

Head Coverings in Public Worship

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Introduction

A controversial topic that is avoided by many pastors and sessions today is the issue of head coverings in public worship. There are many reasons why this subject is avoided. (1) It is viewed as a “no win” situation by sessions that do not want to offend people of diverse opinions on the topic. (2) The passage that deals with head coverings is difficult to understand and thus has been used to prove completely different viewpoints. (3) The use of head coverings in public worship today is both rare and unpopular. Indeed, a number of women and even a few men are greatly offended by the use of head coverings in public worship. (Pastors have been fired or asked to resign simply because their wives covered their heads.) (4) Sadly, many pastors in our day view their job *not* as proclaiming truth, but as primarily managing people. Therefore, doctrine and practices that are controversial must be either avoided or explained in a manner that justifies current practice.

Although the use of head coverings in public worship is controversial and unpopular, there are some important reasons why it needs to be considered. One obvious reason is that the apostle Paul devotes a major portion of a chapter in an epistle to this topic. The Spirit-inspired apostle gave detailed argumentation in favor of the practice of head coverings. Everything in God’s word merits our utmost attention. Also, Paul *commands* the use of head coverings for women in worship. If this practice is to be ignored or avoided today, the church must have clear exegetical reasons why. As Christians our utmost allegiance is not to the status quo or the spirit of the age, but to our Lord Jesus Christ and His infallible word.

Before we examine the apostle’s teaching regarding head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, there are a few preliminary considerations. (1) Paul’s teaching on head coverings comes within a larger section of the epistle dealing with disorders related to the public worship of God: the veiling of women (11:2-16); improper conduct at the Lord’s supper (11:17-34); and, the abuse of spiritual gifts (12:1-31). Therefore, the passage under consideration does *not* speak to the issue of whether or not women ought to wear head coverings at all times. (2) Although there is no way to ascertain how Paul became aware of the head covering problem at Corinth, it is likely that he was informed of the abuse by a letter (e.g., see 1 Cor. 7:1). In any case, he considered the problem to be serious enough to deal with at length. (3) This section of Scripture presupposes that at least some women at Corinth had stopped covering their heads in public worship. Although we do not know why women were forsaking the head covering during worship, it may be that some women in the church had misunderstood or misapplied Paul’s teaching that in Christ “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).¹ The apostle’s teaching that, *in the matter of salvation*, social status, race and even

¹ The standard orthodox interpretation of Galatians 3:28 (which was held by the Reformers and was universally accepted until the church was influenced by feminism in the nineteenth century) is that it speaks of the oneness of male and female as beneficiaries of God’s grace in Christ (see Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Cambridge: James Clarke, [1575] 1978), 342-343; John Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 112; John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament*, 9:25; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:663; James W. Porteous, *The Government of the Kingdom of Christ* (Edinburgh, 1873), 168; Ernest DeWitt

differences of gender are totally irrelevant may have been twisted into a statement regarding role differences between men and women. Paul's emphasis on God's ordained order of authority (c.f. 1 Cor. 11:3, 7-9) implies that women needed to be corrected in this area.

(4) The apostle begins the section dealing with abuses in public worship by praising the Corinthians for keeping the traditions (v. 2). The word translated "traditions" (*paradosis*) or "ordinances" (KJV) in this context refers to the Word of God as handed down by Paul. The apostle's giving of praise before correction has puzzled a number of commentators. Why does the apostle begin a section correcting false practices by praising the Corinthians for obeying inspired apostolic doctrine? There are a number of sensible answers to this question. It is possible that the abuses in Corinth were conducted by a small minority in the church. Thus, Paul could praise the main body as being faithful. Another possibility is that Paul commends the Corinthians for being faithful in many areas before he corrects them as an encouragement to even greater faithfulness. In other words he praises them for the good before he admonishes them for the bad. The apostle corrects them in a very loving tactful manner as a father does a sensitive child.

A Foundational Theological Statement

Interestingly, the apostle begins his teaching on head coverings in public worship, not with a rebuke or delineation of the problem, but with a foundational theological statement. "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" (v.3). This theological statement serves as a reference point for verses 4 and 5. The fact that some women in Corinth were not covering their heads during public worship is a symptom of a greater problem. It is an indication of a false understanding of what Jesus' work entails for social relationships in the new covenant era. Therefore, Paul begins with a statement regarding God's ordained order of authority in creation. "With the view of proving that it is an unseemly thing for women to appear in a public assembly with their heads uncovered, and, on the other hand, for men to pray or prophesy with their heads covered, he sets out with noticing the arrangements that are divinely established."² Paul notes four gradations of authority that apply to the created order: God, Christ, men, women. (1) The head of Christ is God. This point refers to the fact that in His incarnate state as Mediator Jesus has voluntarily assumed a position of submission to the Father. Obviously, as the second person of the Trinity, the Son is equal in power and authority with God. (2) The head of every man is Christ. This statement is true in a number of ways. As God and Creator, the Son is supreme Lord over all men and women. Also, in His role as the divine-human Mediator Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). He is the Head of the church and the savior of the body (Eph. 1:22, 23; Col. 1:16). (3) The head of the woman is the man. God has placed the man in a position of authority over the woman. The apostle will go into more detail regarding this principle in verses 7-8. "The man is first in order in being, was first formed, and the woman out of him, who was made for

Burton, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1980), 206-207; Otto Schmoller, *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* ([1870] 1978) 2:88; R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, [1937] 1961), 188-189; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 175-176.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:353.

him, and he not for the woman, and therefore must be head and chief...and she is to be subject to him in every thing natural, civil, and religious. Moreover, the man is the head of the woman to provide and care for her, to nourish and cherish her, and to protect and defend her against all insults and injuries.”³ The covenant headship of the man over the woman was established by God on the sixth day of creation (Gen. 2:18-25). This principle is taught throughout Scripture. A notable example is Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” (see, 1 Pet. 3:1, 5-6; Rom. 7:2; 1Cor. 11: 8-9; 1 Tim. 2:12-13; 3: 4-5, 12; Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:20; 31: 32; Hos. 2: 2, 7; Num. 30:3-15; Ex. 22: 16-17; 21: 1-11).

There are a number of things to note regarding Paul’s initial statement on authority. First, the apostle does not set out to prove the principle of authority and subordination, but merely asserts it as an established fact of God’s created order. Second, the authority structure that Paul sets forth is universal with respect to time and place. As a creation ordinance (that is, a law or principal that is founded upon God’s created reality), the headship of the man over the woman is not in any manner a product of culture or social evolution. The covenant headship of the man over the woman applies throughout all history to each and every culture. Any attempt to circumvent Paul’s teaching regarding this matter is an act of rebellion against God Himself who established this authority structure. Third, the word translated “head” (*kephale*) means “ruler,” “leader,” or “the one who has authority over.” Feminist and egalitarian attempts to avoid the clear meaning of this passage by interpreting the Greek word *kephale* as “source” have been thoroughly discredited.⁴ Fourth, Paul’s statement regarding man’s authority over the woman does not mean that women are inferior to men. Men and women are metaphysically (i.e. as regarding their being, essence or nature) equal, although different in many ways (e.g., Men are physically stronger than women. Peter refers to women as the weaker vessel [1 Pet. 3:7].) Also, they are equal spiritually before God. They are saved and sanctified in the same manner and have the same status as redeemed children of God in Christ (see Gal. 3:28. 1 Pet. 3:7). Therefore, women are not second-class citizens in the family, church or society. The difference between men and women that Paul describes refers to *function* and *purpose*. Man was created to lead in a loving manner (i.e. as a servant leader; Mt. 20:25-28; Eph. 5: 25-33). The woman was created as a helpmeet to submit to her husband in a respectful manner and assist him in the task of godly dominion (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:9; Eph. 5:22-23). Fifth, Paul’s foundational statement in v. 3 informs us that God considers the uncovered head of a woman in public worship shameful, not because it is immodest or contrary to culture, but because it symbolizes a usurpation of God’s created order.

After delineating God’s ordained order of authority, Paul proceeds with concrete examples of violations of this principle and additional arguments in favor of the use of head coverings in public worship.

Dishonor and Shame

In his next argument Paul sets forth a hypothetical situation in public worship in order to discuss appearing in public worship with (for men) or without (for women) a head covering.

³ John Gill, *Exposition of the New Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1809] 1979), 2:683.

⁴ See Wayne Gruden, “The Meaning of *Kephale* (Head): A Response to Recent Studies” in John Piper and Wayne Gruden, ed., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 425 ff.

“Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered, dishonors his head. 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. 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” (1 Cor. 11:4-6).

Praying and Prophesying

Before we consider the apostle’s argument from shame there are a number of things to consider in this passage. There is a need to define the apostle’s reference to praying and prophesying in public worship. Many commentators consider the reference to women praying and prophesying in public worship problematic because in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 women are commanded not to speak during the worship service. Since it is impossible for Scripture to contradict itself, and since it would be especially absurd for the apostle to blatantly contradict himself within the same epistle, scholars have offered a number of different, yet possible, interpretations that answer this alleged difficulty. Calvin argues that Paul’s discussion of women praying and prophesying during public worship is merely hypothetical because he later forbids the practice altogether.⁵ Another possibility is that the apostle regards women setting forth direct revelation from God to be an exception to regular speaking (e.g., the uninspired exposition of Scripture). In other words, since prophecy is God Himself speaking without human exposition, a woman prophesying is not herself exercising authority over a man (see Matthew Henry’s commentary on this passage).⁶

Probably the best interpretation is that the acts of prayer and prophecy mentioned by Paul represent congregational participation in public worship. (Scholars refer to a description of a part [in this case a part of public worship] for the whole as a synecdoche). The commentator John Gill gives an excellent explanation of this passage. He writes, “Not that a woman was allowed to pray publicly in the congregation, and much less to preach or explain the word, for these things were not permitted them: see 1 Cor. xiv.34, 35. 1 Tim. ii.12. But it designs any woman that joins in public worship with the minister in prayer, and attends on the hearing of the word preached, or sings the praises of God with the congregation.”⁷ While it is true that women do not teach in the public assemblies or lead in prayer, they do pray liturgically (i.e. in unison with the whole assembly; e.g., the Lord’s prayer) and they do sing inspired songs that are prophetic Scripture when they sing the Psalms.

The reason it is important to properly understand the meaning of prayer and prophecy is that if coverings were only required during the specific act of setting forth divinely inspired prayer or new divinely inspired teachings directly from God, then one could argue that head coverings for women applied only to the first century for the gift of prophecy ceased with the death of the apostles and the close of the canon. Since the use of head coverings in both the

⁵ Calvin writes, “It may seem, however, to be superfluous for Paul to forbid the woman to prophesy with her head uncovered, while elsewhere he wholly prohibits women from speaking in the Church (1 Tim. ii.12). It would not, therefore, be allowable for them to prophesy even with a covering upon their head, and hence it follows that it is to no purpose that he argues here as to covering. It may be replied, that the Apostle, by here condemning the one, does not commend the other. For when he reproves them for prophesying with their head uncovered, he at the same time does not give them permission to prophesy in some other way, but rather delays his condemnation of that vice to another passage, namely in chapter xiv.” (*Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 11:356; see Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1959), 208-209.

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:561.

⁷ John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 2:684.

Eastern and Western church was universal in the post apostolic era, it is extremely unlikely that head coverings were used only during the exact time that divinely inspired teaching or prayer was being spoken.

What is a Head Covering?

What does Paul mean when he says head covering? Does he refer to a piece of cloth (i.e. a veil), which is the traditional interpretation, or does he refer to long hair? There are a number of reasons why the head covering must be interpreted as a piece of cloth or a veil. First, words and phrases that Paul uses to describe the head covering are used in other places in Scripture to describe a fabric head covering over the head. In verse 4 the unusual phrase *kata kephales echon* translated “having his head covered” which literally means “having down the head” is used in the Greek Septuagint to translate Hebrew phrases referring to cloth head coverings. “[A]lthough Paul’s idiom is somewhat unusual, it is not without precedent. In Esther 6:12 Haman is said to have ‘hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered’ (RSV). The LXX [i.e., the Greek Septuagint] translates this last phrase *kata kephales* (= ‘down the head’). So also Plutarch speaks of Scipio the Younger as beginning to walk through Alexandria ‘having the *himation* down the head,’ meaning that he covered his head with part of his toga so as to be unrecognized by the people. Almost certainly, therefore, by this idiom Paul is referring to an external cloth covering.”⁸

The contrast that Paul sets up between men and women in v. 5 is even clearer than v. 4. Here the apostle uses the phrase “having her head uncovered” or literally “unveiled.” The Greek word in all its various forms used throughout this section (e.g., v. 5, *akatakalypto-* “unveiled”; v. 6, *ou katakaluptetai-* “is not veiled”; v. 6, *katakalyptestho-* “let her be veiled”; v. 7, *ouk ophethei katakaluptesthai-* “ought not to be veiled”; v. 13, *akatakalypton-* “unveiled”) clearly refers to a cloth covering or veil.

This interpretation is supported by the Septuagint (i.e. the Greek translation of the Old Testament completed in 247 B. C.), which used the various forms of *katakalypte* to describe a fabric of cloth covering. In Genesis 38:4-15 the same word (*ekalupisato, katekalupato*) is used to describe Tamar covering herself with a veil. It is obvious that it does not refer to a hair covering. In Isaiah 47:2-3 we read, “Take the millstones and grind meal. Remove your veil (*apokilupsai to katakalumma*), take off the skirt (*anakalupsai tas polias*).... Your nakedness shall be uncovered (*anakaluphthesetai*).” Once again the covering is cloth or fabric.

The word *akalyptos* or covering is derived from the word *kalumna*, which means a veil. The word *kalumna* is used eighteen times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (i.e. the Septuagint; Ex. 26:14; 27:16; 34:33, 34, 35; 39:20; 40:5; Num. 3:25; 4:8, 10, 11, 12, 14 twice, 31; 1 Chron. 17:5). Every time this word occurs in both the Old and New Testament (e.g., Col. 3:13, 14, 15, 16) it always refers to a fabric veil. It is never used to describe the hair. Consequently, unless the immediate context refers to the hair specifically, we should always regard *kalumna* (or one of its derivatives) as referring to a fabric veil worn on top of the hair.

Second, the covering of a man’s head is associated with shame by the apostle Paul. The background of this assertion is the Old Testament where, in times of sorrow or when men experienced shame, they covered their heads with a cloth covering. In 2 Samuel 15:30 we read, “So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his

⁸ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 506-507.

head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up” (cf. Esther 6:12). “Another instance of the Hebrew word is in Jeremiah 14: 3-4, when men are ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads, because of a dearth [of rain] brought by God’s judgment. The only other Old Testament occurrence of this word in the grammatical *Qal* stem is in Ester 7:8; it would seem that in each of these Old Testament events an external cloth covering is what is in view.”⁹

Third, the idea that the covering refers to hair and not a cloth veil is rendered impossible by Paul’s comparison between being uncovered and having short, mannish hair. In verse 5 the apostle says that being uncovered is bad because it is shameful like having short hair (i.e., shorn or shaven). It would be absurd to say that it is wrong or shameful for a woman to have short hair in public worship because having short hair is like having short hair. Note further what the apostle says in verse 6: “For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn.” Would it make sense for Paul to say, “If a woman has short hair, then let her also have short hair”? No, not at all! The apostle is saying that if a woman is going to appear in church without a veil or cloth covering (which is shameful), then she might as well cut her hair short like a slave or lesbian. The apostle’s analogy only makes sense if he is comparing one shameful activity to another shameful act. If both activities are identical, then the whole analogy is nonsense. Some Christians have attempted to circumvent this analogy by defining shorn and shaven in two different manners: one meaning short hair, while the other pointing to a bald head. This argument falls to the ground when we observe the fact that Paul uses the terms as synonyms in verse 6: “shorn or shaved.” The covering can only refer to a cloth or veil; hair simply does not and cannot work in this context.

Fourth, in verse seven Paul says that man is not to be covered because “he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.” Thus, the woman must be covered. Only God’s glory is to be uncovered during the service. In verse 15 we are told that a woman’s long hair is her glory. Since only God’s glory is to be uncovered during public worship, the woman’s glory must be covered. “The hair of a woman cannot be both the glory *and* that which covers the glory! Nothing can be both ‘A’ and ‘non-A’ at the same time and in the same way. Paul taught us that the object which is the glory cannot also cover the glory! And he taught us that only God’s glory is to be seen in the worship service.”¹⁰ Obviously then, the woman’s glory (i.e. her long hair) must be covered with a cloth fabric of some kind.

Is It Hair?

There is one common objection to all the preceding arguments. It usually takes the form of a question. Doesn’t Paul explicitly say in verse 15 that her hair is given to “her for a covering”? In other words, why should a woman wear a veil for a covering when Paul says that long hair is her covering? There are a number of reasons why long hair could not be the covering that Paul requires throughout this chapter. As noted, the meaning of the word for covering used in verses 4, 5, 6, 7 and 13 clearly refers to a cloth covering or veil in Scripture. Interestingly, when the apostle refers to long hair as a covering he uses a completely different Greek word (*paribolain*) in order to distinguish one type of head covering from another. It is noteworthy that when Paul refers to a cloth veil in this chapter he always uses a different form of *kalumna*

⁹ Sherman Isbell, *Authority and the Woman’s Head: Notes on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (1995), unpublished paper.

¹⁰ Richard Bacon, *Paul’s Discourse on the Use of Head coverings in Public Worship: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, TX: 1997), Internet article.

(*katakalupto*, *akatakaluptos*, *akatakalupto*), but as soon as he discusses hair as a covering he introduces a completely unrelated Greek word (*peribolaion*). Paul is making a clear distinction between these two types of coverings that unfortunately is lost in translation. The apostle does not want us to confuse the covering of hair for the covering of cloth (the veil). Further, (as noted) if long hair is substituted for a cloth covering in verses 5 and 6, the passages make no sense whatsoever (e.g., “If your hair is cut short, then let it be cut short”). If Paul’s main concern in chapter 11 is to teach women that they must come to the worship service with long hair then why not simply teach on the necessity of women having long hair *all the time* as a law of nature. There would be no reason to have a separate discussion about long hair in public worship because a woman’s hair is not something that can be removed and replaced in a moment when one desires. Also, the idea that the head covering is long hair would require one to interpret the head covering in reference to men in verse 4 as long hair, which is extremely unlikely.

Paul’s reference to long hair as a natural covering comes in a series of reasons for the use of a cloth covering in public worship. The argument for long hair takes one of Paul’s *sub-points* for the use of a cloth veil and makes it the main proposition of the whole section. If Paul’s only and main concern was simply that women keep their hair long while men keep their hair short, then why not begin the discussion with this point? Also, why would Paul use a word for a cloth covering throughout his argument and then use a different Greek word in verse 15 if he was only concerned about hair styles? One of the greatest problems for the long hair argument is that short lesbian-like hair on women and long effeminate styles on men is not simply a problem for public worship, but is also a clear violation of God’s law relating to maintaining the God ordained difference between the sexes. If women were trying to look like men, which was common lesbian behavior in the Greco-Roman world, Paul would have dealt with this perverse behavior in his section on sexual immorality and would not have treated the matter as something only improper in public worship.

Obviously then, the apostle is pointing to nature (or the natural order) where a woman’s long hair is a natural covering as supporting evidence for the use of a cloth covering in public worship. “The implication is that as *nature* has provided women with a head-dress of hair, she is intended, not, of course, to consider this as a substitute for further covering, but to wear a head-dress when she is praying to God in the company of men, nature being regarded as supplying the norm even for such attire.”¹¹ John Murray writes,

“The Greek of verse 15 is surely the Greek of equivalence as used quite often in the New Testament, and this would justify the rendering, ‘her hair is given her for a covering.’” The covering of long hair provided by nature (verse 15) “does not interfere with the demand for the additional covering contemplated in verses 5, 6, 13,” and indeed Paul appeals to it in support of the artificial covering. Bruce Waltke observes, “The presupposition is used here nearer to its original meaning of ‘over against.’ Her long hair stands ‘over against’ and ‘corresponds to’ the covering desiderated for the public assembly.” The natural covering in verse 15 “asks for” the worship covering of verses 4- 7.

The point is that verses 5, 6 and 13 contemplate an artificial covering which is to be put on for the worship assemblies of the church, while verses 14 and 15 “adduce a consideration from the order of nature in support of that which is enjoined earlier in the passage, but is not itself tantamount to it. In other words, the long hair is an indication from ‘nature’ of the

¹¹ James Moffat, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Hadder and Stoughton, 1938), 154.

differentiation between men and women, and so the head covering required in verses 5, 6, 13, is in line with what ‘nature’ teaches.”¹²

The Greek scholar Buchsel has noted that the preposition *anti* which has the basic meaning of “over against” or “in place of” can refer to “a mere equivalent in estimation...or similarity.” He cites 1 Corinthians 11:15 as an example of similarity.¹³ In other words, Paul is not saying that a woman’s long hair is the head covering that he is arguing in favor of in the worship service, but rather that it is similar to the cloth covering. Nature points to the use of a cloth covering in public worship. Godet writes, “It has been objected, not without a touch of irony, that for the very reason that nature has endowed woman with such a covering, she does not need to add a second and artificial one (Holsten). But this is to mistake the real bearing of the apostle’s argument. All is spiritual in his view. He means that nature, by constituting as it has done each of the two sexes, has given both to understand the manner in which they will fulfill their destiny; for man, it will be public and independent action; for woman, life in domestic retirement and silence. Whoever has the least appreciation of the things of nature, will recognize the profound truth of this symbolism.... Women’s physical constitution is a revelation of the Creator’s will regarding her. Not to conform to this indication, is not merely to offend social propriety, it is to transgress the will of the Creator.”¹⁴

Regarding the argument in favor of long hair as a covering, one more thing needs to be noted. It has been the experience of this author that virtually everyone (pastors, elders, Sessions, individuals) who argues for long hair as a covering in public worship, does not require women to have long hair. Why is this fact important? It is important because it reveals that, at least for many people, the long hair argument is little more than an excuse to avoid the real sign of submission—a cloth head covering. Many avoid this charge by arguing that the apostle’s main concern in this section of Scripture is to teach believers that hairstyles must be different for men and women. In other words, the length is relative. Women’s hair must be at least a little longer or at least a different, more feminine style than men’s. If this assertion is the apostle’s point, then (as noted) why bring it up in a discussion regarding proper attire or decorum during public worship? Are we to believe that a reversal of sexual roles regarding appearance is permitted outside the worship service? Unfortunately, most of the pastors who exegete this section of Scripture today are more interested in justifying current practice than carefully determining the meaning of the text. Pastors who preach sermons that offend a large number of the feminist-influenced women in the church usually suffer some form of persecution.

Dishonoring Your Head

Paul says that a man with a head covering in public worship dishonors his head and a woman without a head covering dishonors her head. What does it mean to dishonor his or her head? There are basically three interpretations of this statement. The first interpretation regards the term “head” metaphorically. Therefore, the man dishonors his head, Jesus Christ, while the woman dishonors her head, the man (i.e. her husband, or father, or for widows the elders, etc.).

¹² John Murray, “The Use of Head Coverings in the Worship of God,” A personal letter written on November 16, 1973, published in *Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*, Winter 1992.

¹³ Buchsel, “anti” in Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:372.

¹⁴ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel [1889] 1977), 557- 558.

In support of this interpretation Fee writes,

The “head” that would be shamed is man’s metaphorical “head,” Christ. Several things make that clear: (1) The asyndeton (no joining particle of conjunction) gives the sentence the closest possible tie to v. 3; (2) Paul uses the personal pronoun “his” rather than the reflexive “his own”; (3) to refer to himself in this way compounds metaphorical usages without warning; (4) otherwise the preceding theological statement has no place in the argument whatever. Therefore, Paul is asserting that if the man were to “have down the head” when praying/prophesying, he would bring shame to Christ in some way, or at least to the relationship established by Christ’s being “head.”¹⁵

The second interpretation regards the term “head” literally. That is, a man who wears a head covering dishonors himself; a woman who does not cover her head dishonors herself. Charles Hodge prefers this interpretation:

1. Because, in the immediately preceding clause the word is used literally, “If he cover his head, he dishonours his head.” 2. Because, in v. 5, the woman who goes unveiled is said to dishonor *her own* head, i.e. as what follows shows, *herself*, and not her husband. 3. It is more obviously true that a man who acts inconsistently with his station disgraces himself, than that he disgraces him who placed him in that station. A commanding military officer, who appears at the head of his troops in the dress of a common soldier, instead of his official dress, might more properly be said to dishonour himself than his sovereign. For a freeman to appear in the distinguishing dress of a slave, was a disgrace. So the apostle says, for a man to appear with the conventional sign of subjection on his head, disgraced himself. If the man be intended to represent the dominion of God, he must act accordingly, and not appear in the dress of a woman.¹⁶

The third view combines the previous views into one. In other words, Paul purposely uses the somewhat ambiguous term “head” (i.e. ambiguous in this context) because he wants the people at Corinth to understand that not only does a violation of proper attire in public worship bring dishonor or shame upon oneself, but also is a dishonorable act toward one’s authoritative head; that is, the one in authority over the man or the women. A man who wears a head covering in public worship shames himself by appearing in the assembly in the attire of a woman and brings dishonor to Christ by covering God’s glory. The woman shames herself by appearing as a man and also dishonors her husband by appearing in a manner that is a usurpation of his authority. “The unveiled woman dishonors her head, because that is the part in which the indecency is manifested. Also by claiming equality with the other sex she disgraces the head of her own sex.”¹⁷ The third view is the most likely given the fact that immediately before verses 4 and 5, “head” clearly refers to the one who has authority over the man or woman. But, immediately following verses 4 and 5, it is obvious that a woman without a covering brings shame upon herself for it is the same as being “shorn or shaved.” A woman who does not wear a head covering shames herself by appearing in a shameful manner and she brings dishonor to her husband by usurping his authority.

¹⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 506.

¹⁶ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1958), 208.

¹⁷ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *First Epistle on St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, [1911] 1978), 230.

Shorn or Shaved

Paul's argument for a cloth covering for women in verses 5 and 6 is dependent upon a comparison between being unveiled in worship and having the head shorn or shaved. (The term "shorn" [*keoro*, to shear as sheep] refers to cutting the hair short with clippers. The word shaven [*churasthai*] refers to a hair cut by a razor. The point of both words is the same: the woman takes on the appearance of a man). This argument raises the question: what is shameful about a woman having short hair? Although it is fairly common to hear sermons where short hair or a shaved head is considered the mark of prostitutes in Corinth, there is no contemporary literary or archeological evidence to support this interpretation.¹⁸ In the Scriptures as well as ancient and modern societies (at least until very recent times), the shorn or shaved head represents shame or disgrace. In Isaiah 7:20 shaving off the hair is used to describe destruction in a very disgraceful manner. Young writes, "No insult could be greater than this. A shorn, disgraced, devastated theocracy..."¹⁹ A very common practice among ancient nations was to shear the hair of conquered peoples. The shaved or shorn head was a sign of shame and humiliation. Slave women often had their heads shaved.²⁰ (Keep in mind that in the ancient world most slaves were obtained as one nation conquered another.) In both the Greek and Roman cultures of Paul's day, the "masculine" or dominant partner in a lesbian relationship often had short hair like a man. This perverse practice is still common among lesbians in our day.²¹

In both Middle Eastern and European cultures, the shearing of a woman's hair is also associated with adultery. Vincent writes,

Among the Jews a woman convicted of adultery had her hair shorn, with the formula: "Because thou hast departed from the manner of the daughter of Israel, who go with their head covered, therefore that has befallen thee which thou hast chosen." According to Tacitus, among the Germans an adulteress was driven from her husband's house with her head shaved; and the Justinian code prescribed this penalty for an adulteress, whom, at the expiration of two years, her husband refused to receive again.²²

During World War II, French women who were discovered to have had a relationship with German soldiers had their heads shaved to bring shame and disgrace upon them for their unseemly behavior. Regarding the Greeks Moffat adds, "This was a well-known reproach for Greek woman. One of Menander's comedies was on the outrage done to a girl by a jealous lover who cut her hair short, and the scene was laid at Corinth; a *shaven* woman was *disgraced*, even if her head was shaved or cropped against her will, and much more so if she cut her own hair short, by way of aping men."²³

It is important to emphasize that although the shearing or shaving of a woman's hair has been viewed as something humiliating, that brings shame upon the woman in virtually every culture throughout history, the apostle's point is not based on culture or custom. Short hair on a woman is shameful because it violates God's natural order. This assertion is evident by the apostle's immediately prior statement regarding God's ordained order of authority (v. 3) as well

¹⁸ See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 511.

¹⁹ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:298.

²⁰ See A. T. Robertson, *Word Picture in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1951), 4:160.

²¹ Fee, 511, footnotes 80 and 81.

²² Marvin, R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1887] 1946), 3: 247.

²³ Moffat, 151.

as other supporting arguments based on the priority in creation (v. 8-9) and verses 14-15 where it is asserted that short hair on a woman is against nature. When God created Adam (man) and Eve (woman), He distinguished them one from another in a number of ways. Long hair on women and short hair on men is one such natural distinction. (This point will be discussed at length when we consider 1 Cor. 11: 14-15). This distinction is also to be reflected in people's attire after the fall. Jehovah says that it is an "abomination" for women to dress like men and vice versa. (Deuteronomy 22:5 reads, "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.")

Let Her Be Shorn

After stating the fact that a woman who attends public worship without a head covering shames her head because the uncovered head is just as shameful as being shaved, Paul drives his point home with two conditional sentences that say essentially the same thing from two different perspectives. First, he says that if a woman refuses to wear a head covering, then let her cut off all her hair. In other words if she is not going to wear a head covering which is shameful, then let her be consistent and thus be even more shameful by cutting her hair off to look like a man. To paraphrase: "If you are willing to shame yourself by refusing to wear the sign of submission which is proper, then make your rebellion and the shame that goes with it explicit, obvious and even more shocking by appearing in church like a man."

Then, Paul turns the argument around with another conditional sentence. If it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off (i.e. "shorn" or "shaved") which it most certainly is, then let her wear a head covering. Note that at the end of verse 6 the apostle issues the imperative or command: "let her hair be covered." The use of the imperative form means that Paul is not merely offering friendly advice or offering a suggestion regarding a voluntary matter. The apostle under divine inspiration *orders* women to wear a cloth head covering in public worship. We may not like what Paul has to say. It may not fit in our modern "liberated" culture where women often want to look and act like men. It may not be popular in modern evangelical and Reformed churches, which sadly are often influenced by our degenerate heathen culture. The thing that matters is that God has made His will known to us regarding this issue in His authoritative Word. Therefore, we must submit to it whether we want to or not; whether it is popular or not. It is an issue of divine command. When Paul comes to the end of the section that addresses abuses in public worship (including the issue of head coverings, chapters 11-14) he underlines his teachings by reminding the Corinthians of his apostolic authority. He writes, "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" (1 Corinthians 14:37). "The continued influence of Christ by the Spirit over the minds of his apostles, which is a divine prerogative, is here assumed or asserted."²⁴

The apostle's whole argument thus far is rooted upon the way God intended things to be in creation. The argument from God's ordained order of authority and nature should not be construed as and logically cannot be an argument from culture or custom.

²⁴ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 307.

The Glory of Man

The apostle's main argument is based on man and woman's position in creation as it relates to glory. 1 Corinthians 11:7 reads, "For man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man." Paul says that man is morally obligated not to cover his head because he is the image and glory of God. "The verb *opheilei* [ought], which appears again in v.10, usually carries moral overtones, this is something that should, or should not be, done."²⁵ On the other hand, the woman is obligated to wear a head covering because she is the glory of man.²⁶

This statement raises the question: what does Paul mean by "image" and "glory"? The apostle is clearly referring back to the creation account in Genesis (see Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18-24). In the creation account, Genesis 1:27, both man and woman are referred to as the image of God. Both bore the likeness of their Creator; both were created with knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Yet there is a difference between the man and the woman. Man is said to image God in a unique manner that the woman does not. Man is God's glory in a sense that the woman is not. How does the Bible set man apart from woman? The answer to this question is the key to understanding Paul's point. The major difference between man and woman respects man's ordained role in taking dominion over the earth. The man images God in a different manner than woman because the man has the leadership role in the family, the church and the state. The woman has been placed by God in a subordinate role, a role of submission to the man. These different roles are illustrated in the creation account (Gen. 2: 18-24) where Adam is made directly from the dust of the ground and Eve is created through the man (Paul will even elaborate on this observation in vs. 8-9: from God to the man, from man to the woman).

The term "glory" is not mentioned in the Genesis account. However, Paul's use of this term in this context is not difficult to discern. How is man God's glory? Man is God's glory not only because he is the crown of God's creation, but also because he reflects Jehovah's divine majesty, kingship or sovereignty as no other creature does. God created man directly from the dust to rule over all creation. As the covenant head he has the *direct* responsibility of leadership, of pursuing the dominion mandate, of directing the covenantal spheres of life (e.g., the family, the church, the state). Man is reflective of God's attribute of sovereignty in a special way. Therefore, according to Paul's inspired teaching, if a man covers his head in public worship, he is symbolically denying his special place as God's image and glory. Therefore, it is wrong for a man to cover his head. "Because of this high dignity Paul feels it right that there should be no sign of subordination about man when he worships"²⁷

The woman, on the other hand, is man's glory. She was taken out of man to be a helper suitable to him. She is his special assistant in the task of Godly dominion. She does not reflect God's glory as a ruler, but rather reflects the man's glory as a sovereign for she serves under his authority. "She receives and reveals what there is of majesty in him. She always assumes his station; becomes a queen if he is a king, and manifests to others the wealth and honour which may belong to her husband"²⁸ Therefore, a woman must worship with her head covered.

²⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 514, footnote 8.

²⁶ In verse 7 Paul uses a figure of speech (an ellipsis) whereby the obligation of the woman in 7b is purposely left out because it is already implied as the opposite of what is obligated to do in worship.

²⁷ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 153.

²⁸ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 210.

While all of this may seem a bit esoteric to modern minds which have been conditioned to an extent by our perverse culture that rejects the God ordained authority structure, it really is a simple and beautiful argument. In public worship God's glory is not to be covered. The Christian man who has been redeemed by Christ and thus restored to his proper position as a dominion man in Christ should reflect God's glory publicly during worship. The Christian woman is to exhibit her faith in Christ and her restoration to her God-given task under her husband by covering her head during public worship. God's glory is to be on display during worship, while the man's glory is covered. Paul's argument here makes it abundantly clear that the head covering issue is not simply a matter of culture or custom. The uncovered head of the man and the covered head of the woman reflect the horizontal relationship of man and woman established at creation and the vertical relationship between redeemed man and woman and God during public worship. The restoration of man and woman's relationship to creation, each other and God is on display in Christian assemblies. It is something that the angels of God can observe and learn from.

Covenant Headship or Creation Ordinance

The apostle supports the preceding argument by noting two historical facts recorded in the account of Adam and Eve's creation. (This verse not only supports Paul's argument regarding glory in verse 7, but also the apostle's beginning statement in verse 3: "the head of the woman is the man".) First, Eve originated from Adam. "Adam was not in any way derived from (*ek*) a woman; he was created directly by God. The opposite is the fact regarding woman. Eve was derived from (*ek*) Adam: bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'."²⁹ Paul makes a similar statement regarding the creation of Adam and Eve to prove the subordination of the woman to the man in 1 Timothy 2:12-13. He writes, "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve." The inspired apostle says that God's method of creating Adam and Eve serves a distinct purpose. God was setting forth the creation of Adam and Eve as the archetypes of man and woman for all subsequent generations. Adam was created first because he is the leader, the covenant head of the woman. Eve originated from Adam to be at his side as a helpmeet. Matthew Henry points out that this does not mean that the woman is inferior but that her purpose in life is different: "Yet man being made last of the creatures, as the best and most excellent of all, Eve's being made after Adam, and out of him, puts an honour upon that sex, as the glory of the man, I Cor. xi. 7. If a man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust double-refined, one removed further from the earth."³⁰ The man is created first and is a reflection of the divine glory, while woman is created second, out of the man and thus is reflection of that original reflection.

Second, Paul refers to the purpose of the woman. Eve was created for Adam, as a helpmeet unto him. "[S]he was created on his account, and not he on hers."³¹ "She was naturally therefore, made subject unto him, because made for him, for his use, and help, and comfort. And she who was intended to be always in subjection to the man should do nothing in the Christian

²⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937), 44.

³⁰ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: McDonald Publishing House, n. d.), 1:19.

³¹ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 210

assemblies, that looks like an affectation of equality.”³² God could have created Adam and Eve at the same time and in the same manner. But, He created Adam first and then took Eve out of Adam to teach us about covenant headship and authority in marriage. Paul is telling us that man and woman’s relationship (where the wife is subordinate to her husband and the woman is the glory of the man) is founded upon a creation ordinance. These realities abide forever and must be reflected in public worship. *The apostle’s directives regarding the head covering in connection with public worship are based not on culture or custom, temporary or contemporary conditions or circumstances, but on two facts from the original creation of Adam and Eve.* Therefore, Paul’s teaching on head covering cannot be circumvented by an appeal to culture as if Paul was only concerned that Christians not offend the pagan Greek’s principles of fashion for woman.

Because of the Angels

Paul, in verse 10, gives an additional reason for head coverings: “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” This verse raises two questions. What does Paul mean by “authority” (Greek, *exousia*—power, authority) and what does the term “angels” refer to? The term power or authority refers to the cloth covering on a woman’s head, which is a sign that she is under the authority of her husband. Poole writes, “The thing signified is here put for the sign, as the sign is often put for the thing signified. Thus the ark, which is called, *the ark of God’s strength* Psal. cxxxii. 8, is itself called, *his strength* 1 Chron. xvi. 11.”³³ The apostle argues that a woman must have a symbol on her head which points to her covenant head’s authority. The veil indicates that she joyfully and willingly submits to the authority of the man God has placed over her. She recognizes his headship. Interestingly, it has been this writer’s experience that women do indeed understand the symbolism of the head covering. This understanding is usually expressed in hatred and contempt for the sign of submission. The reason for the angry opposition to head coverings is not because women have a natural hatred of hats and veils, but because of their sinful opposition to what the cloth covering represents—the subordination of the woman. We do not find the modern spirit of feminism in godly Rebecca who puts on her veil in the presence of Isaac as a token of subjection (Gen. 24: 65).

The second word that needs to be defined is “angels”. There are only two plausible interpretations of this word in this particular context. One possibility is that Paul is using the word to refer to ministers and officers in the church, which are sometimes identified as angels in Scripture (e.g., Rev. 2: 1, 8, 12, 3:1, 7, 14). The best and most common interpretation is that the apostle is referring to the angels of God (i.e. the holy angels) who are ministering spirits for the good of God’s elect. The Bible repeatedly affirms that angels are concerned for and active on behalf of Christ’s church. Luke tells us (15:7, 10) that the angels in heaven celebrate the conversion of every sinner. Godet says,

[A]ccording to Eph. iii .10, they behold with adoration the infinitely diversified wonders which the Divine Spirit works within the Church; that, according to 1 Tim. v. 21, they are, as well as God and Jesus Christ, witnesses of the ministry of Christ’s servants; finally, that, in this very Epistle (iv. 9), they form along with men that intelligent universe which is the spectator of the apostolic struggles and sufferings. Why, then, should they not be invisibly present at the

³² Matthew Henry, 6:562.

³³ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1963 [1685]), 3:578.

worship of the Church in which are wrought so large a number of those works of grace? How could an action contrary to the Divine order, and offending that supreme decorum of which the angels are the perfect representatives, fail to sadden them? And how, finally, could the pain and shame felt by these invisible witnesses fail to spread a sombre shade over the serenity of the worship? In Christ heaven and earth are brought together (John i. 52).³⁴

In Isaiah 6:2 we are told that the angels cover or veil themselves as they worship. The angels were also witnesses of God's original creation of the earth (Job 38:7) where the creation ordinance of covenant headship was established. Although Paul does not elaborate on how or why angels would understand that women worshipping without their heads covered is shocking and disorderly, his whole argument presupposes that such is the case. This point raises the question: If the head covering issue was merely a matter of custom or culture would the angel argument make any sense? Are angels offended if women are not fashionable or if women do not act in accordance with Greek or Roman concepts of proper attire? No, of course not! Once again note that Paul is not appealing to cultural norms or temporary considerations.

After going into considerable detail regarding the covenant headship of the man and the subordination of the woman (especially in relation to creation) Paul stops to discuss the mutual dependence between man and woman. He writes, "Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are of God" (vs. 11-12). Why does Paul stop to state the obvious: that the woman came from the man (Adam) and that since creation all men have been born by a woman? After stating that woman is man's glory and created for his sake, the apostle wants to avoid any impression that woman exists as a slave to man or that the woman is inferior to the man. "What Paul has been saying might easily be understood of an undue subordination of women. This is far from his thought. There is a partnership between the sexes and in the Lord neither exists without the other."³⁵ God has set up the authority structure the way He has not so men can lord it over women, but so they can more effectively serve Christ and fulfill the dominion mandate. "The apostle's single object is to show the true nature and limitations of the subordination of the woman to the man."³⁶ Given the great abuse that women have suffered at the hands of heathen men and the fact that Christian men must still deal with their sinful natures, Paul's reminder is needed. "The subordination of the wife to her husband is tempered in Christ by the oneness of the spiritual life which they both draw from the Lord."³⁷

An Appeal to Christian Conscience

After noting the mutual dependence of men and women in the Lord, Paul makes an appeal to the Christian conscience. "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered"(v. 13)? What does the apostle mean by the statement "judge among yourselves"? Is Paul saying that the head covering issue is a matter of personal opinion or an issue that can be determined by human autonomy? No, not at all! He is appealing to the Christian conscience, which is directed by God's revelation in Scripture and in nature. Paul had just given them Spirit inspired teaching regarding God's ordained order of authority and the

³⁴ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, 553.

³⁵ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 155.

³⁶ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 212.

³⁷ Godet, 553.

constitution of things as created by God. He had made it very clear that the facts of creation (e.g., both the manner in which Adam and Eve were made and the purpose for which they were created) teach that it is wrong for a woman to attend public worship with her head uncovered. The apostle will reinforce the impropriety of woman worshipping without a head covering in the very next verse where he again appeals to nature or the natural order of things as created by God.

That Paul is *not* appealing to the human conscience, as an *independent* standard, is supported by the form of the question itself. The apostle's question is rhetorical and is framed in such a manner that it demands a negative response. Therefore, the apostle is not stopping in the middle of his teaching on head coverings merely to say, "Well, what do *you* think about this?". He is saying, "You know that it is improper, shameful and wrong for a woman to worship in the public assembly with her head uncovered". Paul asks the rhetorical question in order to emphasize the point that everyone whose judgment is submitted to God's Word ought to know this truth.

Paul's Appeal to the Natural Order

In support of the preceding rhetorical question Paul appeals to nature. He writes, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering" (vs. 14-15). The central question that arises from Paul's rhetorical question regarding nature is: What is the meaning of the term "nature"? One's understanding of this term will have a profound impact on the relevance of this section of Scripture for today's church. Given the importance of this term we will analyze some of the more common interpretations before presenting what we consider to be the biblical meaning of the term.

A common understanding of the passage is that Paul was following the popular Greek philosophy of his own day, which considered cultural customs as extensions of natural law. There are a number of serious problems with this view.

First, it ignores the fact that Paul not only wrote under divine inspiration, but also that he had condemned human philosophy in another epistle (see Col. 2:2-10, 20-23). Obviously, he had no regard for the opinion of sinful men in determining church ordinances.

Second, this interpretation makes Paul out to be a pragmatist whose main concern in this chapter is *not* the upholding of universal principles that flow from God's created order but, rather, the avoidance of social criticism. In other words the apostle wants public worship to conform to Greek and Roman culture so that the heathen will not be offended. This cultural offense could hinder the spread of the gospel and disturb the peace of the church.

Third, the example that Paul used (men having short hair and women having long hair) was not universally practiced in Paul's own day (this point will be examined in more detail below). Indeed, there has never been a time in history that short hair on men was a *universal* custom. If Paul was in any sense merely accommodating culture then: (1) the universal nature of Paul's argument falls to the ground; (2) one could expect Paul to determine rules regarding head coverings according to the custom of the region (e.g., in the Germanic areas a different custom could be observed in public worship than in Greek areas.); (3) the apostle could not argue that attending public worship without a head covering was *not* practiced in any of the Christian churches (1 Cor. 11:16).

Fourth, the idea that Paul was merely following cultural practices of his own day (instead of basing his argument on something universal in creation, that is trans-cultural), turns the

apostle into a *cultural relativist* with regard to public worship. If we accept this interpretation, then this section on head coverings really has no direct application to our own day, because in modern western culture virtually anything is acceptable. There are women with short hair in virtually every profession. There are even women with Mohawk haircuts and shaved heads. Further, long hair on men has been acceptable ever since the 1960s even though it is no longer fashionable. People who reject cloth head coverings on the basis of the cultural argument need to answer the following questions: If a time comes when virtually all women wear short hair because society regards it as feminine and fashionable should churches require women to have short hair in order not to conflict with the surrounding custom? What about missionaries who must function in strange cultures? If a culture regards a plate worn in the lip of a woman to be a sign of submission should church authorities require it in public worship? The answer to these questions is obvious. Once one connects the apostle's commands to cultural convention in any way, the passage as a whole becomes determined by culture. For the Christian, culture is to be determined by God's law as revealed in Scripture and not the other way around.

The Cultural Argument

Another view (which has much in common with the previous view) is that Paul does appeal to God's created order throughout chapter 11, but that the cultural manifestation of God's role for men and women is not fixed. In other words, the cloth veil is a cultural manifestation of a universal truth and thus is only required in cultures that consider veils to be signs of a wife's submission to her husband, or, more generally the subordination of women to men. The gist of this argument is that veils were required in Paul's culture, but they are not required in our culture because their use and meaning is no longer recognized. This view is very common among evangelical scholars today. While this interpretation is superior to the previous interpretation (where Paul is essentially mimicking Greek philosophy), it nevertheless is subject to many of the same objections. Note the following problems with this interpretation.

First, it presupposes that Paul was enforcing a Greek custom with no historical or textual support. Was it the universal practice of Greek or Roman women to walk about in public veiled as the cultural argument assumes? If it can be established that it was not the common practice for Greek or Roman women to wear veils in public or in their religious rituals, the whole cultural argument falls to the ground. After an exhaustive study of the dominant practice regarding head coverings in Paul's day, the German scholar Oepke essentially concludes that Paul was imposing a biblical custom upon the Greeks that was contrary to their normal practice. Note the following conclusions of his study. He writes,

It used to be asserted by theologians that Paul was simply endorsing the unwritten law of Hellenic and Hellenistic feeling for what was proper. But this view is untenable. To be sure, the veil was not unknown in Greece. It was worn partly as adornment and partly on such special occasions as match-making and marriage (--559), mourning (--559, cf. also Penelope), and the worship of chthonic deities (in form of a garment drawn over the head). But it is quite wrong that Greek women were under some kind of compulsion to wear a veil in public. Plut. may seem to suggest this. ...But the first passage refers to the Roman custom, concerning which Plut. may not have been too well informed, and the second reflects special Laconic customs. Passages to the contrary are so numerous and unequivocal that they cannot be offset by two sayings of the sage of Chaironeia which are not apodictic and which may have been occasioned by special trend. The mysteries inscription of Andania (Ditt. Syll., 736), which gives an exact description

of women taking part in the procession, makes no mention of the veil. Indeed, the cultic order of Lycosura seems to forbid it. Empresses and goddesses, even those who maintain their dignity, like Hera and Demeter, are portrayed without veils, whereas hetaerae occasionally wear hoods. Helen appears before Paris with the upper part of the body uncovered, but with a veil. At the time of Tertullian Jewesses were prominent on the streets of North Africa because they wore veils (De Corona, 4, ed. F. Oehler, I [1853], 424 ff.; De Oratione, 22 [CSEL, 20, 193]). *Hence veiling was not a general custom; it was Jewish.* If the veiling of Jewish women was common in the West, we may presume that it was an accepted rule in the East. *The Jew regarded it as typical of Gentile women that they should go about unveiled* (Nu. r., 9 on 5:18, Str.-B., III, 429)... Yet, though the custom [i.e., of wearing a veil] was applied with particular stringency by the Jews, it was oriental rather than distinctively Jewish. The home city of Paul, i.e., Tarsus, is the frontier. Evidence of the veil in Tarsus is provided by Dio Chrys. Or., 33, 46 and coins bearing the image of Tyche of Tarsus. There are exceptions. But Tarsus is stricter than the rest of Asia Minor. In general one may say that etiquette as regards the veil becomes stricter the more one moves east. This rule is brought out clearly by the provisions of an old Assyrian code. Married women and widows must be veiled when in public places. On the other hand, the head of the harlot, here equated with the slave, must remain unveiled under threat of severe penalties. When a man wishes to make one of these his legitimate wife, a special act of veiling is demanded. *Paul is thus attempting to introduce into congregations on Greek soil a custom which corresponds to oriental and especially Jewish sensibility rather than Greek.* In principle the demand ought to extend to all women in all situations. In practice, however, Paul applies it to married women in the churches, and in the first instance he restricts it to the sphere of life which stands directly under the jurisdiction of the congregation, i.e., divine worship.”³⁸

McKnight notes that William Ramsay, who was an expert on the Greek culture of Paul’s day, concurs:

Historically, it was a covering commonly worn in public by women of Jewish origin but not by the Greek women. The covering used by Jewish women is thought by many commentators to have been a large piece of cloth which was a common article of clothing such a shawl or cape. The cloth would serve as a head covering at any time it was appropriate. Concerning the difference in Greek and Jewish custom, we find that Dion Chrysostom (writing in 110 A. D.) recognized nothing that was “Greek” about the Tarsians (of the Greek city of Paul); but he did find one thing worthy of praise. He was very pleased with the extremely modest dress of the Tarsian women, who were always deeply veiled when they went abroad. And this was in spite of the fact that **it was utterly different from the Greek customs.** (The Cities of St. Paul, William Ramsay, p. 202). In other words, a covering was not the custom in other cities and especially Greek cities.”³⁹

If it was the cultural practice of Greek or Roman women to wear head coverings in public or during their religious rituals, then one could understand the argument from culture. But, the teaching of Paul was in direct contrast to the Greco-Roman practices of that day.⁴⁰ The apostle

³⁸ Oepke, “Kalupto” in Gerhard Kittle, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:562-563. Emphasis added.

³⁹ Clyde McKnight, *Concerning The Head Covering*, Internet article, <http://home:texoma.net/~moses/headcover.htm>.

⁴⁰ There was a cult in the Greco-Roman world where *both* men and women covered their heads during the pagan sacrifice. This practice, however, was not something that influenced the apostle’s teaching on public worship at all. Jewish men began to cover their heads in the public service of the synagogues probably a few generations *after* the close of the N.T. canon of Scripture. The priests who ministered in the temple service covered their heads during their ministrations. This practice, however, should not be considered a contradiction to Paul’s teaching in 1

was not honoring Greek practice, nor was he instructing women to wear cloth veils in worship because their non-use would have been offensive to Greek society. Paul's inspired teaching (if anything) would have been offensive to Greek culture. It would have been considered a distinctly Jewish or eastern practice. Clearly, the apostle was imposing a biblical practice upon a distinctly pagan culture. The idea that Paul was following Greek culture rather than directing it has no merit whatsoever. What all of this means, then, is that modern American, European, African or Asian culture must submit to Paul's directives in 1 Corinthians 11 whether or not his instructions are culturally acceptable or not. The Bible is to direct culture and not the other way around. Further, it has been the experience of this author that modern women throughout the United States do indeed understand the significance and meaning of the head covering. This understanding is one of the reasons that the head covering is so strongly hated and opposed by feminists of all types.

Second, Paul's example of men with long hair as being against nature would not have been acceptable to many Greeks. As Moffat notes,

[H]is Greek hearers must have welcomed an appeal to nature. But they would be taken aback by being asked if long hair was not disgraceful for men. What of the long-haired Spartan heroes in far-off days? What of philosophers at the present day who wore their hair long as an ascetic trait, or to show their indifference to the world? Why, 'the Greek wears long hair on his head because he is a Greek, not a barbarian,' as the moralist Apollonius protested (Epist. viii.). Paul thought it effeminate, however, and praised the braided tresses (I Pet. iii. 3) of women as not merely a glory, or ornament, but as a sort of covering.

The implication is that as nature has provided woman with a head-dress of hair, she is intended, not, of course, to consider this as a substitute for further covering, but to wear a head-dress when she is praying to God in the company of men, nature being regarded as supplying the norm even for such attire.⁴¹

When considering ancient hair styles Aune writes,

Long hair was often regarded by the Greeks a sign of effeminacy in male (H. Herter, "Effeminatus," *RAC* 4:629) or moral laxity in a female Ps. Phocylides 212). Fashions change, however, for Greek men once favored long hair (Herodotus 1. 82; Plutarch *Lysander* 1; co. Plato *Phaedo* 89 B-C) though by the fifth century B. C., only Spartan men wore their hair long (Aristophanes *Aves* 1281-82; Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 8.7). The Romans wore their hair long until the third century B. C., after which they considered long hair either barbaric or old fashioned (Juvenal 5.30). The Gauls wore their hair long, and as a result northern Gaul was

Corinthians 11 because: (1) the priest's sacrificial duty's were ceremonial; (2) the priests were not worshipping in a public service with their families but were serving God by themselves as a special class set apart; (3) The turban on the head of a priest has a completely different meaning than the veil on the head of a woman. (4) The priests were wearing a special uniform. "Essentially a uniform draws attention to the office or function of person, as opposed to his individual personality. It emphasizes his job rather than his name." (G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 138) Regarding the high priest's dress Wenham adds, "In putting on these clothes he took to himself all the honor and glory of the high priesthood.... His glorious clothing symbolized the significance of his office. Probably symbolic significance was also attracted to the individual items in the priestly attire, but that now escapes us." (*Ibid*, 139) Kellogg writes, "The official robes of the high priest marked him...as the servant of *the God of the tabernacle*, whose livery he wore. For these colours, various modifications of light, all thus had a symbolic reference to the God of light, who made the universe of which the Mosaic tabernacle was a type." (S. H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock, 1978 [1899]), 193)

⁴¹ James Moffat, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Houghton and Stoughton, 1958), 154.

called *Gallia Comata*, “long-haired Gaul.” Apollonius of Tyana, following the practice of philosophers, wore his hair disheveled (Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* 8.7). Parthian warriors wore their hair long (Plutarch *Crassus* 24.2), and many interpreters have understood the demonic locust army as mytho-poetic imagery for the Parthian threat (see *Excursus 16A: Rome and Parthia*).⁴²

The teaching of Paul that long hair on a man is shameful was not universally accepted in the ancient world, nor is it accepted today.

The only position that makes sense in both the broad and narrow context of the passage is that nature refers to God’s created order and that the differences in the sexes that God established at creation are universal and binding. Therefore, the head covering for women in public worship is not based on a localized or temporal custom but on creation itself. There are a number of reasons why this interpretation is unavoidable. First, the word nature (*phusis*) in Scripture is never used to describe culturally relative customs. It rather is used to describe moral principles established at creation. Paul writes, “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature [*phusis*]” (Rom. 1:26). Homosexual behavior, the apostle says, is against nature; that is, it is against God’s original order established at creation. The concept of the law of nature in Scripture is never man’s opinion regarding what he sees in the world after the fall. It is never a principle derived *apart* from written revelation. Also, obviously it is never something that can contradict Scripture. The law of nature and the law of Scripture teach the same thing. Paul can assume that the differences of appearance between men and women are obvious facts of the created order not because this was the opinion of the Greeks or Romans but because it was the teaching of God’s infallible Word. God’s Word says that transvestite dress, the unisex style or homosexual role reversal dress is an “abomination” to the Lord (Duet. 22:5). It is a blatant, perverse act against God’s created order. Likewise, the autonomous reversal of hairstyles is an abomination.

When Paul asks the historical question regarding nature teaching that long hair on a man being shameful (Note that the apostle uses the same word [Greek—*atimia*] in Romans 1:26 to describe the vile nature of homosexual behavior) he is reflecting the teaching of God’s law. We know that long hair on men was not acceptable during the Old Covenant era by means of historical example. When God wanted to set the Nazarites apart from the other Jewish men, He ordered them to allow their hair to grow (Num. 6:5). The Nazarite could be immediately identified in Israel, as a man living in unique separation unto God, by his longer than ordinary hair.⁴³ When God wants to emphasize the terrifying and perverse nature of the beasts from the

⁴² David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 532.

⁴³ God’s forbidding of those men who take the Nazarite vow to cut their hair (Num. 6:5) raises an obvious question regarding Paul’s statement about long hair being shameful and against the created order. If it is wrong or shameful for a man to have long hair, then how could God command the Nazarites to let their hair grow long? There are a number of reasons why the Nazarite vow should *not* be used to overturn the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. First, it was well known to the Israelites that the Nazarite vow was extraordinary and that the long hair of the Nazarite had nothing to do with effeminacy. The long hair symbolized an increase of the Spirit’s power, which increased faith, virtue and grace. The hair pointed to a greater consecration unto God. Second, God who established the natural order of things has the right to make exceptions to the normal order of things; we do not. Third, there are positive elements regarding appearance that God can or could changed that do not contradict the moral law in any way. God created Adam and Eve with a difference in appearance. Eve had long beautiful hair and Adam had short hair. Jehovah could have made the difference hair color (e.g., men- black hair; women- pink hair) but He chose hair length as the difference. Thus, while under normal circumstances men should have short hair exceptions can be

bottomless pit He says “they had hair like women’s hair and their teeth were like lion’s teeth” (Rev. 9:8). The long hair on these beasts emphasizes their evil, perverted and contrary nature.

Second, if one accepts the interpretation that by “nature” Paul is referring to Greek and Roman customs and that as customs change the apostle’s imperatives regarding head coverings can be set aside or applied in a completely different manner, then one has defined the law of nature in a relativistic manner. Such a view is totally contrary to Scripture which teaches that God has one law or ethical standard which is communicated to mankind in *two ways*: through the Bible and through nature (Ps. 19, cf. vs. 2-3, 8-9). This explains why the Gentile pagan nations are often condemned by God for transgressing the ethical precepts revealed in God’s law (including the moral case laws) even though they did not have written revelation. The natural revelation of God’s law should never be set in opposition to the special revelation of God’s law. It also obviously should not be treated as relativistic law that is constantly changing according to corrupt man’s evolving concepts of what is right and wrong. Once we understand the manner in which the Bible defines nature as relating to Christian conduct, all attempts to place head coverings in the category of the foot washing or the Middle Eastern greeting (e.g., “greet one another with a holy kiss”) are overthrown.

Third, Paul’s appeal to nature as a reality of God’s created order fits perfectly with the immediate context. The apostle had discussed God’s ordained order of authority (1 Cor. 11:3), the shameful of the woman’s uncovered head in worship (1 Cor. 11:6), the appeal to the creation of man and woman and their created purpose (1 Cor. 1:7-9); and the observation of angels (1 Cor. 11:10). The appeal to nature (biblically defined) summarizes, emphasizes and serves as a climax to all the preceding arguments based on creational reality (i.e. the way God intended things to be). The reason the woman has been created in a certain manner with a different appearance (e.g., the long beautiful hair—her *natural* covering) is that women have a distinctive calling from God. This calling is to be exhibited in public worship by the use of a veil. The idea that Paul defines nature as a changing, arbitrary custom undermines the apostle’s previous arguments from creation and the created order rather that supports them. Something that is in flux that can have completely different meanings over time and geographical areas cannot serve as foundation for behavior in public worship. This point is supported by modern evangelical and Reformed churches that use the custom argument to ignore or overturn the teaching of the apostle throughout the chapter. In other words, a decisive argument for head coverings by the apostle has been twisted into a decisive counter argument against head coverings.

A Universal Church Practice

Paul concludes his discussion of head coverings in public worship by an appeal to apostolic authority and universal church practice. “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16). There are a number of important things to note regarding this verse.

Paul’s discussion of head coverings both begins and ends with an appeal to apostolic authority (cf. vs. 2 and 16). While the apostle supports the use of head coverings with careful argumentation from general and special revelation, he reminds the Corinthians of his special authority in this matter as an inspired apostle. Indeed, Paul emphasizes apostolic authority by

made for Nazarites and for those who couldn’t cut their hair for health reasons. This point, however, does not mean that we can overturn Paul’s command because of customs or personal opinion.

using the pronoun “we”—“we have no such custom”. In context the “we” refers to all of the apostles. The apostle’s inspired, authoritative teachings, which have been inscripturated for our benefit, are foundational for the church and authoritative for all time (Eph. 2:20). Paul’s appeal to apostolic authority is designed to shut the door completely upon all further debate concerning head coverings. Paul in essence is saying: “Look, if you want to argue about this matter (i.e., against head coverings in public worship), then I want you to know that you are not only contradicting me but also all of the apostles. We all stand with one accord on this issue and not only we but so do *all* the churches of Jesus Christ.” Hodge writes,

With such persons [i.e. contentious trouble makers] all argument is useless. Authority is the only end of controversy with such disturbers of the peace. The authority here adduced is that of the apostles and of the churches. The former was decisive, because the apostles were invested with authority not only to teach the gospel, but also to organize the church, and to decide everything relating to Christian ordinances and worship. The authority of the churches, although not coercive, was yet great. No man is justified, except on clearly scriptural grounds, and from the necessity of obeying God rather than man, to depart from the established usages of the church in matters of public concern.⁴⁴

One could walk into any first century Christian church, whether in Asia Minor, Palestine, Greece, or Rome, and observe a lesson in covenant headship and the Christian family. Sadly, the opposite is true today. Modern declension can be observed in most churches every Sabbath because the apostolic injunction is rarely observed. Feminism and sloppy man-pleasing exegesis have contributed to the widespread disobedience to apostolic authority today. The only remedy for such rebellion against this biblical imperative (see 1 Cor. 11:6b) is repentance.

Note also that unlike modern Reformed churches, which teach and practice diversity on this issue, Paul demands uniformity of doctrine and practice. The apostle says that if anyone seems to be contentious (i.e. disposed to quarrels or dissentious argumentation) about this matter they must stop and submit themselves to apostolic authority and universal church practice. Paul understands that there are people in the church who disagree with his teaching on head coverings. He recognizes that some people may even be angered by his doctrine. This recognition, however, does not cause Paul to act like a spineless modern church bureaucrat who attempts to ride the fence on controversial issues. Rather, Paul stands on the inspired truth of his argumentation and demands uniformity of doctrine and practice on this matter. Biblical unity is established on the teaching of Scripture. Real lasting unity can only be achieved when believers submit themselves to the authority of Scripture.

The modern idea that unity is accomplished through compromise, through allowing mutually contradictory practices and doctrines in the church, is rejected by Paul. The inspired apostle knows that his arguments for head coverings in worship are not based on contemporary usages, but on biblical truth and creational realities that will last as long as the present earthly economy. The covenant headship of the husband over his wife and the purpose of the wife is the same today as it was when Paul wrote this chapter (1 Cor. 11:7, 8, 9). A woman’s beautiful hair is still given to her as a natural veil, as her glory, as it was in times past (1 Cor. 11:14-15). The divine order of authority from the Father to Christ and from the man to the woman obviously has never been abrogated (1 Cor. 11:3). The angels of God still observe the public worship of God as they did in the first century (1 Cor. 11:10). When we consider the apostle’s careful

⁴⁴ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 214.

argumentation, brilliant reasoning, sublime analogies and authority as an inspired teacher, we can understand his dogmatism and unwillingness to compromise on this issue. For Paul to allow diversity of teachings or practice on this issue would be to admit that he was totally wrong in his reasoning. For modern churchmen to allow diversity of practice on this issue is to implicitly deny the perspicuity of Scripture and apostolic authority. Modern believers who profess that they believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture, yet who want to argue with the apostle Paul about his teaching on head coverings must repent and submit to the inspired command of Christ's chief apostle: "Let her be covered" (1 Cor. 11:6).

Moreover, note that the custom ("we have no such custom" v. 16) to which Paul refers is the practice of women attending church *uncovered* (i.e., without wearing a cloth veil on the head). This point is important because Paul's statement has been used by some exegetes to overturn the teaching of the whole chapter.

Before we consider the reasons why the custom is the non-use of head coverings by women, it is important to establish a proper translation of the apostle's statement. Virtually every modern translation (NASB, NEB, RSV, and NIV) mistranslates *toiauten* as "other" ("we have no *other* custom"). Perhaps the reason this statement is so frequently mistranslated is that interpreters do not want to translate a verse in a manner that contradicts the immediate context. In other words, they recognize the absurdity of Paul saying, "we have no custom of women wearing head coverings in public worship," immediately after issuing orders for women to cover their heads, followed by many reasons why head coverings are required (The absurdity of this meaning is true whether one believes head coverings are cloth coverings or long hair). But following the ordinary rules of the Greek language *toiauton* means *such* not "other." Clark writes, "Of English versions, only the KJ and the ARV of 1901 translate the Greek correctly. The others are plainly wrong. *Hemeis toiauton sunnetheian ouk echomen* can mean only 'We have no such custom.' Foreign translations maintain the better scholarship of the KJ and the ARV."⁴⁵

Having noted the proper translation of the second half of verse 16, let us return to the proper meaning of "custom." Regarding this term there are three main interpretations:

(1) The custom referred to is the use of head coverings in worship. This view regards the statement "we have no such custom" as an abrogation of head coverings altogether as if the preceding arguments in favor of the practice were insufficient or culturally conditioned. This interpretation is patently absurd. The idea that Paul, who had just spent most of a chapter in an epistle giving detailed arguments why his imperative ordering women to cover their heads in worship must be obeyed, would then turn around and say, "By the way we the apostles reject the use of head coverings in worship as do all the churches", is an implicit denial of verbal inspiration. Any interpretation that has Paul explicitly contradict himself on the same page and does violence to his moral character, as if he were playing a joke on the Corinthians, should be unacceptable to any Bible-believing Christian.

(2) Another view is that the custom refers to the practice of being contentious (e.g., see Calvin, de Wette, Meyer and Edwards). While this interpretation does not contradict Paul's teaching, as does the previous interpretation, nevertheless, it is not the most plausible interpretation. Being contentious or argumentative is a fault or bad habit, not a custom. Further, would Paul need to explain that none of the apostles believe in being contentious and harassing the elders in a church? Would he need to tell the Corinthians that none of the churches as an official practice adhere to nasty argumentation? Of course not!

⁴⁵ Gordon Clark, *First Corinthians* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1991 [1975], 178.

(3) The only interpretation that does justice to the context and makes sense is that the custom refers to women going unveiled in public worship. The only custom of which there can be any question here is that on which the whole passage has turned: women attending public worship without being veiled. Godet writes, “Paul means that neither he, nor the Christians formed by him, nor in general any of the Churches of God, either those which he has not founded or those properly his own, allow such procedure in their ecclesiastical usages; comp. xiv. 36, 37, where the idea simply indicated here is developed.---The material proof of this assertion of Paul’s is found in the Christian representations which have been discovered in the Catacombs, where the men always wear their hair cut short, and the women the palla, a kerchief falling over the shoulders.”⁴⁶ Charles Hodge concurs. When criticizing the view that custom means the custom of being contentious he writes, “The only reason assigned for this interpretation, is Paul’s saying *we have* no such custom; which they say cannot mean the custom of women going unveiled. But why not? The apostles and the churches constituted a whole—neither the one nor the other, neither the churches nor their infallible guides, sanctioned the usage in question. Besides, no other custom is mentioned in the context than the one that he has been discussing. “If any one appear contentious,” is not a custom and suggests nothing to which the words *such a custom* can naturally refer.”⁴⁷

Let us once again consider the full impact of the apostle’s argument in verse 16. Paul is asserting that all the apostles are in agreement that women must cover their heads in public worship; that in every church (regardless of location—whether in Africa, Asia, or Europe; or culture—whether Jewish or Gentile, Greek or barbarian) women worship Christ with veiled heads. The apostle’s statement explains why throughout all church history in every branch of the Christian church (Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant [Lutheran, Episcopal, Reformed], Coptic, etc.) until around the 1960s women worshipped with their heads covered. The testimony of church history can only be explained if the universal practice of the apostolic church was for women to cover their heads with a cloth veil during public worship. The sad truth is that head coverings were abandoned because: (1) Pastors were not preaching the whole counsel of God. (2) Hats and scarves became unfashionable. (3) Churches were infected with egalitarianism and feminism. Unfortunately once the unbiblical practice of women worshipping *without* head coverings became widespread, pastors and teachers defended current practice instead of calling the church to repentance. It would be prudent for modern churchmen to reconsider their widespread departure from an apostolic ordinance that had been the universal practice of the Christian church for the last two thousand years. Have these men discovered

⁴⁶ Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977 [1889]), 560.

⁴⁷ Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 214. Leon Morris also gives the correct interpretation of verse 16. He writes, “But Paul has no intention of arguing the matter with any who is given to wordy battles (*contentious, philoneikos*, is one who loves strife). Such are capable of prolonging an argument indefinitely. In the face of such an attitude Paul points to universal custom. *We have no such custom*, i.e., such as women praying or prophesying with head uncovered. Exactly whom he means by *we* is not clear, but the addition, *neither the churches of God*, shows that what he has just outlined is the habit throughout the Christian churches.” (*1 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958], 136). Alfred Plummer agrees: “There are people who are so fond of disputing that they will contest the clearest conclusions, and the Corinthians were fond of disputation. But the Apostle will not encourage them. If such should question the dictates of decorum and of nature in this matter they may be told that the teachers have no such usage as permitting women to be unveiled, -a thing unheard of in Christian congregations. It is possible that *hemeis* means only himself, but he probably means that he knows of no Apostle who allows this.” (*First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* [Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1978 (1911), 235].

something that Paul, Augustine, Anselm, Calvin, Hodge and John Murray have missed? Certainly not!⁴⁸

Conclusion

Although the use of head coverings in public worship is obviously not as important as the doctrines of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ or justification by faith alone, nevertheless, it is important for a number of reasons. (1) It is required by Scripture and thus cannot be set aside like a bad recipe. When God has spoken on an issue, our job is to trust and obey whether we like it or not. (2) In our day when marriage and family life is at an all-time low, any teaching and practice that supports the covenant headship of the man and the submission of the wife needs our utmost adherence. Head coverings represent what God teaches about marriage. Therefore, we should not mock or hate this biblical practice, but embrace it wholeheartedly. (3) Culture at the present time in America is becoming increasingly pagan, hedonistic and anti-Christian. Any biblical practice that sets God's people apart from our culture and sets an example for it ought to be embraced by believers. We certainly do not act as a salt and light to our heathen culture when we reject biblical imperatives relating to covenant headship and instead imitate the world. (4) A recurring problem for churches in the last one hundred years has been the intrusion of egalitarian and feminist principles into their beliefs and practices. An excellent way to stop such dangerous syncretism is to obey biblical teachings that feminists hate, such as head coverings. The best defense is a good offense. May God enable us to return to the teaching of the apostles on this issue so that families will be strengthened and the angels properly instructed.

Appendix: The Church Fathers on Headcoverings

Paedagogus, *The Instructor*, Book 2 Chapter 11

Though you may with great propriety use the language addressed to him who said, "Your arm is beautiful; yes, but it is not for the public gaze. Your thighs are beautiful; but, was the reply, for my husband alone. And your face is comely. Yes; but only for him who has married me." But I do not wish chaste women to afford cause for such praises to those who, by praises, hunt after grounds of censure; and not only because it is prohibited to expose the ankle, but

⁴⁸ Some people who do not want to submit to Paul's teaching on head coverings seize upon the word "custom" in verse 16 and argue that a custom is a culturally conditioned, temporary practice. This argument should be rejected for the following reasons. (1) Paul's argumentation in support of the imperative ("let her be covered") cannot be reduced to a support for a merely local, temporary custom. Appeals to the creation ordinance of covenant headship, the purpose of the man and woman, the teaching of nature or general revelation and the observation of angels render such an argument absurd. (2) The statement that every church everywhere does *not* allow women to worship without the head covering proves that the use of head coverings was trans-cultural. Keep in mind that Greek women were not accustomed to wearing head coverings in their rituals. (3) The Greek word for custom (*sunetheia*) in verse 16 denotes the habitual practice of the churches and not a mere custom in the sense of a Dutch wooden shoe festival. Paul K. Jewett (who is certainly no friend of covenant headship or Presbyterian orthodoxy) agrees: "Therefore the apostle's remark (v. 16) that the churches of God have no such custom (*sunetheia*) of women unveiling themselves during public worship cannot mean that he regarded the whole matter as a mere custom. Though one may argue that such is the case, one cannot say that this is what the text means. Quite the contrary, this particular custom, in the thinking of Paul, was part of the apostolic tradition which he had given them and by which they were bound. This, in fact is the note on which he opens the whole discussion, praising them for holding fast traditions (*paradosis*) 'even as delivered them to you' (v. 2)" (*Man as Male and Female* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 118).

because it has also been enjoined that the head should be veiled and the face covered; for it is a wicked thing for beauty to be a snare to men.⁴⁹

Fragments Of Clemens Alexandrinus, Book 4. *The Chaplet, Or De Corona*. Chapter 4

If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer. That reason will support tradition, and custom, and faith, you will either yourself perceive, or learn from some one who has. Meanwhile you will believe that there is some reason to which submission is due. I add still one case more, as it will be proper to show you how it was among the ancients also. Among the Jews, so usual is it for their women to have the head veiled, that they may thereby be recognized. I ask in this instance for the law. I put the apostle aside. If Rebecca at once drew down her veil, when in the distance she saw her betrothed, this modesty of a mere private individual could not have made a law, or it will have made it only for those who have the reason which she had. Let virgins alone *be veiled*, and this when they are coming to be married, and not till they have recognized their destined husband. If Susanna also, who was subjected to unveiling on her trial, furnishes an argument for the veiling of women, I can say here also, the veil was a voluntary thing. She had come accused, ashamed of the disgrace she had brought on herself, properly concealing her beauty, even because now she feared to please. But I should not suppose that, when it was her aim to please, she took walks with a veil on in her husband's avenue. Grant, now, that she was always veiled. In this particular case, too, or, in fact, in that of any other, I demand the dress-law. If I nowhere find a law, it follows that tradition has given the fashion in question to custom, to find subsequently (its authorization in) the apostle's sanction, from the true interpretation of reason. These instances, therefore, will make it sufficiently plain that you can vindicate the keeping of even unwritten tradition established by custom; the proper witness for tradition when demonstrated by long-continued observance. But even in civil matters custom is accepted as law, when positive legal enactment is wanting; and it is the same thing whether it depends on writing or on reason, since reason is, in fact, the basis of law. But, (you say), if reason is the ground of law, all will now henceforth have to be counted law, whoever brings it forward, which shall have reason as its ground. Or do you think that every believer is entitled to originate and establish a law, if only it be such as is agreeable to God, as is helpful to discipline, as promotes salvation, when the Lord says, "But why do you not even of your own selves judge what is right?" And not merely in regard to a judicial sentence, but in regard to every decision in matters we are called on to consider, the apostle also says, "If of anything you are ignorant, God shall reveal it unto you;" he himself, too, being accustomed to afford counsel though he had not the command of the Lord, and to dictate of himself as possessing the Spirit of God who guides into all truth. Therefore his advice has, by the warrant of divine reason, become equivalent to nothing less than a divine command. Earnestly now inquire of this teacher, keeping intact your regard for tradition, from whomsoever it originally sprang; nor have regard to the author, but to the authority, and especially that of custom itself, which on this very account we should revere, that we may not want an interpreter; so that if reason too is God's gift, you may then learn, not whether custom has to be followed by you, but why.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Schaff, P. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. electronic ed. Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2000.

⁵⁰Schaff, P. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. electronic ed. Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 2000.

Fragments Of Clemens Alexandrinus, Book 4, *The Chaplet, Or De Corona*. Chapter 14

Much less may the Christian put the service of idolatry on his own head - nay, I might have said, upon Christ, since Christ is the Head of the Christian man - (for his head) is as free as even Christ is, under no obligation to wear a covering, not to say a band. But even the head which is bound to have the veil, I mean woman's, as already taken possession of by this very thing, is not open also to a band. She has the burden of her own humility to bear. If she ought not to appear with her head uncovered on account of the angels, much more with a crown on it will she offend those (elders) who perhaps are then wearing crowns above. For what is a crown on the head of a woman, but beauty made seductive, but mark of utter wantonness, - a notable casting away of modesty, a setting temptation on fire? Therefore a woman, taking counsel from the apostles' foresight, will not too elaborately adorn herself, that she may not either be crowned with any exquisite arrangement of her hair. What sort of garland, however, I pray you, did He who is the Head of the man and the glory of the woman, Christ Jesus, the Husband of the church, submit to in behalf of both sexes? Of thorns, I think, and thistles, - a figure of the sins which the soil of the flesh brought forth for us, but which the power of the cross removed...

Tertullian Part Fourth Book 2 Section 3. *On The Veiling of Virgins {Women}*

Letters of St. Jerome Letter 38

4. In days gone by our dear widow was extremely fastidious in her dress, and spent whole days before her mirror to correct its deficiencies. Now she boldly says: "We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii. 18, R.V.) In those days maids arranged her hair, and her head, which had done no harm, was forced into a waving head-dress. Now she leaves her hair alone, and her only head-dress is a veil. In those days the softest feather-bed seemed hard to her, and she could scarcely find rest on a pile of mattresses. Now she rises eager for prayer, her shrill voice cries Alleluia before every other, she is the first to praise her Lord.⁵¹

Two Books Concerning Repentance

69. Let custom itself teach us. A woman covers her face with a veil for this reason, that in public her modesty may be safe, That her face may not easily meet the gaze of a youth, let her be covered with the nuptial veil, so that not even in chance meetings she might be exposed to the wounding of another or of herself, though the wound of either were indeed hers. But if she cover her head with a veil that she may not accidentally see or be seen (for when the head is veiled the face is hidden), how much more ought she to cover herself with the veil of modesty, so as even in public to have her own secret place.

St Ambrose Book 1 chapter 12

"Can any better veil," she said, "cover me better than the altar which consecrates the veils themselves? Such a bridal veil is most suitable on which Christ, the Head of all, is daily consecrated."⁵²

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⁵¹Schaff, P. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. VI*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997.

⁵²Schaff, P. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series Vol. X*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997.