THE QUESTION

What did the early church think Paul meant about head coverings (1 Corinthians 11:1–16)?

Asked by a THF member on May 19, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 13 early Christian passages and 74 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-church-think-paul-meant-about-head-coverings

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

Early Christian writers read this passage as an order of headship: God is the head of Christ, Christ of the man, and the man of the woman. From this they taught that men pray with heads uncovered and women, unmarried girls included, pray veiled. They also noted that women prophesied, and that man and woman need each other.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

IN THIS STUDY

1	Paul sets out an order of headship	2	6	Women also prayed and prophesied	4
2	Men uncover their heads, women cover theirs	2	7	Man and woman depend on each other	4
3	Every woman includes unmarried girls	3		What these passages don't tell us	5
4	The covering should cover the whole head	3		The Sources: 13 early Christian passages and 74 Bible verses, with links	5
5	The veil belongs above all in church	4			

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

POINT 1 OF 7

Paul sets out an order of headship

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria repeats Paul's chain: the Lord is head of the man, and the man is head of the woman. The Apostolic Constitutions quote the same verse and add that the head of Christ is God the Father. Both read it as an order of rule and care in the home.

1

"And if the Lord is head of the man, and the man is head of the woman, then the man, being the image and glory of God, is lord of the woman."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 4.8 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2

"But Christ is the head of that husband who walks in the way of righteousness. And the head of Christ is God, even His Father."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Men uncover their heads, women cover theirs

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian sums up Paul's reasons why a man should not cover his head: his hair, the angels, and Christ as his head. He says Paul gives two separate rules, one for each sex, using the word every in both.

3

"In all these opposite points, the result is that a man is not to cover his head. That is because nature has not given him excess of hair, because it is not shameful for him to be shaven or shorn, because the angels did not transgress on his account, and because Christ is his Head."

later in the same passage

"Look at the two distinct names, man and woman, with "every" in each case: two different laws, distinct from each other, one of veiling and the other of baring."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

POINT 3 OF 7

Every woman includes unmarried girls

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Some in Tertullian's day said the rule was only for married women. He answers that Paul names virgins elsewhere when he means them, so here, by saying every woman, he speaks of the whole female sex.

4 "For by this very fact, that he has not named virgins, as he does in another place where he is teaching about marrying, he shows well enough that his remark is made about every woman, and about the whole sex."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Prayer* 22 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

5 "He intended the virgin to be understood in the woman, for the same reason that he did not name the boy separately, but allowed him to be implied in the man."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 7, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

The covering should cover the whole head

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian rebukes women who wore only small bands or caps. He says the veil should cover as far as loose hair would reach, down to the neck. He ties this to Paul's words about having a sign of authority on the head.

6 "Let them know that the whole head constitutes the woman. Its limits and boundaries reach as far as the place where the robe begins."

later in the same passage

"For it is they that must be subjected, for the sake of which power ought to be had on the head. The veil is their yoke."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 17 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 8, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

POINT 5 OF 7

The veil belongs above all in church

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian points out that some girls veiled themselves in public among pagans but went uncovered in church. He asks why they would hide their head outside and show it before God.

7

"And as they veil their head in the presence of heathens, let them at all events in the church conceal their virginity, which they do veil outside the church."

later in the same passage

"To what purpose, then, do they thrust their glory out of sight abroad, but expose it in the church?"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 13 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 9, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Women also prayed and prophesied

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Irenaeus notes that in his letter to the Corinthians Paul speaks of both men and women prophesying in the Church. He uses this against a group that rejected the gift of prophecy.

8

"In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul clearly talks about prophetic gifts and recognizes both men and women prophesying in the Church."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book III* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 2, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 7 OF 7

Man and woman depend on each other

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

A letter in the name of Ignatius quotes Paul's words that neither is man without woman nor woman without man, and calls men to honor women. Clement of Alexandria adds that man and woman share one human nature and one virtue.

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don't republish.

9 “Do not despise women, for they have given you birth and raised you.”

later in the same passage

“Neither is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man," except in the case of those who were first formed.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 1, page 6 Read it in the library ›

10 “As far as human nature is concerned, woman does not have one nature and man another, but the same nature. And the same is true of virtue.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 4.8 (c. 190–215 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 4, page 6 Read it in the library ›

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- Most of the detail about the veil here comes from Tertullian; the other writers speak mainly about headship.
- These passages do not fully explain Paul's words about the angels.
- They do not settle whether women wore the veil all day or only in worship.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 13 early Christian passages and 74 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–13, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 14–50, in Bible order), then 37 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *13 passages from 6 writers*

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · source 1*

1 *Epistles of Ignatius* **Quote 9, page 5** is the man without the woman, nor the woman without the man… [continues online] **read ›**

Irenaeus, *c. 175–202 AD · sources 2–3*

2 *Against Heresies: Book III* (1885 English) **Quote 8, page 4** “must conclude, moreover, that these men (the Montanists) can not admit the Apostle Paul either… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Against Heresies: Book V* (1885 English; on point 1) “the Word is through all things, and is Himself the Head of the Church… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 4–5*

4 *Stromata* 4.8 **Quote 10, page 5** even without formal learning, whether barbarian or Greek, whether slave, old man, boy, or woman. For self-control is open to all human beings who choose it. And we admit… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Stromata* 4.8 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the Church… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 6–9*

6 *On Prayer* 22 **Quote 4, page 3** “while he says that nature herself, 1 Corinthians 11:14, which has… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 8 **Quotes 3, 5, pages 2, 3** man and woman, with "every" in each case: two different laws, distinct from each other, one of veiling and the other of baring. Therefore, if the words "every man" make… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 17 **Quote 6, page 3** do not quite reach to the ears. If they are so weak in hearing that they cannot hear through a covering, I pity them. Let them know that the whole… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 13 (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “as they veil their head in presence of heathens, let them at all events in the church conceal their virginity, which they do veil outside the church… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 10–12*

10 *Apostolic Constitutions* **Quote 2, page 2** take care to please him alone. And when you are in the streets, cover your head, for by such a covering you will avoid being viewed by idle persons. Do… [continues online] **read ›**

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) “We do not permit our women to teach in the Church, 1 Corinthians 14:34 but only to pray and hear those that teach… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 1) if the man be the head of the woman… [continues online] **read ›**

Methodius, *c. 270–311 AD · source 13*

13 *From the Discourse on the Resurrection* (1885 English; on point 2) being the form which the Deity Himself employs, as the most wise Paul explains: For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *37 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

14 **1 Esdras 4:17** And they make men’s garments, and they bring men glory; and men cannot exist apart from women. **read ›**

15 **1 Esdras 4:22** And by this you must know that women rule over you. Do you not labor and toil, and give and bring everything to women? **read ›**

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

16 **1 Esdras 5:40** And Nehemiah and Attharias told them not to share in the holy things until a high priest should arise clothed with the Manifestation and the Truth. **read ›**

17 **Judith 12:6** and sent to Holofernes, saying, “Let my lord now command that your slave be allowed to go out to pray.” **read ›**

18 **Judith 16:8** For she put off the garment of her widowhood for the exaltation of those who suffered in Israel; she anointed her face with perfume and bound her hair with a headband, and she took a linen garment to deceive him. **read ›**

19 **Wisdom of Solomon 4:2** When it is present, people imitate it, and they long for it when it has gone; and throughout the age it marches crowned in triumph, having won the contest for prizes that are undefiled. **read ›**

20 **Wisdom of Solomon 8:8** And if anyone also longs for wide experience, she knows the things of old and infers the things to come; she understands the turns of speech and the solutions of riddles; she foreknows signs and wonders, and the outcomes of seasons and times. **read ›**

21 **Wisdom of Sirach 3:2** For the Lord has glorified the father over the children, and has established the judgment of the mother over the sons. **read ›**

22 **Wisdom of Sirach 25:1** In three things I was made beautiful, and I stood up in beauty before the Lord and men: harmony among brothers, and friendship among neighbors, and a wife and husband who suit each other. **read ›**

23 **Wisdom of Sirach 41:16** Therefore be ashamed in regard to my word; for it is not good to keep every kind of shame, and not everything is approved by all in good faith. **read ›**

24 **Baruch 5:2** Put on the double cloak of the righteousness that comes from God; set on your head the miter of the glory of the Everlasting. **read ›**

25 **Letter of Jeremiah 1:31** And in their houses the priests sit with their tunics torn, and their heads and beards shaved, and their heads uncovered. **read ›**

26 **Susanna 1:32** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

27 **Susanna 1:34** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

28 **1 Maccabees 14:19** And these were read before the assembly in Jerusalem. **read ›**

29 **Luke 3:5** Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked places shall become straight, and the rough ways shall become smooth roads. **read ›**

30 **Acts 3:17** Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers. **read ›**

31 **Acts 4:1** As they spoke to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came to them, **read ›**

32 **Acts 9:14** Here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” **read ›**

33 **Romans 9:16** So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy. **read ›**

34 **Romans 9:19** You will say then to me, “Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?” **read ›**

35 **1 Corinthians 5:2** And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, so that the one who did this deed might be removed from among you. **read ›**

36 **1 Corinthians 11:2** Now I praise you, brothers, that you remember me in all things, and hold firm the traditions, even as I delivered them to you. **read ›**

37 **1 Corinthians 11:3** But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. **read ›**

38 **1 Corinthians 11:4** Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. **read ›**

39 **1 Corinthians 11:5** But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head. For it is one and the same thing as if she were shaved. **read ›**

40 **1 Corinthians 11:6** For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or be shaved, let her be covered. **read ›**

41 **1 Corinthians 11:7** For a man indeed ought not to have his head covered, because he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man. **read ›**

42 **1 Corinthians 11:10** For this reason the woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels. **read ›**

43 **1 Corinthians 11:11** Nevertheless, neither is man without woman, nor woman without man, in the Lord. **read ›**

44 **1 Corinthians 11:13** Judge for yourselves: is it fitting for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? **read ›**

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

45 **1 Corinthians 11:15** But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, because her hair is given as a covering. **read ›**

46 **1 Corinthians 11:16** But if anyone wishes to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. **read ›**

47 **1 Corinthians 12:23** Those parts of the body which we think to be less honorable, on those we bestow more abundant honor; and our unpresentable parts have more abundant modesty, **read ›**

48 **1 Corinthians 14:34** Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but to be in submission, as the law also says. **read ›**

49 **1 Corinthians 14:35** And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. **read ›**

50 **2 Corinthians 3:16** But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *37 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 2:23 · 6:1

Deuteronomy 29:29

Matthew 5:14 · 6:2 · 6:5 · 6:10 · 12:36 · 20:5 · 22:1

Luke 2:49 · 4:18 · 7:35 · 10:16

John 1:1 · 1:3 · 1:10 · 1:14 · 4:14 · 7:39 · 13:23 · 14:6

1 Corinthians 4:7 · 7:34 · 11:14 · 15:8

2 Corinthians 10:13

Galatians 5:16 · 5:22

Ephesians 4:6 · 5:21 · 5:28

Philippians 2:25

Colossians 3:11 · 3:18 · 4:1

Revelation 14:4

© 2026 The Historic Faith · Library only, never the web · For personal study; please don’t republish.

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did the early church think Paul meant about head coverings (1 Corinthians 11:1–16)?” on May 19, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

Library only. This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

How it was made. Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.

How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “What did the early church think Paul meant about head coverings (1 Corinthians 11:1–16)?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-church-think-paul-meant-about-head-coverings. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 5.”

© 2026 The Historic Faith. Selection, arrangement and editing by THF; machine-compiled text and public-domain quotations are not claimed. For personal study; please don’t republish.

THEHISTORICFAITH.COM

THE END OF THIS STUDY