

UNDERSTANDING
CHRISTIANITY

Head Covering

A Scripture Truth Publication

Head Covering



A Scripture Truth Publication

Head Covering

© Copyright 2003 Scripture Truth

A publication of Scripture Truth

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission of Scripture Truth Publications.

Quotations from the Bible are from the Authorised Version (Crown Copyright) unless otherwise indicated.

ISBN 0 901860 26 3

Published by Scripture Truth Publications
Coopies Way, Coopies Lane,
Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 6JN

*Scripture Truth is an imprint of Central Bible Hammond
Trust, a charitable trust.*

Typesetting by John Rice

Illustration © Microsoft Corporation

Printed by Sovereign Press

Introduction

In many churches today, it has become increasingly common for women to be bareheaded. Indeed, the woman who goes to church wearing a head covering stands out as the exception in some churches. Yet only some sixty years ago, the opposite would have been true. The majority of women in church wore hats.

Does this profound change of practice merely reflect a change in social customs? Indeed, is Christian behaviour in general to be determined merely by current social practices? These two articles are both written by Christian women. They are written out of their deep conviction that Scripture clearly teaches that when a woman prays, she should have her head covered. The articles originally appeared in the magazine, Scripture Truth. These edited versions are reprinted here because it was felt that their message deserved a wider audience.

The lack of wearing of head covering seems to reflect a deeper feeling on the part of many that Christian behaviour can be adapted to prevailing social practices as the individual chooses. The authority of Scripture, and particularly its teaching on church order, has been largely set aside. Nevertheless, it is still true that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally ‘God-breathed’), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The great Reformation cry, “Sole Scriptura” (the Scriptures alone) still challenges Christian behaviour today. That cry needs to be heard in our land again!

Is Head Covering Relevant Today?

“... and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” 1 Peter 3:15.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1 – 16.

In order to examine this subject seriously, it is necessary to look at the original text and the actual meaning of the word ‘covering’. We are, unfortunately, at the mercy of the translators of this word in 1 Corinthians 11:1–16. This is probably the reason that this subject is so poorly understood and the Scriptural directive largely ignored today. To be accurate, therefore, reference has been made to the original Greek, with the help of Newberry’s “The Englishman’s Greek New Testament” and Vine’s “Expository Dictionary of Bible Words”. (One does not have to be a Greek scholar to recognize where the two relevant Greek words are used!)

The two relevant words used in these verses are ‘*katakalupto*’ (verb) meaning ‘*to cover up*’ or ‘*to be veiled*’; and ‘*peribolaion*’ (noun) meaning ‘*something thrown around*’, hence ‘*a veil, covering or mantle*’. ‘*Katakalupto*’ is used in verses 5, 6 (twice), 7 and 13 whereas ‘*peribolaion*’ is used once only in verse 15. (In verse 4, the translation is literally ‘Every man praying or prophesying, having [anything] on [his] head ...’.)

Most translations unhelpfully use the same English word in verse 15 as in the other four verses, in spite of the fact

that a different Greek word is used there. However, if an accurate meaning of Scripture is to be conveyed, the use of a different Greek word in the original should be reflected by a different word in the English. It is significant that Paul introduces a completely different word for 'covering' in verse 15 from that used in the preceding verses. It is reasonable to conclude that if he had been suggesting that 'her hair' met the requirements for a covering which the earlier verses had demanded, he would have used the same word for 'covering' in verse 15. However Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, chose to use a completely different word.

Paul, at this point in his argument, is basing his appeal on the grounds of nature. Contrasting man and woman, he first refers (a) to the shame of a man having long hair and (b) to the desirability of a woman having long hair. He then draws the conclusion that a woman's hair is given as a veil in order to indicate from creation her position relative to man, in modesty and submission (as denoted by a veil).

To apply an identical meaning to the two different Greek words used in the passage would remove any sense from v.6 and one can, therefore, state emphatically that the 'covering' of verse 15 *cannot* equate with the 'covering' of the earlier verses. To equate them would render the opening words of verse 6 nonsensical because if one were to assume that 'her hair' in verse 15 met the requirements for the covering, demanded by the earlier verses, then verse 6 would have to read, "For if a woman be not

covered (i.e. does not have her hair), let her hair also be cut off"! How could her hair be cut off if she did not have any? Such an interpretation would make verse 6 utterly ridiculous and should be seen to do so by any serious reader.

Moreover, if her hair is the covering which is required for prayer, then men who are other than completely bald would be in violation of verses 4 and 7 when they prayed or prophesied. Scripture is always consistent with itself.

There seem to be four other arguments raised by those who are against the application of this Scripture today. They are:

- It is not relevant today.
- It was a cultural thing.
- It was only Paul saying it.
- It is not important.

Each of these arguments will be examined.

It is not relevant today. This Scripture has to be relevant today because it is in the same chapter as the instructions given regarding the Lord's Supper. One cannot logically recognise the latter part of chapter 11, quoting it regularly, and at the same time ignore the first half of the same chapter! The Lord's Supper was established in a Jewish culture with only Jews present. This is not rejected as irrelevant on the grounds that society has changed.

It was a cultural thing. It is unique to this epistle that its message is directed to the church at Corinth and "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." These words came down to

us through the ages and surely indicate that they are not limited to the temporary and fading culture of Corinth. Regarding the practical implications, the only biblical authority which a man has for uncovering his head for prayer is found in this chapter. If the instruction for women is to be disregarded on cultural grounds, as some suggest, why is it regarded as irreverent if a man enters a church with a hat on his head? Scripture is emphatic and simple here. The man is not to have anything at all on his head while praying or prophesying but, in contrast, the praying or prophesying woman must be covered. Who has the authority to decide which verses can be negated for cultural reasons?

To allow culture to decide or influence scriptural teaching is a slippery slope for biblical interpretation. Culture does not change the Word of God. Feminism is a cultural influence which has infiltrated many churches because the concept of cultural interpretation of the Scriptures has been allowed. Culture should never be allowed to override Scripture. "...the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8). God is right and man is wrong if he disobeys Him!

It was only Paul saying it! If we disregard Paul's teaching, we are left with very little instruction about the order of the New Testament Church. The Lord Jesus did not directly teach us about this but He did entrust it to His servant Paul, whose instructions on these matters are necessary. It is crucial to insist, therefore, that his writings are part of the canon of Scripture, "If any man think

himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Paul was an apostle i.e. he had actually seen the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7-8). “You are...fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built on the *foundation of the apostles* and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:19-20). The Lord Jesus left the set-up of the New Testament Church order largely to Paul and his teaching cannot therefore be disregarded.

It is not important. It is sometimes said that this passage is of negligible importance, more important things being to preach the Gospel and to love one another. The reasoning behind this argument is that we should obey God only on issues which we consider to be important and that obedience is optional on ‘unimportant’ issues. Who decides which of the Lord’s commandments are unimportant? Love is the greatest thing and Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Can one deliberately disregard Paul’s clear injunction which he received from the Lord? If we do not like God’s teaching, should we not ask ourselves why?

The application, therefore, is to all women, praying or prophesying. We should regard this direction as a privilege “because of the angels” (verse 10). Should we obey God or man?

Jane Worsley

Head Covering - Cultural or Cosmic?

Please read 1 Corinthians 11:1-16.

Note v.10: “For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority* on her head because of the angels” (NKJV).

“...*power on her head*” (AV).

“...*a token of the authority* under which she stands” (JND trans. footnote).

“...*a symbol of authority*” (NAS).

“...*a sign of authority*” (NIV).

Note also 1 Corinthians 14:37: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the *Lord.*”

This “commandment of the Lord” has been obeyed for nineteen centuries. Increasingly it is now rejected or ignored, and the reason is not far to seek. Verses 1-9, stating the truths on which it is based, are now glaringly ‘politically incorrect’. But, taking Scripture as her guide, the Christian woman is happily liberated from the conventions of this world.

The sign on her head shows that God’s order of headship – God, Christ, man, woman (vv.3-5) – is acknowledged. This raises the question, “A sign – for whose eyes?” For those around? To avoid being taken for a Corinthian harlot? The closing words of v. 10 are specific: “because of *the angels*”. In Scripture, God gives important signs to the

angels so that they might take note of them. Two examples are Ezekiel 9:4-6 and Revelation 7:1-3. In both cases, the faithful have a sign put on their foreheads, so as to be spared at a time of judgment carried out by the angels. Head covering is a no less vital sign. The privilege of giving this sign is given to Christian women.

Very real to earlier generations of the Church, and over-sentimentalised in Victorian times, the awareness of angels is another casualty of our secular age. These mighty beings are servants, warriors, heralds – *and observers*. Peter reveals in his 1st letter, chapter 1, verse 12, that angels are intensely interested in the salvation wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ, and in its visible outcome – the whole body of the redeemed on earth, His Church. Paul, too, in 1 Corinthians 4:9, speaks of himself and his fellow apostles as being made “a spectacle (literally ‘theatre’) both to angels and to men”.

Ephesians 3:10 tells us that now, in our day, “the manifold (many-sided) wisdom of God” is being displayed in the Church “to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places”. So our conduct in the Church is continually observed by the angelic hosts – both God’s and Satan’s! One of those ‘many sides’ of God’s wisdom is the order in creation as given in 1 Corinthians 11 - God, Christ, man, woman. The implication is, therefore, clear: the covering on the head of a praying or prophesying woman is a sign for angels, a sign which they understand, that she accepts and upholds that order.

“As long as Eve accepted the place of priority of Adam, she was protected against the powers of darkness which have always tried to dominate the woman” (Cor Bruins). Acting independently of her head and husband, Eve committed the first act of human disobedience. It was witnessed by the angels. God’s angels must have been appalled – Satan’s angels, triumphant! Now, in the great company of the redeemed, destined for the Father’s house, the fruit of His Son’s triumph over Satan, we women – “daughters of Eve” – to quote C.S.Lewis – have the honour of declaring to those same witnesses of her fall (for angels are deathless) our loyalty to His wise designs by this simple sign, which they can read – the covering on our head.

If the argument of 1 Corinthians is valid, the bare head is also a sign to be read by the angels, a sign of the rejection of Scripture.

Many Christians have been taught to regard this as a minor matter, connected only with moral conditions in contemporary Corinth. This is despite the fact that the apostle deals with it immediately prior to his teaching on the Lord’s Supper and the exercise of gift in the Church. So a mixed message is being relayed to the armies of heaven. Furthermore, Paul’s plain statement, “for this reason” in v.10, alludes not to contemporary society, but to creation and headship.

Cultural – or cosmic? The dictionary states that the reverse of ‘cosmos’ is ‘chaos’. Head covering is not, in Scripture, a side issue. It is a “commandment of the Lord”

(1 Corinthians 14:47) to every Christian woman. Obedience to that commandment is not only a duty, but a unique privilege. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Hazel Dixon

Head Covering

The lack of wearing of head covering seems to reflect a deeper feeling on the part of many that Christian behaviour can be adapted to prevailing social practices as the individual chooses. The authority of Scripture, and particularly its teaching on church order, has been largely set aside. Nevertheless, it is still true that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally ‘God-breathed’), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The great Reformation cry, “Sole Scriptura” (the Scriptures alone) still challenges Christian behaviour today. That cry needs to be heard in our land again!

ISBN 0 901860 26 3

STP

A Scripture Truth Publication