

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 11:2-16

Topic

Since in Corinth it was considered shameful for a woman to pray or prophesy without a head covering, Paul said, “For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn.”

Title

“The Shorn Ultimatum”

I refer to it as ‘Witness Wear.’ It is clothing that presents a Christian witness. The first one I owned was a sweatshirt from a start-up company called *Living Epistles* that simply but boldly said, *Jesus is Lord*.

Typically it is a t-shirt or a hat, but you can get beanies and socks and shoes that have a Christian symbol (or Scripture) witnessing of your faith. Not to mention jewelry of all kinds.

I came across one article that reported the following:

The Christian clothing sector has become one of the most popular in the American fashion industry. Total sales are more than \$4.5 billion every year. Christian t-shirts are the number one choice of teenagers and youth below 23 years of age, exceeding the popularity of t-shirts from even the NBA.

Among the believers in the church in Corinth, there was a ‘witness wear’ and a ‘witness not-wear’ that was causing problems in the worship service:



- There was something that the men were wearing that they shouldn't have been wearing: "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head" (v4).
- There was something that the women were not wearing that they should have been wearing: "But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head..." (v5).

Does this have any significance to us today? I mean, after all, among the Christian sisters, there are very few head coverings. And the brothers with hats sometimes leave them on during the worship service. Are we therefore violating Scripture?

I'll organize my comments around two questions: **#1 What Was The Dishonoring Head Covering?**, and **#2 Who Was The Head To Be Honored?**

#1 - What Was The Dishonoring Head Covering?

www.headcoveringmovement.com

It's a website devoted to bringing back the wearing of head covering by all Christian women in worship services. I'll say this: They have a really cool logo.

One of the first things you read on the site is this:

The wearing of fabric head coverings in worship was universally the practice of Christian women until the twentieth century. What happened? Did we suddenly find some biblical truth to which the saints for thousands of years were blind? Or were our biblical views of women gradually eroded by the modern feminist movement that has infiltrated the Church?

You might not realize that in many denominations, even in America, **head covering for women is still the norm.**

There is so much disagreement on these verses that I want to do something a little different.

I want to first try to identify what the men were wearing, and what the women were not wearing. Then, with that in mind, we'll go verse-by-verse.

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With so many really competent Bible scholars and commentators in disagreement on certain particulars, we are not going to be the ones who solve this topic once and for all. But we do need to make discoveries and, then, decisions. It isn't enough to dismiss head covering as cultural. We need to see if it's biblical. You sisters either can go on just as you are... Or you'll need to scarf-up.

The Christian brothers in Corinth were wearing something they shouldn't. "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head (v4). A man ought not to cover his head" (v7).

"Head covered" is a poor translation in terms of what is being said about the men. It should be, *having down the head*.

It doesn't mean *hanging* down your head; it means there is something hanging down *from* your head. A Greek scholar says further that it is an expression that would be used of a type of fabric. The question to ask is, "What fabric did the brothers in Corinth hang down from their heads?"

I think we get a big clue in Paul's second letter to these same believers:

2Co 3:12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech -

2Co 3:13 unlike Moses, *who* put a **veil** over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

When Moses came back from visiting God, his face shone with the glory of God. Moses wore a veil afterward so that the Israelites would not see the glory fade. Paul used it to teach a spiritual truth:

2Co 3:15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

2Co 3:16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

There's a lot we could say, but the point for today is this: Wearing the veil wasn't a good thing because it represented God's glory as temporary and fading, whereas in Jesus "the veil is taken away" so that under the New Covenant we go from glory-to-glory.



I suggest (as do others) that what was hanging down the head of the brothers in Corinth was a veil. We can't be certain, but the mention of the veil in the second letter adds weight to the argument.

They were wearing a 'Moses-veil,' they thought, to call attention to the glory of God... *Which was the exact opposite of what the veil Moses wore represented.* So, guys: No more veils, OK?

What the sisters in Corinth were *not* wearing that they should have been was a head covering, e.g., a scarf or a shawl or some such fabric that covered her hair.

It doesn't follow that we ought to join the head covering movement. Head covering was definitely a concern in Corinth, but it was not universally practiced by all the sisters in the New Testament. Two examples:

1. Paul gave instructions to Pastor Timothy in Ephesus on how believers ought to conduct themselves in the household of God. In First Timothy 2:9, Paul instructs, "The women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing." He did not mention head covering. In fact, by telling them not to go overboard braiding their hair he was letting us know that in Ephesus the sisters did not wear head covering.
2. The apostle Peter wrote to dispersed Christians throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (which was much of the Roman Empire South of the Black Sea). In First Peter 3:3, he admonishes the women concerning their adornment, and - almost verbatim what Paul said - says that it should not be based on externals, including braided hair. Again, if the women were practicing head covering, their hair would not be in view. It is reasonable to conclude that the sisters of Peter's audience were not wearing head coverings.

Notice, too, that the head covering is specifically connected to public ministry. "Every woman who **prays** or **prophesies** with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head" (v5). The sisters in Corinth were not being told to wear head coverings at all times - only while participating in worship.

There are other biblical customs that read like commands but are situational:

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- We're told to greet one another with a holy kiss, for example. Inappropriate.
- Jesus said we were to wash one another's feet. Not gonna happen.

This instruction on head coverings follows hard on Paul saying, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God..." (10:23-24). For whatever reason or reasons, women not wearing head covering when participating in the services was offensive in Corinth in a way it wasn't in other places.

We thus teach that brothers should avoid the temptation to wear Moses-veils; and that sisters are free to wear or to not wear head covering.

When in other countries or cultures, or even here in the US, both brothers and sisters ought to conform to what is the norm, becoming all things to all men in order to win them to Jesus.

#2 - Who Was The Head To Be Honored? (v2-16)

Taking these verses from the top... A new topic has begun, and it is order in the worship service. Paul is going to address mistakes they were making with regard to the roles of men and women; mistakes they were making at the communion table; and mistakes with regard to the exercise of spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecy.

1Co 11:2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you.

Wait - I thought they were making mistakes? They were. But they were making them during the practices Paul had established: The worship service, and the Lord's Supper. They were keeping the traditions, just not entirely correctly. I'd rather have to correct someone who is out of order than wonder where they are.

1Co 11:3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.



Whoa; that seems out of nowhere. But it is the foundation for everything Paul had to say about church order - including the roles of men and women in the church. The traditions he established weren't his own man-made order. It was God's order, going all the way back to the creation of Adam and Eve.

We understand God as revealed in the inspired Word of God to be a trinity, a tri-unity, of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There is *one* God Who exists eternally in *three* Persons. They are equally God.

However, for the purpose of achieving the plan of salvation for the human race, God the Son, Jesus Christ, voluntarily subordinated Himself to God the Father. Elsewhere we learn that likewise God the Holy Spirit subordinated Himself to both Father and Son as He is sent by the Father to reveal the Son.

God the Father is the "head." He exercises authority over God the Son. In essence they are equal but for your sake, so that you might be saved, they have adopted different functions. There is a proper order to things.

There is also supposed to be a proper order among human beings. Jesus Christ is the "head" of every man. Each Christian man is to be in voluntary subordination to Jesus.

Where does that put women? It leaves them in voluntary subordination to their husbands and to church leaders. The man is not superior to the woman; in Jesus Christ we are equal.

However, to function according to God's plan for the family and for the church, the man has been assigned as the "head" of the woman.

1Co 11:4 Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head.

As TaserFace explained to Rocket in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*, when asked why he chose that name, "It's metaphorical." The "head" being dishonored isn't a man's physical head. It is Jesus - our spiritual "Head," the Head of His body on earth, the church.



Wearing a Moses-veil to appear spiritual was a big step backward, in a sense devaluing Jesus' work on the Cross.

1Co 11:5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

1Co 11:6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.

Commentators have a lot to say about the customs in Corinth, and what kind of women shaved their heads, and what it symbolized. Truth is, no one knows - except the original recipients - what it was in Corinth that made this shameful. We only know that it did, and that Sinead O'Connor wasn't popular there.

1Co 11:7 For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

1Co 11:8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man.

1Co 11:9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

There's nothing here that is weird, or chauvinistic, or prejudicial. Look back to the foundational principle in verse three, and read where it says, "the head of Christ is God." Does that mean Jesus is somehow less than God, inferior to God? That would be blasphemy. Paul is talking about order; about the right way of doing church, based on God's order established at creation.

Woman is equal to man, as Jesus is equal to God the Father. But Jesus voluntarily assumed the subordinate role of Savior in submission to the Father. Woman, then, as helper is a compliment to man. She is complementarian.

Paul's point: How a sister acts and dresses in public, especially public worship, should adhere to God's divine order in creation.

1Co 11:10 For this reason the woman ought to have a *symbol of* authority on *her* head, because of the angels.

Ahh. The head covering is a "symbol" of her submission to the "authority" of the man. Once again, before you get upset, think of Jesus, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of

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men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6-8).

What do “angels” have to do with the worship service? Warren Wiersbe comments, “In some special way, the angels share in the public worship of the church and learn from the church. Public worship is a serious thing, for the angels are present.”

- In Ephesians 3:10, we read, “to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*,”
- 1Pe 1:12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven - things which angels desire to look into.

1Co 11:11 Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.

1Co 11:12 For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.

Not a matter of superiority; only proper order.

1Co 11:13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

1Co 11:14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?

1Co 11:15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her for a covering.

Hair styles and length can be rebellious:

*She asks me why, I'm just a hairy guy
I'm hairy noon and night, hair that's a fright
I'm hairy high and low, don't ask me why, Don't know
It's not for lack of bread, like the Grateful Dead
Darlin', give me a head with hair, long beautiful hair*

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*Shining, gleaming, steaming, flaxen, waxen
Give me down to there hair, shoulder length or longer
Here, baby, there, momma, everywhere, daddy, daddy
Hair, hair, hair, hair, hair, hair, hair, hair
Flow it, show it, long as God can grow it, my hair*

In the '60s, Singapore enacted a ban on long hair on men, which amounted to a locked door for rock bands like Led Zeppelin. In 1972 the band wasn't even allowed to leave their private jet once they landed in the country.

The Bible nowhere commands a proper length of hair for men and women.

If you think this is it - a command - then how do you explain Samson and John the Baptist? They were Nazirites from birth, and as a symbol of their dedication to God, they were never supposed to get a haircut. Paul himself, in the Book of Acts, took a Nazirite vow - which included him not cutting his hair.

Generally speaking, throughout history men have worn their hair shorter, and women longer. The principle behind Paul's comments is that - wait for it - we should always be careful to maintain biological gender distinctions. They reveal the order of creation.

Verse fifteen is clarifying: "But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her for a covering." A more literal translation is, "her hair is given to her **instead of** a covering."

Was Paul confused? First he said that the sisters must have their heads covered, but then he said their hair was sufficient as a head covering?

It's because of the distinction we pointed out earlier. The sisters in Corinth, for a reason or reasons known to them but not to us, must cover their heads **when praying or prophesying**. But they need not all the time wear head covering. Their long hair was sufficient - so long as it wasn't elaborately braided and decorated so as to call undue attention to themselves

1Co 11:16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God.



John Wesley said, “The several churches that were in the apostles' time had different customs in things that were not essential; and that under one and the same apostle, as circumstances, in different places, made it convenient.” What if Jesus, in His earthly ministry, even one time acted independently of His Father? To quote Vizzini, “*Inconceivable.*” So, too, when we mess with God’s order for the family or the church. It fails to communicate the true servant-nature of our Lord.

You could apply this to contemporary contentions:

- Do women pastors and elders communicate the order God established at creation?
- Does same-sex marriage communicate the order God established at creation?
- Does gender neutrality communicate the order God established at creation?

There’s a lot more here than shawls.

To quote Warren Wiersbe again, “The important thing is the submission of the heart to the Lord and the public manifestation of obedience to God’s order.”

“The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.” We are to communicate that foundational truth to the world by maintaining it in the home and in the household of faith.

Creation declares the glory of God. So can we when we maintain God’s order.

