Notes: If you've read this passage, then you probably recognize that it is a difficult passage to understand. Or, it might be easy to understand, but difficult to accept, if you live a culture like ours. At least two of the challenges in studying this text are (1) understanding Paul's use of the Greek word “kephale” for “head”, which instances are literal and which instances are figurative, and (2) similarly, in his use of the Greek word “gyne”, when does it mean “woman” and when does it mean “wife”? If you compare translations, you will notice that the NASB translates it as “woman” in every instance, whereas the ESV alternates between “woman” and “wife”. Another challenge for this study is to have some knowledge of the cultural norms in first century Corinth. Enjoy your study and ask God to teach you from this passage.

11:2-16 “Headship and Head Coverings”

1. What were the “traditions” that Paul had delivered to them? Look up the following verses to find negative and positive uses of this term.
   a. Matt 15:2
   b. Col 2:8
   c. 2 Thess 2:15
   d. 2 Thess 3:6

2. In verse 3, Paul identifies the foundational truth of headship to begin his teaching on the matter of head coverings? From what you observe in verse 3 and from these verses where the same term is used in other NT passages, what you think is meant when Paul writes that person A is the head of person B.
   a. Verse 3
   b. Eph 5:22
   c. Col 1:18
   d. Col 2:10
   e. Col 2:19

3. What two behaviors or practices does Paul describe in verses 4-5 that are dishonoring or disgraceful?

4. What exact behavior or practice was Paul addressing? In other words...
   a. Was the context of the praying or prophesying in church or in private or both?
b. What is the difference between praying and prophesying?

c. Was Paul addressing praying and/or prophesying in church as the only one speaking at a given time, or more generally, any form of praying/prophesying while at church? In other words, individual, one-at-a-time speaking vs. many speaking simultaneously.

d. Did the head covering requirements apply to any other forms of public speech, or just to praying and prophesying? (speaking in tongues, speaking at a business meeting, giving a personal testimony, leading in worship, etc.)

5. What reason does Paul give for each of the behaviors or practices that you identified for your answer to question 3?

6. What statements does Paul make in which he assumes an agreed-upon position? (one example of this is verse 6 in the ESV when Paul said "but since it is disgraceful for a woman to cut off her hair or shave her head...")

7. Paul uses the connector “nevertheless” or “however” to start verse 11. What does that tell us about the relationship between what he has just said and what he says in verses 11 and following?

8. What does Paul mean by “judge for your selves” with regard to whether or not it is proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? My automatic answer to Paul’s question is “It doesn’t bother me a bit”, but somehow, I don’t think that’s the answer that Paul was expecting.

9. What does Paul mean in verse 14 by “Does not nature itself teach you”? It seems to me that Paul was expecting a “Yes” answer, but how or on what basis. How do I know that he was not appealing to personal preference? Or, could I not use the same logic to argue against tattoos?

10. What does he mean by being contentious and the fact that he has no such practice for those who would be contentious?

11. Do you think the requirement for head coverings when praying or prophesying is universal or limited to the church in Paul’s day?

Application

12. Setting aside for the moment whether the requirement for a wife to wear a head covering was limited to the first century culture in Corinth, or whether it is a universal requirement, what is or what are the underlying universal principles that such a practice is based on?
13. As a man and/or as a husband, what do you think this passage has for you? In other words what does it mean for you that Christ is your head? If you have a wife, what does it mean for you that you are her head?