

# HEAD COVERING OF THE WOMAN

## Introduction

To be free of problems is not necessarily a blessed state. Some churches have no problems because they are doing practically nothing. They close their eyes to everything and no one bothers to interfere about what is right and what is wrong. A congregation dedicated to maintaining the status quo (the existing position) may boast of having no problems, but it may be spiritually dead or asleep that it is tragically blind to its real state, e.g. Rev. 3:1, 2, 17. No issue could loom larger in man's relationship with God than that of divine authority. Man is saved or lost by his acceptance or rejection of divine authority. That which constitutes divine authority consists of what God has authorised. What God has authorised for the most part also implies what He has not authorised.

To go beyond the bounds of God's law is as much flagrant violation of His will as is a stubborn refusal to comply with it (1 John 3:4). God's law is what God allows, and when one goes beyond the boundaries described by God's law he is guilty of transgression. When a person in religion goes beyond the framework and limits of God's law, he commits that act which is "unscriptural."

"Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Let us do, as these Jews did, examine the Scriptures to see if, according to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, that is, 1 Cor. 11:1-16, a woman of the 20th century is under obligation to cover her head while at worship with the assembly or if she is not under this obligation. Divine Inspiration says: "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Eph. 5:17). He who closes his eyes and ears to the truth is unwise.

Some questions that I like to answer, which are brought against the covering of the woman's head are these: (1) Is the covering of the woman's head that is mentioned by the inspired Apostle in 1 Cor. 11:1-16 a CUSTOM of the time or a command from God? (2) Is this covering of the head applicable for the women of the 20th century or was only for that time, for the women at Corinth? (3) Was the inspired Paul giving instructions to the church at Corinth ONLY or to the WHOLE body, the CHURCH? These are three questions which constitute the whole division that exists among the body of Christians today. I believe, that if

these can be answered "Scripturally" then this problem that is causing much division among Christians will be solved.

**Question Number 1. "Is the covering of the woman's head that is mentioned by the inspired Apostle in 1 Cor. 11:1-16 a CUSTOM of the time or a command from God?"**

**Answer:** In 1 Cor. 11:1-16 we find two words that are mentioned by the inspired Apostle, the first one is mentioned in verse 2, that is, "traditions," and the second one is mentioned in verse 16, that is, "custom."

These two words have the key to our understanding the answer of this question.

(1) The Greek word for the word "traditions" that we find in 1 Cor. 11:2 is "PARADOSIS," which means, "a handing down or on (akin to paradidomi, to hand over, deliver), denotes a tradition, and hence, by metonymy, (a) the teachings of the Rabbis, interpretations of the Law, which was thereby made void in practice, Matt. 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8 (b) or apostolic teaching, 1 Cor. 11:2, R.V., "traditions" (A.V. "ordinances"), of instructions concerning the gatherings of believers (instructions of wider scope than ordinances in the limited sense); in 2 Thess. 2:15, of Christian doctrine in general, where the Apostle's use of the word constitutes a denial that what he preached originated with himself, and a claim for its divine authority (cp. paralambano, to receive, 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3); in 2 Thess. 3:6, it is used of instructions concerning everyday conduct." (W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of N.T. words*, p. 221, 222).

(2) The Greek word for the word "custom" that we find in 1 Cor. 11:16, is, "SUNETHEIA," sun, with ethos (see No 1), denotes (a) an intercourse, intimacy, a meaning not found in the N.T.; (b) a custom, customary usage, John 18:39; 1 Cor. 11:16; or force of habit, 1 Cor. 8:7, R.V. "being used to" (some mss. here have sunudesis, conscience; whence A.V., "with conscience of," Vine, p. 263).

Now, that we have the original of both words, we can understand better our difficulty and unlock that which is causing a lot of misunderstanding.

In 1 Cor. 11:2, the inspired Apostle says, "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you." He does not say, "... and maintain the customs even as I have delivered them to you." I am sure that all agree with this.

In 1 Cor. 11:16, the inspired Apostle says, "If any man seemeth to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." Here, too, he does not say, "If any ..., we have no such traditions."

So, if the word "custom" of verse 16 applies to everything else, surely it does not apply for the head covering mentioned in these verses. Some interpret this verse, that the word custom refers to women attending to worship unveiled and some say it refers to being contentious is not a custom with the apostles. Whatever it refers to it is referring to something new and not to an already established practice. The inspired Paul had given to them three reasons why women ought to cover their heads, not only the three reasons should be sufficient to show them and us that the head covering is a command from God, but he also showed to them that the settled and established practice, that is, that a woman at worship ought to have her head covered, and from the beginning followed the course outlined by him, which showed that all the other apostles had established it by rule. My question here is this: "If the head covering is not one of those traditions that are mentioned in verse 2 and is a custom, then why it is not mentioned as a "custom" as we find the word in verse 16?"

Truth is truth and remains exactly what it is without regard as to the number who accept it or reject it. The important question is: "What does the Bible teach about it."

The inspired Apostle was commending them for remembering him in everything and MAINTAINING the TRADITIONS (PARADOSIS) even as I have delivered them to you." We can interpret this in other words which means the same thing: "... and maintaining the "instructions concerning the gatherings of believers (instructions of wider scope than ordinances in the limited sense), EVEN as I have delivered them to you." Another question that I like to make is this: "What does the Holy Spirit teach in His word about women attending for worship with their head uncovered, today? Are we living in the SAME Christian Age as were those women that were praised by the Holy Spirit for covering their heads? Is not the account that is written for us in God's Word, written as an example for all the women of the Christian Age, so that they will know exactly what is their duty about the head covering?" (1 Cor. 11:1-16).

In Hebrews 10:25 we find an example which mentions the word "custom" (ethos) too. "Not forsaking the coming together of (our) selves, as custom with some (is), but exhorting, and by so much more as ye see drawing near the day." The Greek word "ethos" means a habit, custom or manner. Question: "What is the custom mentioned in Heb. 10:25?" Surely it is NOT the "attending" or the "coming together." It is the "forsaking" of the assembly together. The "attending" is a command by God but the "forsaking" is a custom that some were getting as a habit. The custom was not something already established by God (in this case, "the coming together of ourselves") but something that deviated from the will of God (in this case, "the forsaking of the assembly together"). The same applies to the covering of the woman's head. The "custom" mentioned in 1 Cor. 11:16 is not the head covering but the deviation from the God-given order.

So, if the Holy Spirit is NOT referring to the head covering as a "custom," why we, mere men, refer to it as a "custom"? Is the Holy Spirit commending a custom in 1 Cor. 11:2 or the traditions delivered? NO ONE can prove from the Bible that the head covering was a custom of the time but it can be proved that women attending for worship unveiled was a custom (1 Cor. 11:16).

**Question number 2: "Is this covering of the head applicable for the women of the 20th century or was only for that time, for the women at Corinth?"**

**Answer:** Verse 5, of 1 Corinthian 11, gives us the answer to this question, it reads: "But every women that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head..."

If one studies carefully the meaning of this verse he will understand that the inspired Apostle's stress was not for the women of Corinth only but for all the women of the Christian Age. Let us see what this verse really says. Here, in this verse, we have the answer to our question.

The key word here is the word "EVERY." This word is the word that shows if the head covering of the woman was only for the Corinthian women or not. Look it up in your dictionary and see its definition. The Odhams Concise English Dictionary gives this definition: "EVERY—each one, all, each of a number, singly or one by one." As we can see, this word has some different applications and this should be of great help to us to understand better if the covering of the woman's head is or was applicable for the women of Corinth only or for ALL the women throughout the whole Christian Age.

1. EVERY — each one, "heis hekastos." — Acts 2:6, "Every man heard them speak in his own language."

This shows to us that the word "EVERY" here applies only for those present.

2. EVERY — all, "pas." — Matt. 4:4, "... but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." This show to us that all the words of God are important for the Christian life, not some of them only.

1 Cor. 1:2, "Unto the church of God, which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

Here we have one of the clearest applications about the universality of what we find written about the head covering. The words 'ALL' and "EVERY" in this passage of Scripture means the same thing, that is, the ENTIRE church, the whole body, the ONE BODY, and not a part of it, a congregation in some place, but that one church, UNIVERSAL. The same Greek word is used here (PAS) that is used about the covering of the woman's head, of "EVERY WOMAN" in 1 Cor. 11:5. There must be no doubt about the phrase "EVERY WOMAN" that this applies for ALL the women of the world and not the women of Corinth only, because if this was so, then we should have the Greek word "HEKASTOS" and not the Greek word "PAS." (See Vine's Dict., and Young's Analytical Conc. to the Bible).

3. EVERY — each of a number, "hekastos." — 1 Cor. 12:18, "But now hath God set members every one of them in the body, as it pleased him."

Here, although we find the word "every," this do not have the same meaning as that of 1 Cor. 11:5, "Every woman..." This is referring to the individual and that of 1 Cor. 11:5 is referring to the woman in a universal sense (PAS and not HEKASTOS).

4. EVERY — singly or one by one, "kath hen." — Rom. 12:4-5, "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

Here, we have another clear explanation of the meaning of the word "EVERY" that we find in 1 Cor. 11:5.

So, from these four meanings of the word "EVERY," we see that: (1) Acts 2:6 — "EVERY one" (heis hekastos), but not "EVERY woman" (pas, that means, "every one of the class denoted by the noun connected with it." 'Vine', e.g. Matt. 3:10).

(2) Matt 4:4 — "EVERY" (pas) ALL women, but not "heis hekastos" or "hekastos" or "kath hen."

(3) 1 Cor. 12:18 — "EACH of a number" (hekastos), but not "pas" or "heis hekastos" or "kath hen."

(4) Rom. 12:4-5 — "EVERY" singly or one by one (kath hen), but not "heis hekastos" or "pas" or "hekastos."

From this, that we have just read, we see, that the covering of the woman's head while with the assembly for worship is compulsory for ALL (pas) the women of all ages, the Christian Age. We have also seen, that the covering of the woman's head is written down in God's word, not as a "CUSTOM" but as one of the "instructions concerning the gatherings of believers."

An important question that deserves a Scriptural answer is this: "For a woman to cover her head while with the assembly for worship, is this a "matter of faith" or not?"

It is our studied and firm conviction that everything we do in religious matters must be authorised by the word of God. Whatever is done without "chapter or verse" is not "in the name of the Lord," is not involved in "walking by faith," and will not please God. We must have Bible authority for all that we do. Everything which God has revealed, we are to defend as true. We are to surrender no part of it

whatever, for every part of it is of value to mankind, if not, then it is not written in God's word. (John 20:30,31). This is given to ALL the saints, once and for ALL. (Jude 3).

**Question:** "Who determines which words in the Bible are/are not from God? WHO?" If one discards a part of the Bible (in our case, 1 Cor. 11:2-16), does not every other person have the same right to do this too? The decisions made on the small problems govern subsequent decisions on larger issues.

Scripture is a seamless garment, and when the threads are unraveled at one place, soon the entire fabric gives way.

**Question:** The covering of the woman's head while with the assembly for worship, is this a part of this garment, from that that the Holy Spirit revealed in that "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints?" If it is, then without any difficulty it is our duty to defend it as true. If we discard the covering of the head of the woman at worship, do not all the existing denominations have the right to discard whatever part they want?

We often speak of "necessary inference." The word "necessary" isn't necessary. If it is an "inference" it is necessary, and if it is not necessary it is not an inference. There is a vast difference between "inference" and "assumption." Many things are called inference which are not inferences.

When an action, fact, or teaching is absolutely demanded by the Biblical information at hand, then that action, fact, or teaching is inference, and this should be obeyed and done.

**Question:** Why the covering of the woman's head is "necessary" and therefore an "inference"? Why?

**Answer:** First of all, because this is a part of God's revelation, and not man's. Secondly, because "it is not proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered." (1 Cor. 11:13). Third, "because of the angels." (1 Cor. 11:10). Fourth, because "ALL the Apostles and ALL the churches of God recognised no other practice, except that women ought to cover their heads at worship." (1 Cor. 11:16). Fifth, because by the covering of her head at worship, the woman is showing her place in the Divine order. (1 Cor. 11:3-5). And sixth, because by this, the woman is showing obedience to God's Word. (James 2:10).

The New Testament plainly teaches that in order for us to be pleasing to God we must "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). It likewise declares that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Obviously, where there is no word there can be no faith. The Bible says, "and without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him ..." (Heb. 11:6).

**Question:** Is the divine order that we find in 1 Cor. 11:3, which is about the divine order as to headship and dominion of the woman, man, Christ, and God a MATTER OF FAITH? I personally believe it is. Does not verses 4 and 16 (and here one must try to understand perfectly) show HOW that order should be respected and HOW it may be disregarded?

"It is a basic principle of Biblical hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) that if and when and to the extent that God does specify the HOW in connection with the carrying out of any obligation that the HOW becomes just as binding as the obligation itself; but if and when and to the extent that God does NOT SPECIFY THE HOW, the manner and method is left to the realm of human judgement, the realm of expediency." (The Spiritual Sword, 1973, Vol. 5, No. 1 p. 24).

**Question: Does God show the HOW in connection with the carrying out of the obligation (in our case, the head covering), when HE, in HIS WORD tells us that "it is not proper for a woman to pray to HIM with her head UNCOVERED? (I Cor. 11:13). HOW that obligation can be honoured and respected? The answer is simple, "by the covering of the woman's head at worship with the Christians.**

We have clearly the HOW shown to us by God Himself in His Word in connection with the obligation of the woman toward the divine order as to the headship and dominion of the woman, man, Christ and God, and as I have already said, GOD, and not mere man shows the HOW of how that divine order should be respected and HOW it can be discarded. (I Cor. 11:4-16).

Where there is no word there can be no faith, and God says, "without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him ..." (Heb. 11:6).

**Question: Do we have the WORD OF GOD regarding the covering of the woman's head? Can any one deny that we do not have it? Then, if we have it, and we DO have it (I Cor. 11:1-16), is this not a MATTER OF FAITH?**

I like to end this study by the Apostle Paul's question: "Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" (I Cor. 11:13).

The Holy Spirit wrote this question for all the CHRISTIAN AGE, for those who find themselves in some difficulty about the head covering. Here, one can explain this verse in this manner: "Now, after explaining why a woman should cover her head while at worship, after giving to EVERY (pas) woman and to EVERY (pas) man (verses 4,5) the reasons as far as creation (verses 7-9,12), now that you know all this, the responsibility is upon you, judge for yourselves, tell me yourselves, decide yourselves, it is your responsibility because you know all the reasons, "IS IT PROPER for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?"

"Judge for yourselves (I Cor. 11:13). Here the inspired Apostle puts the question up to the good judgment of his readers. Most people who understand the divine arrangement will gladly agree with it. This is not the only place that we find this question being put to the inquirers. We find this question being put to the same church in Corinth. In I Cor. 10:15, Paul laid down the same question, "Judge for yourselves what I say." Here, the Greek word for the word "judge" is the same as that in I Cor. 11:13, that is, "krino" which means, according to Vine, "primarily denotes to separate, select, choose; hence, to determine, and so to judge, pronounce judgment." (p. 280).

**Question: What is there that one has to separate, select, choose, determine, to judge or to pronounce judgment in these verses of the Letter to the Corinthians? Does this mean, that because the word "Judge" means to make a choice, we are at liberty to choose what we think is best for us?**

Let us see properly what is the meaning of this word from the context of these passages, that is, 1 Kor. 10:15; 11:13.

The subject of 1 Kor. 10:15 is about idolatry. Paul says, "I speak as to sensible men; judge for yourselves what I say." I am sure that no one understands that by these words we can choose idolatry. I am sure that all understand that these words mean that "now, that we have all that is necessary about what is right and what is wrong about idolatry, the responsibility is upon us, and as sensible men and women properly informed, we must make a good choice, separate that which is bad from that which is good, decide to walk in the path that we find in God's word, pronounce judgment on everything that is unscriptural, and pronounce our obedience to everything that is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The subject of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is the covering of the woman's head while with the assembly for worship that shows that by this covering, the woman is showing her

place in the Divine order that we find in verses 3-5. What is the meaning of this phrase, "Judge for yourselves" that we find in verse 13? Does this mean that the woman is at liberty to choose whether she covers her head at worship or not?

Certainly not! This means, that as sensible, matured men and women we must be able to use our minds, our senses that were given to us by God, we must be capable of using the minds God have given to us. The inspired Apostle appeals to us to do so in this matter of idolatry and the head covering. He, by inspiration, gives us in both cases, concrete facts dealing with the subjects that will help us, as thinking men and women, to make the right decision. We have a great responsibility to "JUDGE OURSELVES" by walking in the steps that All the Apostles and ALL the churches of God walked in. (I Cor. 11:16).

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