

Introduction

- Why this Book?

- and How This Book is Organised

Paul's teaching on women's headcoverings in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 has been widely discussed—particularly in recent years when modern Western secular attitudes have come increasingly into conflict with traditional understandings of the text, and modern views have increasingly influenced both the interpretation of the text and also women's headcovering practices—both in church and in the wider society. For these and other reasons, there will likely be a wide variety of views amongst readers of the present work about how best to understand and apply Paul's teaching. The purpose of the present book is to present an alternative interpretation based, in large measure, on a structural analysis of the passage. This alternative interpretation is broadly traditional, but nevertheless it differs from a) "standard" traditional interpretations in several areas, as well as differing from b) the more recent interpretations. These areas of difference are listed below:

a) Areas of Difference with Traditional Interpretations

The present book is written from a conservative Evangelical perspective and the interpretation of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 presented is broadly in line with traditional interpretations. However, the interpretation offered differs to some extent from the traditional view in respect of four interpretive tendencies. These are:

i) First Tendency

The first tendency amongst traditional interpreters is to see the two sections where Paul speaks about hair as pointing to a parallelism between hair and veiling—both in presence and in absence. Thus, shame for the woman is associated with the lack of a veil when praying or prophesying (v. 5) and also with a (corresponding and matching) lack of hair (v. 6), and in vs. 13-15, the presence of long hair as a covering is seen as pointing to the need for an additional veil when the woman is praying. This view was eloquently described by John Chrysostom (AD 347-407). The present book presents an alternative interpretive "model" to this intuitively reasonable "hair corresponds to veil" model. The admittedly less intuitively

reasonable model presented in this book is that Paul's "hair" teachings are illustrations in which problems associated with the two "hair situations" parallel two potential problems when a woman is praying or prophesying. The slogan for this is, "For prayer, think hair!" This view will be described during the course of the book.

ii) Second Tendency

The second tendency is to see the woman's veil as a symbol of her subjection to male authority. This view also was taught by J. Chrysostom. The present book recognises that many sincere and devout Christian women wear headcoverings for the above reason, but it also presents the view that, notwithstanding the merits of this motive, this reason for veiling is not actually present in 1 Cor. 11:2-16, and further, that this *a priori* interpretation of the passage makes it harder to follow Paul's (admittedly complicated!) actual reasoning for veiling when a woman is praying or prophesying. Male headship is, however biblical and indeed is taught in this passage! Furthermore it is argued in the present book that male headship is involved in Paul's reasoning regarding veiling, albeit not in the very direct way described above.

iii) Third Tendency

The third tendency is to see in this passage a requirement for women to have, wherever possible, long hair (as opposed to, for example, "medium length" hair.) I have to say do not see this requirement in the passage. Rather, I see Paul noticing a universal truth about women's hair, namely that a woman's long (?and/or coiffured) hair is a glory to her, and he is using this as an illustration regarding prayer (i.e. For prayer, think hair!). I don't think Paul is *requiring* that women should try to get this sort of glory: he is describing, not prescribing! Furthermore, Paul only says, "*if* a woman has long hair/lets her hair grow long, it is a glory to her . . .". It is, I suggest, conditional and volitional not obligatory!

iv) Fourth Tendency

This is to see the requirement for veiling for a woman as extending beyond praying and prophesying in church to all occasions when the woman is in public. This view was held, and again eloquently described, by John Chrysostom.

b) Areas of Difference with "More Recent" Interpretations

In the present book, I interact, at least to some extent, with three “more recent” interpretations, which will be discussed in more detail later. These are: i) an emphasis on social anthropology for understanding the text, ii) the view that a woman’s long hair is actually the *only* covering that is required and iii) the view that Paul’s purpose in this passage largely concerns the need to establish culturally appropriate semiotic markers of gender identity.

These views can overlap not only with each other, but also sometimes with more traditional understandings of the passage.

With such a variety of views, both traditional and more recent, it was therefore not at all clear to me how best to structure this book in order to present the work in a way that will be accessible, and also be seen as reasonable and appropriate, by all! Unfortunately, I do not have the ability for that task, but will try to make up for this deficit in my ability by here explaining how the book is actually structured, and to hope that it will make some sense, and be acceptable, at least to most readers!

How the Book is Organised

The book is organised into three sections.

The first section is a sort of “portmanteau” of introductory ideas. There is an outline of the analysis and its results together with a statement of the “background assumptions” used in the analysis. This is followed by a more detailed review of the seven alternative approaches already given in this introduction (i.e. the four “traditional” views and the three “more recent” views), and finally, the text of the passage (using the Received Text) is presented and the meaning of some key words discussed.

The second section is a long and involved section that deals with the analysis “proper” of the passage. This section starts off with two chapters on the main translation issue in the passage, namely whether the “standard” translations of 1 Cor. 11:15b, such as “For the (long) hair as a covering (garment) is given to her”, are in fact a plausible translations. I will be arguing that they are not, and I put forward some alternative translations, including the two that best fit the analysis presented in this section of the present work. This is followed by the chapters which really get to the heart of the book—the formal structural analysis of the passage and the role of that structure in both reflecting, and helping to determine, the meaning of the passage as a whole.

Finally, the third section considers briefly what might be a practical out-working if it is concluded that the present work presents a reasonable understanding of Paul's teaching.

I encourage the reader to feel free to work through as much or as little of the book as he or she wishes, and in any order that seems appropriate! One feature of this book is that much of it was written in the form of separate units which have subsequently been brought together in a (perhaps too lightly) redacted form. The result is that there is quite a lot of repetition particularly of key points. This repetition is particularly noticeable when topics looked at in the "Setting the Scene" sections (Chs. 1 and 2), are repeated in the "Chiastic Structure" sections (Chs. 6 and 7) and sometimes in the two "translation issue" sections (Chs. 4 and 5) as well! This is not an ideal feature of the book, and perhaps at some stage it will be necessary for the book to be more selectively edited! However two advantages of this are that the book does not need to be read all the way through from start to finish in order for the reader to appreciate (hopefully in both senses!) the overall "message", and that each individual section hopefully "makes sense on its own terms" in a way that would perhaps not be so clear if the book had been more severely redacted. Well, excuses over!!

I've also included a limited, partial index, as well as an index of Scriptural passages (excluding 1 Cor. 11:2-16/17a itself) referred to in the text and also a bibliography.

I hope you will enjoy the book—though I recognise that some parts, especially the parts that emphasise structural analysis with their associated diagrams, may seem unfamiliar, and perhaps over-complicated, particularly if the reader is more used to the approach (and appearance!) of more traditional commentaries.

Well, let's begin . . . !

