

## Should men have long hair?

*Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him. (1 Corinthians 11:14)*

**The above verse should be read in the context that is presented in 1Corinthians 11:3-16.** (Just a note, the word "head" in verse 3 meant to the Greeks "source" not ruler or authority)

In first century Greece, long hair identified a man as a homosexual. For example, in Juvenal's Satires (8.112-131) he refers to a "long-haired catamite" in Corinth. So I think the hair-length here is based on the cultural implications and expectations. This discussion was relevant as a discussion on sexual identity in Corinth. That is why Paul told the Corinthian women they should not pray or speak in church without a shawl over their head, as that was the custom. Women in that day in Corinth who had their head uncovered or their hair cut (women in that culture did not cut their hair) were likely identified as a prostitute or rebellious. It was about the cultural norms and what was culturally acceptable in terms of sexual identity. Remember, men did not wear pants back then so the dress was more similar for men and women, so the hair became an identifying factor in distinguishing gender. In short, in Corinth long hair on a man was identified with homosexuals and women, and shorter hair on women was identified with prostitutes, men, and rebellious women.

The principles presented here are still relevant, but the specific practices are probably based on local culture. Therefore, it depends on how long hair for men is seen in the culture in which you live. For example, in some parts of India, long hair identifies you with particular Hindu religious groups and is therefore best avoided for Christians. In our own western culture, long hair is not seen as an indication of your sexuality or religious beliefs, so this verse does not provide a compelling reason for Christian men to avoid long hair. On the other hand, it does suggest that we should avoid behaviors that are commonly associated with immorality.

If we misunderstand the point of Paul's writing here, we will have to condemn all women who cut their hair and all men who do not, and women would have to wear head coverings in church and not be allowed to speak at all. In Numbers 6 it is recorded that the Nazirite vow forbade a man from cutting his hair until the vow was fulfilled. Sampson, Samual, and John the Baptist were Nazirites for life. We are not bound by such things today, but the point is that a Nazirite was not to cut his hair as a sign of his consecration to God. Today men and women are free in Christ, we are not bound by such vows to have long or short hair, but we are bound by the law of love. Paul's point in dealing with the issue of head coverings and hair length here went to the greater issue at hand which was sexual identity and violating the moral norms of the culture they lived in. For example, men today in our culture do not wear clothing that is commonly considered feminine as it would call into question sexual identity. That was the issue with the hair and head coverings in Paul's day.

In our culture today men having long hair or women having short hair is not considered moral or immoral. Today, the length of hair does not determine our sexual orientation or identity, so unlike in Corinth, we can exercise liberty based on personal preference in this area. What we do not have the liberty to practice is that which is considered immoral, harmful, or contrary to Christ. My people perish because of a lack of knowledge. Let us rightly divide the word of truth.