

A Contextual Paraphrase of I Corinthians 11:2-16

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From chapters 11 through 14 Paul responds to questions that the Corinthians have asked him concerning propriety in worship. He begins this section (11:2-16) by speaking of a first century fashion phenomena of church members who were adopting hairstyles (long hair let down) that clearly reflected the manner and custom of effeminate homosexual men and loose living women. As far as we can tell, Paul has never brought up this particular matter with them before. Much of what he has to say is time bound but the principles are timeless. What follows is a contextual paraphrase of I Corinthians 11:2-16 in the light of recent scholarship. While he should not be blamed for any of my mistakes see, for example, Philip B. Payne's article: "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Cor 11:2-16." Priscilla Papers 20 number 3 (2006) 9-18.

2. I commend you for upholding the customs and traditions I have taught you. I am glad that you are showing me respect in this way. Now (can we talk?) about a custom that I am *not* pleased with. (It has to do with certain fashions you have embraced that are *not* matters of moral indifference. In this particular instance, something as simple as how you wear your hair can tend to blur the natural and appropriate distinctions that exist between men and women.) How should I begin? 3. Foundational to everything that I have to say is the idea that the source of every man is Christ, and the source of every woman is man, and the source of Christ is God. 4. Every man who prays or prophesies with long effeminately styled hair dishonors God as the source of his masculinity. 5. Correspondingly, every woman who prays or prophesies with her hair - not done up in a respectable fashion - (but hanging down loose in the seductive manner of an immoral woman) is showing disrespect for her ultimate source - God. It's disgraceful. 6. What I am saying is that, if a woman wears her hair down in public, she may as well have her head shaved (like a convicted sex criminal!). Clearly, no Christian woman should adopt a hairstyle that evokes this image. 7. Similarly, a man should not assume the coiffure of a girlie-man who wears his hair like a woman. Humanity as a whole has, after all, been created in the image of God - as male and female. It is in glorying in our created order as men and women that we are fulfilled and God is glorified. 8. (This is not something new; it has been established as a cherished ideal from the beginning.) What does the Scripture say? Man did not come from woman - but woman from man; 9. neither was man created for woman but woman for man. 10. It is for this reason (not to mention the holy angels - who wing their way above us as we worship) that a woman ought to *signify the power she has to fulfill God's design** by following the respectable practice of doing her hair up properly in public and not letting it down in a way that makes her look like a sex object. 11. (And by the way, guys, don't read too much into this notion of man's priority in the creation account; I quoted the Genesis account as an illustration of the mutual role that the sexes play in reflecting the glory of God as male AND female.) Look at it this way: IN THE LORD a new order has been established; from now on, woman is not to be considered separate from man - nor is man to be considered separate from woman. 12. For as woman came from man, so also man comes from woman. But don't forget the big picture; everything comes from God. 13. This begs the question: is it appropriate for a woman to pray in public with her hair styled in a way that exchanges the image of God (so beautifully reflected in her chaste femininity) for the look of a promiscuous woman? 14. Similarly, does not the very order of creation teach you that it is degrading for a man wear his hair in an effeminate manner? 15. Don't get me wrong, a *woman's* long hair, if it is done up properly, is a beautiful thing. It has been given to her to as a covering to distinguish her as a woman. 16. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, simply tell them that we *have no custom* that says (as some of you evidently do) that "Anything goes in worship". Show some respect for God (and each other) by deporting yourself with propriety in public.

* Often translated: "wear as a symbol of her subjection" - whereas in the Greek it means "a sign of *her* authority".