

A Study Of The Head Covering

Introduction. Problems come and go in religion. An issue that we may have felt has died down will resurface at a later date. This is perhaps true of the head covering issue. To some brethren, this issue is a matter of faith, one which a woman must practice or be lost eternally. They place this issue on par with belief in God, baptism for the remission of sins, premillennialism, weekly observance of the Lord's supper, etc.

We are going to examine the text of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and see what it teaches us about the wearing of a covering by women. May the good Lord be with us in our examination so that we will see the truth.

I. ***The Headship Of Man And Woman***

- A. Before criticizing the brethren concerning the congregational abuses, Paul commended the church for what it was doing right.
 - 1. The Corinthians remembered Paul always. The church had not forgotten the apostle nor his labors among them.
 - 2. The apostle praised the Corinthians because they faithfully kept the ordinances which he had given to them. The ordinances which were handed down were the teachings of Jesus. It includes both doctrine and manner of conduct.
- B. In vs. 3, Paul lays out the order of God's ranking. Christ is the head of the human race; He is the master over it. Every man, whether he acknowledges it or not, is subject to Jesus Christ. Man is also head of the woman. The woman is to be subject to the man. The woman cannot exercise authority over a man since she is subject to him (1 Timothy 2:12-15).

II. ***"Praying Or Prophesying"***

- A. Vss. 4-5 are the key to this passage. "Every man praying or prophesying" and "every woman praying or prophesying" means inspired actions. They were inspired, Spirit-led people. This was not ordinary, common, uninspired preaching and praying.
 - 1. "Prophesying" in the Bible is always inspired teaching, and since both the "praying" and "prophesying" are adjectives modifying the same man and the same woman, there is strong presumptive evidence that the "praying" is inspired praying and not ordinary prayers of uninspired people.
 - 2. Many of the prophetic discourses were expressed in hymns, prayers and psalms, as well as in general and specific statements (Genesis 20:7-17; Exodus 15:20-21). One cannot scripturally and legitimately separate the "prophesying" of the prophetess and prophet from the prayers (both of supplication and intercession)

and hymns or psalms which were the manners and ways in which the "prophesyings" were revealed.

- a) The proponents of hat-wearing in the assemblies will not let this instruction stand as it is in vss. 4-5. They have the men preaching and teaching (which is not "prophesying") in the assemblies but will permit the sisters only to sing.
 - b) They erroneously claim that this is her "prophesying" in the assemblies. They have men leading in prayers and the women only listening to and consenting to the prayers in silence, with subjection. Yet they want her to put something on her head to show her subjection!
- B. The prophetesses at Corinth and in early congregations did have to show their subjection by being veiled. They were public and private teachers. Lest they be exalted, lest they try to assume authority over men, lest they feel they were not in subjection, they were to be veiled when they prayed or prophesied, whether they did this publicly or privately.
1. The "veil" of 1 Corinthians 11 is one that fully covers the head of the prophetess. A hat, shawl, scarf, mantilla, net bonnet, etc. will not do for the specific covering demanded in 1 Corinthians 11.
 2. Advocates of the covering position will not permit such substitutions of meanings of words when the matters of baptism, singing in worship, benevolence to poor saints, oversight of elders, etc., are under discussion. Why do they allow themselves to be blinded and freely substitute a hat or some other type of headdress for the veil?

III. **A Series Of Illustrations**

- A. Vs. 6, and those that follow, begins a series of illustrations of vss. 4-5, statements of divine truth, which show the propriety of the women under discussion (the prophetesses) being veiled.
1. "Shaven" (*xurao*) means "a razor, to shear, shave, to get one's self shaved" and "shorn" (*keiro*) means "to have one's hair cut off, be shorn; to get or let be shorn; of shearing or cutting short the hair of the head."
 2. Thus the woman (in this case, the prophetess) who would not be veiled, refused to recognize her subjection to man and obey the instructions of the apostle, might as well be shaved and shorn. Her natural hair is a covering (*peribalaion*, vs. 15), and it denotes her sex and femininity, and therefore her subjection as a woman to man. If she would not wear the veil, then she should be consistent and cut off her hair.
- B. Man is God's crowning creation, made in His image, and gives glory to God. The woman was made of man and for man, a suitable companion

for him. Man, therefore, should "pray or prophesy" unveiled, and the woman should do so veiled in honoring the man.

- C. Man was first created and then the woman, and she was taken from man (Genesis 2:21-24; 3:15). She bears his name and was created for his happiness and companionship. She is a complement and counterpart to and of him. Truly she is of man. His priority and headship is affirmed and it was proper she should be veiled when "praying or prophesying."
 - 1. In every passage in the New Testament where the woman's conduct, dress, attitude, disposition and relationship to man is discussed, the emphasis is on her spirit.
 - 2. As in the Old Testament, nowhere is she commanded to show this subjection by some kind of outward, visible, article of clothing or headdress.
 - 3. All women for all time -- at home, in the assembly, in public -- are commanded by God to show their subjection by their godly demeanor.
- D. The "power" ("sign" or "symbol of authority") she was to have on her head was a veil, a sign of man's authority over her. She was to do this "because of the angels."
 - 1. This phrase is an ellipsis; words must be supplied to complete the sense ... because of the angel's subjection and recognition of authority. Paul reasons from the greater to the lesser, the superior to the inferior.
 - 2. Angels are superior beings to men and women, yet submit to and recognize authority. Therefore, it was proper that the inferior, the woman, submit to and recognize the authority of man by wearing the veil upon her head.
- E. God has made the man and woman mutually dependent upon each other, and especially is this true as they learn and do God's will (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7). They truly become "one flesh" and "heirs together of the grace of life."
- F. Man is born of woman and could not have life without her. She came from him, and he comes from her. Their existence depends upon each other. Yet all is of God, i.e., by His arrangement that each lives by, in and through the other, and that He has given man a place of headship and the woman a place of subjection.

IV. ***The Propriety Of The Veil***

- A. Paul addresses two points in these verses as to the propriety of the prophetess being veiled and the prophet unveiled:

1. "Judge in yourselves ..."
 - a) It was apparent to all. The saints could judge and understand this matter and pronounce judgment upon it.
 - b) It just was not "comely," seemly proper or becoming that the woman should pray unveiled.
 2. "Even nature itself ..."
 - a) "Nature" is something which is a long standing practice (cf. Romans 2:14; Ephesians 2:3). Man should not be veiled when praying, just as his hair is not to be long. Their long standing practice taught them that a man's long hair is shameful, and a man praying veiled was shameful.
 - b) A woman's long hair is a natural covering and a glory to her. Their long standing practice of a woman having long hair taught the propriety of the prophetess praying with a veil.
 - (1) Paul's special purpose in these verses is not to discuss the length of hair, as he does not define long (how long) or short (how short), nor enforce lengths nor standards as to the cutting or not cutting of it.
 - (2) These verses are an illustration of vss. 4-5. A man's short hair stands in contrast to the woman's long hair. The prophet, unveiled, stands in contrast to the prophetess, veiled, illustrated by the short hair of the man standing in contrast to the long hair of the woman. Thus "nature" teaches the truth he had enforced in vss. 4-5.
- B. The apostolic authority is stated in vs. 16.
1. The matter of inspired men and women and their being unveiled and veiled was not to be a matter of contention among brethren and in churches. Paul had stated what must be done -- and they were to do it. This was to be done by all the prophets and the prophetesses in all the churches.
 2. There was to be no such custom or practice as a prophet "praying or prophesying" veiled, or a prophetess "praying or prophesying" unveiled. A uniform practice was established in the early congregations by the apostolic orders in 1 Corinthians 11:4-6.

Conclusion. All that God has ever bound upon women is found in passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-6. If they decide to wear a hat, shawl, doily, mantilla, etc. on their head as a matter of their own personal conscience, that is their business. "Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God" (Romans 14:22).

However, if they wear anything they on their head as a matter of faith and duty to God, they are in error. We pray that they will not be deceived by someone who misunderstands God's word. They would bind hat-wearing on

them as a matter of faith just as the Judaizing teachers in the early days bound circumcision and keeping of days upon Gentile Christians (Acts 15:1-2; Galatians 4:8-11; 5:1-4). Do not permit these brethren to bring you into bondage in this matter.

I am deeply indebted to Bill Cavender for the use of his material.