

Christian Women's Headcoverings in Church

- a Pattern for Today?



A Structural Analysis of Paul's Teaching
in 1 Cor. 11:2-16

Stewart Fleming



Christian Women's Headcoverings in Church

- a Pattern for Today?

-a Structural Analysis of Paul's Teaching
in 1 Cor. 11:2-16



Stewart Fleming



Famous Fox Publications



First published in Great Britain in 2022

This hardback edition 2022

Famous Fox Publishing
1 Crosses Cottages
Windermere LA23 1JU

Copyright © Stewart Fleming 2022

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British
Library

ISBN 978-1-903966-38-9

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vii
----------------	-----

Prologue: Paul Teaches the Corinthian Church about Women's Headcoverings!	1
------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---

Introduction: - Why this Book? - and How this Book is Organised	5
--------------------------------------------------------------------	---

Section One—Some Preliminary Topics

Ch. 1 Setting the Scene—I - An Introduction to This Book's Interpretive Approach to the Passage	9
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---

Ch. 2 Setting the Scene—II - a Review of Some Alternative Views	33
--------------------------------------------------------------------	----

Ch. 3 1 Cor. 11:2-16 in the Received Text	53
-------------------------------------------	----

Section Two—Analysis

Ch. 4 "Is a Woman's Long Hair a Covering" (v. 15b)? Part 1	59
---------------------------------------------------------------	----

Ch. 5 "Is a Woman's Long Hair a Covering" (v. 15b)? Part 2	73
---------------------------------------------------------------	----

Ch. 6 Introduction to the Chiastic Structure of the Passage—Part I	93
-----------------------------------------------------------------------	----

Contents (Cont.)

Ch. 7	Introduction to the Chiastic Structure of the Passage—Part II	111
Ch. 8	The “Bookends” for the Passage in vs. 2 and 16-17a	129

Section Three

Reflections and Conclusions	149
-----------------------------	-----



Addendum—Isaiah Ch. 4	155
Selective Index	159
Bible & Classical References	161
Bibliography	163



Preface

Paul's teaching about headcoverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is well-known—not least for the diversity of interpretations that it has produced! This book is the result of my attempt to see whether an analysis of the structure of this passage can make a distinctive - and hopefully helpful - contribution to understanding what Paul was teaching the Corinthian church on this topic.

I think that this analysis, together with the associated studying and thinking in which I have been engaged, has clarified, at least to my own satisfaction, the broad outlines of Paul's teaching in this passage, and I am delighted to have the opportunity to pass on the results of the analysis and other conclusions for the consideration and assessment of others. However, in doing so, I realise that many readers may already have strongly held views on Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 - and in particular regarding the head-covering (and hair-covering) behaviour which Paul enjoins for women when praying and prophesying in church, the topic which forms the focus of the present work. Given this strength of feeling and the diversity of interpretations, the views expressed in this book are likely to contrast, at least to some extent, with views currently held by many readers, and not always in ways that will be welcomed!

Given this background, it was not immediately obvious how best to proceed! Since my aim is to show that the view presented is a reasonable one and not to attempt to prove that all other views must be wrong (a task to which I am, as will become clear, not at all equal!), I felt that the book would most usefully serve as a setting forth of the direction of interpretation to which an analysis of Paul's reasoning, as reflected in the structure of the passage, seems to me to point, rather than a detailed analysis of, and comparison with, alternative interpretations. Nevertheless, I have included a chapter (Chapter 2) which specifically reviews several of the more frequently encountered alternative interpretations, as well as offering comments on these at various points throughout the book. These thoughts are given as kindly as possible and with the best of intentions, but inevitably they sometimes take the form of criticism. I am fully aware that my own efforts at interpretation will likely evoke equivalent responses—if only in the mind of the reader—and I dare to hope these responses may be equally kindly intentioned!

The view set forth is broadly in line with the traditional one that i) Paul taught that Christian women should indeed veil or cover their heads/hair when praying or prophesying in church and ii) that this teaching also applies today. However, the reasoning put forward for this differs in important respects from some of the explanations provided by others who also

hold to the traditional view (for example, regarding the traditional claim sometimes made for the symbolic significance of the headcovering as showing the woman's submission to male authority whilst praying and prophesying). Furthermore, some of the other "concomitant" aspects of the traditional understanding of the passage - for example, the view that is sometimes held that Christian women should wherever possible have long hair or that women's headcoverings are required outside of church—whatever the intrinsic merits of these views, are not seen as being positively taught in 1 Cor. 11:2-16, at least according to the present proposed analysis of the passage. I therefore risk alienating "traditionalists" as well as those who hold to more recent interpretations such as the views that i) the woman's headcovering *is* her long hair, ii) that Paul's teaching is based upon (and, as far as direct application is concerned) limited to local head-covering and hairstyle practices and cultural values in the 1st Century Mediterranean world and iii) that Paul's teaching is largely concerned with maintaining appropriate markers of gender identity in the church at Corinth. (These views, or at least aspects of them, are by no means mutually exclusive, either with themselves or, in some cases, with more traditionalist understandings.)

There is, unfortunately, quite a lot of repetition in the book—particularly in places where several topics, which may have been covered elsewhere, have been brought together to make a particular point or in a different context. I apologise in advance for the repetition, and hope it will not detract too badly from the book's contribution to the ongoing debate.

The production of the book has been largely undertaken as a solitary venture, so the oft-stated claim that "the author must alone bear the responsibility for any errors" is more strictly true in this case than in many another preface. However, I have been greatly helped by a number of informal discussions as well as commentaries, articles, sermons and talks and some of these resources are listed in the bibliography.

I hope you will find this book interesting, even if you do not approve of all the results set forth or share the conservative Evangelical pre-suppositional basis for the approach taken. I will be delighted to hear your thoughts, insights and corrections. I can be contacted via my theological website, www.famousfox.org which has many articles in which I attempt to analyse passages of Scripture from a structural perspective, or directly at stewartfleming@mail.com

Stewart Fleming
The English Lake District
October 2022