

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 – Major Questions

1. Are these verse talking about public prayer and prophecy in church or private prayer and prophecy?

This section seems to be talking about public prayer and prophecy in church for the following reasons:

- 1) The immediate context is about how to behave when the church comes together.
 - 11:17-34 contains instructions about how to eat the Lord's Supper when they come together as a church. See especially 11:17-18 ("when you come together").
 - Chapters 12-14 are about the proper use of spiritual gifts when they come together as a church.
 - There are clues in the text that all three sections are meant to be read as a unit focused on how they behave when coming together as a church
 - 11:2 begins with "Now I commend you..." Thus, Paul is first commending them for getting the traditions right (although they still need instruction on head coverings).
 - Then in 11:17 he says, "I do not commend you," and moves on to two things they are getting wrong – the Lord's Supper and spiritual gifts in worship.
 - The close parallel suggests that all three sections should all be seen as instructions about corporate worship.
- 2) Paul ends his discussion of head coverings with an appeal to church practice, not individual practice.
 - 11:16 appeals to the commonly accepted practice among the churches, not the commonly accepted practice among individual believers in private.
 - This closely parallels his argument in 14:33-34, which is clearly referring to the gathered church and not private Christian practice.
- 3) Prophecy (especially in 1 Corinthians) is something done in church, not privately.
 - 14:3 – the one who prophesies speaks to the people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation
 - 14:4 – the one who prophesies builds up the church
 - 14:22 - prophecy is for believers
 - 14:23 - if the whole church comes together
 - 14:29 - let two or three prophets speak
 - 14:31 - you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged
- 4) Shame and honor require an audience
 - The main consequences for misusing head coverings is dishonor/ disgrace/ shame/ impropriety (v.4, 5, 6, 13).
 - These are all ways of talking about how an individual appears in the eyes of another. If this were referring to private prayer and/or prophesy, no dishonor would be possible, since no one else would be present to confer honor or shame.

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- 5) Taking this to refer to private prayer leads to absurd conclusions.
- Men and women are told to pray continually in 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
 - If 1 Corinthians 11 applies to all private prayer, including this “continuous” prayer, then the requirements of 1 Cor 11 apply at all times.
 - This means that men would never be able to cover their heads, even in cold weather.
 - This means that women would always have to cover their heads, even in the shower.
 - These conclusions are absurd. Therefore, 1 Cor 11 must not refer to every form of private prayer. Instead, it most likely refers to public prayer in the gathered church.