



Conducted by
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THE 'HEAD-COVERING'

This month I wish to deal with a number of questions which have been raised as a result of a study of 1st Cor, 11;1-16, and the first comment I want to make is that it is important to bear in mind that, in this passage, Paul is delivering instructions relating to *conduct in the worship of the Church*, v.17,ff.

Consequently, what the *World does*, or what it *thinks* about the subject is irrelevant. Those outside of the Church neither understand nor care about such matters. Therefore, we should not be influenced by talk of what '*people of today*' think, or by what '*modern fashion*' dictates.

Question 1. "Does verse 3 mean that Woman is inferior to Man?"

Certainly not! The Bible nowhere teaches that Woman is Man's inferior.

Gen. 2:18 tells us that she was created '*a helper, fit for him,*' or, suited to his needs who made up what was lacking in his life.

Just as Adam himself was created '*in the likeness*' of God (Gen. 1:26; Gen. 5:1), Eve was created '*in the likeness*' of Adam. In fact, the word '*likeness*' used in Gen. 1:26, might be rendered '*reflected image*', so that when Adam saw the Woman for the first time, he exclaimed, with obvious delight, '*At last! This is bone of my bone!*'

The Hebrew word '*estem*' which has been translated '*bone*' is also rendered '*life*', '*same*' etc. Adam said, in effect, "*This is life of my life.*" "*This is part of me!*"

We read in Gen. 2:21 that '*God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the Man . . .*' and Woman was formed - or shaped - out of his *flank*, or *side*. Let us be precise here! *Not* out of his '*rib*'! It is amusing how such fictions are passed on as facts!

The word used is '*tsela*', and this passage is the only place in the entire Old Testament scriptures where it has been translated '*rib*.' In 19 other verses it has been rendered '*side*', as for instance, in Job 18:12, A.V.

Eve was created an intelligent, emotional and moral being, equal to Adam in every respect. She was not created to be either his inferior or his superior, but to stand beside him and to complement him; to be the partner appropriate to his needs.

This introduces the second question, which is also based on the 3rd verse.

Question 2. "In what sense, then, is Man 'the Head of the Woman'?"

First, please notice that I am using the English Revised Version's rendering of the verse, because in this instance, it is closer to the Greek text, which literally says, "*the head of woman the man*".

We must not allow ourselves to be misled by the Revised Standard Version, because when it says "*the head of a woman is her husband*", it does not offer us a translation but injects an interpretation - and a false one, at that - and there is a world difference between '*translation*' and '*interpretation*'.

The word '*aner*', which the R.S.V. renders '*husband*', actually expresses *gender*, not *relationship*. It means '*an adult male*' and it is a word which occurs 213 times in

the Greek New Testament, and is correctly translated in the 'King James Version' as '*man*' 156 times, and '*husband*' a mere 50 times. Sometimes this mistranslation is used to argue that what Paul teaches here applies only to *married* women, but an accurate translation shows that it also applies to single women in the Church.

So, what about the word 'Head'? Well, the word is - '*kephale*' - and is used in a variety of ways, but in the context of this passage - (and context should always determine how a word is to be understood) - it clearly means '*the outstanding or determining part of the whole - the origin*'.

By taking the Corinthians back to **Gen. 2:21-23**, Paul reminds them that Man was the *origin* of Woman's existence (v.8). The same truth is also expressed in 1st Tim. 2:13, where he reminds Timothy that "*Adam was formed first, then Eve*".

What is being emphasised, therefore, is *priority*, not *superiority*, and if we recognise this, we shall not make the mistake, which some people make, of accusing Paul of demeaning womanhood.

It is sadly true that some find it difficult to deal with the declaration in Eph. 5:22, where Paul says, '*Wives be subject to your husbands*', and it is the word 'subject' that is seen as a problem. But *submission* does not mean *inferiority*, and we can illustrate the difference by using an analogy.

In the verse at which we are looking, Paul says "The head of the Woman is the Man, and the head of Christ is God".

Now, we know, from (**John 1:1-4**), that, as the Word, Christ is *equal* to the Father. He is Deity. He is God, because He shares the father's Nature.

Yet, during His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus, the Christ, was also *subordinate* to the Father, always doing the will of the Father. He said, "*I delight to do Thy will, O God!*" Heb. 10:5-7. (See also **Heb. 5:8; Phil. 2:1-8**, etc.).

Equal in His Deity, yet subordinate to the Father in the working out of the divine Plan of Redemption, never did the Lord Jesus consider Himself demeaned as He accepted the role assigned to Him by the Father and obeyed His will.

So, Woman is *equal* with Man in her relationship with God, and she deals with God personally in matters relating to her own salvation. In Christ there is neither male nor female (**Gal. 3:28**). But she is required to be *subordinate* to Man in matters relating to the Church and life in the Kingdom. In the Church, God has appointed particular roles for both Man and Woman, and when those roles are accepted and properly carried out, there is no sense of superiority in Man, or sense of inferiority in Woman. On the contrary, there is mutual love and respect.

For example, a Christian husband is expected to care for his wife '*as he cares for his own body*', whilst a Christian wife is expected to be subject to her own husband '*as to the Lord*'; that is, just as willingly as the Church submits to Christ as His Bride (**Eph. 5:24-3**).

Therefore, if you were to ask me to express in just one word what this passage teaches, I would say that its *main* theme is '*Subjection*'. The inspired apostle is trying to make the Corinthians understand that, *in the Kingdom - i.e., the Church - there is a certain order which must be observed, and it is essential that both men and women should recognise and accept their places in that order.*

If all we see in the passage is '*the head-covering issue*' we miss its real teaching and fail to grasp of what the Holy Spirit wants us to understand.

Question 3. "Is it correct to say that this passage deals with a situation that was local and temporary, and which, therefore does not apply to us today?"

Well verse 16 certainly implies that *this particular problem* was 'local', in the sense that whilst it existed in the church in Corinth, other congregations were apparently unaffected by it. But it would be wrong to think that it does not concern the Church today.

Ask yourself these questions:-

Is God *still* the head, or 'origin' of the Christ?

Is Christ *still* the head of the Man? (And remember that what is being discussed concerns the Church, not the world at large).

If the answer is affirmative, we must accept that the entire verse lays down an age-abiding principle, which may not be dismissed as having only a temporary application.

Question 4. "Does the passage teach that women should be 'veiled' at a worship-service?"

There are, as I hope we have already seen, certain words which need to be very clearly defined, because the failure to understand them aright has given rise to a number of erroneous assertions on this subject.

For example, it may come as a surprise to find that the word '*veil*' is nowhere found in the Greek text, even though it is used in several modern translations. In fact the word for '*veil*' - '*kalumma*' - is not found *anywhere* in the entire Corinthian letter, and only four times in the entire N.T., all of them in one chapter. That chapter is 2nd Cor. 13, where we read that Moses '*veiled*' his face, to hide the glory that he brought down from Sinai.

What 1st Corinthians 11 describes is a '*head-covering*.' A covering for the head.

In v.6, '*covered*' is the word '*katakalypto*', which means '*head uncovered*', and when the R.S.V. uses the words '*unveiled*' and '*veil*', these are incorrect translations. Yet again, they represent a mistaken *opinion*.

I have looked at few of the versions I possess, to see just how others have rendered v.5, where both the English Revised Version and the Revised Standard Version use the word '*unveiled*'.

In seventeen different N.T. translations that I examined, the words used are, '*bareheaded*', '*unconcealed head*', '*uncovered*', '*without a covering*', '*with nothing on her head*', '*head not covered*'.

Rather surprisingly, even the scholarly William Barclay got this wrong. He wrote much that is correct when he wrote about that role of women in N.T. times, but when he stated that Jewish women wore a '*yashmak*', which he described as '*a long veil, from below the eyes down, almost, to the feet*', he was in error, and when he also stated that in Paul's time, the women wore '*an Eastern veil which was even more concealing*' - (i.e., more concealing than the Yashmak) - he compounded his error.

Professor Barclay described this other garment as '*coming completely over the head having only an opening for the eyes and reaching down to the feet*'. He then declared that '*a respectable Eastern woman would never have dreamed of appearing in public without it*'.

This is not true. A '*veil*' of any sort was not at all common in Palestine in N.T. times, and certainly not as common as it is in these days, when women in strict Moslem countries are required to wear such a covering at all times, except in the presence of close relatives.

The use of the veil covering the face and body, as described by Prof. Barclay, was imposed on women in Islamic countries by the publication of the Koran. Yet, Mohammed himself, who had an eye for female beauty, did not have any difficulty seeing that a good number of women were beautiful enough for him to decide to take them as 'wives'!

It is quite important to understand that 1st Cor. 11 is not talking about women being 'veiled', because it was not the custom of either Hebrew, Israelitish or Jewish women, to wear such garments. If we go back to early O.T. times, we find that Hebrew women did not even wear a veil that covered their faces, let alone their entire bodies.

In Gen. 24:65, we read about Rebekah, accompanied by her maids, travelling to meet her husband-to-be, whom she had never seen. When she saw him at a distance, she asked, "Who is that man?" On being told that this was the man she was to marry, she dismounted from her camel, because it would have been disrespectful for her to remain seated and to look down on him. We are then told, 'so she took her veil and covered herself'.

Remember that Isaac himself had never seen Rebekah. It was when he saw the young woman wearing the veil, that he understood which of the women in the group was to be his bride. The modern bride's veil has a history longer that is usually realised!

There is an even earlier occurrence which proves that Hebrew women did not commonly use veils. This is recorded in Gen. 12:11, where we read that, when they were about to enter Egypt, Abraham said to Sarah, his wife, 'I know that you are a woman beautiful to behold, and when the Egyptians see you . . .'

Verse 14 records that, 'when Abraham entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful', and they praised her to Pharaoh.

How could that happen, if Sarah had been wearing a veil?

There are other passages which prove that, veils were not as common as they are today in Islamic society.

Gen. 29:17 tells us that 'Rachel was beautiful and lovely'. The Hebrew says, 'lovely of face and form', and Jacob evidently saw this.

At a much later period in Old Testament history, Esther 2:11 records that King Ahasuerus sent for Queen Vashti, 'in order to show the people and the princes her beauty'. See also Deut. 21:11.

In short, 1st Cor. 11 refers to a covering for the head - not a veil.

To be continued.

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