

## *Does περιβόλαιον mean “testicle” in 1 Corinthians 11.15?*

Mark Goodacre, Duke University SBL International Meeting, Rome, July 2009: Paul Section

**Abstract:** In a recent provocative article (“Paul’s Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11:13-15: A Testicle instead of a Head Covering,” *JBL* 123/1 (2004): 75-84), Troy Martin provides a new translation of a famously difficult verse. Arguing that περιβόλαιον in 1 Corinthians 11.15 means “testicle”, Paul is saying that a woman's hair is given to her “instead of a testicle”. Paul is assuming ancient attitudes to the body, according to which hair is “part of the female genitalia”. However, the lexical basis for Martin's case is not strong enough to justify the new translation. Neither of the texts adduced by Martin (Euripides, *Herc. fur.* 1269 and Achilles Tatius, *Leuc. Clit.* 1.15.2) are speaking about περιβόλαια as “testicles”, thus the interesting contextual material from ancient medical sources are not relevant as background to interpreting Paul. The conventional translations, according to which a woman's hair is given “for a covering” or “instead of a covering”, are preferable.

1 Cor. 11.15b . . . ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται αὐτῇ.

NRSV, NASB, ESV: “For her hair is given to her for a covering.”

Martin: “For her hair is given to her instead of a testicle.”

“This ancient physiological conception of hair indicates that Paul’s argument from nature in 1 Cor 11:13–15 contrasts long hair in women with testicles in men. Paul states that appropriate to her nature, a woman is not given an external testicle (περιβόλαιον, 1 Cor 11:15b) but rather hair instead. Paul states that long hollow hair on a woman’s head is her glory (δόξα, 1 Cor 11:15) because it enhances her female φύσις, which is to draw in and retain semen. Since female hair is part of the female genitalia, Paul asks the Corinthians to judge for themselves whether it is proper for a woman to display her genitalia when praying to God (1 Cor 11:13).”

- Is ἀντὶ περιβολαίου “instead of” or “for”?
- Euripides, *Herc. fur.* 1269: ἐπεὶ δὲ σαρκὸς περιβόλαι' ἐκτησάμην ἡβῶντα, μόχθους οὐς ἔτλην τί δεῖ λέγειν. Martin’s translation: “After I received [my] bags of flesh, which are the outward signs of puberty, [I received] labors about which I [shall] undertake to say what is necessary.”
- Achilles Tatius (*Leuc. Clit.* 1.15.2): αἱ τῶν πετάλων περιπλοκαί, τῶν φύλλων περιβολαί, τῶν καρπῶν συμπλοκαί. “the entwinings of the flowers, embracing of the leaves, and intercourses of the fruits”