

1 Corinthians 11:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.

Analysis

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head—Paul addresses male head covering first. In Jewish custom, men covered their heads in prayer (modern practice, though not universal in the first century). But in Greco-Roman culture, men typically prayed with heads uncovered. Paul sides with Greco-Roman custom here, but his reasoning is theological, not cultural.

The wordplay on *kephalē* (head) is crucial: the physical head represents the metaphorical head (Christ, v. 3). A covered head symbolically obscures the glory of God that man is to display (v. 7). **Dishonoureth his head** means both shaming his physical head and dishonoring his metaphorical head, Christ. When men pray or prophesy (both require Spirit-inspiration), they function as representatives of Christ's headship and must visibly display that glory, not veil it.

Historical Context

In Greco-Roman worship, men removed head coverings while women covered their heads (symbolizing modesty and respectability). Jewish practice was mixed—later rabbinic Judaism mandated male head covering, but first-century practice was diverse. Paul navigates these cultural customs with theological principle: worship should visibly display the created order and not confuse gender distinctions. The pneumatic activities (praying, prophesying) were accessible to both men and women (11:5), but gender-appropriate signs maintained creational order.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do our worship practices visibly honor Christ's lordship and created order?
2. What cultural customs in your context communicate respect or disrespect in worship, and how should Christian practice engage them?
3. In what ways might modern egalitarian impulses inadvertently obscure important biblical distinctions?

Interlinear Text

πᾶς	ἄνθρωπος	προσευχόμενος	ἢ	προφητεύων	κατὰ	κεφαλὴν
Every	man	praying	or	prophesying	covered	head
G3956	G435	G4336	G2228	G4395	G2596	G2776
ἔχων	καταισχύνει	τὴν	κεφαλὴν	αὐτοῦ		
having	dishonoureth	G3588	head	G846		
G2192	G2617		G2776			

Additional Cross-References

2 Samuel 15:30 (Parallel theme): And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.

