

Understanding 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in Light of Culture & Veiling in the Cult of Dionysus

The traditional Pentecostal/Apostolic method of understanding the passage of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is in connection with **salvation**, but the subject of the passage is veiling, which is clearly a cultural concern. The parallel, or analogy, of veiling with hair length, presented by the Apostle, is also found in ancient writings and was apparent in Greco-Roman culture, so, hair length, along with veiling, was also a cultural concern. The scriptural passage must be seen as related to culture and not salvation.

Catherine Clark Kroeger, instructor of Classical and Biblical Greek, focused her study on the writings of Paul concerning women. She was an expert on the cult activities of women. She and husband, Richard, set the historical stage for the passage in an article entitled *Sexual Identity in Corinth: Paul Faces a Crisis*.

First century Corinth was caught in the web of a sexual identity crisis. The confusion was manifested in the art and literary forms of the day as well as in the actual practices. Lively debates went on about the relative merits of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Deeply entrenched in Greek society, homophilia was considered highly chic by the Roman intelligentsia. Most of the poetry in the ancient world had been written to persons of the same sex, though Virgil, under the influence of Augustus' stern morality, presented a healthy and positive picture of heterosexual love.

Marie Delacourt has identified some fifteen vase paintings depicting bearded men in feminine attire and women disguised as men.¹ Both statuary and paintings reveal hermaphrodites with the attributes of both sexes. Torn by tremendous upheavals throughout the Roman Empire, individuals were asking, 'Who am I as a sexual human being?'; 'with whom can I establish a significant relationship?'

Although we cannot know the precise question which elicited Paul's response as recorded in 1 Cor. 11:1-16, it is obvious that he is speaking in these verses to an identity crisis.

Paul's answer is a complex one. The most outer level is obviously the veiling of women. It might be more accurately described as a discussion of appropriate attire and hairstyle for *both* men and women.

¹ "Hermaphrodite," 1958, p22

Paul is calling for a differentiation in their personal appearance at worship services. This becomes comprehensible when one understands the importance of sex reversal or exchange of sex roles in many ancient religions. Clothing exchange was quite widespread in Dionysiac religion. Corinth was a major center of the cult. At certain religious events women shaved their heads, and men assumed veils or long, flowing hair and golden hairnets. Though the earlier Greeks engaged in the Trojan War are described as “long-haired Achaeans,” by the first century a shaven head on a woman and long tresses on a man were viewed as sexual inversions. Hebrew men such as Samson, Absalom, and the Nazarites, had also maintained long hair with no suspicion of effeminacy, but this was no longer true in the New Testament period.

Artistic representations of Dionysus became less masculine and developed softened features and lengthened hair ‘that renders it difficult at times to distinguish a head of Dionysus from one of Ariadne’ (Farnell, *Cults of the Greek City States*, V. p278). The god himself was becoming sexually ambivalent and was called ‘sham man,’ ‘in feminine form,’ ‘male-female,’ and ‘double-natured’. Men who took part in the Bacchic train wore the *krokotos*, the saffron-colored feminine veil to imitate the god himself.

Paul’s words appear to be a directive against such pagan activities. He tells men to pray bareheaded although Jewish men covered their heads with prayer shawls, and the priests wore turbans on their heads when they served in the temple. (Ex. 39:28)

Among the Gentiles matters were different. ‘It is more usual for women to go forth in public with their heads covered and men with their heads uncovered,’ Plutarch wrote of the Romans (*Roman Questions*, 267a). Corinth, a Roman colony on Greek soil, had become increasingly Greek in its traditions, including stricter veiling and seclusion of women.

Sex reversal was also a significant factor in the worship of Aphrodite [the Roman Venus], whose temple dominated the Corinthian acropolis. Within stood an enormous statue of the goddess in her Asian form, clad in armor, the male accoutrements of war. In many other places her sexuality was ambivalent. There is in Cyprus a statue of her bearded, but with female dress, with the scepter and signs of the male nature, and they think the same goddess is both male and female. Women sometimes shaved their heads to honor an image of Aphrodite having ‘both male and female organs’. (Scholiast, *Iliad*, II, 280)

Even the pagan philosophers of the era were dismayed by the confusion of sexual lines, and Epictetus wrote: ‘Therefore we ought to preserve the marks God has given us; we ought not to give them up, nor, as far as we can prevent, confuse the sexes which have been thus distinguished. (quoted by Grant, *Hellenistic Religions*, p155)

Against such blurring of sexual differentiations the Apostle Paul speaks out. To repudiate or to obliterate the identity God has bestowed on us as sexual beings is a ‘disgrace’, a remnant of the pagan religion the Corinthians had so recently left (1 Cor. 12:2, “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols...”)

Not only was the veil a distinctively feminine article of clothing, but it also indicated the claims of husband and home. The absence of a wife’s veil was proper cause for a divorce in Hebrew tradition. The Hellenized Jew, Philo, called it a ‘symbol of modesty’ (*Special Laws*, III, 56). But, Greek women ‘driven from the shuttle and the loom by Dionysus’ discarded their veils and hailed the god as *Lusios* Liberator.

Bacchus/Dionysus was immensely popular with women, esp as the worship of him provided the cloistered Greek wife an opportunity to leave her home under divine compulsion and afforded a vent for sex hostility. The veil and orderly tresses, by contrast, indicated propriety and harmony with husband and home; their removal the reverse. While several of the ancient religions offered temporary release from the marriage tie, this was not true of Christianity.”

Although there would have been Jews in the church at Corinth, most were Romans, and Greeks—converts out of the pagan, Greco-Roman religions. Paul deals with paganism throughout the entire 1st Epistle of Corinthians. The old pagan religion of Dionysus still exerted an influence on the recent converts at Corinth. They were uncomfortable with meat that had been offered to idols (8:1-13), they had to be admonished not to attend sacrificial meals in pagan temples (10:21, 21), as in Bacchic feasts, there was drunkenness at the Lord's Supper and ecstatic madness at the worship service (14:23). According to another author there are 17 passages that reflect the Dionysiac cult.² The Apostle instructed men to pray and prophecy bareheaded and women veiled, lest the Church be identified with paganism.

Dr. Kroeger has more to offer in *The Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman Cults of Women*:

“Ancient Greek women were disadvantaged, neglected, and repressed members of society. They were kept as virtual prisoners in their own homes, cut off from normal human contacts. They often turned to religion as a release and escape. It is not surprising that their worship should develop anti-social tendencies. Abundant literary and artistic evidence reveals sex hostility esp in Dionysiac religion. Dionysiac vase paintings reveal sexual harassment on the part of men and direct attacks by women upon masculinity. Sometimes women deliberately used cult activities to repel men.

Among feminine worshipers of the god Dionysos removal of the head-covering and disheveled hair could also bespeak resistance. Women sometimes used their worship of Dionysos, the Roman Bacchos, as a vehicle of protest. Virgil speaks of a queen who tried to use a Bacchic revel to arouse public opinion against her husband.

“Necks bare, and hair left free to the winds...doff the fillets from your hair, join the revels with me.”

The uncovered head and unbound hair was to signify both commitment to the strange god of wine and madness and at the same time repudiation of male injustice.

Such sex reversal was a specific distinctive of the Dionysiac cult and by the second century A.D. was considered to be indispensable to the religion.³ **Men wore veils and long hair** as signs of their dedication to the god, while **women used unveiling and shorn hair** to indicate their devotion.⁴ Men masqueraded as women, and in a rare vase painting from Corinth a woman is dressed in satyr pants equipped with the male organ. Thus she dances before Dionysos, a deity who had been raised as a girl and was himself called male-female and “sham man”.⁵

The sex exchange that characterized the cults of such great goddesses as Cybele, the Syrian goddess, and Artemis of Ephesus was more grisly. Males voluntarily castrated themselves and assumed women's garments.⁶ A relief from Rome shows a high priest of Cybele. The castrated priest wears veil, necklaces, earrings and feminine dress. He is considered to have exchanged his sexual identity and to have become a she-priest.”

² “Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Cor. 11:2-16”, by Philip B. Payne

³ Philostratos, “Imagines” 1.2; Aristides, “Rhet.” 41.9 (ed. Keil); Euripides, “Bacchae” 836, 852

⁴ Plutarch, “Moralia” 266 C-E; Athenaeus 12.525; Lucian, “Dea Syria” 6

⁵ Farnell, “Cults of City States,” 5. 275-280

⁶ Ovid, “Mel.” 4.237; Catullus 63.5; Martial, “Epigram” 3:81.3; Pliny, “Nat. Hist.” 35.48, 165; Lucretius 2.611

Unveiled with wild, unbound hair was a sign of protest against oppression, of freedom from the loom and the household. The Kroegers write in *An Inquiry into the Evidence of Maenadism in the Corinthian Congregation*, “Dishevelled hair and head thrown back were almost trademarks of the *maenads* [“mad ones”—female worshippers of Dionysus] in Greek vase painting and in literary sources. The wildly tossing head was also a distinctive of Cybele worshippers, and often the locks which had been so frantically whipped about were SHORN OFF as a sacrifice to the goddess...*Maenads* on



vases throw their heads back, their necks bulge with shouts and their mouths open wide.”

The half-life size torso of a frenzied *maenad* has been recognized as a reduced copy of Scopas’ “Maenad,” famous in the ancient world. The thin *chiton* has come open through the violent movement and gives a glimpse of the powerful, strained body.⁷



Female devotees shaved their heads in the cult of Isis, another major ecstatic religion in Corinth. Bacchus-Dionysus, the Liberator, gave women both a rallying point for protest and an occasion for sexual freedom, and they worshipped bareheaded. Furthermore, unbound and uncovered hair was necessary for a woman to produce an effective magical incantation—surely an anathema in the nascent Church!

In both Greek and Hebrew tradition a woman’s veil was a symbol of chastity, and Stobaeus preserves a warning to husbands that the best way to preserve their wives’ chastity was to keep them away from the worship of Dionysus and the Great Mother.⁸



⁷ “Women in Greece and Rome,” by Verena Zinserling; p64

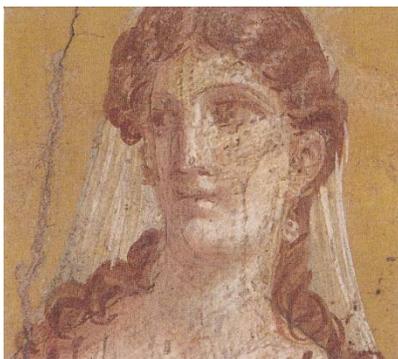
⁸ “An Inquiry into Evidence of Maenadism in the Corinthian Congregation,” by Richard & Catherine Clark Kroeger

Unveiling was associated with either loose hair or a shorn or shaved head. The hair could be cut off in sacrifice to the deity or cut short or shaved to imitate a man. Women in the church at Corinth had to be veiled with hair bound to the head, while praying and prophesying, so not to give the impression of frenzied *maenads*.

Emperor Augustus' stern morality, along with their philosophers' views, influenced the Greek and Roman world out of homosexuality. The moral philosophers of the day agreed with Paul and used similar terminology as Paul's in their writings regarding hair length. Similar statements can be found in Plutarch and Pseudo-Phocylides. Pseudo-Phocylides, Sentence 212: "Long hair is not fit for men".

H. Herter, in *Effeminatus*, cites more than 100 references to effeminate hair in classical antiquity.⁹ The Stoic philosopher, Musonius Rufus (AD 66), refers to hair as "a covering by nature" and objected to men appearing as women "...to be seen as womanish, something that should be avoided at all cost." Epictetus referred to effeminately dressed hair on a man as "against nature." Philo's *The Special Laws* states, "A much graver...evil...has ramped its way into the cities...the disease of effemination...the man-woman who debases the sterling coin of nature should perish...[These are] grievous vices of unmanliness and effeminacy..." Josephus' *The Jewish War* states, "[They] unscrupulously indulged in effeminate practices, plaiting their hair."¹⁰

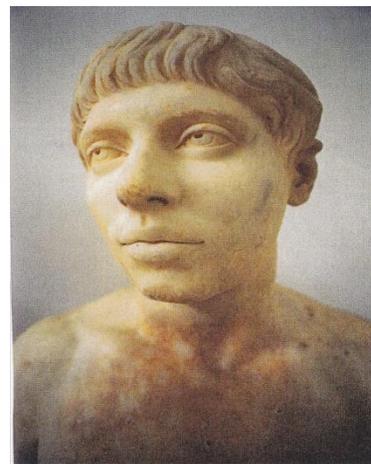
Long hair on women and short hair cuts on men was not a "holiness standard"; neither did it separate Christians from Pagans, but, it became the **CULTURAL NORM THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE!** As the Greco-Roman world worked their way out of homosexuality and endeavored to establish themselves as heterosexual human beings, short hair cuts on women were viewed as *masculine* and long hair on men was viewed as *effeminate*. The Apostle gave the Christian approval of the cultural concept the entire Empire was moving into and answered the question that confused the pagan philosophers.



Roman woman's hairstyle



Augustus Caesar



Young boy in typical haircut of Roman Men

⁹ "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Cor. 11:2-16", by Philip B. Payne; H. Herter, "Effeminatus", RAC2,620-50

¹⁰ "Wild Hair and Gender Equality in 1 Cor. 11:2-16", by Philip B. Payne

Roman men began wearing shorter hair and shaving off their beards during the late Republic (100-31 BC) and early Empire period (31 BC-100 CE).¹¹ Men in the Empire wore the Caesarcuts—after the Emperor. It was not a shaved haircut, but it was short. The hair was cut the same length all over the head with short bangs across the forehead.

“Shame”, “Glory”, & “Nature”

“...if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven...Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her...”
(vv 6, 14, 15)

UPCI author Segraves states on p55 of *Hair Length in the Bible*, “...the Bible teaches that if a woman cuts her hair or shaves her head, it is a disgrace to her in the sight of God.” He has the wrong idea. The word, “shame,” is NOT the word, “sin” and does not denote a condition of unholiness, uncleanness, or unrighteousness BEFORE GOD, but it bears a meaning in CULTURE of being publicly disgraced BEFORE SOCIETY.

The idea of shaving the head as a sign of subordination, humiliation, or punishment persisted into modern times. Since ancient times victorious armies have shaved their conquered enemies bald in order to degrade them and leave a visible mark of their defeat. In ancient Rome and Greece slaves could be identified by their short hair cuts or shaved heads. This practice showed that a slave was utterly submissive to a master, even in matters of personal appearance. When Julius Caesar conquered Gaul, a region where long hair was much admired, he ordered that the Gauls cut their hair as a sign of submission to Roman authority. Roman authorities also shaved the heads of the early Christians as a form of ridicule and humiliation.

Paul knew very well that not all women in the Empire could grow long hair; it was only permitted for FREE women. If growing long hair were a requirement for salvation, how could a female slave have been saved? Corinth’s church included both slave and free (7:21-24). The general determination is of a mixed-caste community, approximately half slave and half free.¹² Not only did slave women in short hair cuts become saved, but in the Corinthian church they prayed, prophesied and operated the gifts of the Spirit equally with free women in long hair. In Christ there was no distinction between bond or free (Gal.3:28).

In some societies, women who committed adultery might have had their hair cut off as penalty. This was true in India, ancient Teutonic nations, and ancient Babylon under the Assyrians.¹³ This was also the punishment for adultery among strict Judaism.¹⁴

¹¹ “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherrow

¹² “The Corinthian Women Prophets,” by Antoinette Clark Wire; pp64-45

¹³ “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherrow

¹⁴ “Sketches of Jewish Social Life,” by Alfred Edersheim; p142

Even as recently as the end of WW II shaving the heads of women was practiced as a form of sexual punishment. Over 20,000 French people accused of collaboration with Germany endured the shame of having their heads publicly shaven. Nearly all those punished were women, and a vast number were innocent of committing adultery with German soldiers. Their SHORN heads brought public shame upon these women.¹⁵

So, there was more than one way being “shorn” or “shaven” was considered “shameful” on a woman in Roman Greece. Besides denoting slavery, mourning the dead, and adultery, by the 1st century it became associated with lesbianism. It has often been asserted that the shaven head was a sign of prostitution in Corinth, but there is not a known piece of evidence for such in the literature of antiquity.¹⁶ Eerdman says that a shaved head was shameful because it indicated “the ‘male’ partner in a lesbian relationship.” Paul’s appeal to the creation order of Genesis 2 shows...some sort of sexual identity confusion lurks in the background.¹⁷ (Also expressed by Kroeger).

The word used by Paul translated “shame” is *atimia* and means, “disgrace:--dishonor, reproach, vile... This word means to lower down from a place of honor: *Atimia*, as a noun, signifies “shame, disgrace”...¹⁸ The most common word used by philosophers to describe effeminate hair is the same word Paul used, “shame” (“degrading”), *atimia*. What was a man’s *atimia* was a woman’s *doxa* or “glory.” *Doxa* means “dignity, honour... “glory” primarily signifies an opinion, estimate, and hence, the honor resulting from a good opinion.”¹⁹ Corinth was a society where **assumptions about shame and honor were entrenched**. Corinthian women prophets functioned within an **honor-oriented culture**.²⁰

Paul used both *atimia* and *phusis* (“nature”) in condemning homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27 (“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: [*pathe atimias*] for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature [*ten phusiken chresin eis ten para phusin*]: And likewise the men, leaving the natural use of the women [*ten phusiken chresin*] burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly...”) Paul refers to the blurring of what is natural as *atimia*: long hair on men (v 14), men’s hair cuts on women (v6), and sexual relations between persons of the same sex in Romans. Homosexuality is condemned by Paul as “dishonor,” because it is not in accordance with “nature.” Such terminology also occurs in Philo of Alexandria, who also condemned same-sex love as contrary to nature. Paul explicitly uses the expression *para phusin* with respect to female homoeroticism. The most common motif in the condemnation of female homoeroticism in the Roman world is that the woman has become *masculine*. There is a lengthy list of ancient writers who regarded lesbian practices between women as “unnatural”: Plato, Seneca the Elder, Martial, Ovid, Ptolemy, Dorotheos of Sidon, Manetho, Pseudo-Phocyclides...” The moral philosophers who eschewed homoerotic sexual relationships utilized appeals to “nature” as a “proof” for their arguments.²¹

¹⁵ “Shorn Women: Gender and Punishment in Liberation France,” by Fabrice Virgili

¹⁶ “Listening to the Spirit in the Text” [Eerdmans, 2000] 63

¹⁷ Belleville, “Women Leaders,” 27-28

¹⁸ “Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words”, #819

¹⁹ “Strong’s Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words”, #1391

²⁰ “The Corinthian Women Prophets,” by Antoinette Clark Wire, pp128-9

²¹ C. Williams, “Roman Sexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity”; “Unveiling Paul: Gendering “Ethos” in 1 Cor. 11:2-16,” Caroline Vander Stichele, University of Amsterdam; Todd Penner, Austin College

Paul's use of the word, "shame," in reference to a woman in a short hair cut was not so much in regard to slavery. A slave's status would be different in a community where slave and free are "baptized in one spirit into one body" (12:13).²² The short hair cuts on women slaves in the church were not the problem, but Paul was speaking of hair length in association with homosexuality and paganism. Against "nature" and "shame" referred to the **deliberate** and **willful** sex reversal practiced in pagan cults.²³

The Nazarites

Women could take a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:1-5). After the vow their hair was shaved off. The shaven head of a woman after a Nazarite vow did not publicly disgrace her, nor was she viewed as *masculine*. Female captives of war also had shaven heads (Deut. 12:12), but these practices had nothing to do with **sex reversal**.

It was not "against nature," a "shame," or *effeminate* for men in the OT to have long hair. For instance, Samson's **strength** lie in his long hair. *Hair Length in the Bible*, p67, states, "Since 1 Cor. 11:14 tells us it is a shame for a man to have long hair, this vow not only set a man apart, but also shamed him, perhaps signifying the shame Jesus endured..." 1 Cor. 11:14 does not belong in the OT. There was nothing in the Law of Moses against long hair on a man because it was "against nature" and a "shame."

Absalom's long hair was greatly admired. II Samuel 14:25-26, "*But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his head... the hair was heavy on him...*" Segraves states on p65 that "Absalom is not an example to follow. He was a rebel in every sense of the word." On p66 is stated, "...Absalom's hair, the manifestation of his rebellion.." The Bible does not say Absalom's hair was long because of rebellion! But, his hair is included in the description of his beauty, for which he received praise. **In none of the examples of hair length in OT times was sex reversal involved.**

Hair in History

The differentiation between the sexes in hair length that existed in the culture of the Roman Empire disappeared. In the Byzantine Empire (395-453) men cut and styled their hair like their Roman counterparts, but by the time Justinian became Emperor in 527, Roman influence had waned, and men began growing longer hair.²⁴

The Middle Ages began after the fall of the Roman Empire, leaving the Roman Catholic Church as a major influence on European politics, culture, and society. The Catholic Church passed clerical laws that dictated hairstyles, which were largely ignored. Early in the Middle Ages, upper-class men wore their hair longer and often styled in waves or loose curls. After the English clergy denounced long hair, King Henry I (reign 1100-1135) and his noblemen continued to wear long curls.

²² "The Corinthian Women Prophets," by Antoinette Clark Wire; pp64-65

²³ "The Apostle Paul and the Greco-Roman Cults of Women," by Catherine Kroeger

²⁴ "Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History," by Victoria Sherrow

Among the Franks, during the Merovingian period (481-752 CE), the Merovingian rulers were renowned for their long, flowing hair. They were known as the “long-haired kings” and ruled in Gaul from ancient times until 751 CE.

New ages bring new hairstyles, and the Renaissance marked a time of slightly more freedom in hairstyles. During the Renaissance men’s hairstyles became longer and more complex. The Cavaliers had hair flowing to beneath the shoulder.

In the 17th and 18th centuries Charles II, King of England, France, & Ireland wore a long, curly, thick wig. Louis XIV had an abundance of splendid hair. The *queue* was a man’s low pony tail. By the 1600’s European troops secured the back of their hair in a ponytail, and during the 1700’s the back of the hair often was formed into a *queue*.

Men in flowing locks are seen in images depicting the signing of the treaty with the Indians or the Pilgrim Fathers’ first landing.

President Washington wore his hair as long as a king’s. Washington’s hair was tied in a *queue* and powdered. Before the Revolution he wore it equally long, but unpowdered. In 1780 he required that all soldiers should have their hair combed and powdered. Thomas Jefferson wore his hair throughout his life parted and falling to just below the shoulder and powdered.²⁵ No one has ever regarded the Founding Fathers as “gay” or *effeminate*.

Men in Europe and the American colonies wore short ponytails during the 1700’s, or they wore wigs with a type of ponytail—the *queue*. During the late 18th century, most men tied their *queue* with a simple black ribbon. The *queue* of the 18th century became the pony tail of today. It was a male style in the first place.

Photographs of men from the Victorian Era had their hair short cut. The statesman, Lloyd George, had longish hair in 1928. The link between long hair in a man and homosexuality was certainly not borne out in the case of this most heterosexual of statesmen.²⁶

In 1961 the land of the relatively long-haired Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson was actually throwing young men into prison because their hair was too long!²⁷

The “Titus” Cut

Short hair cuts were not worn by women in the Roman Empire for style, fashion, ease of care or comfort, but slave women wore their short hair in simple styles.²⁸

Through the Middle Ages and Renaissance women had long hair. But, the *Titus* cut in France in 1796 signaled the end of long hair and ushered in the fashion of short hair (1790-1800).²⁹ The *Titus* cut



²⁵ “The History of Hair: Fashion and Fantasy Down the Ages,” by Robin Bryer

²⁶ “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherror

²⁷ “The History of Hair: Fashion and Fantasy Down the Ages,” by Robin Bryer

²⁸ “Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History,” by Victoria Sherror

²⁹ “Fashions in Hair”, by Corson; p608

was extremely popular. Mary Anne Clarke, Mistress to the Duke of York, wore the *Titus* in 1803, but Madame Recamier made the short style respectable. Juliette Recamier dominated the high society of the Consulate period and was regarded as the most ravishing woman of the times. The painting of her shows her in the height of Neoclassical fashion, reclining on a Directoire style sofa in a simple empire line dress and short hair “*a la Titus*.”³⁰

Part of the stigma attached to short hair stemmed from its association with lesbianism. The *Titus* cut was not regarded as a “shame,” but in 1909 Amedeo Modigliani, in Paris, had her hair cut as short as that of any male bank clerk and caused a stir. She adopted the style, **not for sexual reasons**, but simply as a matter of practicality, she being a keen horsewoman. Women were beginning to lead far more active lives, more women began entering the workplace, and Modigliani of 1909 was clearly showing the way.

Although the popularity of long hair was restored for women, the scissors came out again at the end of WWI.

The “Bob”

The rise of the “bob” coincided with rapid social and political changes during and after WWI (1914-1918). Some historians think the hairdo spread after military nurses who had served on the war front returned home with short haircuts they had adopted for hygienic reasons. Meanwhile, on the home front, many young women had taken jobs to help the war effort. Women’s roles and opportunities in education and the workplace began expanding, and short hairstyles reflected women’s changing roles. Busy, active women found short hair easier to manage.



In the mid 1910’s Irene Castle, who with her husband were a famous ballroom dancing team, cut her hair into a “bob,” but it did not take off as a style until the 1920’s. The “bob” began in Paris, France, but Castle was generally credited with introducing the “bob” into the U.S.

While Castle’s hair was still long Signor Pierro Raspanti, was working in New York and “bobbing” hair. 3500 were cut every week; hundreds were turned away. 90% of the young women and 50% of their elders, without age limit, joined the ranks of the bobbed. The paper reported 2000 women were having their locks shorn every day.³¹ Raspanti remarked, “There was a time when I had to have smelling salts on my table here, so many women felt faint when they saw their hair was gone...Nowadays they only rejoice in the freedom of bobbed hair.”

The “Castle Bob” was not a man’s haircut; the “bob” symbolized the **independence** that women had achieved, first by making themselves indispensable on the Home Front and behind the lines in the 1st World War and then by gaining the vote; **the link with lesbianism was totally disappeared from our culture.**

³⁰ “Portrait of Madame Recamier,” http://www.fotopedia.com/wiki/Portrait_of_Madame_R%C3%A9camier

³¹ “Fashions in Hair”, by Corson; p611

UPCI author, Segraves, in *Hair Length in the Bible*, does not present the history of the “bob” correctly and has some rather amusing things to say about Irene Castle. He mentions the smelling salts and remarks that women at first found the idea of cutting their hair “revolting,” but how could this be true when multitudes of women had their hair cut? He also has horribly antiquated and **false** views, all negative, to say about the women’s movement and quotes from Gloria Steinem, a radical. Steinem is not “proof” the women’s rights movement is wrong. On p53 he states,

“Historically, the “liberation” of women from biblical beliefs, principles, and roles is connected with women cutting their hair.

(The “bob” was not the first short hair cut for women, but it was indicative of educational opportunities for women, better employment, and the right to vote, because we live in a Democracy. These rights are not against the Bible.)

The practice did not originate with spiritual revival, but with the flapper era of the twenties.

(WW I nurses made it popular.)

It was not godly women who decided that cutting their hair should now be acceptable, after centuries of being a disgrace.

(“Shame” was cultural, and long hair was not indicative of godliness. Pagan women in the Roman Empire wore long hair.)

Instead, the practice of women cutting their hair was born out of the desire of women to “break the chains” of responsibility to husbands and fathers.

(How wrong can you get?)

It was not introduced to our society by a preacher, but by a dancer.”

(She did not “introduce” it.)

Conclusion

The passage of 1 Cor. 11:1-16 must be understood within its correct historical context. More than anything else, the historical background illuminates the passage.

Hair length is not a Heaven and Hell issue, but the subject of hair and hair length falls into the category of CULTURE. “Shame” indicated a social stigma and a cultural convention. Paul was writing to the Corinthian situation and not trying to make a universal, timeless statement. Short hair on women today is not a “shame,” and even though some people may frown upon men with pony-tails, long hair does not mean they are “gay.”