup>

In his initial article, Grudem asserts that “source” was not a viable meaning for κεφαλή in Paul’s day but that “authority over” was a clear meaning for the term. After going to great lengths to provide evidence leading him to this conclusion,<sup>16</sup> Grudem addresses the question of whether Paul could have been intending to use κεφαλή in a new way in the NT. To this question Grudem responds, “It assumes a situation that could not have occurred. It assumes that Paul . . . would use a common word in a sense never before known in the Greek-speaking world and expect his readers to understand it, even though he gave them no explicit explanation that he was using the word in a new way.”<sup>17</sup> In a more recent article, Grudem acknowledges Fitzmyer’s acceptance of “source” as a possibility for κεφαλή but ultimately expresses hope that in the future scholarship will realize the impossibility of such a definition.<sup>18</sup>

Against those who agree with Grudem and Fitzmyer, other scholars argue that the appropriate way to understand κεφαλή is as “source” or “origin.” Talbert argues that the references to creation in 11:8-9 make it clear that 11:3 intends to speak of source/origin

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<sup>13</sup> Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in I Corinthians 11:3,” 53-54, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in I Corinthians 11:3,” 54-55.

<sup>15</sup> Fitzmyer, “*Kephalē* in I Corinthians 11:3,” 57.

<sup>16</sup> Grudem, “2,336 Examples,” 48-58. Grudem’s conclusion that “source” was not a viable meaning for κεφαλή even in the NT is based on his interpretation of the NT passages in view and therefore is somewhat circular.

<sup>17</sup> Grudem, “2,336 Examples,” 58.

<sup>18</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 25-65; see 62, 64.

and not authority.<sup>19</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza also contends that the context of the passage makes the meaning “source” apparent.<sup>20</sup> Despite the arguments made by Grudem, various scholars have done research to show that “source” or “origin” was a legitimate definition for κεφαλή in the Greco-Roman world. Among those scholars is Payne. He provides fourteen reasons related to lexical and literary evidence, culture, literary context, and logic supporting the meaning of κεφαλή as “source” instead of “authority.”<sup>21</sup>

There is a third, more convincing argument for the meaning of κεφαλή, especially as it pertains to 1 Cor 11:2-16: that it connotes prominence, preeminence, and honor. Johnson espouses the connotations of “honor” and “prominence.” One of his critiques of the ongoing debate about κεφαλή is the singularity of nuance applied to the term by advocates either for “authority” or for “source.”<sup>22</sup> After evaluating much of the work done by Grudem and Fitzmyer, Cervin contends in a similar fashion that κεφαλή cannot mean “authority over,” can occasionally mean “source,” but most likely means “preeminence.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, so too does Andrew C. Perriman argue that κεφαλή connotes being “one who is foremost or preeminent.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, Perriman responds in detail to many of the examples used by Grudem and Fitzmyer, and Perriman shows that the uses

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<sup>19</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians, A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 86.

<sup>20</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 229.

<sup>21</sup> Payne, 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> Alan F. Johnson, “A Review of the Scholarly Debate on the Meaning of ‘Head’ (*kephale*) in Paul’s Writings,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 41 (2009): 35-57; see 52-53.

<sup>23</sup> Richard S. Cervin, “Does *Kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority over’ in Greek Literature: A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 (1989): 85-112; see his conclusions on 112. Grudem wrote a response to Cervin’s argument reasserting the strength of his own argument that κεφαλή means “authority over.” See Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies,” *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990): 3-72.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The Meaning of ‘Κεφαλή’ in 1 Cor. 11:3,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 2 (1994): 602-22; see 609-10.

of κεφαλή that signify a ruler are *not* closely connected with the idea of authority.

Perriman also responds to many of the arguments that have been put forth to advocate κεφαλή as “source,” and he shows that often the concepts of “beginning” and “source” (as source equals cause) have been confused and equated incorrectly. In both his treatment of arguments for “authority over” and arguments for “source,” Perriman goes back to the ancient examples cited and carefully evaluates them. Perriman’s analysis is meticulous and persuasive, and in further development of his argument he offers the following options for κεφαλή as reflecting the idea of preeminence and representing the connotations Paul would have had in mind in writing 1 Cor 11:

i) [T]he physical top or extremity of an object, such as a mountain or river; ii) more abstractly, that which is first, extreme (temporally or spatially); iii) that which is prominent or outstanding ; and iv) that which is determinative or representative by virtue of its prominence. Here, moreover, we remain in sight of the commonest figurative usage of κεφαλή in the LXX, by which the head, representative of the whole person by synecdoche, serves as the locus of a wide range of moral and religious experiences. Blessings, mischief, blood, recompense, reproach and judgment all come upon the head, typically from the hand of God (e.g. Gen. 49:26; 1 Kgdms. 25:39; 2 Kgdms. 1:16; Neh. 4:4; Ezek. 9:10; Judith 9:9); a vow is made upon the head (Num. 6:7); transgressions abound over the head (Ezra 9:6; Ps. 37:5); joy and praise are over the head (Isa. 35:10; 51:11; 61:7); shame and dishonour are closely associated with the head (Num. 5:18; Deut. 21:12; Jer 14:4; Ep. Jer. 31).<sup>25</sup>

Metaphorically, κεφαλή refers to position and placement as it connects to representation, not authority. This concept of placement does not suggest a sense of intrinsic inferiority or superiority (after all, Paul is not suggesting that Christ is inferior to God); rather, it indicates an inherent, unique connection between a subject and that

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<sup>25</sup> Perriman, 618; see 602-16 for Perriman’s analysis of “source” or “authority over” as meanings for κεφαλή. Cf. Stephen Bedale, “The Meaning of κεφαλή in the Pauline Epistles,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 5 (1954): 211-215. Bedale uses the Hebrew term שֵׁרֵשׁ to link κεφαλή with ἀρχή in Paul’s NT writings. Thus, argues Bedale, by κεφαλή Paul means “beginning,” and in 1 Cor 11 the term connotes authority for the man and indicates subordination for the woman, but Paul “is here speaking only of men and women in their respective sexual differentiation and function, not of their spiritual status or capacities.”

subject's head.<sup>26</sup> Thiselton's comments on the God/Christ relationship help to explain further how these relationships function:

The Greek Fathers' use of the term *perichoresis* well suggests the dialectic of distinctiveness, reciprocity, and oneness which Paul begins to unfold. Phil 2:6-11, as pre-Pauline material which Paul endorses, portrays a voluntary renunciation of "rights" (in this context, genuinely a right). The God-Christ relation has *nothing to do with self-glory* or with affirmation of the self at the expense of the other (cf. the ethical context of Phil 2:6-11; it is *not an involuntary or imposed "subordination," but an example of shared love*). The shared love controls the use of freedom, and thereby each brings "glory" to the other by assuming distinctive roles for a common purpose.<sup>27</sup>

In a relationship between a person and that person's head, one member (the head) represents and the other reflects. Such is the case for the God/Christ, Christ/man, and man/woman relationships, says Paul.<sup>28</sup>

This relationship of representation and reflection is important to recognize. In a sense, the ideas could be interchanged for men and women. That is, a woman's behavior represents a man's honor: if she behaves poorly and receives dishonor, her behavior is representative of the dishonor that will come upon the man.<sup>29</sup> A man or his behavior reflects the reputation of the woman: the honor or dishonor given a man is a reflection of

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<sup>26</sup> Garland, 516; see also, 532, on which Garland reiterates that the head relationship between God and Christ does not suggest a subordinationist Christology. Cf. Garland, 713-14. Neither does 1 Cor 15:24-28. In 15:28, Paul uses the title Son to emphasize that Christ, who is part of the Godhead rather than a separate deity, will submit to the will of the Father because he, too, participates in this will. The emphasis here is on monotheism, not subordinationism. Furthermore, Paul's statements in 1 Cor 15:24-28 and those in 1 Cor 11:3 should not be carelessly equated or too closely connected. In 1 Cor 11 Paul uses *κεφαλή* to speak of preeminence and honor; in 1 Cor 15 Paul is talking about powers and creation being subjected to Christ and ultimately God. *Κεφαλή* does not appear in 15:24-28, and in these verses it is the *feet* that are mentioned in discussing authority and rule. The absence of *κεφαλή* does not show that the term does not connote authority, of course. Rather, given that *κεφαλή* does not appear in 15:24-28, we cannot use these verses to read into Paul's assertions in 11:3. In 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul draws a connection between men/women and God/Christ so that the women will respect the men around them, not obey them. Cf. Johnson, 52. Johnson, too, asserts that the passage is not about insubordination but is about dishonoring. He sees it as equally emphasizing both men and women.

<sup>27</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 804. Italics original.

<sup>28</sup> Garland, 516.

<sup>29</sup> This means that the woman ought to be loyal to the man in her behavior, since she has the ability to dishonor (shame) him if she so desires.

the behavior of the woman. What is significant in Paul's argument is the emphasis he chooses to place on the ways the man is "head," or preeminent over the woman. As is stated below, Paul mentions in 11:12 a way in which woman is preeminent over man.<sup>30</sup> It is the situation Paul is addressing that leads to his focus on man's preeminence: the women in the Corinthian congregation are not behaving as if they remember or respect either their intimate connection with the men in the congregation or the importance of the man in the human race. Their behavior dishonors and is dismissive of the men with whom they worship.

The triad Paul outlines in 11:3 specifies three sets of unique relationships that can be described in one way by representation and reflection: God is the head of Christ, Christ the head of man, and man the head of woman; however, this triad does not indicate that each member only directly relates to his or her head.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, 11:3 asserts that man is the head of the woman, and 11:7 asserts that woman is the glory of man.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, 11:3 asserts that Christ is the head of man and God is the head of Christ, and 11:7 asserts that man is the glory of God, not Christ.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, God directly relates both to man and woman as Creator.<sup>34</sup> The statement that man has Christ as his head is not about exclusion of the female but inclusion of all humanity; it traces all people back to their identity in God (creation) through Christ (creation and redemption).

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<sup>30</sup> At this point, the male/female human relationship should not be too closely compared to the God-Christ relationship. The interchangeability of preeminence within human relationships is not the case within the divine relationship.

<sup>31</sup> To say that Christ is not the head of the woman and that man is an intermediary between the woman and Christ/God, then, not only misses the point but is also incorrect.

<sup>32</sup> And Perriman has argued that these two statements are reciprocal; see Perriman, 621-22.

<sup>33</sup> So see Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, vol. 7 of *Sacra Pagina Series*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 396.

<sup>34</sup> It should be remembered that, even though God used the man's rib to create the woman, this does not make man an intermediary between God or Christ and the woman. Genesis 2 makes it clear that the man's role in God's creation of the woman was completely passive.

It serves as a reminder of this point both to males and to females. That the woman is intimately connected to the man as part of humanity cannot be understood without humanity's connection to and identity in Christ. Then, the God-Christ relationship means that all things, even Christ, belong in and to God.

Moving forward in 11:4, Paul uses a peculiar expression to bring up the topic of head coverings. He asserts that any man praying or prophesying *κατα κεφαλῆς* dishonors his head. Padgett, who argues that 1 Cor 11:2-16 refers to hairstyles rather than head coverings, draws a major part of his argument from his understanding of the expression *κατα κεφαλῆς*:

First, *kata* does not generally mean “on” (as it would have to for “head covering”). Usually it means “down,” or accompanied by a verb of motion “against”. Second, the word veil, *kalymma*, does not occur at any point in this passage. Third, v. 14 specifically mentions the idea of men having long hair (*koma*). We thus join a growing number of scholars in rendering *kata kephalēs echōn* as “having (long hair) coming down from the head”.<sup>35</sup>

Paul could have used a more direct term to reference head coverings in 11:4, but perhaps his terminology is intentionally used to make a point. With the genitive *κατά* typically means “down from,” intended spatially, or “against,” which can connote hostility.<sup>36</sup> If *κεφαλή* has a double meaning here, referencing both the man's physical head and his metaphorical head (Christ), the preposition *κατά* contains undertones of opposition in addition to its standard meaning. That is, Paul uses an expression that loosely refers to the wearing of a garment on the head and at the same time suggests the

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<sup>35</sup> Alan Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church: The Contradictions of Coiffure in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 20 (1984): 69-86; see 70. Padgett also argues that the combination of the terms *ἀκατακάλυπτος/κατακαλύπτω* in 11:5-7, 13 with the use of *ἀντί περιβόλαιον* in 11:15 reflects a concern for how hair is worn, not with veils or coverings. The meanings of *ἀκατακάλυπτος*, *κατακαλύπτω*, and *ἀντί περιβόλαιον* are to be explored below.

<sup>36</sup> BDAG, “κατά,” 511.

hostility marked by the wearing of such a garment. For a man to worship with something “down from” his physical head is for a man to set himself against (in opposition to by means of self-promotion) Christ, his metaphorical head.<sup>37</sup> For a man to pray or prophesy in a way that opposes the values of Christ is dishonoring to Christ as well as to himself, giving the second instance of *κεφαλή* in 11:4 a double entendre as well.

In recalling the arguments made by Finney and Gill concerning male head coverings in liturgical settings, it is now possible to evaluate their usefulness for 1 Cor 11:2-16. Both Gill and Finney explain that the male head covering was an indicator of status for the man wearing it.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the covering was an act of piety in order to honor one’s god. The covering would be removed only if someone of higher status were also present, and this would be an acknowledgement of the other person’s higher status but would, more importantly, show deference to the god being worshiped.<sup>39</sup>

That some men in the Corinthian community are praying/prophesying with heads covered indicates that during worship they are using a show of piety to insist on their own social ascendancy over other men and over women as well. Paul reminds the men that it is not honoring to Christ, and therefore God, to cover the head if this also entails the promotion of the self over others. Furthermore, this behavior of self-promotion shames the men themselves because Paul has already made it clear that striving for the worldly perception of honor, and mistreating others in the process, is shameful. In 11:3 Paul is clear in saying that “Christ is the head of *every* man”—there is no place for self-promoting honor-claims in the body of Christ; all are equally united in him. Paul is

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<sup>37</sup> Thus, while Padgett uses the expression *κατα κεφαλής* to argue that the passage references hairstyles, this expression may actually be further indication that 11:2-16 references head coverings.

<sup>38</sup> Gill, 247-51. Remember that Gill references the portraiture of Corinth specifically. Finney, 35, 39, 45-47.

<sup>39</sup> Finney, 40.

willing to depart from the cultural understanding of honor and shame, even in regard to one's deity, according to his own understanding of gospel values for the community.<sup>40</sup>

Although Paul addresses a problem with the Corinthian men in 11:4, the larger problem in the Corinthians congregation seems to be with the women.<sup>41</sup> They are going *uncovered* in worship while praying and prophesying, and it is dishonoring to their “heads.” Although it has been argued that the terms ἀκατακάλυπτος and κατακαλύπτω refer to hairstyles rather than head coverings,<sup>42</sup> in classical Greek, κατακαλύπτω referred not to hairstyles but to head coverings, as the term carried the connotation of covering or veiling.<sup>43</sup> Further analysis of κατακαλύπτω reveals that throughout the Classical, Hellenistic, and Imperial periods, the term referenced an object that covers something else. When the topic was a head, κατακαλύπτω indicated a garment that covers the head.<sup>44</sup> This is the sense in which Paul uses the term, and the overall thrust of the passage reveals that Paul is calling for the Corinthian women to cover their heads, even if the act of covering is related to the hair underneath the covering as well.

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<sup>40</sup> Finney, 47-48. That is, while the men of the highest social ranking would normally have retained the covering both as an indicator of personal status and an act of piety before God, Paul eliminates this practice in order to place all worshippers on the same social level. All humans are equally human before Christ, who is part of the Godhead. NB: It is possible that the reference to male head coverings is a rhetorical point for the sake of argument. After all, Paul's overall focus in the passage is on women. Regardless, the logic remains the same. Paul's discussion of the male attire reflects his understanding of what is appropriate behavior and attire.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., see Collins, 400; Garland, 506; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 495.

<sup>42</sup> See Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” 70. See also Fee, 497. Padgett argues that, as used both in the LXX (Num 5:18) and by Philo, the term ἀκατακάλυπτος references a woman's unbound, free-flowing hair. But cf. Preston T. Massey, “The Meaning of κατακαλύπτω and κατα κεφαλῆς ἐχων in 1 Corinthians 11.2-16,” *New Testament Studies* 53 (2007): 502-23; see 519-21. Philo's words do not have to be interpreted according to Padgett's argument.

<sup>43</sup> Garland, 520.

<sup>44</sup> Massey, “The Meaning of κατακαλύπτω and κατα κεφαλῆς ἐχων,” 502-23. See also Garland, 519. Garland asserts that trying to prove the argument primarily deals with hairstyles and not coverings “is a false trail that can only misdirect the interpretation of the passage.”



In fact, for the women to abandon the covering during worship reveals their hair, bringing attention to it. The women likely have their hair adorned as part of their displays of honor,<sup>45</sup> but, even if not, just being bare-headed may affiliate these women with the more prestigious of the day.<sup>46</sup> It seems that there is a tension for uncovered women, though. While the wealthier, more prestigious women of the day might be brazen enough to go without the covering, others may associate the lack of covering with the stigmas about which Finney speaks.<sup>47</sup> In this way, the dishonor Paul mentions in 11:5 refers to the women's physical heads, but the physical heads symbolize the women themselves. They bring shame upon themselves by going without the covering.<sup>48</sup>

Going without the covering also shames the women's metaphorical head because the act is self-centered. It is both a display of self-promotion and a visual disassociation with the men in the congregation. The women may believe that the new order in Christ means they do not have to wear head coverings, since the coverings emphasize a human connection and possibly subordination. Instead, like the men, the women believe they can worship uncovered as a sign of equality, no longer needing a garment that acknowledges the men in their midst.<sup>49</sup> It seems that the women have become preoccupied with their equal status and personal honor, however, and are treating the men dismissively, as if they have no connection to the men. Inasmuch as going uncovered feeds the women's preoccupation with their own status and encourages them to treat the men this way, it is unacceptable to Paul.

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<sup>45</sup> Alicia J. Batten, "Clothing and Adornment," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 40 (2010): 148-59; see 154-55.

<sup>46</sup> Witherington, 234-35.

<sup>47</sup> Finney, 35-36.

<sup>48</sup> So see Collins, 407.

<sup>49</sup> Finney, 49-50.

The women's behavior cannot be understood apart from either how it affects the men in the congregation or how it affects themselves. If Finney's fictive kinship concept is correct,<sup>50</sup> Paul is urging the believers to see themselves as a united family. This does not mean that Paul buys into all the societal values of honor and shame or that he adopts any of them uncritically. Rather, Paul is willing to examine societal values in light of the gospel and accept, reject, or adapt them as he sees fit. Here, Paul appeals to a corporate sense of honor and dishonor. In Greco-Roman society, when one member of a group or family lost honor, the whole family did.<sup>51</sup> The Corinthian women think that they are promoting themselves in the assembly; instead, by ignoring gospel values and bringing shame on the men in the congregation, they are also bringing shame on themselves.<sup>52</sup>

In 11:6 Paul declares, "If a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair." It is likely that this statement is a sarcastic, exaggerated response to the women's insistence on going uncovered in worship. If this is so, Paul is not unaware of the possible negative connotations of a woman's shaven head, whether the connotation is mourning or humiliation, and he assumes that neither are the Corinthians unaware of these connotations. Paul's attitude is simple: If you are going to behave this way, it speaks as well of you as a shaved head would.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Finney, 50-51.

<sup>51</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 37C of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 4. Concepts of honor were wrapped up in family and societal connections. Neyrey speaks only of "ascribed" honor, but honor had a corporate sense no matter how it came about. Cf. Perriman, 621. Perriman claims that "the woman's status and value is summed up in the man;" in this statement he errs. The woman's status and value is summed up in God through Christ. It is better to say that the woman's identity cannot and status should not be understood apart from the man.

<sup>52</sup> Also implied is that the woman shames Christ/God. Just as the man's self-promoting behavior brings shame to himself, other men, women, Christ, and ultimately God, so too does the women's self-promoting behavior bring shame upon all those to whom she is connected.

<sup>53</sup> Recall the evidence from Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, and Tacitus. See Gill, 256; Garland, 520.

It is also possible that in 11:6 Paul is providing a legitimate option for the women who wish to remain uncovered: they can cut off their hair, which will remove the distraction of the exposed hair in worship. In making this suggestion, however, Paul is calling out the women's motives perhaps more than he is making a serious suggestion. For a woman a shaved head *could signify* a vow. If a woman were fulfilling a vow, it was acceptable to have a shaved head.<sup>54</sup> Since the women's motives in going uncovered are for self-gain, however, it would be nonsensical and hypocritical for the women to shave their heads, hence 11:6b, "But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil." In 11:6 Paul is exposing the self-centered motives of the women by suggesting they use their decision to participate in worship with exposed heads as a further means of worship and self-sacrifice. Therefore, while the act of shaving the head could carry positive connotations, here it carries only a sense of shame.<sup>55</sup>

The word for "shameful" here is *αἰσχρός*. It is defined as "pert[aining] to being socially or morally unacceptable, *shameful, base*," and of it BDAG says, "A term esp[ecially] significant in honor-shame oriented society; gener[ally] in ref[erence] to that which fails to meet expected moral and cultural standards."<sup>56</sup> This is an important point in the passage. Paul is not simply concerned with the way the women's behavior impacts those around them. He also *does care* how it reflects on their reputation, and he anticipates that the women in the congregation will, too. After all, their behavior is

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<sup>54</sup> Garland, 520; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Religious Hair," *Studies in the New Testament, Volume 1: Glimpses of the Legal and Social Presuppositions of the Authors* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 170-75; see 171. These vows were made with the husband's consent. If, as Derrett contends, the hair is associated with sexuality, then a shaved head is a sign that the woman is willing to sacrifice her sexual attractiveness out of devotion to the Lord.

<sup>55</sup> It is shameful because the religious act of shaving the head would not come from sincere motives. It is also shameful because, without this religious connotation, a shaved head carries negative implications.

<sup>56</sup> BDAG, "*αἰσχρός*," 29.

already motivated by societal perceptions. Paul is in no way attempting to belittle the women or the sense of honor they do, in fact, have for their value as human beings. Rather, Paul opposes any display of honor that is belittling to others and, in his understanding of the gospel's value system, speaks poorly of one's own character.

### Understanding 11:7-9

In 11:7-9 Paul again roots his opinions on the cultural norms of male and female dress in the created order—that is, in that which comes from God. Paul asserts that men should not cover their heads because man is the “image and glory of God,” but this must be read in light of Paul's earlier statement that it is dishonoring to man's head for man to pray or prophesy covered. In light of 11:7, in which Paul also says that woman is the glory of man,<sup>57</sup> 11:8 shows how woman is related to man (he is her preeminent partner in the human race, from whom she was created *by God*), and 11:9 explores the implications and nature of that relationship (this connection does not suggest inferiority).

What does it mean that man is the image and glory of God and that woman is the glory of man? Paul often talks about glory. Sometimes human beings can give glory to God, as in Rom 4:20. Other times human beings, and especially believers, hope for or have glory (Rom 2:7; 8:17-18; 1 Cor 2:7). In 1 Cor 11:7, man is said to *be* the glory of God. How does this relate to the creation language in which it is discussed?

Gerhard von Rad notes that in Hebrew כבוד is related to honor and importance, being that which makes someone or something impressive. In reference to God, כבוד

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<sup>57</sup> Note that the NRSV translates this as “but woman is the reflection of man.” “Reflection” is an appropriate translation for δόξα. Although in one sense “reflection” connotes the sense of connection that is indicated here, it misses the idea of “impressiveness” that is being emphasized (to be explored below).

indicates the overwhelming impressiveness of God's self-manifestation.<sup>58</sup> In the Greek, *δόξα* can refer to radiance, honor, repute, and reflection.<sup>59</sup> Paul's statement in 11:7 indicates that man being the image and glory of God is a revelation of God's radiance and impressiveness; every man has intrinsic honor. This is true for every man, not only those who have achieved some sort of status or prestige. All equally participate in the image and glory of God. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the men to comport themselves in a way that properly reflects this glory and understands what true repute entails: the respect of others. Finney explains that this sense of solidarity gives glory to God through the assertion of equal participation. He says, "The wearing of the traditional Roman head-covering brought honour to the gods; in Paul's teaching it is now the absence of that head-covering which, in asserting the brotherhood of believers, brings honour (glory) to God and reflects something of his image."<sup>60</sup>

In 11:7 Paul is not insinuating that men have an advantage over women, being the glory of God while women are not. Women, too, bear God's image.<sup>61</sup> Women, too,

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<sup>58</sup> Gerhard von Rad, "כְּבוֹד in the OT," in Kittel "δόξα," in vol. 2 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 238-42; see 238.

<sup>59</sup> Gerhard Kittel "δόξα," in vol. 2 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 233-55; see 234-37.

<sup>60</sup> Finney, 48. Cf. Perriman, 620. Perriman asserts, "Whereas in the context of worship it is appropriate for the 'image and glory of God' to be seen, the 'glory of man' should be concealed." This may be true to an extent, but the problem as Paul outlines it is that the woman is dishonoring her head by going uncovered. Perriman's statement only makes complete sense if there is a double entendre present 11:5, that the woman both dishonors the man by being dismissive of him/promoting herself and dishonors herself by accidentally promoting the very ones over whom she intended to assert herself.

<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that the text does not say that woman is the image of man. Woman, too, is created in the image of God. Paul would be well aware of this in his knowledge of Gen 1. But see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Cor 11:2-16 Once Again," in *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting Major Issues* (2009, repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 159-81; see 165; Murphy O'Connor asserts that Paul establishes "man *alone*, against all Jewish tradition, as 'the image and glory of God' (v. 7b)." This does not follow from Paul's argument. Cf. Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Gender and Creation in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: A Study in Paul's Theological Method," *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 151-71; see 156: "Paul's oft-noted failure to state that women too is the image of God, as the first creation account implies ('in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them'),

participate in the special place given to humanity; after all, man is representative of woman, and what is true of him includes her. Paul's statement that woman is man's glory emphasizes the women's special relationship to the men, that women reflect humanity's impressiveness. Women are honored in relation to and among men. Padgett explains, "*doxa* means that woman is the glory, the splendor, the grandeur of man."<sup>62</sup> This positive connotation is explored in Paul's next two statements (11:8-9).

When Paul expresses that woman was created *διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα*, he has in mind the creation story of Gen 2. In Gen 2:18 God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him an *עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ*." No living creatures God creates are able to fulfill this requirement (Gen 2:20) until God creates the woman (2:21). Although the modern-day traditionalist understanding of *עֹזֵר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ* conveys the idea of a helper subordinate to the man,<sup>63</sup> the Hebrew does not carry this meaning. In light of the linguistic development of the terms *עֹזֵר* and *כְּנֶגְדּוֹ* and their cultural connotations, the most appropriate translation of this expression is "a power (or strength) *equal* to him."<sup>64</sup>

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need not be taken as a denial. It is best understood as an intentional omission for the sake of stressing that woman is the glory of man." See also Morna D. Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor 11:10," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964): 410-16; see 411.

<sup>62</sup> Padgett, "Paul on Women in the Church," 80. See also Payne, 13: "The glory of someone is the person or thing in which he glories or exults, as Adam does over Eve in Genesis 2:23. Woman is depicted in Genesis as the crowning glory of creation made specifically to be man's partner." Payne goes on to say that "Paul's appeal to woman as the glory of man affirms woman as the proper sexual partner of man. This exposes the error of effeminate hair, for, in symbolizing homosexuality, it repudiates woman as man's sexual mate." While Payne's former comment is useful, his latter comment misses the point of the passage; neither homosexuality nor sexuality in general is primarily in view here.

<sup>63</sup> E.g., Robert D. Culver, "A Traditional View: Let Your Women Keep Silence," *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 25-52; see 31. Cf. NIV: "I will make a helper suitable for him;" ESV: "I will make him a helper fit for him."

<sup>64</sup> R. David Freedman, "Woman, A Power Equal to Man: Translation of Woman as a 'Fit Helpmate' for Man is Questioned," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9 (1983): 56-58; see 58. Paul's strong Jewish identity was no doubt affected by the Hellenism of the time; however, Paul spent time during his young-adult life in Jerusalem receiving some sort of Jewish training. At the time Jerusalem was the cultic center of Judaism. Paul was a Hebrew and a Pharisee, a heritage he took seriously. So see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 423-26. In Phil 3:5-6 and

The LXX contains the same connotation. In 2:18 God says, “ποιήσωμεν αὐτῷ βοηθὸν κατ’ αὐτόν” (“We will make for him a helper according to him”). Furthermore, 2:20b reads, “τῷ δὲ Ἀδὰμ οὐχ εὗρέθη βοηθὸς ὅμοιος αὐτῷ,” meaning, “but for Adam there was not found a helper similar to/of the same nature as him.”<sup>65</sup> The word βοηθός, an adjective used substantively in 2:18 and 2:20, references a helper who rescues or aids the weak. The connotation is not that of a servant or subordinate. The word ὅμοιος in 2:20 specifies the similarity of the βοηθός, who will be created in the following verses, to the man. It is a qualifying term that prevents the reader from thinking that woman somehow supersedes man; they are equals.<sup>66</sup> Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the LXX confirm that the woman, being an equal strength to man, represents the impressiveness he holds as *humanity* created in God’s image. Therefore, Paul’s statements in 11:8-9 affirm the woman’s value even while it asserts that man is preeminently connected to woman.

In 11:7-9 Paul reminds the women why, in light of creation, they ought to respect the men in their congregation. In God’s creation of male and female, God created the man and then created the woman out of the man; therefore, the woman’s humanity cannot be fully understood apart from the man’s.<sup>67</sup> The women in the Corinthian congregation

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Gal 1:13-14, Paul describes his pre-gospel life as thoroughly Jewish. Therefore, Paul likely would have been familiar with the nuances present in the Hebrew Gen 2 story. Even so, the LXX carries the same connotation as the Hebrew.

<sup>65</sup> Translation mine.

<sup>66</sup> BDAG, “ὅμοιος,” 706-7, and BDAG, “βοηθός,” 180. The word ὅμοιος in 2:20 makes it clear that, although woman is man’s βοηθός, he is not her subordinate. It is remarkably affirming of women that *this* is the qualification that must be made in 2:20.

<sup>67</sup> Paul certainly did not believe that the interconnectedness of man and woman required a sexually based marriage relationship. Paul himself was single and promoted the single life for those who had such a calling (1 Cor 7). He was able to understand, however, the value of the basic connection of men and women with each other as fellow humans. This is worth noting. Paul is *not saying* that the value of woman is wrapped up in her sexual or romantic relation to man. Rather, Paul is affirming that the woman’s basic identity as a human being should not be understood without her co-human: the man. In the same way, the man’s identity as human cannot be properly understood without his co-human (the woman). This close

are intimately and uniquely connected to the men, their co-humans and preeminent partner in creation. The men ought to be treated with honor and respect, not with dismissive behavior. By giving honor to the men in the congregation, the women are asserting that they are co-participants in humanity with the men. They are not asserting themselves over the men but joining with them in being human. In this way, the women reflect and exhibit the glory of man and participate in the glory of God.

While he is clear to remind the women of the importance of men, Paul also affirms that this relationship speaks highly of women: woman is the glory of man (that which is impressive about him) and important to man, having been created as a “power equal” and companion to him. This will lead Paul to assert what he does in 11:10.

#### 11:10-12, Authority and Interdependence

In 11:10 when Paul says, “the woman ought ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς,” what exactly is he saying?<sup>68</sup> The phrase διὰ τοῦτο, which introduces 11:10, plays a significant role in what Paul is trying to communicate in this verse. Διὰ τοῦτο carries with it the force

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connection between male and female can be expressed in a marriage relationship, but that is ultimately not what is in view here. See also Fee, 523.

<sup>68</sup> The traditional view has interpreted this phrase to mean that man needs to be in authority over woman. The assumption is that διὰ τοῦτο, “on account of this,” references woman’s being made from and for man, therefore establishing her subordinate place to him. So see Culver, 31. See also NLT. This traditionalist argument is not possible given the Greek phrasing, which translates: “the woman ought to have authority over [her] head.” Translation mine. Although αὐτῆς does not appear here, the context requires it. As Fee explains, “There is no known evidence either that *exousia* is ever taken in this passive sense.” Fee, 519-20; Payne, 13. Others have suggested that a head covering serves as a sign of the woman’s authority or somehow gives the woman authority. E.g., Finney, 52. Many English translations reflect this understanding: e.g., NIV, ESV, NASB, and NRSV. Similarly, BDAG lists ἐξουσία in 1 Cor 11:10 as “a means of exercising power,” referencing a veil; however, if correct this meaning of ἐξουσία would be limited to this sole example. No other listing for ἐξουσία in BDAG fits this explanation. BDAG, “ἐξουσία,” 352-53. This explanation suggested by Finney and BDAG may be a possibility, although close examination of the language of the verse within the logic of the entire passage reveals that there are better ways to understand 11:10.



of everything Paul has said up to this point.<sup>69</sup> It is on account of the shared humanity of the man and the woman, grounded in Christ and ultimately God; on account of the unique connection between the man and the woman, which emphasizes the man's preeminence in human history and declares that the Corinthian women's behavior ought to show respect for the men in their community of faith; and on account of the way in which the woman is affirmed as a valuable, equal member of humanity who has the unique role of reflecting and embodying the impressive humanity of the man that Paul goes on to say, "ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς."<sup>70</sup>

The term *ἐξουσία* can connote "freedom of choice, right"; "control . . . capability, might, power"; "authority, absolute power, warrant"; "ruling power"; "authorities"; "domain [of power]"; or "a means of exercising power."<sup>71</sup> In its various nuances, *ἐξουσία* has to do with power, whether this connects to ability, entitlement, or choice. Paul uses the term *ἐξουσία* nine other times in 1 Corinthians. The first usage, in 7:37, is a reference to one's ability to have one's passions under control, not being controlled by one's passions. This suggests connotations both of control and freedom. Then, 1 Cor 8:9 is a clear reference to liberty or freedom. The next six occurrences (9:4, 5, 6, 12, 12, 18) are part of Paul's discussion on his approach to apostleship. He is at pains to show that he has put aside his rights in order to do what he deems best in certain situations. Here *ἐξουσία* connotes this idea of one's right, freedom, or entitlement. The final time Paul uses *ἐξουσία* in 1 Corinthians comes in 15:24, and this context connotes authority and power.

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<sup>69</sup> Since 11:10 is the climax of the chiasmus in 11:8-12, *διὰ τοῦτο* also references what Paul will say next, which is a reiteration of the interdependence of men and women.

<sup>70</sup> See also Hooker, 414, who says, "At this point we may ask whether there is not a closer link than is sometimes supposed between the various stages of Paul's argument."

<sup>71</sup> BDAG, "*ἐξουσία*," 352-53.

When used with ἔχω, ἐξουσία can mean *to have the right to do something*.<sup>72</sup> It can also mean *to have power or authority over someone/something*, whether that relates to “potential or resource to command, control, or govern” or “the right to control or command.”<sup>73</sup> This concept of “power over” is especially true with the combination of ἔχω, ἐξουσία, and ἐπὶ, a combination occurring only once in 1 Corinthians: 11:10. In the ἔχω-ἐξουσία-ἐπὶ construction, the object of ἐπὶ references that over which the subject has authority or power. For example, Rev 20:6 reads, “Over [those who share in the first resurrection] the second death has no power.” In Rev 11:6, the two witnesses “ἐξουσίαν ἔχουσιν ἐπὶ” the waters to turn them into blood. In Rev 14:18, an angel comes out, “ὁ ἔχων ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ” the fire. These examples suggest both the *right* and the *potential* to control the object of ἐπὶ. The idea of power and right to command also includes the freedom of discernment that comes with choosing to do something. For instance, in Rev 16:9, in which God is said to have authority over the plagues, this also means that God *chooses* when to send them or not to send them.<sup>74</sup> It is because God has this freedom of control that the people curse God for sending them.<sup>75</sup>

When Paul asserts in 11:10 that the woman ought to have ἐξουσία over her head, he is surely referencing both a woman’s ability and her right or authority to be in

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<sup>72</sup> See BDAG, “ἐξουσία,” 352. The expanded definition here is, “A state of control over someth[ing], freedom of choice, right.” Sometimes this is “the ‘right’ to act, decide, or dispose of one’s property as one wishes,” and other times this is simply the right/entitlement to do something. See Rom 9:21; 1 Cor 9:4ff; 2 Thes 3:9, Heb 13:10.

<sup>73</sup> BDAG, “ἐξουσία,” 352-53. E.g., Rev 13:12.

<sup>74</sup> Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” 71-72.

<sup>75</sup> These examples all use ἐπὶ plus the genitive; ἐπὶ plus the accusative also indicates authority over something, although examples of this use the verb “to give” (E.g., Luke 9:1; Rev 6:8, 13:7). See also Rev 2:26. Here, too, Christ *gives* authority to the one who is victorious, but the preposition ἐπὶ is used with the genitive: “δῶσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν.” This verse suggests right, capability, and perhaps even autonomy/freedom in ruling over the nations.

command of her own physical head.<sup>76</sup> This ἐξουσία means that the woman is able to keep her head under control: she has both the capability and, if necessary, the resource/covering to do so. It also means that the woman has the right to be in command of her head: she, and no one else, is in charge of it. Furthermore, since ἐξουσία also entails a sense of freedom and discernment in governing or exercising one's rights, the woman can also choose *how* she will command it.

As mentioned above, the full force of Paul's statement in 11:10 cannot be understood without the expression διὰ τοῦτο, which reiterates everything said up to this point. The woman was created by God and given full partnership in the human race. She embodies the δόξα of the man's special place in creation, that is, his humanity. She, too, is connected to Christ and, ultimately, God as part of the human family, which God created and redeemed. Her humanity gives the woman the ability and right to govern her head as she sees fit.

The thrust of διὰ τοῦτο is not yet complete, however. Paul clearly thinks that the Corinthian women *should* cover their heads, and he understands the best use of the women's ἐξουσία to result in them doing so because the fullness of the woman's humanity cannot be understood apart from her preeminent partner, the man, or apart from the Christ-value of respect for the other instead of self-promotion.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, inherent in the Corinthian women's right and ability to govern their heads is the responsibility to

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<sup>76</sup> This verse most likely references the woman's physical head, and also implied is the woman's entire self, since the head can represent the self. But cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, 228. Schüssler Fiorenza suggests a double entendre for κεφαλή here, also indicating the man. She argues that the reference to angels at the end of 11:10 implies that angels are mediators for prophetic utterances and therefore both give women the ability to dress their physical heads as they wish and indicate that women have just as much power over men as men do over women.

<sup>77</sup> It is ironic that the "other" in this situation is the woman's human counterpart.

govern them well, not with selfish disregard for their brothers but with a respect for the men that brings true honor to everyone in the Corinthian congregation.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, inasmuch as the woman's physical head can be representative of her being, this ἐξουσία entails the responsibility the Corinthian women have to choose proper attitudes toward the Corinthian men. In doing these things, the women are governing themselves well.<sup>79</sup>

While Paul's expectation that the Corinthian women cover their heads is clear from the remainder of the passage, in 11:10 he does not explicitly state it. Perhaps his ambiguity is intended as a challenge: How will the women choose to use their ἐξουσία? Will it be with a true understanding of what this ἐξουσία really is? Paul hopes that the women will properly exercise their ἐξουσία and respect the men worshipping with them instead of behaving dismissively toward the men,<sup>80</sup> since proper use of ἐξουσία contributes to worship of God, whereas improper use of it takes away from worship.

Paul adds "because of the angels" to the end of 11:10. Although this phrase seems to come unexpectedly, Paul believes that angels watch human actions (1 Cor 4:9) as part of their role in governing the natural order. One of their affairs is the worship of God.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, Gerhard Kittel explains that, "In Ezekiel the cherub is the bearer of כבוד

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 839. The women are honored too, since their choice reflects their own respectability and respect for others.

<sup>79</sup> In a sense, to govern well includes keeping their heads under control. For this understanding of the phrase, see Gundry-Volf, 159-60. Cf. Payne, 13. According to Payne, Paul is saying that a woman needs to wear her hair up and not in an unkempt manner. Hence, she is exercising control over her hair. And see Collins, 411. Collins asserts that the most immediate meaning is that a woman, who has control over her own physical head, does this properly when she wears her hair appropriately. Collins goes on to say that Paul may also be referencing controlled speech, since the mouth is part of the head and the actions in consideration are praying and prophesying. Although the passage is more about head coverings than how women wear their hair, Collins catches some of Paul's nuance here.

<sup>80</sup> Fee, 523. This sentiment goes hand in hand with Paul's concern elsewhere in 1 Corinthians to respect and not be dismissive of fellow believers. The assembly of believers does not adhere to the same value system as that of the world, and in many ways it chooses to redefine this value system. This redefined value system does not permit behavior that dishonors the other for the sake of the self.

<sup>81</sup> Hooker, 412-13. Cf. Collins, 412. Collins suggests that the presence of angels in the assembly heightens the need for order, since that is proper.

(9:3; 10:4, 18, 22; cf. Sir. 49:8). Similarly, in Judaism the concept of divine δόξα can sometimes be transferred over to the angelic powers around God.”<sup>82</sup> Since angels, who witness the Corinthian worship, represent God’s radiance and are guardians of the natural order, the women ought to comport themselves in a way that best reflects their own δόξα as a means of worshipping God.<sup>83</sup>

Paul’s simultaneous assertion of the woman’s authority to govern her own head and her responsibility to govern it well by covering herself is crucially located within the argument. 1 Corinthians 11:8-12 has a chiasmic structure: the chiasmus begins in 11:8-9, climaxes with 11:10, and ends in 11:11-12.<sup>84</sup> The location of 11:10 naturally reveals its importance in the chiasmus and the passage. It is the zenith and focal point of 11:8-12, delivering a powerful assertion about the Corinthian women’s comportment. It also complements and counters 11:7a, which alone could lead the reader to expect a different conclusion than what 11:0 provides.<sup>85</sup> Fee offers the following outline for 11:7-12:

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<sup>82</sup> Kittel, 251. See NT examples in 2 Pet 2:10; Jude 1:8; Rev 18:1.

<sup>83</sup> The phrase “because of the angels” has troubled scholars for many years. See Fee, 521. Although it has been suggested that Paul insists on a covering to prevent male angels from lusting over women, there is no evidence from that time period for such an interpretation. See also Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia,—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, trans. James W. Leitch, ed. George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 189. Conzelmann mentions other suggestions made by scholars: that woman needs to be protected from fallen angels (Tertullian) or demons because she is derived from man and is weak (Kümmel), or even that angels are the protectors of creation, and therefore women are to show their subordination (Heinrici, Robertson and Plummer, Bachmann; Foerster; Harder; Caird). These suggestions are not well supported by the text and do not correctly deal with ἐξουσία. Murphy O’Connor, “1 Cor 11:2-16 Once Again,” in *Keys to First Corinthians*, 177-78, argues that the reference is to human messengers. He believes that the presence of visitors supports the need for the Corinthians to wear their hair appropriately. Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” 81-82, agrees that human messengers are likely in view but argues that Paul is insisting on freedom so that visitors do not feel out of place for wearing their hair differently from the Corinthians. All of Paul’s other references to angels in 1 Corinthians refer to supernatural beings, however. At this point, scholarship is still unclear as to why angels are referenced here. Until further clarity is reached, it is difficult to understand the full importance of the phrase, and it should be noted that scholars on all sides have used it to find support for their arguments.

<sup>84</sup> Fee, 518, 523.

<sup>85</sup> Fee, 519. Cf. Gundry-Volf, 160, who argues that Fee’s chiasm for this section does not work. Gundry-Volf does not properly interpret 11:9, however.

- 7       *For*  
       On the one hand, MAN ought not to have the **head covered**,  
                                   Being the image and glory of God;  
       On the other hand, THE WOMAN  
   is the glory of MAN;
- 8       [A]     *For* MAN is not from WOMAN,  
   but WOMAN from MAN;
- 9       [B]     *For* also MAN was not created for WOMAN's sake,  
   but WOMAN for MAN's
- 10    For this reason  
       THE WOMAN ought to have authority over her (own) **head**  
   because of the angels.
- 11    *in any case* (nonetheless)  
       [B']    Neither WOMAN apart from MAN,  
               nor     MAN     apart from WOMAN,  
   in the Lord.
- 12    [A']    For just as the WOMAN (is) from     the MAN,  
               so also the MAN     (is) through the WOMAN,  
               *but* all things     (are) from   God.<sup>86</sup>

In the chiasmic relationship between 11:8-9 and 11:11-12, 11:11-12 reiterates the interdependence of man and woman. Although the woman is given much credit in 11:7-10, the women at Corinth are ultimately being told to change their behavior because of their human connection to men. After the climactic appeal for proper behavior in 11:10, Paul takes the time to reiterate that this connection is not one-sided or unequal. The presence of *πλήν* at the beginning of 11:11 sets what is to follow in contrast with what has just been said. *Πλήν* is defined as a “marker of something that is contrastingly added for consideration,” in general and as “only, in any case, on the other hand, but” in direct connection to 1 Cor 11:11.<sup>87</sup> Its purpose is to eliminate any false thinking that this expectation placed on the women reflects an unbalanced relationship between the sexes. It is as if Paul is saying, “But wait: just as women should not consider their interests independently of men, neither should men consider their interests independently of

<sup>86</sup> Fee, 494. My outline for these verses (above) is similar to Fee's.

<sup>87</sup> BDAG, “*πλήν*,” 826.

women. Yes, woman came from man, but man is born through the woman. And anyway, God is the ultimate source of everyone and everything.”

1 Corinthians 11:11-12 reiterates that women and men are not independent,<sup>88</sup> and neither does their connection lead to one-sided dependence. Rather, men and women are interdependent, even and especially “in the Lord.”<sup>89</sup> Just as the first woman came from the first man, so are men born of women. Furthermore, “all things come from God.” Lest anyone be inclined to assert herself or himself over the other, all should remember that God is the Creator and source of all people and things. As Witherington notes, “Men and women share a horizontal dependence on each other and a vertical dependence on God.”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the corporate worship setting, of all places, should remind believers of God’s supremacy over all things. God is the one who has set the order of the world, first in creation and then in Christ. Both in creation and in Christ, God has called for a connection and cooperation between men and women that is based in a respect for the other and a respect for the one who gave life to all.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See Payne, 13. Payne argues that “independent” is not listed as a definition for *χωρίς* in BDAG and is not what is in view here. Indeed it is not listed directly in BDAG; however, “apart from” and “separated from someone” can connote not being closely connected with that person and therefore can refer to independence. See BDAG, “*χωρίς*,” 1095. Cf. Padgett, “Paul on Women in the Church,” 71-72. Padgett translates *χωρίς* as “different from.” He views 11:11 as evidence that men and women are not different (i.e., unequal) in Christ. It appears as though the standard use of *χωρίς* relates more closely to the idea of independence; thus, the emphasis must be on interdependence.

<sup>89</sup> Paul’s addition of “in the Lord” in 11:11 reminds the audience that the restoration of God’s intention in creation does not depart from the interdependent relationship of man and woman. Rather, even as believers are “in the Lord” they are still connected to each other. Also, the phrase does not limit the interdependence only to the “religious sphere.” If anything, it serves as a reminder that the work of Christ reiterates the male and female interdependence that has existed from the creation of humanity. See Fee, 523-24. Fee states, “Some have argued that ‘in the Lord’ does not fully qualify v. 9, but rather sets up the equality of man and woman in Christ in terms of their salvation.” Some scholars who hold this view are Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 419-20; and Conzelmann, 190. The argument made concerning 1 Cor 11:2-16 sounds similar to the arguments about Gal 3:28 that claim the verse has only soteriological implications but no social implications.

<sup>90</sup> Witherington, 238.

<sup>91</sup> So see Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 842-43.

### 11:13-15, Avoiding Self-Promotion

After having put forth the main thrust of his argument, Paul asks the Corinthians to decide among themselves whether it is even appropriate for a woman to address God uncovered (11:13).<sup>92</sup> If they have not already been convinced by his appeal to unity, perhaps they will be convinced by recalling that God is the ultimate audience. Paul indicates why he believes it to be improper for a woman to pray uncovered through the complex rhetorical question in 11:14-15. The reasoning has to do with the honor and dishonor associated with hair, he insists.

According to “nature,” for males it is shameful to have long hair, but for women it is an honor and glory. At first it seems odd that Paul would appeal to nature to argue for different hair lengths, since men and women can grow long hair. Nature is a reference to “what [Paul’s] society understands to be natural,” however.<sup>93</sup> Since, as Payne asserts, “Nature is the origin and guarantor of culture,”<sup>94</sup> it makes sense to use this word to indicate cultural norms. Paul may even be suggesting both the cultural order (what is conventional) and the created order (since the distinction between genders is innate).<sup>95</sup>

As has been discussed, the Roman culture of the day did not take kindly to males with long hair. For men long hair was “effeminate and shameful,”<sup>96</sup> as was overly elaborate hair.<sup>97</sup> For women, however, long hair was a source of esteem. During the

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<sup>92</sup> See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 843. Thiselton explains that *κρίνω* has the sense of “coming to a decision,” not simply considering something. In this way, Paul is continuing his appeal for unity among the believers.

<sup>93</sup> Garland, 530.

<sup>94</sup> Payne, 14. Additionally, following cultural norms very often is what seems most natural to people, especially when those norms have been reinforced since birth.

<sup>95</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 844-46. Thiselton draws his conclusions from evaluating the argument of Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther, Bd 2, 1 Kor 6,12-11,16*. (Solothurn, Switzerland; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger; Neukirchener, 1995), 521.

<sup>96</sup> Derrett, 171.

<sup>97</sup> Garland, 530-31.



Classical and Hellenistic periods, the term *κόμη* specifically referred to hair functioning ornamentally.<sup>98</sup> Elaborate, tastefully arranged hair could bring prestige to women; furthermore, long hair reveals a woman's magnificence.<sup>99</sup> Just as the covering on men is dishonoring to God in the assembly of believers, being an assertion of prestige, so too is the exposed, likely adorned hair of women distracting and therefore improper as they pray to God in the assembly.

Scholars have had significant difficulty understanding 11:15 in the context of the entire passage. Those who believe the passage refers to head coverings have had to answer why suddenly it seems that the woman's hair serves as a covering.<sup>100</sup> The answer is often that her hair is used as an analogy for a covering: the need for a woman to be covered is reflected in the fact that she naturally grows long hair.<sup>101</sup> This explanation is problematic: if the woman is given long hair, which covers her body and is given to her

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<sup>98</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 825.

<sup>99</sup> Fee, 528. Cf. Derrett, 171. It may also be considered a sign of sexual attractiveness for women.

<sup>100</sup> The Greek word here is *περιβόλαιον*. See BDAG, "*περιβόλαιον*," 800. *Περιβόλαιον* generally refers to a garment worn on the body.

<sup>101</sup> E.g., Talbert, 89; Garland, 531. Some have ignored the problem altogether. E.g., Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 421. Fitzmyer does not address the apparent contradiction between 11:15 and the rest of the passage. He simply says that a garment is required for the woman's natural covering (her hair) because her hair is her glory. Even though Fitzmyer interprets 11:15 this way, he offers the literal translation that the woman's hair "has been given [to her] instead of a wrap-around mantle." His use of "instead" seems to call attention to the apparent discrepancy in the passage, but Fitzmyer does not even mention this problem. Troy W. Martin does address the apparent discrepancy in 11:15. He argues that *περιβόλαιον*, which is typically translated "covering," actually means "testicle," and that a woman's hair was considered part of her genitalia. In Martin's view, Paul believes the women's hair would be indecently exposed if left uncovered, especially in worship. See Troy W. Martin, "Paul's Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11:13-15: A Testicle instead of a Head Covering," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123 (2004): 75-84; see 76-83. Although Martin's argument is fascinating, there is almost no evidence to support it. So see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Sex and Logic in 1 Cor 11:2-16," in *Keys to First Corinthians: Revisiting Major Issues* (2009, repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 142-58; see 147-48; Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Cor 11:2-16 Once Again," in *Keys to First Corinthians*, 180. Murphy-O'Connor actually argues that, since *περιβόλαιον* "is a particular type of covering, i.e. a 'wrapper', something that is 'thrown around' an object, a person, or part of the human body," the term does not necessarily have to refer to a garment and can refer to the way hair is worn. Thus, Murphy-O'Connor understands 11:15 to say that hair is given to the woman so that she can wrap it around her head. Cf. Payne, 15. Payne rightly holds that *περιβόλαιον* is referencing an item of clothing.

for that reason, why does she need to wear something in addition to the covering she already has? The answer to this question comes in Paul's use of the preposition *ἀντί*.

The term *ἀντί* normally means "indicating that one person or thing is, or is to be, replaced by another, *instead of, in place of*" or "indicating that one thing is [equivalent] to another, *for, as, in place of*."<sup>102</sup> Of the two definitions, the second is not possible in 1 Cor 11:2-16. If Paul is claiming that the hair and the covering are equivalent, the covering would be either unnecessary or equally as disruptive as the hair itself. This is clearly in conflict with the rest of the passage.<sup>103</sup> It is possible, though, to make better sense of 11:15 using the connotation of replacement for *ἀντί*.<sup>104</sup> Paul has just asserted that a woman's hair is her glory, being that which brings honor to her, and that it is inappropriate for her hair to be exposed during worship because it takes away from the honor that is due to God. If *δοῦναι* is functioning appositionally here, the sense of the clause is, "namely, the hair has been given [to her] instead of a covering." The hair is a woman's

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<sup>102</sup> BDAG, "*ἀντί*," 87-88. The very last definition listed is "indicating result, [with] implication of being a replacement for [something], *wherefore, therefore, so then*." The only listed biblical example for this meaning is Luke 12:3; however, extracanonical and extra-biblical examples are listed as well. In Luke 12:3, the construction is different than in 1 Cor 11:15b. Although it seems possible to translate 1 Cor 11:15b as "Because the hair is given [to her], therefore, the covering [stands in as a replacement in worship]," this ignores the difference in grammatical construction.

<sup>103</sup> But cf. Payne, 15. Payne notes that the preposition *ἀντί*, which precedes *περιβόλαιον*, can connote replacement or equivalence. He believes that, regardless of which connotation *ἀντί* carries in this passage, it means that if men and women wear their hair appropriately, there is no need for an additional covering for women. Payne holds that Paul's reference to a head covering in 11:15 reveals that the entire passage is about hairstyles. See also Alan G. Padgett, "The Significance of '*anti*' in 1 Corinthians 11:15," *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994): 181-87; see 185-87. Padgett, too, asserts that either understanding of *ἀντί* renders a covering unnecessary. In an earlier article, however, Padgett argued that *περιβόλαιον* references wrapped up hair, not a covering. Padgett, "Paul on Women in the Church," 82. Contra Payne and Padgett, the two definitions distinctly affect one's understanding of 11:15b.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Preston T. Massey, "Long Hair as a Glory and as a Covering: Removing an Ambiguity from 1 Cor 11:15," *Novum Testamentum* 53 (2011): 52-72; see 52-53, 69-72. Massey holds that the concept of replacement does not make sense with the logic found in the previous verses and that *ἀντί* ought to be understood to mean "as," so that it connotes a counterpart. He goes on to argue that the veil is both a standard covering and an emphaser of beauty. Unlike hair, however, the covering is socially acceptable and does not suggest immodesty. The problem with Massey's argument is that it does not actually clarify 11:15, in which Paul states that the hair is given to the woman *ἀντί* the covering, not the other way around.

natural gift that brings her honor and reflects her intrinsic impressiveness; the covering is not natural and is not part of her intrinsic being. Its purpose *is* to restrict the amount of attention and praise she receives *while wearing it*, and this is appropriate while she prays to God. Naturally, the woman has no such restriction on her glory. While worshipping, the Corinthian women need a covering in order not to assert themselves over, and therefore dishonor, either their Christian brothers or the God whom they worship.

### A Final Exhortation for Unity: No Room for Contentiousness

Paul's last word on the topic sums up his sentiment. The women's behavior is causing disruption in the body, as is always the case when self-promotion is involved, and there is no room for either this kind of behavior or the contention it causes. The summary statement in 11:16 serves to complete a frame for the passage: Paul's opening statement (11:2) is an appeal to that which he has passed along to the believers, and his closing statement (11:16) insists that contentious, self-serving behavior is not part of such tradition or of the comportment of the unified body.

There has been scholarly disagreement on the point of Paul's statement here, largely due to the key phrase *ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν οὐκ ἔχομεν*. Although some scholars as well as various English Bible translations render the Greek word *τοιοῦτος* as "other,"<sup>105</sup> its meaning is actually "of such a kind, such as this, like such."<sup>106</sup> As Fee so

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<sup>105</sup> For commentators/scholars that use "other," see Talbert, 90; Ruef, 111; and Finney, 34. Bible translations that use "other" include NIV, NLT, and NASB. Translations that correctly use "such" include NRSV, ESV, and KJV. Commentators/scholars who use "such" include Fee, 494; Conzelmann, 181; James B. Hurley, "Did Paul Require Veils or the Silence of Women: A Consideration of 1 Cor 11:2-16 and 14:33b-36," *Westminster Theological Journal* 35 (1973): 190-220; see 191.

<sup>106</sup> BDAG, "τοιοῦτος," 1009. Padgett, Payne, and Antoinette Clark Wire accurately translate *τοιοῦτος* as "such," although Padgett asserts that "custom" refers to a tradition requiring women to wear their hair a certain way. See Padgett, "Paul on Women in the Church," 82; Payne, 15. He also notes that the

succinctly asserts, “There is no evidence of any kind that it means ‘other.’”<sup>107</sup> Thus, the verse should most likely read: “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom, nor do the churches of God.”<sup>108</sup>

Συνήθεια can be translated, “a usage or practice that has become established or standard, *custom*,”<sup>109</sup> but the said custom does not refer here to coiffure or coverings.<sup>110</sup> Instead, it refers in two ways to the practice of being contentious. First, there is already a spirit of contention in the congregation. The word meaning “contentious,” φιλόνηκος, literally translates as “victory-loving;” and it represents an attitude Paul has been trying to remove from the Corinthian mindset throughout the letter.<sup>111</sup> This contentiousness, abetted by self-promotion, is the heart of Paul’s issue with the women’s behavior.<sup>112</sup> Second, Paul’s statement in 11:16 anticipates a continued resistance to his argument. Δοκέω, which generally means “to consider as probable, *think, believe, suppose, consider*,” can also connote a sense of resolve.<sup>113</sup> Paul’s entire argument in 11:2-16 is based on an appeal for unity addressed to a group of people who are determined to further

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shift to “no other custom” in some interpretations and translations has been an attempt to make 11:16 fit with the idea that no one should change the established customs regarding head coverings. As Payne notes, however, there is no lexical evidence for such a shift. See also Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 14-15, 31-33.

<sup>107</sup> Fee, 530, fn28.

<sup>108</sup> My translation. See also Fee, 530. Paul refers to other churches four times throughout the letter as part of a correction for the Corinthians. As Fee notes, in 1 Cor 11:16 Paul refers to one group as “we” and another as “the churches of God,” which likely differentiates between Pauline churches and other churches. Fee contends, “If so, then Paul is also reminding the Corinthians of how much greater a body it is to which he and they belong.”

<sup>109</sup> BDAG, “συνήθεια,” 971.

<sup>110</sup> After all, why would Paul spend time insisting that there is no custom for women to pray/prophesy uncovered when he could simply assert that there *is* a custom that women ought to do so covered?

<sup>111</sup> Wire, 15.

<sup>112</sup> So see Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 262-63.

<sup>113</sup> BDAG, “δοκέω,” 254-55. Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 847.

their own interests—indeed, are victory loving—despite that this sentiment counters the very heart of the gospel that connects them.

It is also possible to translate *συνήθεια* as “a relationship in which the participants are compatible because of shared interests, *friendship, fellowship, intimacy*.” This definition is listed first in BDAG.<sup>114</sup> If this is the meaning Paul intends in using *συνήθεια*, it would also be possible to translate 11:16 as, “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have a fellowship of such a kind, nor do the churches of God.” This, too, would emphasize Paul’s point that the unified body of believers is not by nature a body of discord and strife, whether in the local setting of the Corinthian congregation or in any other congregation. Rather, the fellowship of Christ is one of peace and unity.

Troels Engberg-Pedersen adds a worthwhile perspective to the interpretation of this verse and shows the strength of this line of interpreting *συνήθεια*. Paul insists, argues Engberg-Pedersen, that there is no room for contentiousness among the Corinthians because of head attire or for any other reason. Paul asserts that his example along with the apostles and the other churches is one that seeks harmony. At the same time that Paul is giving his final appeal for Corinthian unity, he also shows his own love for unity by leaving the issue up to them to determine. This is reflected in Paul’s command for the Corinthians to judge among themselves (11:13) and in the almost flippant sound of his statement in 11:16. Engberg-Pedersen explains, “Paul is leaving the decision to the Corinthians themselves because on principle he does not want to enforce his own view of the matter in the way in which potential contentious people do want to enforce their view.

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<sup>114</sup> BDAG, “*συνήθεια*,” 971.

Here, then, the idea is: Christians are not contentious — so *I* will not be contentious; I will not *insist*.”<sup>115</sup>

Raymond F. Collins, who also interprets Paul’s statement in 11:16 to refer primarily to contentiousness, references 1 Cor 10:32 to reiterate that Paul himself has avoided being any source of contention for those whom he encounters.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, at the conclusion of 1 Cor 10, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to seek “the good of many” (10:33) by encouraging them to follow after his example (11:1). This is the thought that leads into the discussion on head coverings, and this is the point Paul recapitulates as he concludes his argument: the Corinthian women should not be a source of disunity or strife in the congregation by considering themselves more important than the men.

### Summary of Paul’s Argument in 1 Cor 11:2-16

As can be seen from the above discussion, Paul’s overall argument includes honor and shame as it relates predominantly to head coverings both for men and women. The greater emphasis is on the female’s head attire, however, which becomes clear in the climactic section of the passage: the centrally located 11:7-12, which itself has a central climax, 11:10. The way a woman dresses while praying or prophesying in worship has the ability to bring honor or shame on herself and her male human counterpart.<sup>117</sup> At least some of the women in the Corinthian congregation are not covering their heads, which

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<sup>115</sup> Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “1 Corinthians 11:16 and the Character of Pauline Exhortation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991): 679-89; see 686. Cf. Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans., A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 110. Héring has a similar, though not identical, take on Paul’s sentiment in 11:16. Héring notes both that Paul understands the challenge of convincing those who are already inclined to be contentious and that Paul desires to be peaceable and therefore ceases to discuss the issue. Although Héring’s general take on the passage is incorrect, on these points his contribution is helpful.

<sup>116</sup> Collins, 404.

<sup>117</sup> As is indicated above, this is not necessarily a reference to the woman’s husband. It speaks in general of relations between males and females in the Corinthian Christian body.

they should do while being actively involved in worship. Their behavior is a claim to status, one that is dismissive of the men in the congregation.

It is likely that the Corinthian women's understanding of the gospel—or perhaps the overall Corinthian understanding of the gospel—has led them to this shift in behavior. It may even be that what was originally an embrace of a new, liberating status has gotten out of control and has turned into a demand for privilege and honor. After all, the Corinthians Christians are influenced by the outside Corinthian culture, which teaches them to seek power and self-promotion rather than valuing others. Instead of grasping the full scope of gospel values, perhaps the women see an opportunity for social advancement and esteem in their faith, or maybe their existing mentality leaves them feeling indignant when they are not given the respect they believe they are due. It is clear already that the Corinthian Christians have trouble integrating gospel values into their entire lives and ousting the ingrained mentalities of the larger society.

It is not with any sort of newfound status that Paul takes issue in 1 Cor 11:2-16. Rather, he takes issue with this mentality toward status that lends itself to self-promoting behavior at the expense of others. Regardless of exactly what in their cultural mentality or religious experience has motivated the Corinthian women to assert themselves over the men, it is happening, and it is a problem.

In 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul asserts to the Corinthians that there is no room in the body of believers for self-promoting behavior. Prayer and prophecy are for communion with God and edification of believers, not for boasting about one's own significance and insisting on one's own way. Not only are self-centeredness and self-promotion against gospel values, they also inhibit the formation and development of unity—an important

marker of believers—within the congregation. The dishonoring behavior especially of some women in the congregation is an issue in itself, then, and part of a greater issue, one foundational for the functioning and identity of the church.

Paul's response to the situation is to urge the women, as well as any men who are behaving or thinking of behaving this way, to choose to keep their exercise of freedom under control (i.e., no longer insisting on displays of honor and being dismissive to the men in this process) by covering their heads. He asks them to make this decision out of respect for the "other" in the congregation. In this situation, it is the men who are characterized as the "other." Paul sees this cooperative action as the appropriate decision and as crucial for harmony and solidarity in the body of Christ.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, it is most likely because it is *so* crucial for harmony and solidarity that Paul makes it clear that the most appropriate response is for the women to cover their heads while praying or prophesying.

Paul's call for unity is not simply the emphasis in this particular passage. Rather, it is revealed in what follows how unity is the theme of the entire letter. Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul admonishes the Corinthians to replace worldly values with gospel values in order to promote the unity that comes from Christ among them. Considering the placement of 1 Cor 11:2-16 in the entire letter demonstrates the importance of the passage for understanding the flow of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians.

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<sup>118</sup> See Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 805. Thiselton understands Paul's argument in 1 Cor 11:2-16 similarly: Paul wants to cultivate mutual respect among men and women "for the otherness of the other in public worship" in order to establish unity in the body. Cf. Collins, 404; Mitchell, 262-63, and Witherington, 236. All also argue that unity is a central concern in Paul's argument here. According to Collins, Paul insists that this particular dress code will lead to orderly worship, orderly worship will lead to unity, and a unified congregation will make a better impression on those outside the Corinthian church. Mitchell holds that Paul believes the covering for women will prevent or eliminate contentiousness. Witherington believes that different customs concerning hairstyles have created a sense of divisiveness, so now Paul calls for a unified approach to dress so as to create unity and order in the assembly. Witherington holds that gender is a source of order, which is found first in creation and continues in the new creation of Christ.



## Chapter 6

### 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and the Entire Letter: Unity as a Priority in the Body

Thus far, I have argued that the major emphasis of 1 Cor 11:2-16 is an entreaty to at least some of the Corinthian women to respect the men in their congregation; Paul approaches this argument by appealing to the Corinthians' sense of honor and shame and by rooting the connectedness of all people not simply in culture but in the one who has created and redeemed the human race. Paul's motivation is the gospel value of consideration of the other as opposed to self-promotion and dismissive behavior, and he understands that consideration of the other is part of the broader value system of the gospel in that it brings unity to the body of believers. In my estimation, it is this desire for unity that motivates Paul to admonish the Corinthian women to respect the men in the congregation *in this way*. That is, a unified body results not when each individual member insists on her own rights and freedoms but when, out of gospel love for one another, believers are willing to honor one another instead of seeking their own honor.

In recent years scholars have begun to argue more prevalently that the theme of 1 Corinthians is unity in the body of believers. Indeed, throughout the letter Paul calls for unity in the Corinthian church. The Corinthians are a divided body in which factions have developed, and a general honor-seeking attitude persists among members. Paul's call for unity in response to the condition in Corinth comes at the outset of the letter. In 1:10 he writes, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose." From there forward Paul's appeal for unity continues as the very thread that connects the entire work.

The interpretation I am offering for 1 Cor 11:2-16 contributes to the overall theme of 1 Corinthians since this interpretation demonstrates how the passage fits thematically within the entire work. Furthermore, my argument about the passage also demonstrates how 1 Cor 11:2-16 fits into the flow of the letter. That is, in addition to coinciding with Paul's theme in 1 Corinthians, 1 Cor 11:2-16, when interpreted as it has been herein, performs an important transitional and climactic function in the letter. I demonstrate how this is the case below, but first I must address the theme of unity in 1 Corinthians.

### **The Theme of the Letter**

For many scholars and interpreters over the years, it would be difficult to discuss the theme of 1 Corinthians, as the integrity of the letter has often been doubted. Scholars have espoused partition theories in an attempt to make sense of apparent inconsistencies and stylistic breaks throughout 1 Corinthians. These theories address valid concerns that arise from the text; however, as Thiselton has asserted, "Such partitions theories are needed *only if exegesis fails to reveal a genuine coherence* within the epistle."<sup>1</sup>

Many who have argued for the integrity of 1 Corinthians have failed to identify a general theme for the work.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Karl Barth argues that the resurrection and "last things" form the theme of 1 Corinthians, and Rudolf Bultmann also relates the

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 39. Italics original. See 36-39 for an overview of partition theories and Thiselton's satisfactory response to them. See also Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, rev. ed. (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), xviii-xix.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., see Talbert, xviii-xxi. Additionally, John Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries, ed. D. E. Nineham (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), xix, asserts that the resurrection of the dead and possession of the Spirit are two important emphases within 1 Corinthians, but Ruef offers no overarching theme of the letter. See also Karl Barth's comments on this line of interpretation. Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 6.

theme of the letter to the “last things,” although Bultmann asserts that this is a present reality in the lives of believers.<sup>3</sup> Hans Conzelmann holds that the cross—inasmuch as it brings about justification through grace and faith, eliminates human boasting, and brings about true freedom—is the theme of 1 Corinthians.<sup>4</sup> At one point Thiselton argued that the theme is overrealized eschatology,<sup>5</sup> although his revised stance is that the theme of 1 Corinthians is:

A reproclamation of the different value system of grace, gifts, the cross, and the resurrection as divine verdict, criterion, and status bestowal within the new framework of respect and love for the less esteemed “other.” Glorifying in the Lord and receiving status derived from identification with the crucified Christ (1:30-31) lead to a new value system demonstrable in a wide array of life issues.<sup>6</sup>

Thiselton’s analysis is almost right. The theme of 1 Corinthians is an appeal for a harmonious body of believers who live out gospel values together. This value system is certainly *based on* the cross, as well as the resurrection, and does redefine status and glory as they pertain to various life issues, but Paul’s stress throughout the letter is on how the Corinthians can *live out these gospel values as a unified community*. Certainly Paul corrects Corinthian impressions of status, and undoubtedly his admonitions include the gospel value of respect and love for the “other”; however, as Collins has aptly noted, the most fundamental purpose of the letter is “to exhort a divided community to greater unity (1:10),”<sup>7</sup> with unity being a natural consequence of unobstructed gospel

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<sup>3</sup> Barth, 6; Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding: Collected Essays*, ed. Robert W. Funk, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM Press, 1969) 80, 94.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia,—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, trans. James W. Leitch, ed. George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 11.

<sup>5</sup> So see Anthony C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1978): 520-26.

<sup>6</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, vol. 7 of Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 8,14. Collins lists the following groups as examples of divisions in the body: “the unmarried and widows (7:8), the married (7:10), the rest (7:12), and those who appear to be sensible or

manifestation among them. The theme of unity becomes evident when 1 Corinthians is examined as deliberative rhetoric, with consideration of the letter's language, *topoi*, and structure.

### 1 Corinthians as Rhetoric

Mitchell offers a detailed characterization of 1 Corinthians as deliberative rhetoric and uses this rhetorical evaluation to show that 1 Corinthians does have the “genuine coherence” of which Thiselton speaks; she, too, rightly argues that the entire letter is an appeal to regain unity at Corinth. The letter's thesis (πρόθεσις) comes in 1:10 with Paul's entreaty that the Corinthians eliminate discord and come together as a united body.<sup>8</sup> Paul's exhortation for unity leads him to focus on particular ways in which the Corinthians are not currently unified, and he constructs an “*argument of response* employ[ing] political language and *topoi* to describe the situation at Corinth as factionalism and urge the reunification of the church.”<sup>9</sup> The references to factionalism and the appeal for harmony permeate the entire letter, not simply the first four chapters, which have traditionally been interpreted to be the only chapters that focus on factionalism in the Corinthian church.<sup>10</sup>

Dale Martin, too, correctly holds that the theme of 1 Corinthians is the unity of the believers at Corinth. He draws on Mitchell's thesis that 1 Corinthians serves as

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claim to be so (10:15).” In all but Collins's last example, this list focuses on how the Corinthians are divided in reference to marriage. Other factions exist in the congregation, however; see 1:11-13. Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 52. Fitzmyer also contends that the theme of 1 Corinthians is unity.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 1. Italics original. For Mitchell's argument that 1 Corinthians is deliberative rhetoric, see 20-64.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchell, 68. Italics original.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, 66, 182.

deliberative rhetoric following the patterns of homonoia speeches, deliberative speeches that promote unity and concord, and agrees that the *πρόθεσις* of the work is 1 Cor 1:10.<sup>11</sup>

Martin offers an important clarification, however: the function of the homonoia style in Paul's writing is different than its traditional purpose in Greco-Roman society.

Traditionally, the homonoia speech seeks to establish concord among groups in order to preserve an ideology known as "benevolent patriarchalism," the existing status hierarchy of the day. *Paul's* utilization of the form actually turns it on its head and no longer uses it to reinforce the established prevailing social order. Instead, Paul appeals for unity based on a redefined social order because he believes that the discord in the body derives from the Corinthian believers buying into the status system of the day.<sup>12</sup>

### Language and *Topoi*

Present throughout 1 Corinthians is vocabulary that was used in the ancient world in reference to factionalism and concord. Among such vocabulary are the terms *σχίσμα* (a division or rift), *ἔρις* (contention), *καυχάομαι* (to boast or glory), *ἀκαταστασία* (disorder), *μερίζω* (to divide), *ζῆλος* (jealousy), *κοινωνία* (fellowship), *εἰρήνη* (peace), *σῶμα* (body), *συνέρχομαι* (to come together), *συμπάσχω* (to suffer with), and *ἀγάπη* (love).<sup>13</sup> Some of these terms appear several times throughout the letter, while others appear only a few times.<sup>14</sup> The quantification of each term is only part of the various terms' significance,

<sup>11</sup> Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: The University Press, 1995), 38-39.

<sup>12</sup> Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 39-47, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, 180. For Mitchell's explanation of each of these terms, see her arguments throughout the entire chapter (65-183).

<sup>14</sup> *σχίσμα* (1:10, 18; 12:25), *ἔρις* (1:11; 3:3), *καυχάομαι* (1:29, 31, 31; 3:21; 4:7; 13:3; additionally, the noun *καύχημα* occurs in 5:6; 9:15, 16), *ἀκαταστασία* (14:33), *μερίζω* (used in this way: 1:13; 7:34), *ζῆλος* (3:3; *παραζηλώω*, meaning "to provoke to jealousy," occurs in 10:22), *κοινωνία* (1:9; 10:16, 16), *εἰρήνη* (1:3; 7:15; 14:33; 16:11), *σῶμα* (5:3; 6:13, 13, 15, 16, 18, 18, 19, 20; 7:4, 4, 34; 9:27; 10:16, 17; 11:24, 27,

however; it is also significant that Paul uses so many different terms related to divisions or unity throughout the letter to discuss the Corinthian situation and his wishes for the Corinthian believers.

Additionally, Paul constantly uses kinship language to address the Corinthians. A total of twenty times Paul calls the Corinthians his ἀδελφοί, and once he calls them his children. Finally, in 16:24, Paul reminds them of his love for *everyone* in the Corinthian body.<sup>15</sup> Such kinship language contributes to Paul's appeal for unity. By repeatedly addressing the Corinthians as brothers and sisters, Paul reminds them of their connection to one another and that this connectedness is a natural result of the gospel for all believers.<sup>16</sup>

1 Corinthians also contains several arguments for harmony and against factionalism. These arguments can be characterized as *topoi* since they follow a relatively

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29; 12:12, 12, 12, 13, 14, 15, 15, 16, 16, 17, 18. 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27; 13:3; 15:35, 37, 38, 38, 40, 40, 44, 44, 44), συνέρχομαι (11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14:23, 26), συμπάσχω (12:26), and ἀγάπη (4:21; 8:1; 13:1, 2, 3, 4, 4, 4, 8, 13, 13; 14:1; 16:14, 24; the verb form ἀγαπάω occurs in 2:9; 8:3).

<sup>15</sup> See Collins, 8-9. As for references to the Corinthians as ἀδελφοί, Collins lists 1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24, 29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26, 39; 15:1, 31, 50, 58; 16:15. Paul's reference to the Corinthians as his children comes in 4:14-15. In addition to the direct references to the believers at Corinth as ἀδελφοί, Paul uses a form of ἀδελφός eighteen times in the letter to refer to believers indirectly. Furthermore, twice in 1 Corinthians Paul specifically uses the term ἀδελφή to reference female believers.

<sup>16</sup> In every Pauline letter (disputed and undisputed, although for the sake of simplicity only undisputed are considered here) there are direct references to the addressees as ἀδελφοί. What is significant is how the frequency compares from letter to letter. In Romans, a letter comparable in length to 1 Corinthians, Paul only directly addresses the believers as ἀδελφοί ten times (nine other times he uses a form of ἀδελφός as a reference to believers; he also uses ἀδελφή once). In 2 Corinthians, written to the same congregation as 1 Corinthians but for a different occasion, Paul directly addresses the congregation as ἀδελφοί only three times. The six-chapter letter to the Galatian Christians, in which Paul is at pains to convince the believers that they, too, have full membership in the faith, directly addresses the congregation as ἀδελφοί nine times. In Philippians Paul only addresses the believers as ἀδελφοί six times. Philemon, being a more individualized letter, uses a form of ἀδελφός four times and ἀδελφή once. Most interesting is 1 Thessalonians, in which Paul directly addresses the believers as ἀδελφοί thirteen times in five chapters, using ἀδελφός four additional times to refer to believers. As John M. G. Barclay has argued, however, the Thessalonians were a group of people experiencing social alienation from the outside world. Here, too, Paul is attempting to reinforce their sense of solidarity with one another and with other believers, although it is for the sake of encouragement instead of establishing unity out of a sorely divided congregation. So see John M. G. Barclay, "Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 47 (1992): 49-74, see specifically 52-55.

standard form for making an argument in the ancient world. Mitchell identifies ten different *topoi* in 1 Corinthians that make an appeal for harmony:

- a) Appealing to “ones,” things which the group has in common. . . . The term εἷς is used a remarkable thirty-one times in the letter.
- b) Appealing to the need to seek “the common advantage,” which is the direct response to factionalism, in which one seeks one’s own advantage. . . .
- c) Appealing to the building as an example of concord, here particularized as “God’s building” which is also “the temple of the Holy Spirit.” . . .
- d) Appealing to the political or social unit as a body, here specified theologically as “the body of Christ.” . . .
- e) Appealing to the commonplace that factionalism is “human,” while concord and peace are divine. . . .
- f) Appealing to the unity of the leaders to whom the factionalists claim varied allegiance.
- g) Appealing to the commonplace that factionalism destroys any political body infected with it.
- h) Appealing to past examples of people and nations who suffered because of their factionalism.
- i) Stressing the distinction between the political body itself and the “outsiders” to emphasize and consolidate group loyalty.
- j) Urging people to maintain the *status quo* in order to preserve group stability.<sup>17</sup>

These standard arguments for harmony appearing throughout Paul’s letter combine with his vocabulary choices to build his case for unity among a divided body.

### General Structure

The various sections of 1 Corinthians work together to create one continuous, intelligible letter, and Mitchell’s outline of the letter is particularly useful in demonstrating how this is so. First Corinthians opens with a prescript (1:1-3) and thanksgiving (1:4-9). Then, the body of the letter entails the following: 1:10, thesis statement (Be unified!); 1:11-17, statement of facts describing and responding to the general circumstances at Corinth; 1:18-15:57, four proofs responding to and offering

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<sup>17</sup> Mitchell, 180-81. Throughout the entire chapter (65-183), Mitchell provides specific examples for these conclusions. Her argument is sufficient and convincing, and it will not be further reproduced here.

advice concerning specific instances of factionalism at Corinth; and 15:58, concluding statement containing an indirect reference to the building metaphor introduced in the first proof. Finally, the letter's closing (16:1-24) includes business matters as well as a last appeal for unity in the body.<sup>18</sup>

The four proofs that comprise the body of the letter deal with the various disagreements and discord the Corinthians are experiencing. The first proof includes 1:18-4:21. It contains a rebuke of the Corinthian discord and an appeal to Paul as a positive example. Paul includes a significant building metaphor (see Mitchell's *topoi* above) in his appeal for harmony. This proof contains general evaluations instead of references to specific situations.<sup>19</sup> Paul's second proof includes 5:1-11:1. Here he discusses internal community integrity in relation to outsiders, and he connects the topics under the broad issue of "defilement." The third proof is found in 11:2-14:40, in which Paul discusses problems with unity in relation to church gatherings. Finally, the fourth proof is found in 15:1-57. Here, Paul discusses disagreements about the resurrection and calls for Corinthian unity based on the teachings he has handed over to the Corinthians.<sup>20</sup>

### **1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in Its Literary Context**

In 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul urges the Corinthians to be unified by specifically addressing the attitude of self-promotion some of the Corinthian women are exhibiting

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<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, 184-85. In her outline of the letter, Mitchell does not indicate that the entirety of chapter sixteen has to do with unity in the body; however, in her compositional analysis, Mitchell at least loosely connects each section of the chapter with Paul's appeal for unity. Cf. Mitchell, 293-95.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, 184-85. Cf. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 55. Martin argues that 1 Cor 1-4 serves as a "self-contained argument, containing in nuce all the important strategies and theological points that he will expound in the rest of the letter, when he turns from the general to the specific." Throughout this argument in 1 Cor 1-4, Paul seeks to exhort the Corinthians to unity by challenging their notions of status. Then, in the rest of the letter, Paul applies the concepts covered in chapters 1-4 to particular situations.

<sup>20</sup> Mitchell, 184-85.



while praying and prophesying in worship. First Corinthians 11:2-16 stands at the beginning of Paul's third proof, which offers advice concerning factionalism in the Corinthian community. In these verses Paul uses his response to the head-covering issue as a means of reinforcing full respect for and consideration of the other in his transition from the mundane to the sacred setting, and he connects the passage to what comes before and after it by language, concept, and emphasis.

### Expressions of Ἐξουσία as a Means to Δόξα

In chapter eight, Paul addresses the eating of food sacrificed to idols. Paul differentiates here between knowledge and love, asserting that the former creates arrogance, but the latter goes hand in hand with being known by God (8:3). Someone may know that, since there is only one God, it is not wrong to eat meat offered to idols; however, this knowledge is only beneficial if believers act in love toward those who do not yet have it. Yes, there is only one God and one Christ, Paul agrees (8:6), but this one God is a God of unity, and this one Christ is a bringer of unity. To insist on one's one freedom (ἐξουσία, 8:9) at the expense of a brother or sister's conscience impedes unity and is a sin against that believer and Christ (8:12).<sup>21</sup> In 10:14-22 Paul returns overtly to the topic of idol worship, using Eucharistic language to emphasize the connectedness of the body to one another in Christ. Since all believers are connected, each believer's

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<sup>21</sup> Birgitte Graakjær Hjort, "Gender Hierarchy or Religious Androgyny? Male-Female Interaction in the Corinthian Community – A Reading of 1 Cor. 11,2-16," *Studia Theologica* 55 (2001): 58-80; see 61. Hjort rightfully points out that this concern for the other is a concern for the *weaker* other. Paul's call for unity shows deference to the weak, not the strong.

behavior should be for the sake of building up (10:23) the other. As Paul says, “Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other” (10:24; see also 10:33).<sup>22</sup>

In chapter nine, Paul illustrates the point he is making in chapters eight and ten by using himself and the other apostles as an example. Paul employs the term *ἐξουσία* six times (9:4, 5, 6, 12, 12, 18) to refer to rights he has but refrains from using so that he is *truly free* to proclaim the gospel effectively (9:12, 16, 23). How does Paul exercise this freedom to use his rights (freedoms) effectively? He submits himself as best he can to all people he encounters (9:19-22).<sup>23</sup> His admonitions in this chapter serve to reinforce that for Paul the freedoms, rights, and authority given to an individual are to be used for the good of others by exercising self-control (9:25, 27).

Considering the convictions of others and seeking the good of the other instead of using *ἐξουσία* for one's own interests brings *δόξα* to God (10:31). In 11:1 Paul urges the Corinthians to follow his example in this behavior, just as he follows the example of Christ. Paul then immediately begins addressing the issue of head coverings in 11:2. As has already been established, Paul's climactic point of the passage calls women to check the expression of their *ἐξουσία* in order to show respect and value for their Christian brothers and avoid attitudes of self-promotion. The behavior for which Paul calls is the best expression of the *δόξα* the women embody and the best way to bring *δόξα* to the God whom they are worshipping. Thus, 11:2-16 is in many ways an extension of the principle Paul asserts in chapters 8-10.

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<sup>22</sup> See Hjort, 60-63. Hjort argues that the emphasis in chapters 8-10 is concern for the other instead of insisting on one's own rights based on a principle of love that trumps “knowledge.” See also Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 792-93.

<sup>23</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 438-39.

### Body-Head-Body Language

Paul makes an interesting physiological statement in the transition between the second and third proofs, connecting 10:14-11:34. In 10:14-33 Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are one *body* and should be considerate of one another; in 11:2-16 he urges them to honor one another with their *heads*; and then in 11:17-34 he chastises their behavior at the Lord's supper, reminding them that, inasmuch as the Eucharistic meal concerns the Lord's *body*, this necessarily affects the way the believers treat one another as they partake in it.<sup>24</sup> This meal should be a unifying rite, not only because of its theological import, but also because it is a practice held in common by the churches.<sup>25</sup>

The shift from body to head and back to body in these chapters grounds the issue of praying and prophesying—which in this particular situation represents an attitude of prominence and predominance in the congregation—in the communal nature of the Christian experience. Those who have the Spirit also have a fundamental connection in Christ. Just as the physical head cannot function apart from the body to which it belongs, neither should the Corinthian believers forget their connectedness to one another and God as they actively participate in the worship gatherings. The task of praying or prophesying is futile if not for the benefit of the body, who is the very body of *Christ, the Lord*.

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<sup>24</sup> Garland, 533, comments, "The problem is simply this: when they eat the Lord's Supper, they divide along socioeconomic lines. Each one eats his or her own supper, and those who have plenty ignore those who have little or nothing. This indifference to others shows contempt for the church of God and dishonors Christ's self-giving sacrifice, which the Supper commemorates." The behavior also contradicts the selflessness that the Christian body ought to exemplify. See also Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Corinth That Saint Paul Saw," *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (1984): 147-59; see 157. A Corinthian house of the sort that could host the entire church would have included two rooms for public use: the more luxurious triclinium (dining room) and the less comfortable atrium. Though both rooms would have sizeable measurements, their layouts would have prevented either from sufficing as a sole gathering place for a congregation of at least forty to fifty people. It is likely that friends of the host would be invited to the triclinium while others would be relegated to the atrium.

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, 263.

### Valuing the Other Despite the Setting

As Mitchell's outline of 1 Corinthians indicates, 11:2-16 begins the proof concerning problems with unity in the church gatherings (11:2-14:40). This gives the passage an important transitional role, as Paul moves from one "type" of disunity to another. Prior to this passage, Paul has been presenting his second proof (5:1-11:1), in which he discusses ways the unified community should comport itself with the outside world. As is noted above, Paul includes "body" language in both the section preceding and the section following 11:2-16. In both sections (10:14-22 and 11:17-34) Paul is calling the believers to understand themselves as a unified body in the context of meals.

Paul uses the Eucharistic meal as a symbol of sharing in the one body of Christ, whether it relates to the mundane or the liturgical. That is, how believers comport themselves, in this case regarding eating habits, affects the entire body. This is true whether a believer is dining with pagans and potentially eating food offered to idols or the congregation of believers is gathered for a meal. Either way, self-promotion and self-interest belong nowhere in the believer's behavior; the communal identity and responsibility of the believer cannot be forgotten.<sup>26</sup> Paul's argument in 11:2-16 is nestled in between these two meal sections as a reminder of the inappropriateness of behaving only for one's own interests. Such behavior belittles the full humanity of others, who are also created by God, and dismisses the notion of interdependence that is reinforced for believers.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Barclay, 70-71. Barclay argues that for the Corinthians, "the church is not a cohesive community but a club, whose meetings provide important moments of spiritual insight and exaltation, but do not have global implications of moral or social change." The Corinthians perceived their faith experience as one that made them spiritually superior to those in the outside culture, but not one that distinguished them from the outside culture or one that created among them a true sense of community. Barclay is right; Paul's correction of the Corinthians in chapters 10-11 draws a parallel between the two spheres: the secular world and the faith community. Paul reiterates to the Corinthians how they ought to understand their faith community, regardless of the setting.

### An Opening Note: The First of Two Bookends

The third proof in 1 Corinthians is bookended by discussions on prophecy, the first of which describes appropriate attitudes during prayer and prophecy. In 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul begins the third proof by specifically addressing some of the women who are asserting themselves over their Christian brothers during the prayers and prophecies of congregational worship. In opening the proof this way, Paul makes a statement about his expectations for the believers' comportment during corporate gatherings. The Christian gatherings ought to be marked by a sense of unity, and, in order to have unity in the gatherings, the Corinthians must respect the full humanity of one another. They must treat each other according to gospel values. In opening the proof this way, Paul also suggests what he will continue to develop through the proof: that the gift of prophecy, guided by the principle of love, can play a significant part in bringing about unity in the congregation.

In chapter twelve Paul uses the body metaphor to talk about the variety of gifts given by the Spirit to the members of the body. He emphasizes the individual roles of each member *as well as* the importance of every member. In the body, all members are valuable, and all are worthy of honor, even and especially those who seem to be less significant (12:22-23). Then, in chapter thirteen, Paul asserts that all gifts, knowledge, power, and actions are meaningless if they are not based in love for one another (13:1-3). In fact, love is the greatest of all gifts, and if anyone is going to strive to have a particular

gift, it should be love.<sup>27</sup> Love epitomizes the Christian life and brings the individual in line with the communal.<sup>28</sup>

With all this being said, Paul returns to the gift of prophecy in chapter fourteen as he ends the third proof. During this discussion of prophecy, Paul incorporates the principle of love he espoused in chapter thirteen. Choosing to prophesy over choosing to speak in tongues is better for the whole body and therefore an act of love.<sup>29</sup> Paul maintains that prophecy is for building up and encouraging others, and he contrasts this with speaking in tongues, which is for building up oneself (14:3-4, 12, 17).<sup>30</sup> For this reason, Paul urges the Corinthians to seek the gift of prophecy above the gift of tongues (14:12). Then, Paul asserts that worship ought to be orderly, whether it includes tongues or prophecy, for the sake of building up one another (14:26).<sup>31</sup>

Thus, Paul begins and ends the third proof with a discussion related to prophecy. In both passages, Paul asserts that this gift cannot be expressed without concern for the other, which is a basic value of the gospel. Prophecy is a spiritual gift given *for the sake of others*, and thus is it inappropriate for claims to honor to prevail during this act of

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<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, 270-71.

<sup>28</sup> See Garland, 606. Love is, after all, based in the very cross of Christ, which represents God's love for the world.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, 279-80. Cf. Fee, 572. Fee asserts that love is the "necessary ingredient" for all spiritual gifts; Paul is not opposed to the gift of tongues but of expressions of this gift in the assembly used not for corporate edification. This is why he insists that a translator must be present if someone is going to speak in tongues.

<sup>30</sup> This is, of course, ironic since chapter eleven reveals that some of the Corinthians (and especially some of the Corinthian women) are *not* allowing prophecy to have its fully beneficial effect but are, instead, distracting themselves and others by insisting on their own rights while prophesying and praying.

<sup>31</sup> The command for women to be silent in 14:34-35 (or 14:33b-35) has been a key passage in conversations concerning women's roles in church settings. Space and focus do not allow a thorough treatment of these verses; however, Garland, 664-73, offers a helpful discussion of them. Garland highlights recent interpretations of the verses, including interpolation theories, Corinthian quotation theories, and the theory that Paul's statement is best interpreted as a concern for harmony between husbands and wives. Garland's discussion at least provides a helpful starting place for interpreting 14:34-35. Cf. Mitchell, 280-83. Mitchell also asserts that this command for the silence of women is for the sake of concord, not a general statement for all situations. Fee, 699-705, holds that these verses are an interpolation.

worship. Although in chapters 11-14 Paul discusses other aspects of the Corinthian unity within the context of church gatherings, his treatment of prophecy reveals this particular gift to be of significance in establishing and maintaining such unity.

### **1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as Part of the Whole**

The theme of 1 Corinthians is unity in the body, and 1 Cor 11:2-16 is one of many passages addressing a situation in which the Corinthians need to be more unified. As in most situations Paul addresses in the letter, in 1 Cor 11:2-16 one of the key inhibitors to unity is a self-serving attitude among at least some of the believers; the Corinthians are far more interested in their own interests and their own self-promotion than in valuing others in the body. First Corinthians 11:2-16 stands at the outset of those passages referencing problems at Corinthian gatherings, and it serves as a bridge between the coming emphasis on Corinthian gatherings and the former emphasis on general life issues pertaining to the outside world. It reminds the Corinthians that believers are dependent on others in the body of Christ regardless of the setting. It calls for behavior during church assemblies that promotes unity by honoring the other instead of insisting on one's own rights.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

As part of his letter to the Corinthians urging them to become unified as a body of believers, Paul writes 1 Cor 11:2-16 and addresses the issue of head coverings during prayers and prophecy. Paul's main concern is that the women cover their heads while praying or prophesying in order to honor their male counterparts in the body of believers and, ultimately, to honor God. In this situation, Paul endorses the cultural norm of the day for female dress because this norm challenges the women to remember their unique and significant connection to men as fellow humans created by the one God, who not only is the sole Creator of all things but also is the author and premiere exemplar of unity. The Corinthians can achieve this unity by abandoning the worldly value of self-promotion and adopting the gospel value of respect for and consideration of the other.

In order to demonstrate that this is Paul's point in 1 Cor 11:2-16, I began my argument by examining Greco-Roman concepts of honor and shame, especially as they pertain to head attire and adornment, both in secular and liturgical settings. Next, I turned to Paul's response to the Corinthian preoccupation with honor and status; this response is to replace worldly values with gospel values and subject cultural norms to gospel interpretation as those norms are either retained or rejected. Then, I argued that in 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul employs the gospel value of consideration of the other for the greater purpose of unity. In doing this, Paul calls upon the Corinthian women to retain culturally standard dress because he understands that dress as a way to show consideration of the other and of God. Finally, I offered a description of how 1 Cor 11:2-16 fits into the flow of the entire letter, which itself is an appeal to unity in the church.



The argument I have made is particularly valuable to interpreting 1 Cor 11:2-16 for a few reasons. First, it incorporates the clear and abundant honor/shame language present in the passage, taking into account how the Greco-Roman concepts of honor and shame were understood and considering how honor and shame related to head coverings. Second, my argument takes into account the way in which Paul responds to cultural values. It explains why Paul retains a cultural norm for women but does not retain it for men: he evaluates each expression of this norm according to gospel values in order to guide the Corinthians toward a better understanding of the Christian life.

Third, my argument is able to demonstrate that Paul's topic is head coverings and that his reference to hairstyles in 11:14-15 neither suddenly switches topics nor indicates that Paul has been talking about hairstyles all along. I offer an interpretation for the unusual expression *κατα κεφαλῆς* that reinforces this reading *and* suggests an additional nuance that further supports the notion that Paul speaks out against self-promotion. Fourth, this interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16 combines Paul's head metaphor, his references to glory, and his intended nuance of *ἐξουσία* in one single explanation: that the issue at stake in the Corinthian community is a proper understanding of the connectedness of all the Corinthian believers in creation and redemption. Such connectedness entails not only the full humanity and value of men and women alike but also the putting aside of rights and prestige in order to respect this full humanity in others.

Fifth, my argument demonstrates how 1 Cor 11:2-16 fits into the flow and emphasis of the letter meaningfully. The passage serves an important transitional role between two major sections of the work by asserting that the same principle applies to

each sphere of life. It also coincides with Paul's emphasis on gospel values and his overall concern for unity throughout 1 Corinthians. This is particularly valuable in light of the numerous interpolation theories that have questioned how 1 Cor 11:2-16 fits into its literary context.

Sixth, and perhaps most importantly, the argument I have made concerning 1 Cor 11:2-16 helps to move interpreters, both scholars and non-scholars alike, past the notion that Paul's point here is about the subordination and limitation of women and onto a more accurate and worthwhile understanding of this passage. That is, 1 Cor 11:2-16 has been used to argue for the subordination of women to men, supposedly either because of an innate inferiority of women or because of established gender roles for women. It has also been used in arguments that limit female involvement in church gatherings and leadership. My argument demonstrates that such interpretations do not match Paul's own argument in 1 Cor 11:2-16. He is not concerned with limiting women in light of some inferiority or predetermined role based on gender. In fact, in these verses Paul does not limit female involvement in congregational activity or leadership at all. Furthermore, Paul's words serve to affirm the value of women as equal to men, even as the women must remember their unique connection to men.

At the same time that it frees the passage from those conversations that have severely limited its application in the Christian community, my argument also demonstrates what *really is* going on in 1 Cor 11:2-16 and how the passage can be meaningfully discussed and applied in scholarly and non-scholarly spheres. In 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul exhorts the Corinthian women to abandon claims to honor that are dismissive to their brothers in the body of Christ. Paul believes that self-promotion

opposes the value system of the gospel and should be replaced with a respect for others that leads to unity.

Thus far, I have not given attention to how 1 Cor 11:2-16 ought to be interpreted for Christians today, but I must note that Paul's own approach to giving advice in this passage as well as 1 Corinthians in general ought to serve as an example for modern believers. That is, we cannot dismiss this passage as irrelevant for our lives by claiming that it was tied to the culture of its day and therefore is inapplicable to our lives. On the other hand, neither can we claim that, because Paul appeals to theological truths, we ought to apply his commands in 1 Cor 11:2-16 directly to our lives without taking cultural nuances into account. Paul's own practice in this passage is *to call for gospel values* in the lives of believers and to offer concrete advice in living out those values *by submitting cultural norms and behaviors to the scrutiny of the gospel*. In some cases, Paul asserts that maintaining cultural norms is the best way to embody the gospel. This is because Paul understands that the gospel is lived out in time and place, not independently of culture.

When the principle espoused in this passage is extracted, we are able to apply that principle to our own contexts today. The larger thrust of the passage, that believers ought to treat each other as fully human and worthy of respect as creatures of God instead of asserting themselves over one another, is absolutely pertinent to the church today. This principle *might* be applied in reference to how one adorns one's head during worship services, although it is certainly not limited to that context. Furthermore, for those of us who live and worship in contexts that assign little, if any, meaning to whether or not a head is covered or how hair is worn, we might do well to extend our application of the

passage beyond its explicit life situation. The question is, *How can we, as believers, comport ourselves so as to respect fully the humanness of those around us, living in consideration of the other instead of seeking our own advantage?*

Thiselton makes a valuable point when he draws connections between the Corinthian thirst for status and the postmodern plea for applause:

*Corinthian culture has much in common with the social constructivism, competitive pragmatism, and radical pluralism which characterizes so-called postmodernity as a popular mood. . . . The reductive and contrived “instrumental” rationality and rhetoric [in postmodern culture] which looks not for truth but for applause and success characterizes . . . the kind of competitive rhetoric which was most highly prized at Corinth.<sup>1</sup>*

We live in a culture that highly values individuality and the individual’s quest for fame, popularity, and affirmation from others. This desire for applause and societal success as a means to esteem reveals itself in a variety of ways. Think simply of a social networking system that offers with every single post the opportunity to accumulate validation through a click or tap of a thumbs up, star, or heart. Our culture teaches us to ask constantly for approval from a public court of reputation. It is possible even with something as theoretically lighthearted as social media to beg persistently for approval and applause. Furthermore, people often use social media, among other public settings, as a means of degrading others for the sake of their own self-promotion. The task of believers, however, is to look to the gospel rather than to the world as a standard of honor and affirmation. Having gospel values as our standard frees us to live humbly and seek the good of others rather than exhausting ourselves with the tasks of self-promotion and rapport building.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 14. Italics original.

### **For Further Exploration**

The following list offers brief suggestions for further research and application of 1 Cor 11:2-16:

1. As I have just mentioned, the principles found in 1 Cor 11:2-16 can be applied to all sorts of life situations. Further application of these principles in daily life is an ongoing task for the Christian community, both universal and local. How can Christians be more respectful and honoring of others? The opportunities are myriad and should not be taken lightly by the church.
2. Of course, it would be a worthwhile task to examine the various ways this passage has historically been interpreted in churches and is still being interpreted today. How do expectations for female head attire (and, at times, male head attire) interact with the greater principles Paul puts forth in 1 Cor 11:2-16? I suspect that, in some settings, head coverings would be the most appropriate option for women who are actively participating in the worship service; in other settings, they would not only be unnecessary, they might even be distracting and therefore detrimental to the worship service.
3. I would have liked to find a more thorough treatment of Paul's reference to the angels in 1 Cor 11:10, and I think any interpretation of this passage would benefit from greater clarity on the issue. Additionally, I would have liked to explore further how 1 Cor 11 fits with the statements about women in 1 Cor 14. Space did not allow for such an investigation, but understanding how the two passages do or do not work together can only increase one's appreciation of 1 Corinthians as a literary work.

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