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## *Is a Woman's Long Hair a Covering (v. 15b)? - Part I*



Photograph from the Edwardian Era of a young lady with long hair. On entering adulthood, the hair was frequently dressed up in a variety of classic styles - the "Pompadour" and the "Gibson Girl" both being very popular.

*“ . . . but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her as a covering. . . ” 1 Cor. 11:15 (NASB)*

*“ . . . and a woman, if she have long hair, a glory it is to her, because the hair instead of a covering hath been given to her; ”  
(Young's Literal Translation)*

We are about to embark on our structural analysis of 1 Cor. 11:2-16. Before we do this however, I would like us to look, in this and the following chapter, at a rather complicated but important topic—namely the translation and meaning of just one part of one of the verses in our passage, namely 1 Cor. 11:15b. In fact, the translation issues centre around just two small Greek words in 1 Cor. 11:15b—namely the words *hoti* and *anti*. It may be hard to imagine that these harmless-looking little words can be

the cause of important translation issues, but I believe this to be the case, and I apologise in advance for the detailed, and somewhat convoluted, approach I have taken for this topic.

I have definite views on how 1 Cor. 11:15b, (and in particular *hoti* and *anti*), should be translated, but unfortunately I do not know of any bible translations that support the “general tendency” of my preferred translation possibilities. In the light of this unfortunate situation, I feel that simply stating my preferred translation options without also explaining why I believe them to be broadly correct will look like an arbitrary, and indeed high-handed, action my part. So rather than simply stating my preferred views, I will be approaching the translation question in two ways - first by pointing out what I see to be hermeneutical difficulties with other (grammatically plausible) translations and secondly by presenting the preferred translations together with what I consider to be some strong justifications for them. For readers wishing to skip this detailed argumentation, my two preferred translations are given at the end of Chapter 5.

In the present chapter, then, I wish to introduce the topic by looking at what I see as a particular difficulty with the “standard” translations of 1 Cor. 11:15b, and also to indicate the (large!) range of different translations that are grammatically possible when we allow for the different meanings of the words *hoti* and *anti* in this verse—a range that is actually increased when we consider the possibility that a question mark might be positioned at the end of verse 15 - as with the Weymouth New Testament translation - rather than either i) no question mark at all at the end of the verse or ii) a question mark at the end of v. 15a instead.

That will be enough for this chapter! In the subsequent chapter, I will try to narrow down these possible translations using a range of relevant considerations both within 1 Cor. 11:15b itself and within the contexts of 1 Cor. 11:3-15 (and verses 13-15 in particular) and also to present, and support, my preferred two translations. Please bear with me!

### Introduction—a Possible Difficulty with the “Standard” Translations

Reading almost all English translations of 1 Cor. 11:15 would lead us unequivocally to answer the question which forms the title of this chapter in the affirmative: yes, according to these translations, Paul clearly teaches that the woman's long hair (or possibly her beautified or coiffured hair) is given to her as or for (*anti*) a covering (i.e. it functions as a covering in an equivalent way to a covering garment) (Gk: *peribolaion*).

At the beginning of this chapter, I gave two representative translations of 1 Cor. 11:15, the NASB and Young's Literal Translation. The NASB is a "standard" translation. This type of translation is by far the most frequent, and teaches clearly that the hair serves as a covering (garment): the hair and the covering are to be seen as equivalents—at least in the context of our passage. Young's Literal Translation appears similar, but we note that this translation uses "instead of" whereas the NASB has "as". These might appear to be basically the same, and most (almost all?) readers of Young's Literal Translation will interpret the verse in that way, but actually, "instead of" refers to "something taking the place (literally or metaphorically) of something else"—it doesn't require that the new item is similar to the old item! For example, "I bought an elephant instead of a car"! This may seem like an extreme, contrived example, but a couple of the biblical uses of *anti* are just as "contrasting" as the one I have just given—as we will see!

It is widely recognised that the "standard" translation of verse 15 appears to present a difficulty for the main direction of Paul's argument in our passage. The difficulty is that Paul appears to be arguing for a fabric covering for the woman who is praying or prophesying in the earlier part of the passage, but now he appears to be saying that the woman's long hair (if worn) actually serves as a covering—thereby undermining his earlier argument! But if we allow "instead of" its full range of meaning, this difficulty disappears since the long hair need not be serving *as* a covering at all!

Translators seem, in general, to be reluctant to recognise this possibility, and interpreters are uniformly opposed to it. Rather, the understanding of the verse that the hair *is* a covering, takes two main directions. One is the view that nature's lesson that the long hair is a covering somehow points to the need for an additional (fabric) covering when the woman is praying/prophesying. (It is assumed that long hair is being taught as a requirement, or at least as an ideal, for all Christian women.) However, sometimes the "hair as covering" view occurs in conjunction with the recent, dramatic, view of 1 Cor 11:2-16 that this covering of long hair is the covering about which Paul was talking all along in the earlier part of the passage. It is important therefore that we recognise, (as we have just done above), that there are other possible translations of v. 15 which will allow alternatives to this bold direction of interpretation. There are several reasons why I think this "long hair as covering" interpretation is unlikely to be the case, and these will be given during the course of this and the following chapters.

The main difficulty, as I see it, with this “hair as covering” interpretation is described in the paragraphs below:

Here is the Greek of 1 Cor. 11:15 together with a literal “word-for-word” English translation which broadly preserves the “standard” meanings found in the KJV, NASB etc.

γυνή δὲ ἐὰν κομᾶ, δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστίν.  
A woman but if she has long hair a glory to her it is;

ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται αὐτῇ.  
because the (long) hair as a covering has been given to her.

To re-iterate, this verse is understood, either as pointing to the need for an additional (fabric) covering, or, in the recent interpretation just mentioned, to be saying that the long hair itself is functioning *as* a sufficient *covering* - thereby meeting, in this interpretation, the requirement from earlier in the passage about the need for the woman not to be uncovered when praying or prophesying).

Before we look in detail about whether the above is a feasible translation of v. 15, I would like to point out a rather curious feature of all standard translations of 1 Cor. 11:15. It is this. Verse 15 apparently teaches, not only i) that the woman's long hair is a glory to her, and ii) that it is a covering,

but iii) that it is a glory to her **BECAUSE** it is a covering!!!

I have yet to find a commentary or article on 1 Corinthians that even notices, let alone attempts to explain, this odd feature!

I can readily understand that long hair on a woman can be seen as a glory to her, and I can see that it could also be seen to act, with respect to covering, in the same sort of way as a cloak or other covering garment, but not that it is a glory to her because it covers her up like a cloak! How does that work? It is surely far from obvious that covering a woman up with a cloak or similar brings glory to her!

If I wanted to explain why long or coiffured hair acts as a glory to a woman I think I would try to get to the heart of the matter—namely that its appearance, texture or movement is attractive and beautiful and appealing, or that it frames the woman's face and neck in a way that enhances her

beauty—not that it looks like, or functions in the same way as, a cloak!

The Song of Solomon appreciates the beauty of a woman's long hair:

“Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead” (Song of Solomon 4:1)

This allusion compares the undulating beauty of the Bride's hair to the movement of bounding goats.

And again,

“Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple. A king is held captive in the tresses” (Song of Solomon 7:5).

The woman's hair here is literally captivating!

Even without these Old Testament comparisons, it doesn't really seem reasonable to say that the fact that the long hair serving *as* a covering, explains why the long hair is a glory to a woman. This doesn't really seem to work as an explanation. After all, most coverings are not glorious—if anything quite the reverse! A dust sheet covering over a sculpture in a museum does not bring glory to the sculpture!!

(Now it is true that occasionally, covering garments can be glorious. For example, Aaron's holy garments in Ex. 28:2 were for glory and for beauty. However, the rest of Ch. 28 is spent in describing these splendid garments, and the special materials from which they were made, and there is nothing to suggest in 1 Cor. 11 that the “standard” cloak-type covering, the *peribolaion*, to which the woman's long hair is apparently compared, is equivalent in glory (or beauty or holiness) to these ornate garments). The word *peribolaion* is simply the word for a covering garment, without connotations of either glory or shame. These meanings, if required, have to be supplied by additional descriptive words. For example, Ezekiel 16:13 and Ezekiel 27:7 in the Septuagint use additional words to describe fine and attractive *peribolaia*, but by contrast, Is. 50:3 speaks of a *peribolaion* like sackcloth.)

Well, that is just a little suggestion as to one of the reasons we can be pretty sure v. 15 is mistranslated. Let us go on to look at this translation question in more detail.

How Should *Hoti* and *Anti* be Translated in Verse 15b?

We have seen that all the standard translations translate *hoti* as “for” or “because” (or similar), and they translate *anti* as “as” or “for” (basically meaning “equivalent to”). I have also suggested that the result is a translation for verse 15 that doesn't really “work”.

Let us look at other possible understandings for these two little Greek words (mainly using the excellent information supplied by *BDAG*—the famous Greek-English New Testament Lexicon) . . .

### Possible Translations for *Hoti*

The “standard” translation for *hoti* in v. 15b, i.e. the conjunction “for” or “because” (this is Meaning No. 4 in the *BDAG* entry for *hoti*) is certainly grammatically entirely possible. The additional meaning “since” is also given under meaning no. 4. There seems to be the possibility of differences in shades of meaning between “because”/“since” and “for” - and *BDAG* briefly discusses the topic of these “shades of meaning”. It seems that “for” might suggest a less direct or emphatic explanation for something than “because” (*BDAG* also places “since” in the same category as “because”). According to *BDAG*, “For” might be more equivalent to something like “infer this from the fact that . . .” - which suggests a weaker cause for something compared with the direct and clear-cut explanation “because”.

I'm not really a Greek scholar, but it seems possible to me that if verse 15b is offering a straightforward explanation for v. 15a, the very common Greek word for “for”, namely *gar*, might have been chosen rather than the less usual (in this context) *hoti*. An argument against this however is that *gar* is always, or almost always, the second word in its clause, and if Paul wanted a particular word order, e.g. for emphasis, in v. 15b, *gar* might not have been sufficiently “accommodating”: if *gar* had been used, the subject of the clause, *he kome*, (the hair), would have had to be to be split up by *gar* (which is presumably not allowed) - and the definite article *he* could not readily be discarded since it is necessary to show that the hair referred to is the same (glorious) hair as that mentioned in the previous clause. This is just a suggestion, but in any case, *hoti* might have been deliberately chosen for other reasons—such as providing a “structural balance” for the *hoti* which occurs in v. 14, or to better allow the parallelism between v. 15a and v. 15b as shown below:

|         |     |     |                   |                       |                       |
|---------|-----|-----|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| a woman | but | if  | she has long hair | a glory               | to her it is          |
| γυνή    | δὲ  | ἐὰν | κομᾶ,             | δόξα                  | αὐτῇ ἐστίν.           |
|         |     |     |                   |                       |                       |
|         | ὅτι | ἡ   | κόμη              | ἀντὶ περιβολαίου      | δέδοται αὐτῇ.         |
|         | for | the | hair              | instead of a covering | has been given to her |

Here, the word order and positioning link “she has long hair” with “the hair”, and “glory” with “instead of a covering”. The latter two, i. e. (inappropriate) glory and a covering correspond to the “issues” of “fittingness” and being “unveiled” when the woman is praying to God (v. 13).

[As an aside, *BDAG* gives two instances in the NT where *gar* is, apparently not the second word in its clause, Heb. 11:32 and 2 Cor. 1:19. In both of these cases however, there is a discrepancy between NA27 and the Received Text, and in the Received Text, *gar* is the second word in the clause!!]

*BDAG* provides us with other meanings for *hoti* which might apply in v. 15b. Two of these are:

“so that”; this is Meaning No. 5 (Special Uses) Subsection “c” in *BDAG*.

“that”; this is Meaning No. 1 in *BDAG* where *hoti* is a “marker of narrative or discourse content, direct or indirect” - (Subsection “a” of Meaning No. 1 in *BDAG* is the relevant subsection for our purposes) - and

So, to summarise, there are three meanings of *hoti* that I think *might* apply to v. 15b:

- i) because/since/for/“infer this from the fact that” (conjunction)
- ii) so that (conjunction).
- iii) that (relative pronoun)

Discussion of how these different meanings might “work” in v. 15b will be deferred until the next chapter.

### Possible Translations for *Anti*

(In this section, I’m supplementing the information provided by *BDAG*

with information from the *LSJ* Greek-English Lexicon of Classical Greek).

The “standard” translation for “anti” in almost all biblical translations of 1 Cor. 11:15b is “as” or “for”: the woman’s (long) hair is serving as a covering garment.

However, the Greek word *anti* has an interesting range of meanings! The original meaning of the word appears to have been “opposite” or “against” in a physical sense (rather like the Latin “ante” - opposite or facing). This usage is found, for example, in the *Odyssey*. In Book 4, line 115, the distraught and weeping Telemachus “held up his purple cloak in front of (*anti*) his eyes.”

However, the word’s meaning of setting two things opposite each other came also to include various types of correspondence between two items. In particular it came to mean “instead of” - indicating “replacement” of one item by another - either by an equivalent or by something different (perhaps even contrasting). There are various shades of meaning between these two extremes.

Thus, the “equivalent” meaning occurs in *Odyssey* 8:545 where Alcinous says, “. . . a guest and suppliant is as close as (*anti*) a brother”.

The “contrast” meaning is found in *Odyssey* 20:307 where Telemachus again is speaking: “. . . your father would have held a funeral here instead of (*anti*) a wedding.

We note that the “replacement with an equivalent” and “replacement with something opposite or contrasting” meanings are very different! “Replacement” is the common feature, but “equivalent” and “opposite” are clearly very different!

The first, original, meaning of *anti*, i.e. two items placed “opposite” or “against” on another is widely held not to have made its way either into the Septuagint or the New Testament. (Prepositions like *epi* and *kata* certainly seem to me to be generally used instead when this meaning is intended, at least to the extent that I have been able to investigate this! However, when the emphasis is on the two items being held together “in tension” in some way—e. g. for comparison or contrast—this may constitute a special case). I think however that the view that this original meaning for *anti* is absent from the NT is in any case an exaggeration, and in the next chapter I hope to give a couple of examples from the NT where, despite the “standard” translation, it seems to me that this original meaning is not simply possi-

ble, but it may even be preferred (or even required). Partly for this reason I think it is possible that the meaning “opposite” or “against” might be intended by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:15b - especially given that he is writing to (presumably) mainly native Greek-speaking Christians in Corinth who would (again presumably) have been familiar with the Classical Greek usage such as the example of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* Book 4, line 115 quoted above. Nevertheless, I suggest we approach this possibility for *anti* with a degree of caution.

However, the other two meanings given above have already been introduced with respect to 1 Cor. 11:15. Both of these meanings are amply represented both in the Septuagint and in the New Testament. Here are some examples:

i) Anti meaning “as an equivalent to” or “as a substitute for”

There are many example that could be given, both from the NT and the Septuagint. For example, in Rom 12:17 we read, “Repay no one evil for (*anti*) evil”.

An interesting case which does not quite satisfy the above meaning is Matt. 2:22: “. . . Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of (*anti*) his father Herod.” Archelaus has substituted for Herod, and they are equivalent insofar as they are both Herods and both reign over Judea, but they are not entirely equivalent—as Joseph’s actions in the surrounding narrative make clear.

This “equivalence”/”substitution” meaning for *anti* is the meaning found in almost all translations of 1 Cor. 11:15b:

“for the hair has been given as (i.e. as an equivalent to) (*anti*) a covering garment to her”.

As already indicated, I think this meaning for *anti* is unlikely because of the many differences between glorious hair and cloaks!

ii) Anti meaning “as a replacement in contrast to”

This meaning, which is really rather different from the “equivalent to” meaning given above is also found in the Septuagint and in the New Testament. Given that the “equivalent to” translation doesn’t really “work” in 1 Cor. 11:15b, it is surprising, and rather odd, at least to me, that this alternative, contrasting possibility for *anti* has not been considered or investi-

gated either by commentators or by most translators!

Anyway, here are some examples:

Example 1) (one of many Septuagint Examples!)

Gen. 2:21 tells us that during the creation of Eve, God filled up with flesh the place from which He had taken Adam's rib:

“kai elabe mian ton pleuron autou, kai aneplerose sarka ant' autes.”

“and He took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh instead thereof”

Here, anti (ant' before a word beginning with a vowel) indicates the filling up of the space vacated by the rib with flesh instead (as also indicated by the original Hebrew and its English translation).

Example 2)

In Luke 11:11-12, Jesus is teaching on prayer, and in a series of three memorable “word pictures” He points out how no earthly father would give a serpent/snake to a son who has asked for a fish! In these verses, the serpent and the fish are contrasted using the word “anti”. We are not meant to understand that the snake is really the same sort of thing as, or is equivalent to, the fish—that would miss the point entirely! Or, to approach the matter from the other side, if a son asks for cod and the father serves up haddock, we might say, “Well, it's not *exactly* what was asked for but it's really pretty equivalent”.

Here is the relevant passage in Greek and English:

|             |                |              |                      |               |
|-------------|----------------|--------------|----------------------|---------------|
| <i>anti</i> | <i>ichthos</i> | <i>ophin</i> | <i>epidosei</i>      | <i>auto</i> ; |
| instead of  | a fish         | a snake      | he will give to him? |               |

Even though the fish and the snake are clearly different things, they occupy the same “conceptual space” since they are both, at least putatively, being given to the son as gifts. I suggest that for A to replace B using *anti* (whether or not the replacement is one of similarity or contrast) the two items need to be “treated” in the same way—in this case by being given as gifts.

To show that this “equivalence of treatment” is likely to be “part and parcel” of the meaning of *anti* when used in this way, we can consider the whole of Luke 11:11.

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for (*anti*) a fish give him a serpent? (v. 11, KJV).

We note that the word “fish” has to be repeated so that both the fish and the serpent can be regarded as being “given” and that this “close linkage” is necessary when *anti* is used to describe a “replacement”. This will be part of the argument in the next chapter for translating *anti* differently when this “close connection” condition is not met.

(The translation “in place of” emphasises the “replacement” meaning for *anti* in a way that is not always recognised in the English expression “instead of” (which is based on the Old English word *stede*, a place)).

This little passage has some close similarities with 1 Cor. 11:15b:

*he kome                      anti                      peribolaion                      dedotai aute*

the (beautiful) hair    instead of    a covering garment    has been given to her?

The main structural difference between this and the fish/snake example is in the order of the words (*anti* precedes the two items being contrasted in the first passage but separates them in the second). There is another possible difference since the first is certainly a question, whereas the positioning of the question mark regarding “what nature does or doesn’t teach” in 1 Cor. 11:14-15 is not agreed upon. (I think it should come at the end of 1 Cor. 11:15 however—see later!)

Example 3) (Another Septuagint example!)

There is a famous verse in Isaiah (Is. 61:3) which speaks of giving to the mourners of Zion “beauty instead of ashes”. The Septuagint (Greek) translation of this part of the verse reads as follows:

*.. dothenai    tois penthousi Zion    autois    doxan    anti    spodou*

*.. to be given    to the mourners in Zion    to them    glory    instead of    ashes*

Here, the two items to be contrasted, glory and ashes, lie on either side of

the word “anti” - the same order as in 1 Cor. 11:15. The position of the verb “to give” is different however—I suggest the reason for the position in Is. 61:3 is that the same verb applies equally to three “exchanges” of which “glory for ashes” is the first: so the verb comes at the head of this list.

I hope these two examples have shown that “anti” can indeed have the meaning “instead of” where the replacement is of something which is contrasted with, rather than equivalent to, the initial item. A further example of anti used to contrast two items in this way is found in Hebrews 12:16.

As a final note on the “contrast” meaning of *anti*, there has to be some similarity between the two items linked by *anti* for the contrast meaning to “work”. For example, consider the OT expression, “instead of glory, shame” or, in the NT, “instead of a fish, a scorpion”, the two items in each case, although contrasting with each other, nevertheless occupy the same “location”, though this location may be more “conceptual” or “functional” than “physical” - in these cases, the “location” is “a received gift”.

When the long hair and the cloak are brought into a relationship of correspondence in 1 Cor. 11:15, they occupy the same “location” in a physical sense in reference to the woman since the long hair takes the same general location as a cloak thrown over the head/hair (e.g. for purposes of modesty). However, the relationship clearly also includes a more “analogous” aspect where the “conceptual situations” correspond (but in a contrasting way)—for example in terms of *function*—since the purpose of the hair is for glory/display and to enhance the woman, but the purpose of the cloak is to cover her. (This “conceptual situation” consideration is relevant to the meaning of *anti* whether the correspondence between the two items is one of similarity or contrast, but, as noted, the “contrasting” correspondence fits the hair/cloak situation of 1 Cor. 11:15b much better than the “similarity” correspondence!)

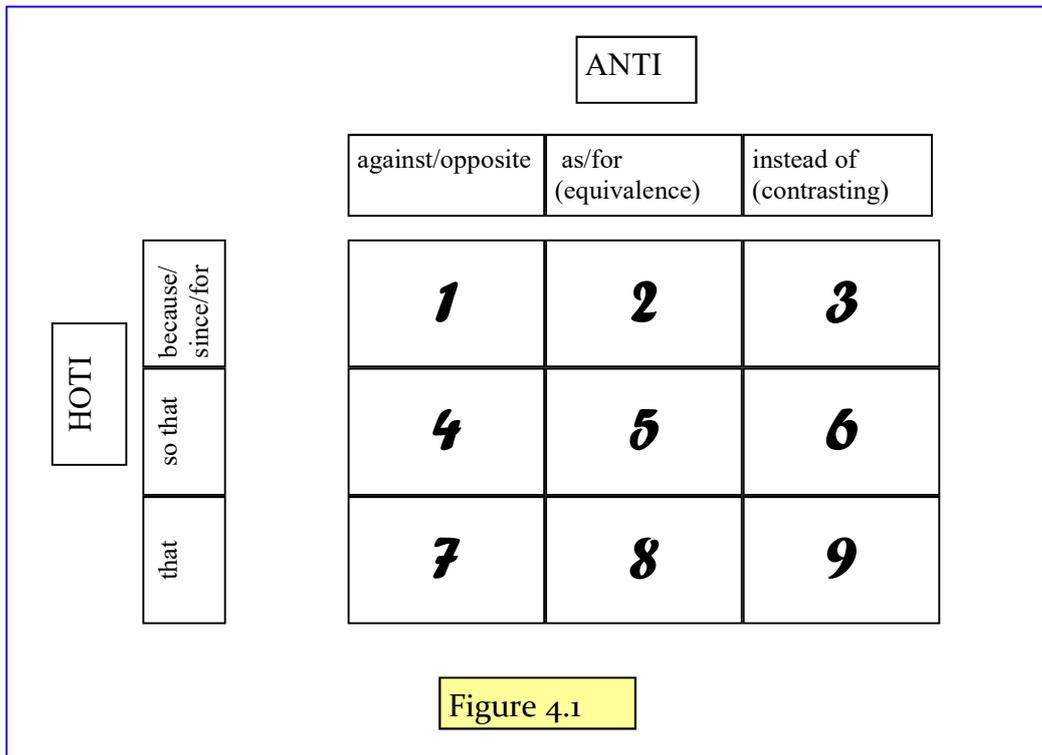
So, the meanings for the preposition *anti* that we will need to consider are:

- i) “opposite” or “against” (just possible, although this is essentially a “Classical Greek” usage)
- ii) “as”, or “instead of” (in an “equivalence” sense)
- iii) “instead of” (in a contrasting sense).

### Translation Possibilities for 1 Cor. 11:15b

Since we have 3 possibilities for *hoti* and 3 possibilities for *anti*, we can set out the nine combined possibilities in a 3 x 3 grid (Please see Figure 4.1 be-

low):



Well, that's enough for this chapter. We will continue our analysis of 1 Cor. 11:15b (using the above numbering scheme) in the next chapter.

