

1 Corinthians 11:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.

Analysis

But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head—Crucially, Paul assumes women are praying and prophesying in public worship. This isn't forbidden (contrast 14:34-35, which addresses disruptive questioning, not Spirit-inspired speech). The issue is how women participate, not whether they participate. An uncovered head dishonors both her physical head and her metaphorical head (the man, v. 3).

For that is even all one as if she were shaven (ἐν γάρ ἐστιν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρημένῃ)—A shaved head signaled shame: prostitution, adultery, or mourning in Greco-Roman culture. Paul's shocking comparison means that removing the head covering in worship carried the same shameful connotation as shaving the head. The covering wasn't mere decoration but a symbol of honor, modesty, and submission to created order. For a woman to prophesy (speak God's word!) while symbolically rejecting that order was contradictory—exercising a gift while despising the Giver's design.

Historical Context

Respectable Roman and Greek women wore head coverings (veils or draped fabric) in public as signs of modesty and marital status. Unveiled women were often prostitutes or adulteresses. A shaved head was a mark of public shame—sometimes forced on adulteresses as punishment. Some Corinthian Christian

women, perhaps influenced by libertine slogans like 'all things are lawful' (6:12, 10:23), were abandoning head coverings as symbols of newfound spiritual freedom, unwittingly communicating sexual impropriety.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Paul affirm women's spiritual gifts (prophecy) while maintaining creational distinctions (head covering)?
2. What modern parallels exist where Christian freedom is misunderstood as license to abandon symbolic practices that communicate biblical truth?
3. How can churches honor both women's giftedness and biblical gender distinctions without collapsing into either chauvinism or egalitarianism?

Interlinear Text

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---------|--------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| πᾶσα | δὲ | γυνή | προσευχομένη | ἢ | προφητεύουσα | | | |
| every | But | woman | that prayeth | or | prophesieth | | | |
| G3956 | G1161 | G1135 | G4336 | G2228 | G4395 | | | |
| ἀκατακάλυπτω | τῇ | κεφαλῇ | καταισχύνει | τὴν | κεφαλὴν | | | |
| uncovered | | head | dishonoureth | | head | | | |
| G177 | G3588 | G2776 | G2617 | G3588 | G2776 | | | |
| ἐαυτῆς· | ἐν | γάρ | ἐστίν | καὶ | τὸ | αὐτὸ | τῇ | ἐξυρημένη |
| her | all one | for | that is | even | | as if | | she were shaven |
| G1438 | G1520 | G1063 | G2076 | G2532 | G3588 | G846 | G3588 | G3587 |

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 21:12 (Parallel theme): Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails;

Luke 2:36 (Parallel theme): And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

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