

Proposition #4: Concerning Headship and Coverture (11:2-16)

11:2 ἐπαινῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί,
ὅτι πάντα μου μέμνησθε,
καὶ καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν,
τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε.

11:2 ¶ Now I-praise †you, brethren,
because †you- {ye} -have-minded *me* [kept me – my instruction – in memory] *regarding-all-things*,
and – just-as I-instructed †you [I-delivered (them) to-†you] –
†you- {ye} are-holding-secure [holding-down] the instructions [traditions \things-delivered].

11:2 • It is good policy to commend persons for what they are doing correctly in order to present a positive balance and show there is no ill intention or fault-finding, preparing them to graciously receive kindly correction on what they may be doing wrong. Paul praises the Corinthians in general for conscientiously following his instructions, which must have included contacting him if any questions arose which they could not resolve. The Corinthians had problems for which Paul rebukes them, but his overall evaluation was positive, at least as to their intention. After all, they aren't contacting him in order not to follow his instructions. Even if they didn't know what to do or how to do it, nevertheless they were ready to do it once Paul explained. So Paul explains another issue.

"Instructions" are things delivered from one person or group of persons over to the next. The word could be translated "tradition," but "tradition" can have a connotation of mere cultural customs passed down by oral communication with honorary authority which has accumulated over time. Rather, Paul, by the authority of Christ Jesus, is the source, and these are directly revealed verbal instructions and instructive examples as to what exactly to do. In modern English, we would not call such things "traditions."

The King James Version reads "keep the ordinances," from which some have inferred that Paul meant only water baptism and the sharing of the loaf and cup. No doubt these instructions were on the level of directives, precepts, and ordinances, but there is no indication that Paul limited his reference to water baptism and the sharing of the loaf and cup - after all, there was in fact some serious fault in their practice of the sharing of the loaf and cup, and neither water baptism nor the sharing of the loaf and cup directly connect with the following discussion of headcovering.

So, what instructions (or traditions or ordinances) is this referring to? This passage appears to refer to actual practices, not merely to principles. Likewise, the passages which follow (11:17-14:40) appear to focus on the actual practices within the gathering of the assembly. So 11:3-16 might likewise refer to practices within the gathering of the assembly. The argument against this is that it doesn't actually say this - which is a very good argument, but not a decisive one.

11:3 θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι,
ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστὶ:
κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς, ὁ ἀνὴρ:
κεφαλὴ δὲ Χριστοῦ, ὁ Θεός.

11:3 Yet I-desire for-†you to-know,
that the head *of-every man* [adult-male] is ▪*Christ*;
and the *head of-* the *-woman* [adult-female /wife] is ▪*man* [adult-male /husband];
and the *head of-Christ* is ▪*God*.

11:3 • Paul doesn't simply address this next issue with a directive - "do this." Instead, he invites their attention to a logical argument ("I desire for you to know"), beginning the argument by stating a principle which he will develop point by point into a compelling conclusion which has directive force by reason of its simple and irrefutable logic. This principle is that there is a constitutional order of headship and submission into which everyone fits somewhere.

Christ submits to God (John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

Wives submit to husbands (Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:22,24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1,5-6).

Children submit to parents (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20).

Servants submit to masters (Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22; 1 Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18).

Populations submit to governments (Romans 13:1; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

Governments submit to Christ (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22).

The gathered assembly submits to Christ (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19).

All things submit to Christ under God (Matthew 11:27; John 3:35; 13:3; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 2:8-9).

All things ultimately submit under God (Romans 11:36; Ephesians 4:6).

But for Paul to mention here all of these levels and channels of this constitutional order would necessarily distract his readers from his point: Man is, by constitutional order, head of the woman. If the woman made motions and pretenses so as to usurp the man's headship, she would be acting contrary to her constitutional position. This would be unconstitutional, and would lead to one constitutional imbalance after another until many things would fall out of order. The same thing would be true if the man or the woman

assumed the headship position of Christ, or if the man assumed a subservient position to the woman. Some jurisdictions technically allow for exceptions in extreme circumstances. For example, women are never encouraged, but grammatically are not excluded from positions in government. Some jurisdictions, such as in the gathered assembly, allow no such exceptions. Deborah the female judge would be a prominent Biblical example of an extraordinary one-time-only exception to this regular order which was made necessary by the failure of male leadership in Israel in an emergency situation - an immediate need for decisive action. The fact that it was necessary for Deborah to lead Israel as judge was itself a humiliation to the men of Israel. This established no precedent for women judges. The exception is allowed only for the purpose of survival, and only for as long as it takes to restore proper order.

"Head" here means the one to whom submission is due (compare Ephesians 5:22-24) (the idea, but not the word, is in 1 Corinthians 15:28). In other contexts, "head" may also mean representative head (the idea, but not the word, is in Romans 5:12,19), or administrative head (Colossians 2:19).

"Man" and "woman" here means adult male and adult female. Though the two terms can mean "husband" and "wife," there is nothing in the context to suggest that these terms are meant to be limited to this meaning either here or anywhere else in this passage. Certainly 11:3 includes husband and wife, but to interpret 11:3 as referring only to husband and wife would be to cast a strange interpretation upon the remainder of the passage.

11:4 πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων,
κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων,
καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ.

11:5 πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα
ἀκατακάλυπτον τῇ κεφαλῇ,
καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν ἑαυτῆς;
ἐν γὰρ ἐστὶ καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρημένῃ.

11:4 *Every man praying or prophesying,*
while *having* anything *down* over his *head*,
continually dishonors [[disgraces\puts-to-thorough-shame] his **Head** [- namely, Christ].

11:5 But *every woman praying or prophesying*
with **her head not-completely-covered** [[not-as-an-object-for-covering]
continually dishonors [[disgraces \puts-to-thorough-shame] **her own head** [- namely, her male protector],
for it-is in effect *one* and the same with- **her-who** *~has-been-shaven* [- namely, a prostitute].

11:4 • Roman men would often cover their heads while performing religious duties. Sodomite men wore long hair. Jewish men prayed with uncovered heads.

11:5 • The Jewish woman wore plaited hair held together with bands and coverings. For a Jewish woman to appear with uncovered head outside of the house was considered shameful and would place her in danger of divorce. Among the Jews, women guilty of adultery had their heads shaved. Among the Corinthians, prostitutes and sodomite women shaved their heads.

Paul regards incompletely covered women and shaved women to be essentially equivalent, so covering is not considered a matter of degree, but is an absolute - either she is covered or she isn't.

11:4-5 • The woman's head is her male protector - if married, then her husband; if unmarried, then her father; if orphaned of a father, then her eldest brother; if no man in the family can responsibly fulfill the role, then her situation is very distressed. She may need help from other kinsmen or friends, or she may be forced to become her own protector. A widow functions as her own head and protector, 1 Corinthians 7:39. Note: this is an entirely different situation from a woman who simply assumes to herself the position of being her own protector.

To assume the appearance and demeanor of those above us is to assume their position, to dishonor them, and to rebel against God's order. A woman is honored in her man, and tears down her own house if she desires honor for herself or deflects it from her man. A man is honored in Christ, and tears down his own house if he desires honor for himself or deflects it from the Lord. So the woman is honored who looks out for her man's honor, and the man is honored who looks out for Christ's honor.

Some say this passage proves that an individual woman may directly address the gathered meeting with prayer and prophecy, therefore 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 cannot mean what they appear to say about women not speaking in the gathered meeting. First, it is uncertain whether this passage is referring to any activity in the gathered meeting. Second, the passage speaks only of what a woman may not do. A negative which prohibits doing a certain thing does not necessarily infer a positive which permits doing any other thing as long as that one prohibited thing is not done - unless, of course, the context clearly indicates that any other thing is permitted, which this context does not. When we approach an intersection which has a stop sign, if we are prohibited from driving through without stopping, we may not infer from this that at every intersection without a stop sign we may drive straight through without any consideration for stopping.

It is uncertain whether this passage refers to activity in the gathered meeting, and it is uncertain whether it assumes women may pray and prophecy in the gathered meeting. However, these two assertions are not necessarily ruled out. Nevertheless, even if we assume that these two assertions are true, there is still no reason to assume that the expression "praying and prophesying" includes individuals - male or female - directly addressing the gathered meeting. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:26 lists singing psalms among the regular activities in the gathering. The terms "prayer" and "prophecy" perfectly describe the contents of the psalms. Acts 4:23-31 explicitly declares, "they raised their voice to God with one accord" and sang Psalm 2 as a prayer. So if both men and women - the congregation - sang the psalms of Scripture in the gathered meeting, this activity could not possibly be excluded from the expression "praying and prophesying." Congregational singing does not necessarily violate the constitutional order addressed in 11:3. Since Paul does not describe what he included under the expression "praying and prophesying," and since we know that singing the psalms would satisfy the meaning of the expression, and since 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 explicitly prohibit women directly addressing

the gathered meeting, we may conclude that if the passage is speaking approvingly of women praying and prophesying in the gathered meeting, then this expression must at least include the congregational singing of psalms, but we lack the necessary information to discern whether it refers to anything more or anything else. It is possible that among Christians the expression "praying and prophesying" was actually a technical term (jargon, idiom, vernacular, lingo) for singing the psalms.

It is a standard and universal rule of interpretation - not just for Scripture, but for all of human communication - that positive directives and doctrine must be drawn from clear passages directly addressing an issue, and that obscure passages which do not directly address an issue must be brought into conformity with the clear and direct passages. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 clearly and directly address the issue of women speaking in the gathered meeting. 1 Corinthians 11:5 and context is admitted by all to be obscure and hard to understand, and it certainly does not clearly and directly address the issue of women speaking in the gathered meeting. Hence we stand hermeneutics on its head when we begin with 1 Corinthians 11:5, and from among many possible interpretations we pick the one which happens to fit our fancy, then we build our entire understanding of Scripture's teaching on women speaking in the gathered meeting upon our own choice of interpretations, contorting 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 until they confess to the meaning which we have clearly imported into 1 Corinthians 11:5.

11:6 εἰ γὰρ οὐ κατακαλύπτεται γυνή,
καὶ κειράσθω:
εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι,
κατακαλυπτέσθω.

11:6 For if a woman *does- not -have-herself-completely-covered*,
then let-her- also -have-herself-clipped.
But since it is shameful [/a disgrace] for- a -woman
▪to-have-herself-clipped or to-have-herself-shaved,
then let-her-have-herself-completely-covered.

11:6 • The word for "have-herself-completely-covered" is ambiguous as to what the covering is. It can mean "to have the head covered with hair" as well as mean "to cover the head with other things."

Paul is arguing that this is an either-or proposition - there is no middle ground. He classifies any woman who has her head clipped or sheared with a scissors with a woman who has her head shaved with a razor. Notice his focus upon the woman's hair.

11:7 ἀνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν,
εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων:
γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρός ἐστιν:

11:8 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀνὴρ ἐκ γυναικὸς,
ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρός:

11:9 καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἀνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα,
ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα:

11:10 διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς
διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους.

11:7 For a *man* indeed is-obligated not to-have- ^ohis head -completely-covered,
being-originally-constituted [ὑπάρχων] as the *image and glory of-God*.

But the *woman* exists [ἐστὶν] as the *glory of- the -man*.

11:8 For man is not constituted out-of woman as his head-source;
But-rather, woman is constituted out-of man as her head-source.

11:9 For also man was- not -*created* for-the-sake-of the woman;
but-rather, woman was created for-the-sake-of the man.

11:10 On-account-of this constitutional order,
the woman is-obligated to-have a controlling-authority [/coverture] upon ^oher head
on-account-of the angels [/for-the-sake-of the messengers].

11:7 • ὑπαρχω [ὑπάρχων] denotes the original state or condition which still exists, in contrast to what is temporary or accidental. ὑπαρχω literally means "to begin below or under, that is, to begin at the foundation or from the very first," and from that develops the meanings "to come into being at the very beginning," "to begin to be from the start," and later "to be present or at hand," "to subsist or supply what is necessary to existence," "to belong to or be in possession of."

εἶμι [ἐστὶν] simply means "to be" "to exist."

The woman is made to correspond to the man, to be his counterpart or mate and his helper suited to him, to be man's glory, even as man is made to be God's glory.

11:8-9 • Woman was made out of man and for man, to be his helper to multiply his joys, pleasures, and comforts, and to divide his trials, afflictions, and sorrows, to rule his house under him, and to care for him. Genesis 2:18-23.

11:10 • This passage is obscure, but prevailing interpretations do seem to assume that the passage is discussing what takes place within the gathered meeting.

One interpretation is that in the general assembly in the presence of God, angelic creatures cover themselves with the natural covering of their glorious wings (Isaiah 6:2; Ezekiel 1:11), so likewise women are obligated to follow this example in the sanctuary of the gathered meeting by covering themselves in a similar way.

An alternate interpretation is that “angels” may refer to men who speak in the gathered meeting as the messengers of God, Ecclesiastes 5:6; Isaiah 42:19; 44:26; Haggai 1:13; Malachi 2:7; 3:1; Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24,27; 9:52; James 2:25; Revelation 1:20; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14. The chief speaker in the Jewish synagogue was called the “angel.” So the woman is obligated to have a controlling authority upon her head because she is in the presence of those who speak for God in the gathering.

Another common interpretation is that “angels” may refer to angelic beings, such as the cherubim who covered the mercy seat within the holiest of holies within the temple. The gathered meeting is explicitly and repeatedly called the holiest of holies, the inner sanctuary of the temple. Therefore, angelic beings may be invisibly present. Compare 4:9. The weakness of this interpretation is that it is not clear or apparent why only women are obligated to be covered before invisible angels.

If we take the words literally, then this is not talking about any outward covering at all, but about the need for every woman to have a controlling authority over her. Remember, it was an angel in the form of a serpent in the midst of the garden who first deceived Eve. Adam should have spoken to the serpent in the midst of the garden, not Eve. It was the subtlety of the serpent to attack and kill the man through the woman. The gathered meeting typologically and functionally corresponds to the midst of the garden of God and to the innermost sanctuary of the temple, the holiest of all. Would we invite Eve to speak? No. In the presence of angels, she needs Adam, the head and controlling authority over her, to speak.

11:11 πλήν οὔτε ἀνὴρ χωρὶς γυναικός,
οὔτε γυνή χωρὶς ἀνδρός,
ἐν Κυρίῳ:

11:12 ὥσπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός,
οὕτω καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικός,
τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ.

11:11 Nevertheless, neither does a man exist apart from a woman,
nor does a woman exist apart from a man, in the design of the Lord.

11:12 For just-as the woman is constituted from the man,
in-this-way also the man is born through the woman;
but all things derive from ▪God as their Head-Source.

11:7-12 • Man is the initial cause of woman, and woman is the instrumental cause of man, but the ultimate cause of both is God. Here Paul supplies a needed balancing point. Man and woman need each other in every respect. Everywhere in Scripture woman is placed in subjection to or under the authority of the man, but nowhere in Scripture is woman placed in subjugation to or under the enslaving power of the man. They each have their respective roles and are mutually accountable to Christ under God for their mutual relationship.

11:13 ἐν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς κρίνατε:
πρέπον ἐστὶ γυναικῆ ἀκατακάλυπτον τῷ Θεῷ προσεύχεσθαι;

11:14 ἢ οὐδὲ αὐτὴ ἡ φύσις διδάσκει ὑμᾶς,
ὅτι ἀνὴρ μὲν ἐὰν κομᾷ,
ἀτιμία αὐτῷ ἐστι:

11:15 γυνὴ δὲ ἐὰν κομᾷ,
δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστιν;
ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται αὐτῇ:

11:13 Judge‡^{+ve} among |/Decide for| ‡your-own-selves:
is-it *proper* |/fitting-to-the-circumstances /suitable| for a *woman* to-be-praying ▪*to-God* while *not-completely-covered*?
No, it is not proper.

11:14 Or does- *not-even the nature* of the thing *itself*-teach ‡you
that if a *man*, on-the-one-hand, should-be-wearing-a-head-of-long-hair,
it-is a mark of *dishonor* |/disgrace| *to-him*?
Yes, its nature does teach us this.

11:15 While-on-the-other-hand, if a *woman*, should-be-wearing-a-head-of-long-hair,
it-is a mark of *dignity* |/glory| *to-her*?
Yes, its nature does teach us this.

Because *the head-of-long-hair* has-been- once-for-all -given to-her by God
in-the-place-of [/answering-to /corresponding-to] a *veiling-apparel* [/cloak \what-is-wrapped-around].

11:13-15 • It was one of the regular occupations of the gathered meeting to carefully and conscientiously deliberate and eventually render judgement on matters. (e.g. 1 Corinthians 2:15; 5:12; 6:2-5; 10:15; 11:31; 14:20,24,29) Paul is confident in submitting his argument to their judgement.

Until this point, Paul has avoided using any word which would necessarily imply an article of apparel. Here, at the very end of his argument, the word for “veiling apparel” - περιβολαίου, a cloth wrapping which is thrown around the head - is explicitly mentioned, but Paul explicitly states that the head of long hair, by its natural design, does the very thing which this veiling apparel is manufactured to do.

The grammar expects a “no” answer to the question about the propriety of a woman praying while not completely covered.

οὐδὲ is used to introduce a question expecting a positive answer. The grammar expects a “yes” answer to each of the comparative questions “does not even the nature of the thing itself teach you?...”

Women’s hair naturally grows thicker, faster, and women are much less prone to baldness. Women are smaller and more delicate than men (1 Peter 3:7), and by general acclamation across cultures, grown women meet a standard of beauty which is not even applied to grown men, and their hair is a large part of that beauty - the exceptions arguably proving the rule. Men are rarely known for their hair, while women are rarely known apart from it. Long hair on men or short hair on women is cross-culturally and universally considered a sign of distress or perversion. To anyone who would argue that it means no such thing in our culture today we would ask the obvious question: “Does a culture in distress or filled with perversion see itself that way?”

11:15 • “Given to her” is certainly a theological passive pointing to God as the source, thereby expressing God’s authority and approval.

The head of long hair stands in the position of being a veiling apparel. This does not rule out wearing an additional veiling-apparel, but it does clearly declare that long hair itself sufficiently functions as a veil - not unlike an angel’s natural covering of wings. If a woman is balding, or has cropped hair - for whatever the special reason - an additional veiling-apparel or a wig would seem appropriate.

11:16 εἰ δὲ τις δοκεῖ φιλόνηκος εἶναι,
ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν οὐκ ἔχομεν,
οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ Θεοῦ.

11:16 Now since *someone* intends [/seems /presumes /has a mind] to-be *contentious* [/argumentative /quarrelsome \fond-of-strife] about this matter, let it be said that **we-ourselves** – the Apostles – are- not -holding-to any custom [/usage] *of such kind* as this last mentioned – wearing special apparel, and-neither are the assemblies [congregations /gatherings] **of-God**.

11:16 • This is a first class condition, which means it assumes the proposition to be true, at least for the sake of discussion. Since Paul has been answering particular questions throughout this epistle, in this context we may assume this discourse is the answer to one of those questions, and we may translate “since” instead of merely “if.”

“Custom” means an established usage, a practice. Some suggest that the “no such custom” refers to an established practice in the Corinthian gathering of men being covered and women being uncovered while praying and prophesying. This seems most unlikely for the simple reason that the Gentile culture would not necessarily require it and the Jewish culture would not be prone to tolerate it. It seems more likely that the passage is a cleverly constructed argument in favor of the conclusion, and that the “no such custom” refers to the content of the conclusion. (One’s presuppositions will drive his conclusions.) If the passage is an argument, and the last half of verse 15 is the conclusion, then verse 16 clinches the conclusion. The argument would follow this train of thought:

1. – (11:2) The Corinthians had written Paul concerning several questions. Apparently some members of the gathering (probably Jews) had written to Paul about the need for women to cover themselves - presumably with cloth veils - possibly in the gathered meeting - and they saw this issue of women covering themselves on the level of authoritative apostolic instruction.
2. – (11:3) Paul argues strongly for the headship of the man and the submission of the woman to the man, agreeing in principle with those who advocate cloth veils for women.
3. – (11:4-5) Paul argues strongly that it is shameful for women not to wear something on their head when praying and prophesying, agreeing in principle with those who advocate cloth veils for women. (If this is taking place in the gathering, then this may refer to singing psalms, which is praying and prophesying, and which all men and women would participate in.)
4. – (11:6) Paul argues strongly that a woman with hair clipped or shorn is the opposite of the woman with her head completely covered, agreeing in principle with those who advocate cloth veils for women. However, Paul introduces a contrast. This contrast is not between either covering the hair completely with a cloth veil or else uncovering the hair partially or completely. Rather, this contrast is between either being completely covered with anything or else having the hair itself partially or completely cut off. Those who advocate cloth veils for women have to agree in principle with this statement, but they may squirm a bit when they realize that Paul’s argument is not based upon a covering of the head with a cloth veil, but simply upon the covering of the head. By introducing the absence of hair as an inadequate covering, Paul has subtly introduced hair as an adequate covering - an implicit point which will become explicit at the conclusion of his argument. If those who advocate cloth veils for women have to agree with Paul’s statement here, then they will not be able to resist the force of his conclusion later.

5. – (11:7-12) Paul argues that the matter of women or men covering or not covering the head is a constitutional issue, agreeing in principle with those who advocate cloth veils for women, but going far beyond their superficial advocacy of an artificial veil by laying a constitutional foundation for a natural covering.
6. – (11:13-15) Paul draws the natural conclusion from the constitutional argument. This conclusion seems so obvious and compelling that Paul declares, "Here's the facts, now you decide for yourselves." Yes a woman must be completely covered. Yes a man must not wear long hair. Yes a woman must wear long hair. That head of hair has once and for all - perfect tense, standing results by virtue of natural creation - been given to her in the very place which corresponds to a veil of cloth apparel. Those who advocate cloth veils for women have been proven to be correct in principle, but they have made the common mistake of confusing the childish ceremonial form - a cloth veil - with the mature understanding of reality - the covering of long hair. Paul has vindicated the advocates of the cloth veil in principle, but he has corrected them in practice. (Practice often extends beyond the borders which principle defines. It's easier to make rules than to apply principles.)
7. – (11:16) Paul clinches the argument by insisting that neither the apostles nor the gathered assemblies hold to any kind of custom which would fit with what was last mentioned - a veiling apparel. He very carefully avoids saying that they oppose women wearing a veiling apparel. He simply says they don't hold to it - they don't require it, and this is on the level of custom, not of instruction. Instruction would be a command. Women being covered was on the level of instruction, but not wearing cloth veils was on the level of custom. Requiring cloth veils simply does not fit with the remainder of the New Covenant picture. Paul doesn't say they can't wear cloth veils, just as he doesn't say they can't avoid pork and he doesn't say they can't celebrate Jewish feasts, though none of these things fit well with the New Covenant. He simply leaves all of these customs to die out on their own under the liberty of the gospel. Yes, the clean food and the special days were once ceremonial statute laws for Israel, while the head covering was never a Biblical law, but only a custom of some middle-eastern peoples such as the Jews. But under the New Covenant, such Old Covenant ceremonies are reduced to Jewish customs which a Christian is free to follow, and even encouraged to follow where there is a special issue of offending a Jew with a weak - that is, a culturally sensitive - conscience, but otherwise a Christian is under no obligation whatsoever to follow. As Christian culture emerged, all of these customs would die out by attrition - gradual disuse - being made superfluous under the full light of the gospel.

It is interesting that some persons, instead of rightly lowering Old Testament ceremonial law to the level of custom under the New Covenant, actually raise custom to the level of New Covenant law. Instead of being left in liberty to make a mature judgement as to what is best, they prefer to be placed under an inflexible childish code.

The apostle declares that there is no "such" custom in the gatherings of God. "Such" means "of a similar nature, class, or kind." The practice which takes place in the gatherings is simple and plain and natural. There is nothing in the practice of the gatherings which is of a similar nature, class, or kind to any practice of the wearing of special apparel. If anything, all special apparel would be as forbidden as all special titles.

Some assert that the Apostle means there is no "such" custom like not wearing a veil. This would seem to follow counter-intuitively from the immediate context. Nevertheless, this assertion might begin to seem plausible if only they could provide one command or normative example under the New Covenant for wearing a cloth veil, or provide examples of other "such" special apparel to be worn (or some other "such" things) in the gathering. What other "such" things as wearing a veiling apparel do we have explicit warrant and obligation for practicing in the gathering? There are in fact none! Furthermore, why would Paul and Peter elsewhere (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3) discuss women plaiting their hair if the hair must be covered anyway? (Though the plaiting of the hair was ordinarily a regular requirement before covering it with a cloth veil, it is plain that Paul and Peter have in view the ornate display of hair.)

This last statement (11:16) implies a doctrine of simplicity, plainness, and naturalness of form and conduct in the New Covenant gathering whenever it met. New Covenant worship is devoid of all shadows and carnal figures, is simple and unadorned, in spirit and in truth, conforming to the nature and reality of things. Even the most symbolic elements of the New Covenant - the imagery of water baptism and the sharing of the loaf and cup - are simple and straight forward, stating clearly what reality is naturally figured. The idea of requiring special clothing and special furniture and special rituals and special buildings and "such" is thoroughly contrary to the very nature of the New Covenant. To require a woman to wear a cloth veil for a covering is to move in a direction which is opposite to the entire tenor of the New Covenant.