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Conducted by  
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### The Head-Covering (2) 1 Cor. 11:1-16

**Question 5. "What difference does it make to God, whether Christian women in worship have their heads covered, or not?"**

In the first 16 verses of the chapter Paul answers this question by presenting a series of reasons, which, briefly, are as follows:

1. He reminds the Corinthians of the order of Creation. vv. 3-10.  
(A grasp of the principles revealed in this section of the chapter is essential to a proper understanding of the subject. Fail to appreciate what is being taught - and 'the head-covering issue' will always remain an 'issue').
2. He declares that a Sense of Propriety calls for the head-covering. v.13.
3. He points out that nature itself teaches it. vv.14-15.
4. He reminds them that this is the Recognized Practice in all the congregations. v.16.

#### ***The Order of Creation***

When Paul states that 'Man is the image and glory of God' (v.7) he means that Man glorifies and honours God when he submits himself to God and obeys His will. When he says that 'Woman is the glory of Man,' he means that Woman becomes Man's glory when she recognizes and accepts the role, which God has appointed for her (see **Gen. 3:16-17**).

The word 'glory' in v. 15 is used in a different sense from verse 7.

We give glory to God by being what God planned for us to be; and, to be obedient to His plan for us is the highest glory that we can attain.

For many centuries the status of women in Eastern society, both Jewish and Gentile, was generally one of inferiority. Although among the Jews under Mosaic Law, a woman had certain rights, her position in society, even in the days of the Lord Jesus, remained an unenviable one when compared with the standing of womanhood in Christian lands today. Only when and where the teachings of Christ became accepted, did women begin to be treated with respect, and only then were they raised to a position of equality with men (Gal. 3:28).

### *The Corinthian Situation*

It was in the first congregations of Christians that this new attitude towards the status of women was first preached and practised. But, apparently, this newly-experienced sense of freedom and equality had led certain women in the church in Corinth to decide to express their 'liberation' by discarding the head-covering which was the recognised sign of female respectability.

Only a few years after this letter was written, the Roman world was prepared to believe the most scandalous stories about the way Christians behaved when they met for worship, and if they were seen to be disregarding the common decencies of society and the social practices which were recognised as normal and proper, the non-Christians would consider that those rumours were true.

Paul says, therefore, that, even on a social level, breaches of convention are to be discouraged and Christians should avoid giving offence by flouting reasonable custom. In this chapter he makes the point that it is proper for Christian women to act with dignity, by scrupulously observing social custom in the matter of the head-covering.

Furthermore, he reminds the 'liberated' women in the church in Corinth that if they abandoned the use of the head-covering, they not only abandon that which indicates that they are women who accept God's order in the Church, but they are, in fact, behaving just like those lawless, immoral women of pagan Corinthian society, who declare that they do not care what society thinks about them.

When, in v.5, he writes about a woman having her head 'shaven,' he is referring expressly to the behaviour of the prostitutes of pagan Corinth - of whom there were many - who regarded themselves as 'free spirits,' beholden to no-one. They not only abandoned the use of the head-covering; they also shaved their heads completely, as a sign of their disregard for society's opinion, but Paul points out that liberty in Christ does not cancel God's rule of subordination or change the divinely appointed order,

In v.6, he drives home this argument by stating that, if Christian women abandoned the wearing of a head-covering because they supposed that in this way they were declaring their freedom, they might as well follow the example of these unruly women of the street and also shave their heads completely, to flaunt their disregard for convention. But, he says, if the women in the church in Corinth agree that it is a shameful thing for a woman to have her head shaved, she ought to wear a head-covering. (Again, note: the reference is to a 'head-covering,' not a 'veil,' which is a misleading rendering).

It is interesting to note that Schonfield, the Jewish translator, actually says that a married Jewish woman could be divorced by her husband for going out bareheaded.

We should remember that, in this chapter, the apostle is discussing what has evidently been happening during worship in the Corinthian church (verses 18,20,33), and he declares that a woman who prays with her physical head uncovered dishonours Man, who God's Word declares to be her spiritual, or primary Head; whilst if a man prays with *his* physical head covered, he dishonours Christ, who is his Head.

Consider this. If today, it does not matter whether or not a woman has her head uncovered in worship, would we be happy if a man were to pray or preach with his head *covered*? And if, as the scriptures state, when a woman fails to wear a head-covering she dishonours Man, who is her head - (i.e. her 'origin'), would not Christ, Who is the head of Man, also be dishonoured, if a Man prayed with his (physical) head *covered*?

It is surely significant that, throughout the ages, for a man to remove his hat -(or cap, or whatever he might be wearing on his head) - has been the sign of respect in the presence of one whom he wishes to honour. Even today, in civilised society at any rate, men still raise their hats to ladies and remove their hats as they enter a house or church building.

Paul says that when a man prays or preaches (*'prophets' means 'to speak forth'*) - he must be bareheaded, because Christ, his Head is present.

Where women are concerned, the opposite is true. He says that, if a woman prays or speaks in public with her head *uncovered*, she shows disrespect for the one whom God has declared to be her head - the man - because, by her action she declares that she does not recognise the presence of a visible head.

(Please note that Paul deals with the question of women speaking in a worship-service where men are present, in ch. 14. He is here dealing, first, with the fundamental issue of submission).

**Question 6. "But does the wearing of a head-covering really have any significance in these modern times?"**

In reply, let me ask this question, "Why, at a formal wedding, does the bride - even *'in these modern times'* - wear a veil? Is that merely a part of the wedding-dress? Is it nothing more than a piece of finery? Is it a meaningless tradition signifying nothing at all?

The practice recalls the fact that, from very early Christian times, the bride's head was covered in affirmation of her willingness to be submissive to her husband.

*'To love, honour and obey'* has long been the form of the vow taken by the bride, even if, in these modern days, a non-Christian society has changed it.

***The Lord's Supper, also no longer significant?***

But consider also, that if the head-covering is rejected on the grounds that it *'belongs to a long-past and different age and culture'*, why do we not adopt the same position with regards to the Lord's Supper? Are unleavened bread and unfermented grape-juice items that can be readily found in our homes? Do we see them on the table of our friends and relatives? Would not today's non-Christians say that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is just as much an *'out-date irrevelancy'*, as the wearing of a head-covering?

We should also bear in mind that there is probably not a single nation on earth which does not treasure and cling to, customs, rituals and ceremonies which date from its historic past. But nations do not abandon their 'traditions' on the grounds that they *'belong to a different time and culture.'*

**Question 7. "What does Paul mean when he writes about 'a sign of authority'?"**

The New Testament contains a good many words that relate to various aspects of 'power' or 'authority'. In this case, the word is 'exousia', a word used 104 times, and it also has various shades of meaning. It may sometimes mean authority that is *demonstrated*, and it may mean authority that is *recognised or acknowledged*.

When Paul says that a woman should have *'exousia'* on her head *'because of the*

*angels'*, he is not suggesting that woman has any sort of authority, or power over the angels.

He means that a woman's use of the head-covering in worship is a sign of her acknowledgement and recognition of authority - a sign that she accepts her role in God's scheme of things, and is willing to comply with His will. In so doing, she provides an example of obedience and submission to the angels, who are looking on.

Jude v.6 records that there was a time when angels sinned. They *'did not keep their own position, but left their proper habitation'*. 2nd Peter 2:4 also refers to this astonishing example of disobedience among the angels, and the consequences were catastrophic, as these passages show.

There can be no doubt that angels are aware of what occurs here on earth, because the Lord Himself tells us that there is joy among the angels in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10), and there are many instances of angelic ministry recorded in the book of Acts, if one cares to look for them.

Eph. 3:10, teaches us that, it is through the Church, that the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to principles and powers in the heavenly places; and this certainly included the angels. Thus, the Christian woman's acceptance of her divinely appointed role is, to the angels, **an abiding example of obedience**, because it demonstrates submission to the will of God.

**Question 8. "What do vv.14 and 25 mean? How does 'Nature' teach?"**

The word for 'nature' is the word *'phusis'*, and it means *'the inborn sense of what is proper'* or *'that which is natural'*. In N.T. times this appeal to 'nature' was quite commonly used. Paul uses it in Rom. 1:26 and 2:14 as well as elsewhere.

The argument here is that there are certain fundamental physical differences between Male and Female, and certain things are instinctive.

Whilst long hair is a glory to a woman it is not natural to man. (Forget those paintings of a Jesus who had long, blonde hair!).

God himself created the distinction between male and female, and we honour Him by maintaining that distinction and by rejecting any of society's practices or customs, which break it down. Paul's argument is that Nature has endowed Woman with such an abundance of hair, because God intends her to be different and does not wish her to copy the man.

In these days, an immoral society seeks to break down the distinction between male and female, so we have 'Unisex' - the 'one sex' society.

We see masculine, short-haired women, who hanker to look like men and who dress in men's clothes, and we have effeminate men, who have taken to wearing women's clothing and using eye shadow and lipstick!

A long time ago, Epictetus, a philosopher in ancient Greece, pointed out that *"there are distinct marks of masculinity and femininity which should not be confounded or abandoned; the gentle voice of woman and the beard of man"*.

(I have never yet heard of a woman needing to regularly shave her chin or trim her beard!) Such women are so abnormal that they used to be displayed as curiosities in circus side-shows. Paul declares that we should give glory to God, by being what He meant us to be and by maintaining our natural and distinctive differences.

This is his argument relating to 'long hair', vv.14-15.

**Woman's Hair - A 'Covering'?**

Of course, we have heard it argued that, since, in this passage, Paul says that a woman's long hair is given to her as a 'covering', that is all she needs!

But Paul does not say this because he is not so foolish as to contradict the arguments he has already made!

1. If a woman's hair is an adequate head covering, meeting God's requirements, when would it be accurate to describe her as being 'not covered'? v.6. Are bald-headed women the ones described as 'not covered'?

2. If, we claim that, when a woman has hair she is 'covered', does she only become 'uncovered' when she loses her hair?

3. And if a woman's hair itself is an adequate covering, does Man's hair also constitute a covering? But he should not be 'covered'!

If a man's hair is also a covering - and if it is a shame for a man to pray or preach with head 'covered' - must he, then, shave his head completely and be bald-headed before he may preach?

Paul tells us that, if Man allows his hair to grow long it is degrading - (or a dishonour to him). But God has given to woman hair which naturally grows long and which is a natural adornment and a distinctive sign of her femininity. When she wears it in a womanly fashion, it is a glory to her. It is a visible sign that she is fulfilling the role for which God intended her, and this should indicate to her the propriety of wearing a head covering, and the head covering should be seen as a logical and reasonable extension of her natural covering.

***The recognized practice of the churches generally, v.16***

It seems that, in this matter of the head covering, the Corinthian church was the only church causing concern, because there is no mention of this problem being experienced in any of the other congregations. On the contrary. Paul's final word on the matter, in v.16, is, *If anyone is disposed to be contentious (about this matter) we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God.*"

The word translated '*custom*', v.16 in the KJV, and '*practice*' in the RSV and other versions, refers to '*common usage*'.

He says that it is the usual practice of all the churches, for women to have their heads covered in worship. No other practice is recognized.

It is significant that the Corinthian church was a church in which, during New Testament times, all of the spiritual gifts were in evidence, **ch.1.7.**

Yet Paul reveals that even spiritually gifted women - i.e., those women who had received spiritual gifts, such as the gift of prophecy or the gift of tongues - were not exempt from God's order requiring them to wear a head-covering when the Church came together for worship, and he even reminds them of another law which was apparently being flouted at Corinth. They were not remaining silent in the assembly.

They seem to have imagined that, because they had been endowed with spiritual gifts, they were exempt from the law which said that women must keep silent in the church, '*for it is not permitted for them to speak*'.

This is dealt with in 1 Cor. 14:34, where the rule is very clearly stated. There are no exceptions - and no exemptions. Even women who possessed miraculous, spiritual gifts must observe the God given order of things. They must have their heads covered, and they must observe the rule of silence in the assembly - like all other women.

***The conclusive word vv.14:37***

*"If anyone thinks he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognise this, he is not recognised."*

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