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6 **1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and the Ordination of Women to Pastoral Ministry**

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11 The purpose of this paper is to explore what guidance the instruction of Paul to the
12 Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 may give regarding the ordination of women to pastoral
13 ministry. Some lament that we are wasting time and money in our sustained pursuit of the
14 ordination question. However, the issue is one of significant gravity, for we all deeply wish to
15 honor God by doing His will in this matter as revealed in Scripture, and to do it in a way that will
16 bless and unite the church. In working together to investigate this issue, we follow in the
17 footsteps of our Adventist pioneers who repeatedly and sacrificially struggled together to
18 discover where the truth of Scripture differed from either tradition or contemporary culture and
19 to follow that truth faithfully.

20 We all recognize that personal and cultural factors influence human interpretation of a
21 text even in the best of conditions. Where time and space, language and culture differ greatly
22 between the writing and reading of a text, and where strong feelings exist on a topic, as in the
23 case of this passage, research demonstrates that the human mind will almost invariably follow its
24 own biases to their predetermined end.¹ In the question we now face, our natural human
25 tendencies draw some of us toward the opportunities for women that have recently become
26 available in Western society, and others toward the assurance of the “way things have always
27 been done” in our traditional cultures, Christian or otherwise. For each group, certain ways of
28 viewing the text may appear obvious, simply because we read it with these and other prior, and
29 often unexamined, commitments and inclinations.

30 In such cases, the only possibility of accurately interpreting Scripture and determining
31 where one is being misled by culture, either in the direction of tradition or that of contemporary
32 thought, begins with submitting oneself to Scriptural truth in accordance with biblically-shaped
33 hermeneutics and careful methodology.² Because of the deceptiveness of the human heart every
34 one of us must, as we do this, repeatedly and honestly question our own assumptions and biases
35 with the help of our interpretive community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Prov 12:15; 14:12. See, for example, Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon, 2012). The thorough analysis of relevant research in this book makes it valuable to read, despite the author’s divergences into evolutionary speculation where we would recognize the origin of the problem in human sinfulness.

² An outline of current Adventist thought on hermeneutics, entitled “Methods of Bible Study,” was voted by the General Conference Executive Committee at the Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986. (This document may be accessed at <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/documents/#Articles81>).

1 It is in this spirit that I submit to you my reading of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16—a text that
2 has been identified as possibly the most difficult in the New Testament to understand—looking
3 forward to thoughtful feedback and dialogue on what I have found in this text. While each of the
4 thorny issues in the passage is fascinating and worthy of attention, this paper will address only
5 those that have significant bearing on the discussion of the ordination of women. In such cases,
6 the difficulty will be outlined and the most plausible solutions will be considered on the basis of
7 Scriptural evidence, working from the clearer aspects of the passage and of Scripture as a whole.
8

9 **1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in Context: Background, Genre, and Structure**

10 In studying 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 we are stepping into the middle of a long-distance
11 conversation between Paul, who is at this point in Ephesus, and the strongly Gentile church of
12 Corinth (1 Cor 12:2; 16:8; cf. 10:1; Acts 18, 19). Paul had written these believers an earlier letter
13 (1 Cor 5:9, 11) and had also received a letter from them (7:1), which seems to have mentioned
14 some issues needing to be addressed (5:1; 8:1; 12:1). Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus had
15 visited with support from the church (16:17), and either a visit or a letter had come from
16 “Chloe’s people,” and possibly from others as well, updating Paul on news from the Corinthian
17 church (1:11). It was possibly through one of these communications that he learned of the issue
18 he addresses in 11:2-16.

19 The letter we call 1 Corinthians is a pastoral letter of exhortation written for the purpose
20 of instructing the believers concerning crucial issues that had come to Paul’s attention. Two
21 general underlying problems among the believers are immediately apparent. As the letter opens,
22 a thirst for preeminence is evident in the friction between rival groups (1:11-12). This thirst
23 involved a desire to appear wise and knowledgeable (8:1; 10:15; cf. 1:17-19). It showed itself as
24 well in lawsuits against one another (ch. 6), in their failure to share fairly in the Lord’s Supper
25 (11:18-21), and in their seeking to possess and be recognized for the more prominent gifts (ch.
26 12-14). Paul, in response, directs them to God’s deeper wisdom of humble service, evidenced
27 above all in the cross of Christ and demonstrated in Paul’s own ministry (1 Cor 1-4). At the
28 center of this better way is the surpassing value of love (1 Cor 13).

29 A second, and related, problem was the Corinthian’s sense of freedom, or authority
30 (*exousia*), to do as they individually chose (6:12; 8:9).³ This had shown itself most flagrantly in
31 the case of sexual immorality among the believers (ch. 5). To this Paul responded with a call to
32 disciplined holiness (6:18-20)—reminding them that in reality God has already provided
33 cleansing (1:2, 30; 6:11)—and counseled them in godly sexuality (ch. 7). Paul also instructed
34 them regarding a less straightforward issue: the eating of food that had previously been offered
35 to idols. He exhorts them to recognize that the love and unity God wants for them requires that
36 they consider the effect of their actions on others and on their loyalty to Christ and act
37 accordingly, rather than selfishly flaunting their own freedom (see esp. 8:7; 10:23-24).

³ It may be that the sense of freedom some felt was related to a misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching about the law, and/or to a misunderstanding among some about the reality of the resurrection (1 Cor 15).

1 At bottom, in their self-focus the Corinthian believers had lost their appreciation of the
2 goodness of God (1:4-9). To such goodness, in Paul’s mind, the truly wise can only respond by
3 giving God glory and honor in word, in life, and in appropriate worship.

4 The problem Paul had been dealing with immediately prior to 11:2-16 was the feeling of
5 some Corinthians, mentioned above, that because they now knew that other gods did not exist,
6 they were free to eat food offered to idols (ch. 8-10). After pointing out that by so doing they
7 were likely to lead the weak—who have only recently come out of idol worship—back into
8 practices that re-enslave them to such worship, and reminding them of what he had given up for
9 the sake of the gospel, Paul turns to the Old Testament example of what happened when Israel in
10 the wilderness mixed loyalty to God and to idols.⁴ Warning them to avoid following Israel’s
11 example, he again stresses that the Corinthians must consider the influence of their actions on
12 other people, however justifiable they may seem, and points them instead to the glory of God as
13 the motive and criterion for all action (10:23-31). He concludes, “Give no offense either to Jews
14 or to Greeks or to the church of God,” calling on them to follow the example he has set for them
15 (10:32-11:1).

16 First Corinthians 11:2-14, which we will now address, begins a section in which Paul
17 deals with selected issues related to their church gatherings. In this larger section desire to have
18 one’s own way and rivalry for honor are once again in evidence, even at the Lord’s Supper,
19 along with disorderliness in relation to spiritual gifts.

20 **Getting the Big Picture: The Structure and Main Message of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16**

21 If one is to understand in a balanced way the details of any passage, it is essential, after
22 exploring the context, to discover the big picture of what the author is seeking to communicate.
23 This is especially essential in a complex passage such as this. The brief overview below seeks to
24 identify the main sections, or stages, of Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and what role
25 each stage plays in the communicating of his message. Following this overview, the passage will
26 then be examined in more detail in light of the framework we have discovered.

27 *11:2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything*
and hold firmly to the traditions,
just as I delivered them to you.

28
29 Verse 2 introduces a transition to a new topic by stepping back from correction and
30 instruction to offer a word of commendation to the believers in Corinth.

31
32 *11:3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the **head** of every man,*
*and the man is the **head** of a woman,*
*and God is the **head** of Christ.*

33 Paul next puts forward an assertion outlining three key relationships between humans and
34 the divine. This verse is often treated as the main point and focus of Paul’s attention in the entire
passage. To test this idea, notice whether each of the following stages of the passage is aimed

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

1 toward the support and explanation of verse 3, or toward dealing with the issue of head-
2 coverings introduced in verses 4-5.

3

11:4-6

*Every man who has something on his **head** while praying or prophesying disgraces his **head**.*

⁵*But every woman who has her **head** uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her **head** for she is one and the same as the woman whose **head** is shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her **head**, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her **head** shaved, let her cover her **head**.*

4 Verses 4-6 make a parallel set of observations regarding the wearing of head-coverings
5 that are improper to one's gender while praying or prophesying. The word "head" is used both to
6 refer to the literal head and to link to verse 3, using the thoughts conveyed in verse 3 to reinforce
7 the assertions in verses 4-6. Notice that the man is addressed first and then the woman, followed
8 by further comment illustrating the level of significance of a wrong choice.

9

11:7-12

*For a man **ought not to have his head covered**,*

*since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; ⁹for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for **the** man's sake.*

¹⁰*Therefore **the woman ought to have** (a symbol of) authority on her **head**, because of the angels.*

¹¹*However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.*

10 In verses 7-12 Paul continues to address the issue of head-coverings, bringing in points
11 from Scripture which operate to give authority to his argument. Again there are parallel
12 statements to the man and then the woman ("the man ought not to" / "the woman ought to"). In
13 this case, however, instead of observations structured as a simple contrasting parallelism, Paul
14 words these statements as directives with accompanying support and qualification. Reference to
15 the literal head again makes a link to the opening premise, now further explained in relation to
16 the head-covering issue by means of specific Scriptural points.

17

11:13-16

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

¹⁴*Does not even nature itself teach you that **if a man has long hair**, it is a dishonor to him,*

¹⁵*but **if a woman has long hair**, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.*

¹⁶*But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.*

18 Even as he concludes the passage, summing up his argument, Paul does not develop the
19 relationships in verse 3, as would be expected if verse 3 were the main point of the passage.⁵

⁵ For an example of a passage that focuses on illustrating and explaining an initial main point, see James argument about favoritism in Jas 2:1-13.

1 Instead he remains focused on the question of head-coverings. This final two-part argument is
2 based on the perception of what is proper, of what is “natural,” and, finally, on church practice.

3 By thus considering the big picture of Paul’s argument, it is clear that his main point has
4 to do with the appropriate use of head-coverings. Verse 3 can be seen to function in the passage
5 as the statement of an opening premise from which Paul will begin to build his case for the
6 counsel he wishes to give regarding head-coverings. Verses 4-6 offer an initial statement of the
7 problem, followed by further instruction and rationale regarding appropriate head-covering (vv.
8 7-12, 13-16).

10 **What Is Paul Really Saying? Exploring the Argument**

11 Paul’s *primary* purpose in this passage, then, is not to address the question of whether
12 women should lead in worship or other functions of the church, but rather how they should be
13 attired as they lead out in the assembly of believers. This does not necessarily mean, however,
14 that the passage carries no implications for our question regarding women’s ordination. We are
15 now in a position to proceed through the passage understanding and exploring each stage in
16 Paul’s argument as it relates to whether and what implications the text may relating to our
17 question.

18 **11:2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything
and hold firmly to the things handed down (*paradosis*),
just as I delivered *them* to you.⁶**

19 Paul’s commendation in this verse may be intended to function as a general
20 encouragement before the series of corrections he is about to give in the major section of the
21 letter he is now beginning (ch. 11-14).⁷ However, the fact that he introduces his next topic in
22 11:17 with the contrasting statement “I do not praise you,” suggests that this positive
23 commendation is especially related to 11:2-16.⁸ In addition to providing encouragement, these

⁶ While the quotes in the previous textboxes were quoted directly from the NASB, the quotes in this section have been modified slightly to reflect more transparently the original Greek as explained in the paragraph(s) below the quotes.

⁷ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 228.

⁸ Troy Martin, “Paul’s Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 1:13-15: A Testicle Instead of a Head-covering,” *JBL* 123 (2004): 258-261. (These are the only two occurrences in the Pauline writings of the phrase “I praise you” / “I do not praise you.”) It has also been suggested that Paul is here being ironic, since he has in the previous chapters corrected the Corinthians for several serious sins. However he gives no further hint of irony, and indeed straightforwardly introduces the next issue (11:17-34) with the contrasting statement, “But in giving this instruction, *I do not praise you* . . .” This suggests that he is speaking straightforwardly here as well. In view of this, the group provoking this counsel would likely be a minority within the church, or possibly critics from outside the church. Thomas F. Martin, “Augustine’s Pauline Method: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as a Case Study,” in *Celebrating Paul: Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J* (ed. Peter Spitaler; CBQMS 48; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America), 258-261. That the Corinthian believers were mostly in conformity in the areas he is about to address is supported by the teaching, rather than rebuking, style of the passage as a whole, evidenced, for example, by the preference for third-person pronouns (e.g. he, she, they) over the more personal and confrontive words (e.g. I, we, and you). The commendation may suggest that the

1 words point the Corinthian believers toward faithfulness to the traditions taught by Paul as being
2 a better basis for receiving recognition and honor than some of the other methods they have tried,
3 and are receiving correction for, in this letter. The noun *paradosis* (tradition) is the standard
4 general term in the New Testament (NT) for ideas that have been handed down or passed on by
5 others. It is used of everything from “philosophy and empty deception” (Col 2:8) and the
6 Pharisees’ tradition of the elders (Mark 7: 3, 8, 9; Gal 1:14) to Christian teachings (2 Thess 2:15;
7 3:6).⁹
8

**11:3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head (*kephalē*) of every man,
and the man is the head (*kephalē*) of a woman,
and God is the head (*kephalē*) of Christ.**

9 For Paul, who has centered his whole life and ministry around God and what He has done
10 in Jesus Christ, everything needed to have a theological grounding. Thus, as he begins to address
11 the problem of head-coverings, he clarifies for the Corinthians three basic relationships which he
12 believes are important for dealing with the issue.¹⁰ He will return to these relationships to make
13 further explanations in verses 4-7, 11, and 12.

14 The ordering of the relationships does not emphasize hierarchy; otherwise one would
15 expect God to be placed at one end and woman at the other. Instead, by placing Christ in both the
16 first and last pairing in the sequence, Paul invites and reminds his audience, above all, to
17 understand all three relationships in the light of Christ and the example and teaching He provided
18 for engaging in relationships. The relation between man and woman falls in the center place,
19 preparing for its ongoing importance in the passage.

20 The key repeated word in all three paired relationships is head, or *kephalē*. The issue
21 many consider key to accurately interpreting verse 3, and indeed the whole passage, is the
22 determination of a single specific meaning of *kephalē* which is commonly employed at the time
23 and that identifies the whole point of verses 2-16. Unfortunately, as often happens, simply
24 selecting from among definitions in common Greek-English lexicons can lead to
25 misunderstanding or false assumptions if one does not explore the rich ways in which the word is
26 used in actual of that day. Further, one of the huge challenges in pursuing the question of the
27 uses of *kephalē* in Paul’s time is that the discussion is so polarized that most work on the
28 question has tended to skew the data to a surprising degree in the direction of each individual

Corinthians have in general been keeping the tradition about head-coverings, but are now troubled by some dissent from inside, or possibly even outside, the church.

⁹ The word for “delivered,” *paradidōmi*, is the standard word for handing down or handing over something, including people, objects, ideas, and doctrines which, in one instance, had come from Jesus Himself (1 Cor 11:23).

¹⁰ It is often thought that Paul is now bringing up something new, hoping the Corinthians would hold fast to this new teaching as they had to his previous ones (Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 163). Yet these relationships were not necessarily new to the Corinthians. The term for “understand” (*oida*), also translated “to know,” is often used to speak of grasping, or deepening, the knowledge of something. Stephen Bedale, “Meaning of *Kephalē* in the Pauline Epistles,” *JTS* 5, no. 2 (1954): 693-694. For example, Paul tells the Ephesians he is praying that they will “know what is the hope of His [God’s] calling...and the greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Eph 1:18-19). Yet it seems odd that if Paul is talking about a set of principles so fundamental to daily life as is often argued regarding v. 3, that he would not speak in terms of a reminder rather than of wanting them to know or understand.

1 writer's preconceptions.¹¹ For those who wish to understand the issue, it is necessary to look up
2 and evaluate usages oneself.

3 The word *kephalē* literally refers to the topmost or foremost physical part of the human or
4 animal body, but most language and culture groups also use the head to represent various
5 figurative ideas suggested by its physical attributes. As with other kinds of word play, the value
6 of figurative language in human communication is its flexibility and its ability to evoke richer
7 and broader meaning than a simple literally-focused word.

8 In the English language probably the most common figurative meaning, when an
9 individual person is said to be the "head," is that he or she is "in authority over" others, or even
10 their "ruler," similarly to the way the physical head understood today to be the control center of
11 the rest of the body.¹² The Hebrew word for head (*rōsh*) is also sometimes used to represent this
12 figurative idea.¹³ However, figurative meanings attributed to a word in one culture do not
13 necessarily apply in another culture or language, and "authority" was not a meaning used of
14 individuals in classical Greek. Yet by the time of Paul,¹⁴ there are a few rare instances of an
15 individual using it in this way, some of the clearest examples being by the Jewish translators of
16 the Septuagint (LXX), who used *kephalē* in several instances to translate the Hebrew *rōsh*,¹⁵ and

¹¹A primary reason for this is that, with the frequent difficulty of identifying what figurative idea is primarily intended in a given usage, an interpreter will naturally tend to see those meanings he is looking for even in the uncertain texts while minimizing the other possibilities where the intended emphasis is uncertain. The claims of Philip B. Payne, (*Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], 117-139); in contrast to those of Joseph A. Fitzmyer ("Kephālē in I Corinthians 11:3," *Int* 47 [1993]) provide an excellent example of this. A somewhat more even-handed overview can be found in Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 812-822. My analysis falls somewhere in between the two extremes, largely because I choose to give priority to clear examples of a usage. A bias in favor of tradition can at times be found even in the lexicons. For example, W. Bauer et al., eds., "κεφαλή," *BDAg* 541-542, virtually ignores the representative use of *kephalē*, and places "superior rank" as a primary meaning in 1st century Greek language on the strength of one citation from 500 AD and their interpretation of Paul.

¹²In ancient times many viewed the heart as the control center of the body while other saw it as located in the head or elsewhere. Catherine Kroeger. "The Classical Concept of *Head* as "Source"" in *Equal to Serve : Women and Men in the Church and Home*. (Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell, 1987), 269.

¹³F. Brown et al., eds., "רֹשׁ," *BDB* 910 lists, as figurative meanings of *rōsh*, a reference to the "top" of something, "first in a series," "chief" (in several senses including "the leader's place", and "the best"), "front," "beginning (of time)," and river-heads." Conzelmann (*I Corinthians*, 183 n.22, 29) notes that where it is used of the idea of sovereignty in the OT, it is over a community, not an individual.

¹⁴I am skeptical of using the early church fathers to understand Paul, since they wrote most often several centuries after the NT and give clear evidence (as early as the late first century) of having been shaped by the surrounding pagan culture in numerous areas recognized by Adventists, including that of authoritarianism and monarchicalism in church hierarchy. Cf. Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 818.

¹⁵The Septuagint was the earliest Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament and was the primary Bible used by the early church. The exact number of LXX uses of *kephalē* clearly referring to authority is debated, but numbers suggested range from about 6 (Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 119.) to 15 (Wayne A. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, Or.: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 545-546.) of which I find about 5 that are really unmistakably referring to a person in authority. The clearest example is Ps 18:43 (English version numbering, 17:44 in the Greek), reported also in 2 Sam 22:44, which states, "Deliver me from the gain sayings of the people: thou shalt make me head (*kephalē*) of the Gentiles: a people whom I knew not served me." Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta: id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006). (Rahlfs's translation of the

1 by Philo (a Hellenistic Jewish apologist) and Plutarch (a Greek biographer, essayist, and priest),
2 whose lives and situations overlapped somewhat with that of Paul.¹⁶ Those who read *kephalē* in
3 11:3 from this perspective understand it to say that, “Christ is in authority over all men, the man
4 is in authority over woman, God is in authority over Christ.” Support is seen in the references to
5 the “creation order” in verses 7-9, in the presence of the word “authority” in 11:10 and in its
6 usage in Ephesians 5:20-33.

7 Yet authority was not a common meaning for *kephalē* in the everyday language of the
8 Corinthians with whom Paul sought to communicate. In reality the LXX translators, when faced
9 with the Hebrew word for “head” (*rōsh*), far more often chose to translate it not with the Greek
10 word for head (*kephalē*) but with a different word that people would more easily associate with
11 the idea of authority (such as *archē* or *hēgemonia*).¹⁷ In fact *kephalē* is never used of authority of
12 one individual over another individual in the LXX, and only rarely and questionably elsewhere.
13 In addition, the instruction about proper head-coverings, which is the topic of 11:2-16 and for
14 which verse 3 forms the initial evidence, does not make any connection to verse 3 with relation
15 to authority although several other implications from these *kephalē* relationships are drawn in the
16 course of the instruction about head-coverings.

17 A more basic figurative idea suggested by *kephalē* and noted in the Greek lexicons is the
18 idea of the extremity of a thing (that is, the “first,” “beginning,” or “top”). This basic concept
19 derived from the physical head being the top or foremost part of the body suggests several
20 figurative ideas that receive some use in the Greek of Paul’s day. One meaning often suggested
21 to fit best in 11:3 is that of source, as in the sources (heads) of a river, but also used in more

Septuagint is used throughout this paper, unless otherwise noted.) The other LXX uses of *kephalē* that most clearly use it to identify someone in a position of authority are Judg 10:18 (in one version); 11:8 (in one version); 11:11; Isa 7:8-9; Lam 1:5. Others identify up to 16-18 uses associated with authority (from amongst a much larger number of figurative uses), largely because they include uncertain or secondary connections to authority.

¹⁶ Plutarch, who lived not far from Corinth within a few decades of Paul, wrote concerning a Roman emperor, “But after Vindex had openly declared war, he wrote to Galba inviting him to assume the imperial power (*hēgemonia*), and thus to serve what was a vigorous body in need of a head, meaning the Gallic provinces, which already had a hundred thousand men under arms, and could arm other thousands besides. . . .” Plutarch, *Galba* 4.3 (Perrin, LCL). Philo, like Paul a highly educated Hellenistic Jew who sought to defend his beliefs to Romans and Greeks, simply compares the head with a king: “Just as nature (*hē phusis*) conferred the sovereignty of the body on the head (*kephalē*) when she granted it also possession of the citadel as the most suitable position for its kingly rank, conducted it thither to take command and established it on high with the whole framework from neck to foot set below it, like the pedestal under the statue, so too she has given the lordship of the senses to the eyes. Thus to them too as rulers she has assigned a dwelling right above the others in her wish to give them amongst other privileges the most conspicuous and distinguished situation.” *On the Special Laws* 3.184 (*Philo VII*, Colson, LCL). Note that here Philo is drawing two figurative ideas from the comparison, the idea of authority and the idea of preeminence, or honor. For more possible examples (which need to be carefully weighed), see Fitzmyer, “Kephālē.”

¹⁷ This is disputed vigorously with individuals on each side taking an extreme position that cannot be substantiated by the evidence. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 119 building on Bedale, “Meaning of Kephālē in the Pauline Epistles,” and others after him claimed it was almost always done this way, while Grudem, Fitzmyer and allies consider it rare (see Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 821. As usual, both extremes push things too far, but an examination of all 49 examples of *rōsh* in the Hebrew OT meaning “chief” listed in Brown, *BDB* 910, evidence that rarely has one of these texts has *rōsh* translated as *kephalē* in the LXX translation).

1 extended senses.¹⁸ To read 11:3 in this way would yield the reading such as “Christ is the source
2 of all men, the man is the source of woman, God is the source of Christ.” On the one hand
3 “source” is a rather rare and disputed meaning for *kephalē* in Paul’s day,¹⁹ but on the other this
4 reading makes the clearest sense of the order of the three relationships, which then could be seen
5 as simply chronological beginning with Christ as the source of the man, the man as the source
6 (through his rib) of the woman, and God as the source of the incarnation of Christ, the Messiah.²⁰
7 Paul seems to build on this idea of man as the “source” of the woman in verse 8 where he states,
8 “For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man.”

9 Another figurative idea flowing out of the relation of the head to the body builds on the
10 idea of the head being physically prominent in relation to the body. Few today would argue that
11 the man is prominent, or preeminent, over the woman in the sense of being ontologically
12 superior, however the physical prominence of the head also underlies the common usage of the
13 head as representative of the whole person. This is the most common figurative usage of *kephalē*
14 in the LXX.²¹ This representative meaning could make sense in 11:3, conveying the idea of
15 Christ standing in a representative sense for all men, the man representing the family unit (as in
16 Genesis 1:26, Paul’s first Adam/second Adam theology, and verses 4, 5, 7 which speak in terms
17 of an individual disgracing or bringing glory to their “head”), and God representing Christ (in the
18 sense that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are often referenced with the simple term “God”).
19 This reading too has found support among some students of the passage.²²

¹⁸ The idea of “source” or “origin” as a figurative meaning for *kephalē* is another hotly debated topic, with Catherine C. Kroeger, “The Classical Concept of *Head* as “Source”,” in *Equal to Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home* (ed. Gretchen G. Hull; Old Tappan, N.J.: F.H. Revell, 1987) and Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 113-140 overplaying the evidence somewhat in supporting it as the single intended meaning in 1 Cor 11:3, while Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 206-208 on the other extreme, argues that source is never a legitimate meaning for *kephalē*. Consider, however, Artemidorus Daldianus (2nd–1st century B.C.), who used it in this way more than once, including of a man’s dream about losing his parents, “the head (*kephalē*) resembles parents in that it is the cause of one’s living...” *Onir. (On Dreams)* 1.35. from Artemidorus Daldianus, *The interpretation of dreams: Oneirocritica* (trans. Robert J. White; Park Ridge, N.J.: Noyes, 1975), 34. Note also the common hymn to Zeus, recorded in *Orphic fragment* 21, which speaks of Zeus both as the head (*kephalē*) and as the maker of all things, and Philo’s statement that “the virtuous one, whether single man or people, will be the head of the human race and all the others like the limbs of a body which draw their life from the forces in the head and at the top.” *Rewards* 1.124-5 (*Philo VIII*, Colson, LCL). See also the *Testament of Reuben* 2.2, where *kephalē* is often misleadingly translated as “leaders.”

¹⁹ Bauer, “κεφαλή,” *BDAG* 542, cites two articles, one in favor and one in opposition of “source” as a meaning of *kephalē*.

²⁰ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 270.

²¹ E. g. “Also God returned all the wickedness of the men of Shechem on their heads (*kephalē*), and the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal came upon them.” *Jdg* 9:57; and “This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons’) each of you has in his tent.” *Exodus* 16:16.

²² Andrew C. Perriman, “The Head of a Woman: The Meaning of *Kephalē* in 1 Cor 11:3,” *JTS* 45 (1994); Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 821. Note, for example, Philo’s observation in his *Life of Moses* 2.30, “in a word, the whole family of the Ptolemies was exceedingly eminent and conspicuous above all other royal families, and among the Ptolemies, Philadelphus was the most illustrious; for all the rest put together scarcely did as many glorious and praiseworthy actions as this one king did by himself, being, as it were, the leader of the herd, and in a manner the head (*kephalē*) of all the kings.” Also from Philo, an earlier statement from the passage from *On Reward* 1.125 quoted as an example of source, “For as in an animal the head (κεφαλή) is the first and best part, and the tail the last

1 The careful reader of the examples in the footnotes above will no doubt notice that often
2 a given use of *kephalē* seems to suggest several possible or overlapping figurative ideas. This is
3 also true of Paul. Ephesians 4:15-16 is an example. It states,

4 “we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head (*kephalē*), even Christ,
5 ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint
6 supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the
7 growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

8 Here we can see the focus on Christ as *source* of life and growth, yet at the same time he is
9 shown to be *prominent*, in fact *preeminent*, surpassing all others. It has further been suggested
10 that it is Christ’s sovereignty which allows him to sustain and strengthen the church.²³

11 Some of Paul’s usages, on the other hand, focus quite strongly on one idea, placing in the
12 background the rest. For example, we find one of the three possible meanings for *kephalē* being
13 alluded to in each of three passages about Christ in the epistle to the Colossians. Colossians 1:15-
14 18, builds on the idea of the head as the foremost part of the body: “He is also the head (*kephalē*)
15 of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself
16 will come to have first place in everything.” In 2:18-19, Paul emphasizes the idea of Christ as
17 source, “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement..., ¹⁹ and
18 not holding fast to the head (*kephalē*), from whom the entire body, being supplied and held
19 together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.” And in 2:9-10
20 there is an emphasis on Jesus’ authority, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily
21 form and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head (*kephalē*) over all rule and
22 authority...”

23 In Ephesians 5:18-6:2, the single instance outside of 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul applies
24 the figurative meaning of head to humans, certain aspects of authority also receive attention. Paul
25 is obviously not saying that the husband is head of the wife in every way that Christ is the head
26 of the church (e.g., in preeminence based on ontological difference or in absolute sovereignty)
27 for there is clearly a huge ontological difference between the relationship between Christ and
28 humans, and between husband and wife. In fact, in verses 25-28 he clarifies exactly what he
29 means the husband to understand by this Christ-like “headship.” The man is to lead in sacrificial
30 service for the spiritual benefit of his wife, who is as his own body while the woman is called on
31 to voluntarily submit to the husband in concert with all believers submitting to one another (v.
32 21-22).²⁴

and worst part, or rather no part at all, inasmuch as it does not complete the number of the limbs, being only a broom to sweep away what flies against it; so in the same manner what is said here is that the virtuous man shall be the head (*kephalē*)...” See also Jer 31:7 (38:7 LXX) and Deut 28:13; 28:44; Isa 9:13-16 (9:12-15 LXX) in which *kephalē* may represent authority but also preeminence, noting in the last instance that both groups represented in Isa 9 as head (*kephalē*) and as tail are leaders of the people. (Compare Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes* 2.5.)

²³ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Head-coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (eds. John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem; Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991), 128.

²⁴ Note that the wife is never told to “obey” as children are (6:21), but to make the voluntary choice to yield in love (5:22), just as all are to do to fellow believers (5:21). “Authority,” in fact, has a wide range of meaning growing out of the basic idea of an ascribed or acknowledged right to act and/or to influence the behavior of

1 From this examination of Paul’s uses of *kephalē* outside of 1 Corinthians 11 it is evident
2 that he uses this word in a multivalent way, playing on one or more of its different figurative
3 meanings as suits the point he is making in each passage.²⁵ Indeed, the speaker or writer, in
4 Paul’s time as today, has the ability to play with standard figurative meanings for a word
5 together with the attributes of the thing represented by that word, in order to shape new
6 applications.²⁶ Although it is frustrating to human desires for precision, language cannot be
7 captured in rigid and impermeable boxes allowing for no blending or deviation. It should
8 therefore not be carelessly assumed that where an author uses figurative language he wishes
9 either to bring to mind all possible meanings, or to allude to one and only one meaning. At the
10 same time the interpretive possibilities are not without boundaries rather, as can be seen in the
11 examples above, intended meanings for a particular usage are generally suggested by the context
12 in which it is used.

13 All three of the main possible readings of *kephalē* examined above, or even some
14 combination of the three, seem initially possible in the context of verse 3 alone. It is essential,
15 therefore, to begin by distancing oneself from assumptions about its meaning in this passage and
16 consider carefully the context of the passage as a whole in order to determine whether Paul is
17 building in verse 3 on the idea of “authority” in his main argument or whether he is emphasizing
18 “source,” “representation,” and/or other figurative ideas related to the “head.” Doing thus should
19 assist the interpreter to avoid imposing on the text his or her own assumed or desired reading.

20 Several observations regarding the three relationships described in verse 3 will prove
21 helpful as we proceed. In the first pair, the words “every man (*anēr*)” are placed first in the
22 Greek, emphasizing that this relationship with Christ as head affects every *anēr*. While the Greek
23 word *anēr* generally refers specifically to the male, Paul occasionally uses it of all humans (with
24 the male thus standing in a representative sense for all people). For example, he tells the
25 Romans, “Blessed is the *anēr* whose sin the Lord will not take into account” (Rom 4:8; cf Eph
26 4:13). Understanding *anēr* to include all people in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is made necessary by the
27 reality that it would be decidedly unbiblical to suggest that any human must stand in the place of
28 a mediator between Christ and another human, as would seem necessary if Christ were not the
29 head of the woman (*gynē*) as well. Most likely, as Plummer notes, Paul chooses the term *anēr*

others.²⁴ It can range from absolute authority and control, such as God ultimately carries, to an authority of influence and gentle guidance. For further definition and discussion, see Bruce Chilton and Jacob Neusner, *Types of Authority in Formative Christianity and Judaism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 541-542; Bernard Ramm, *The Pattern of Religious Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 10; Yves Simon, *A General Theory of Authority* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 3-12; G. D. Yarnold as cited in John Skinner, *The Meaning of Authority* (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), 6.

²⁵ See Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1999), 396, cf. 405-406 on v. 3. Such a use of figurative language creates a multi-layered and evocative communication that is rich in meaning through word play and multiple interconnections.

²⁶ This is something G. Dawes, “The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in Ephesians 5:21-33,” *BibInt* 30 (1998) referred to as “living metaphor,” the recognition that language is not dead and static but endlessly inventive.

1 here because he wishes next to speak of the relationship of man and woman which will be the
2 focal point of the passage.²⁷

3 The pair of terms used to describe the second relationship, *anēr* and *gynē*, can refer to
4 “man” and “woman,” to “husband” and “wife,” or by extension to the first man and woman
5 “Adam” and “Eve.” In the context of the whole passage none of the three can be used
6 exclusively; rather all three are emphasized in separate places in the passage. For example, in the
7 first pairing of verse 3 Paul is certainly not stating that Christ is the head only of husbands, while
8 in verses 4-6 the “husband” is the one who would be primarily disgraced by the woman’s
9 improper head coverings, and in verse 12 it could not be meant that the husband has his birth
10 through the wife. Thus here again, as noted above, it is essential to remember that words may be
11 used in an open sense allowing for a variety of meanings as indicated by the immediate context.
12 In this specific usage in verse 3, either “husband” and “wife” or “Adam” and “Eve,” could be
13 implied. The reading that is ruled out scripturally is the idea that males (as an entire gender
14 group) are in authority over females (as an entire gender group) since such a teaching has no
15 basis in Scripture.²⁸

16 The third relationship, “God is the head of Christ,” raises huge issues in Christology if
17 read as a relationship of control and supremacy. Certainly Paul understands Christ as making the
18 choice to place all things under the Father at the end (1 Cor 15:24, 28), but this must be balanced
19 with the recognition that “all the fullness dwelt in Christ” (Col 1:19) and that the Father similarly
20 places all things under Christ (Eph 1:22) and places Christ’s name above all names (Phil 2:9-10).
21 Indeed, it is said to have been specifically during His time on earth that Jesus is said to have
22 learned obedience (Phil 2:8; Heb 5:28). Interestingly, it was while in this submitted relationship
23 with God that Jesus on earth was “ordained” with full authority for his ministry, and carried out
24 this earthly ministry. Gal 4:4 supports an alternate understanding of God as the source who sent
25 the son into the world.

26 Bringing together what has been discovered thus far, several guiding observations can be
27 made for understanding the implications of this passage for women’s ordination. First, in light of
28 the possible figurative meanings for *kephalē* (“head”) in the understanding of the Corinthian
29 believers and in the writings of Paul himself, one must rely on the context to identify his
30 emphasis for this passage rather than making automatic assumptions about the meaning of this
31 word. Seeking these contexts is the main goal of the remainder of this paper. Second, the focus
32 on Christ created by placing him both in the first and last pair of relationships in 11:3, points to
33 His teaching and example on headship as an important interpretive key to understanding Paul’s
34 intention. In His ministry He faithfully taught the authoritative truth about God and took control
35 of nature and evil spirits, but left humans free to choose their way. He taught and demonstrated
36 that no human was to seek preeminence or authority but rather to be a servant, stating at one
37 point, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise

²⁷ Plummer, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 229.

²⁸ Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 138, suggests that this instance refers specifically to Adam and Eve since *anēr* has an article and is paralleled (spoken of as head) in the verse with the articular use of Christ and of God, both specific individuals.

1 authority over them. It is not this way among you” (Matt 22:25-26). Third, in Paul’s time men
2 were assumed to hold every quality that could be attributed to headship. Paul, however, modified
3 many of them by pointing to Christ’s way of being head, though obviously not incorporating all
4 the ontological differences (e.g. Phil 2:1-11). Upon recognizing the possibility that, as here,
5 human tradition may have skewed biblical truth, the commitment of Adventists, at least in our
6 early days, was to test the tradition to see if it is based on “the teachings of men” or on solid
7 Scriptural evidence.
8

11:4-6 Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.

*⁵But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head,
for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.*

*⁶For if a woman does not cover her head,
let her also have her hair cut off;*

*but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved,
let her cover her head.*

9 Verses 4-6 reveal the problem that Paul is addressing in the passage as a whole. He
10 begins by stating the consequences of improper head-coverings: the disgrace suffered by one’s
11 “head.” His decision to address this issue reveals that at least a few Corinthian believers are
12 engaging in, or at least beginning to advocate, such improper head-covering. Although Paul does
13 not describe the exact situation taking place in the church, and reconstructions of the situation
14 generally involve a fair amount of guesswork,²⁹ certain aspects of the historical situation
15 regarding head-coverings have come clear, due to the growing body of strong research done in
16 recent years. At the same time, other aspects of the situation are not so clear and about these, for
17 the purposes of our paper, it is not helpful to attempt any degree of certainty.

18 One thing that is clear is that Paul’s concern for shame and disgrace in relation to head-
19 coverings is well-founded. Traditionally in the Greco-Roman culture, it was considered deeply
20 immodest for married women to appear in public without the appropriate head-coverings,
21 although some women (especially among the wealthy) were lately choosing not to conform.³⁰ As
22 evidenced in the many statues and inscriptions of women of that day, including a number from
23 Corinth itself, this generally involved a length of cloth (or veil) over one’s head.³¹ A second
24 expectation, which some consider to be the focus of Paul’s concern, was that a woman’s hair be
25 bound up in public.³² The expectation was that a woman’s beauty was to be reserved for her

²⁹ E.g. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

³⁰ See the many literary and archaeological examples cited, for example, by Mark Finney, “Honour, Head-Coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 in Its Social Context,” *JSNT* 33, no. 1 (2010): 31-58; and Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). See, for example: Num 5:18; Isa 47:1-3; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*. 3.270; Philo, *On the Special Laws* 3.56; *Mishnah. Baba.Qamma*. 8:6; *Ketuboth* 7:6; Valerius Maximus 6.3.10; Plutarch, *Moralia* 267A, B; Apuleius, *Metamorphosis* 2.8.

³¹ While one or two writers mention a covering of the face as well (See Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*, 33.48-49), the many statues and inscriptions of women of the day give almost no evidence of this level of covering.

³² Murphy-O’Connor, “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again.”

1 husband and shielded from the desire of other men through covering of the hair and body.³³
2 Protection of a woman's modesty was considered a matter of honor not only for the woman but
3 also for the husband because, as in many societies today, the wife is both a repository and a
4 potential threat to the honor of the man and the family.

5 The reasoning that Paul initially uses with reference to head-coverings here does not deal
6 with it in the sense of sin or moral wrong. Rather, by speaking of "disgracing one's head," he
7 points directly to this issue of honor and shame in the eyes of others (e.g. 11:22; 2 Cor 9:4). Such
8 reasoning is fully understandable to the honor-loving Corinthians.³⁴ Indeed, the acquisition of
9 honor and the avoidance of shame were among the highest values of the ancient Mediterranean
10 world, and causes problems Paul combats in several places in this letter.³⁵

11 In 11:2-16 he speaks repeatedly of the disgrace, or shame, brought to one's head as a
12 result of improper head-coverings. This certainly applied to the woman's own physical head.
13 However, the statement in verse 3 that the "husband is the head of the wife" (v. 3), has prepared
14 the Corinthians to now view a woman's head-covering choices not only in terms of their own
15 freedom, or authority (*exousia*, 8:9), but in terms of relationship. As at numerous other points in
16 this letter, his emphasis is not only on their own honor, which they may have been willing to
17 eschew for the freedom they so much valued (6:12; 8:9), but on the needs of others.³⁶ This is a
18 point he had just been making in 10:31-33 but is also evident in many other passages such 8:7-
19 13; 13:1-6; 14:19, 26. In the case of the woman's head-covering Paul's primary concern is with
20 the dishonor brought upon the husband (not just any male), a dishonor which everyone in that
21 world recognized and felt. The dishonor brought by improper head-coverings would also have an
22 impact on the honor with which God and the gospel of Christ was viewed within the larger
23 community.

24 Two issues that are less clear relate to the first statement in verse 4 about the man.
25 Literally, the statement does not speak of a head-covering for men, but describes the man simply
26 as "having (something?) down from (the) head." Jewish and even Greek expectations regarding
27 head coverings for men in worship remain disputed, and it is possible that Paul is dealing not
28 with head-coverings for men, but with the problem of long hair.³⁷ Secondly, it is often suggested

³³ Finney, "Honour," 40-41; and Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91-92, who cites as an example Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 2.7.6.

³⁴ Evident throughout the letter, from the rivalry between factional groups in ch. 1 to the seeking after the most prominent gifts in ch. 14.

³⁵ On honor, see for example, David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kingship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 55. Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation* (ed. Richard L. Rohrbaugh; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996).

³⁶ Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 116.

³⁷ Murphy-O'Connor, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Once Again." This would make the reason for the concern about gender distinction with regard to dress, which is seen throughout the passage, more understandable because long hair was often recognized as a sign of homosexuality and a blurring of the visual distinction between the genders. (The head-covering of the wife may also in this case have to do with hair being wrapped up and around the head as a form of covering, which was also a common cultural practice, although the evidence for this as a modesty and honor issue is not as strong.) Men did cover the head in worship settings, on the other hand, in Roman circles, in the Jewish priesthood, and possibly others. If Paul refers to head-coverings for men, is it that he literally intends men always to worship with nothing on the head, as a universal principle as 11:7 may appear to say, that he wished men

1 that the counsel in this passage is directed only at women and the statements about men are only
2 to clarify the contrast. This is far from certain, however, and the effort Paul takes to explain the
3 man's part, if briefer than that of the woman, leaves the possibility that there may be a concern
4 (though lesser) regarding male head-coverings as well.³⁸

5 The final point worthy of note is the activities in which the man and woman are engaged
6 in—that is, praying and prophesying. These activities are taking place in church gatherings, as
7 there would be no necessity of coverings in the privacy of one's home and the context in the
8 whole section of chapters 11-14 focuses on such gatherings. While debate continues about the
9 exact nature of the prophesying and its function as a leadership role, two things should be noted.
10 First, Paul speaks of men and women engaging the exact same activities without qualification.
11 Second, he speaks in this way without making even the smallest differentiation between men and
12 women regarding how these two activities are carried out, or suggesting, as one would expect if
13 this passage is about the proper authority of the male in church leadership, that there are other
14 activities or leadership roles in the church in which women must not engage. While Paul
15 throughout the passage supports the idea of gender distinctions with regard to dress, he here
16 makes absolutely no gender distinctions in regard to functions in church gatherings. If this
17 passage were indeed commanding a male-only spiritual headship in the church, it would seem
18 odd that the male and female activities in the church are described in exactly the same terms.

19 Considering, then, the implications of the passage thus far for the question of women's
20 ordination, Paul's initial argument based on 11:3 is an argument dealing with how people of that
21 culture would view certain head-coverings. He makes this cultural argument by reminding men
22 and women, through speaking of the head and thereby linking to verse 3, that they are intimately
23 connected to the one who is their head, and that whatever they do impinges not only upon
24 themselves but also upon their metaphorical head. This use of *kephalē* is built on the idea of head
25 in the sense of prominence or representation, rather than of any position of control or dominance
26 in relation to the woman. As Adventists have always recognized, the counsel is aimed at a
27 particular cultural setting. A faithful application of its underlying principle would suggest that a
28 wife take special care not to shame her husband, and the husband his God, by their choice of
29 what to wear in church. Further, men and women are to avoid blurring culturally recognized
30 distinctions of attire that separate the male from the female (cf. Deut 22:5).³⁹ No distinction
31 between male and female participation or functions in church gatherings is anywhere suggested.

to avoid association with this pagan practice, David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 517; or that men were trying to win honor by covering their heads in the style of the upper class, Finney, "Honour,"; D. Gill, "The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *TynBul* 41 (1990): 260, and Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, 96.

³⁸ This possibility is strengthened if the stated problem referred to long hair since the blurring of genders here is a recognized cultural problem (as alluded to in 11:14-15). Because of the accepted nature of head-coverings for men at worship, that gender differentiation may at any rate be Paul's underlying concern should be considered as a possibility as we move from his initial statement of problem and rationale to other rationales.

³⁹ Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 812-22; W. Loader, *The Septuagint, Sexuality, and the New Testament: Case Studies on the Impact of the Lxx in Philo and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 100, *ibid.*

11:7-12

For (gar) **a man ought not** to have his head covered,
since he is the image and glory of God;

but the woman is the glory of man.

⁸For man does not originate from woman,
but woman from man;

⁹for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake,
but woman for the man's sake.

¹⁰Therefore (dia touto) **the woman ought** to have (a symbol of) authority on her head (kephalē),
because of the angels.

¹¹However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man,
nor is man independent of woman.

¹²For as the woman originates from the man,
so also the man has his birth through the woman;
and all things originate from God.

1 A closer look at the structure of this stage of Paul's argument provides a means of
2 perceiving more accurately his thinking. The two "ought" statements are the most obvious
3 structural markers, insisting that the man and the woman are "under obligation" to act in the way
4 Paul describes. This obligation is based in their creation by God. For the man, the rationale given
5 is brief (v. 7a). Pointing to Genesis 1:26-27, Paul demonstrates that as the image and glory of
6 God, the man is to reveal that image, thereby giving due glory to his Maker.

7 The rationale for the woman's obligation (vv. 7b-9) is longer and more complex than that
8 of the man, and falls before rather than after the statement of obligation. It is, however, similar to
9 the man's rationale in that it is based in Genesis 1-2. Although Genesis 1:26 speaks of humans as
10 made "in our image, according to our likeness," later Jewish and Christian writing often paired
11 the image of God with His glory as Paul does in this verse.⁴⁰ The word "glory" is a synonym of
12 honor and thus links to verse 4, presenting here the positive alternative to the disgracing of one's
13 head warned of there.⁴¹

14 It is not to be supposed that Paul had forgotten or was deliberately ignoring the words of
15 1:26-27, "Let us make man in Our image...and let *them* rule..." and "God created man in His
16 own image,... male *and female* He created them." Rather, it must be considered that Paul wished
17 not to negate, but to add to, Genesis' witness about the woman. Instead of portraying her as
18 something lesser, Paul turns to Genesis 2, where God brings satisfaction and companionship to
19 Adam by giving him a counterpart, whom Paul, possibly inspired by Adam's reaction in verses
20 23-24, refers to her as man's glory. Since in the circumstances of her creation, she was brought

⁴⁰ Antoinette C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 95), 120, 279n. See LXX translations of Num 12:8 and Ps 17:15 (LXX 16:15); also 2 Cor 3:28; 4:4.

⁴¹ For glory as a synonym of honor see, for example, Heb 2:7 (from Ps 8:5) "You have made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor;" and 3:3, "For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house."

1 from man to stand by his side as companion, it is appropriate for her to seek to dress in a way
2 that will bring him honor and not disgrace.⁴² As the precious glory of her husband, and in a
3 society which handled the dangerously attractive qualities of a woman by covering them, not
4 wearing the head-coverings while praying and prophesying had the potential to distract others
5 from the attention and admiration to be given to God alone in worship. The conceptual ideas of
6 “first” and “source,” seem to again link these verses back to the figurative use of *kephalē* in 11:3,
7 making further use of this initial premise with which Paul has chosen to ground his argument
8 about head-coverings.⁴³

9 Verse 10, summing up this rationale with the statement of obligation for the woman, is
10 very cryptic and assumes understandings which Paul and the Corinthians shared, but of which
11 today we are not fully aware. The literal statement is: “Because of this the woman ought to have
12 authority upon/over the head.” A common way of adjusting this statement to fit with the
13 traditional reading of the passage is to assume that the head-covering represents authority and as
14 such should be worn by the woman as a symbol of this authority. This involves adding several
15 words to the statement so that it would say “the woman ought to *wear* a *symbol of* authority on
16 her head” It also attributes a symbolic meaning to the head-covering that is not elsewhere spoken
17 of. Indeed, such an interpretation does not fit with Paul’s argument for head-coverings in the rest
18 of the passage which is concerned with giving honor appropriately, not with authority. A much
19 more straightforward reading which necessitates adding no new words, and which is more true to
20 the normal usage of those words present, is simply “a woman should have authority over her
21 head.”⁴⁴ Such authority is demonstrated by wearing the appropriate head-covering, which would
22 protect her from prying eyes and protect her dignity.⁴⁵ (The stated reason, “because of the
23 angels,” was apparently self-explanatory to the Corinthians but today leaves us debating between
24 several inconclusive possible meanings.)

25 Following this statement, Paul matches and balances the rationale of verses 7b-9, based
26 on creation, with a structurally parallel instruction about man-woman relationships which is
27 based “in the Lord” (vv. 11-12). “In the Lord” refers to the life and community of faith in Jesus.

⁴² The treasuring, in an honor culture, of a woman as the glory of the family is illustrated in an ancient Jewish tombstone from Rome which reads, “Lucilla, the blessed glory of Sophronius”, Collins, *First Corinthians*, 410.

⁴³ While it is possible to quibble about the implications of various words and phrases in Gen 1-2, a “headship principle” focused on eternal subordination is not clearly stated in Genesis and it is not stated in the pentateuchal law (cf. Num 36:1-13). Since this principle would govern daily life in such a fundamental way, it seems odd that it would not be clearly expressed for several millennia after creation.

⁴⁴ M. D. Hooker, “Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Cor. 11:10,” *NTS* 10 (1964): 135-136. Compare the use of *exousia* in 8:9 (there translated “right” or “liberty”) where the people he is addressing are the ones exercising the authority, rather than having it imposed upon them. This represents the normal usage of *exousia*. Note also that Rev 11:4-5; 14; and 20:6 use the same Greek words (*echo*, *exousia*, and *epi*) as 1 Cor 11:10 to indicate “have authority over.” (In the only passage found to support the passive idea of receiving authority upon oneself, Diodorus Siculus’ *Bibliotheca Historica* 1.47.5, the three kingdoms on the head of the statue of Ozymandius’ mother do not represent authority over her, but her preeminent position in being related to three kings.)

⁴⁵ Plummer, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 232-3.

1 Here another aspect of Christian life is brought out—that of mutuality.⁴⁶ Not content to present
2 only woman’s relationship obligations, as he has done with the Genesis story, Paul emphasizes
3 the equal importance of this parallel observation in verses 11-12 by giving it a mirrored,
4 matching structure. Where in Genesis the woman is said to originate from man, in the Lord, Paul
5 states—using contrasting parallelism—that “the man has his birth through the woman.” And
6 where the woman is created “for man” in Genesis, verse 11 declares neither is independent of the
7 other “in the Lord.” The mutuality of these relationships originate from God, no less than the
8 creation account deals with origins in God. In stepping back from his argument about head-
9 coverings to ensure that this is understood, Paul speaks of a level of mutuality that is quite
10 remarkable in the ancient eastern Mediterranean.⁴⁷

11 Thus 1 Corinthians 11:7-12, while it does call on the woman to be concerned for the
12 glory of the One who created her and also the one through whom she was created, does so on the
13 basis of the idea of priority and source, not authority. Therefore just as has been demonstrated
14 with verses 4-6, verses 7-9 are not a clear or stable place from which to build a theology of
15 female subordination, much less an argument for excluding women from leadership.
16

11:13-16

Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

¹⁴*Does not even nature itself teach you that*

if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him,

¹⁵*but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her?*

For her hair is given to her for a covering.

¹⁶*But (de) if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.*

17 Paul’s argument in favor of appropriate head-coverings, which in verses 7-12 has been
18 based in Scripture—both in the creation story and in the Gospel story of redemption in Christ—
19 now returns to the initial issue of how improper head-coverings will be viewed by observers.
20 Such a concern—the effect on, and evaluation of, others—is not a new or unworthy focus of
21 attention in Paul’s mind. He uses a similar argument of effect on others repeatedly in chapters 8-
22 10 in addressing the question of meat offered to idols, and will do so again in chapter 14 in
23 addressing the unruly practice of speaking in tongues and prophesying.

24 This final section of Paul’s argument opens with a question that directs attention to what
25 is considered proper (honorable) with regard to a woman’s head-covering. Paul appears to expect
26 that every Corinthian believer, if they will think about it honestly, will recognize in their hearts
27 that for a women to pray with the head uncovered is improper, or shameful. Such an expectation
28 witnesses to the practically universal recognition of this custom in that time and place.⁴⁸

29 The second question illustrates his point about what is proper, by reference to what
30 “nature” teaches about hair length. Since Paul would have been aware of Samson, Nazirites, and

⁴⁶ Possibly the closest Pauline use of this phrase in the Lord (which he uses 46 times) is actually an OT quote, in 2 Cor 10:17, “But he who boasts is to boast in the Lord.”

⁴⁷ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 93.

⁴⁸ Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, 199, 200.

1 other males who successfully grew long hair, his appeal to nature is not based on the physical
2 characteristics of the natural world or even a universal principle banning such hair. Rather, he
3 refers here to the regular (=natural) order of things as recognized by humans.⁴⁹ By analogy with
4 the length of hair believed to be appropriate for men, and for women, Paul establishes further the
5 points he has made in verses 4-6 about what kind of head-coverings are appropriate for men, and
6 for women. It is notable that in closing his argument he speaks of the individual's own honor
7 rather than pointing to the effects of these styles on the honor of another. As before, the
8 differentiation between men and women that Paul insists on is a visual separation in appearance,
9 underlined by hair and clothing styles.

10 Verse sixteen concludes the passage by appeal to broader church practice, and operates as
11 the conclusion to Paul's argument. The verse witnesses to the value held by Paul, and likely
12 other leaders of the day, of considering the choices of other believers in decisions about Christian
13 practice, and learning from their wisdom. There is no return in these concluding verses (13-16, or
14 in verses 4-12) to any larger theological ramifications of 11:3 or to any implications regarding
15 authority, which is what one would expect if the authority of man over woman had been the
16 central point of the passage.

17 **Implications for the Ordination of Women as Pastors in the Adventist Church**

18 The purpose of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is to persuade the Corinthian believers, who were
19 questioning or trying out other options, to make appropriate choices regarding head-coverings
20 for men and for women.

21 Paul uses four overlapping kinds of rationales to make this argument. First he sets out a
22 series of relationships which, in retrospect, we can see as connections that would be affected by
23 one's choice of head-covering. By speaking of these relationships in terms of "head" or *kephalē*,
24 he sets up the opportunity for meaningful word play as he makes use of several figurative and
25 literal uses of *kephalē* in his ensuing argument. The figurative meanings of *kephalē* that receive
26 the clearest allusions are those related to some degree of prominence or representation (in verses
27 4-7) and to source (in verses 8-9, 12). Authority is not a clear part of his argument regarding
28 head-coverings. At the same time, because there are significant challenges to each of the possible
29 meanings of *kephalē* suggested, its use in this passage should not be used as a foundational proof
30 text for any major teaching from Scripture.

31 Second, Paul gives significant attention to arguing from the standpoint of what is
32 honorable. Above all is the honor due to Christ and to God. In addition, the wife is asked, as one
33 who bears in a special way the glory, or honor, of the husband, to seek to honor him by means of
34 her appropriate and modest attire. The individual's concern for their own honor is also a factor in
35 Paul's argument. Recognition of this culturally-specific honor basis for the counsel in 11:2-16 is
36 the reasoning upon which the Adventist church chooses not to require head coverings for women
37 in church today.
38

⁴⁹ See, for example, the varied possible meanings of the Greek word used for nature (*fysis*) in Bauer, "φύσις," *BDAG* 1030.

1 In a third kind of rationale, Paul argues from creation, demonstrating the concept of the
2 woman as the glory of the man, and calling on the woman to exercise authority over her head in
3 wearing appropriate head-coverings that would not take away from the honor of her husband or
4 her God. And fourth, Paul argues from the new covenant in the gospel of Jesus Christ to recall
5 men and women to an appreciation of the mutuality they enjoy “in the Lord.”

6 Several basic principles emerge from this discourse. Paul makes no differentiation
7 between the participation of women and of men in church leadership. The activities of each are
8 described in exactly the same terms without qualification, just as the spiritual gifts in the
9 following chapter are assigned in such a way. Whether or not authority is a part of Paul’s
10 intended meaning for *kephalē*, no concern is evident here regarding the woman exercising a
11 leadership role or the level of leadership she is given. There is, however, concern regarding the
12 husband-wife relation that should be remembered in the selection of women for ordination: a
13 woman who is unconcerned about the shame or honor she brings on her husband and her God is
14 no more an appropriate candidate for ministry than a man who does not act like Christ in seeking
15 as head to love and benefit his family faithfully (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Eph 5:21-36). I see no barriers
16 to the ordination of women in this passage.

17 There is an important Biblical principle in this passage: when believers gather as a church
18 body it is imperative that each be responsible to ensure that their personal attire and actions do
19 not, in the culture and situation in which they find themselves, bring dishonor upon God or upon
20 those whom it is appropriate for us to protect and seek to bring honor and respect. This suggests
21 that we be culturally sensitive as we enter and interact with different cultural areas and not insist
22 on doing or saying something that would in that setting bring dishonor upon Christ or others.
23 With regard to women’s ordination this suggests that we consider how both our deliberations and
24 our decisions may affect the glory of God and respect toward others in the various cultures of the
25 world.

26 In addition, the visual differentiation between male and female is a key principle behind
27 the “dress code” Paul is advocating for the Corinthians. With regard to women’s ordination, as
28 women are ordained and lead out in church, they should be encouraged and supported in leading
29 as women rather than trying to fit into a man’s shoes of ministry.
30