

## The Apostle Paul on Head Coverings

1 Corinthians 11:3

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

[But I would have you know] "I invite your attention particularly to the following considerations, in order to form a correct opinion on this subject." Paul does not at once answer the inquiry, and determine what ought to be done; but he invites their attention to a series of remarks on the subject, which led them to draw the conclusion which he wished to establish. The phrase here is designed to call the attention to the subject, like that used so often in the New Testament, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

[That the head ...] The word "head," in the Scriptures, is designed often to denote "master, ruler, chief." The word ro'sh (OT:7218) is often thus used in the Old Testament; see Num 17:3; 25:15; Deut 28:13,44; Judg 10:18; 11:8,11; 1 Sam 15:17; 2 Sam 22:44. In the New Testament the word is used in the sense of Lord, ruler, chief, in Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col 2:10. Here it means that Christ is the ruler, director, or Lord of the Christian man. This truth was to be regarded in all their feelings and arrangements, and was never to be forgotten. Every Christian should recollect the relation in which he stands to him, as one that is suited to produce the strictest decorum, and a steady sense of subordination.

[Of every man] Every Christian. All acknowledge Christ as their Ruler and Master. They are subject to him; and in all proper ways recognize their subordination to him.

[And the head of the woman is the man] The sense is, she is subordinate to him, and in all circumstances-in her demeanor, her dress, her conversation, in public and in the family circle-should recognize her subordination to him. The particular thing here referred to is, that if the woman is inspired, and speaks or prays in public, she should by no means lay aside the usual and proper symbols of her subordination. The danger was, that those who were under the influence of inspiration would regard themselves as freed from the necessity of recognizing that, and would lay aside the "veil," the usual and appropriate symbol of their occupying a rank inferior to the man. This was often done in the temples of the pagan deities by the priestesses, and it would appear also that it had been done by Christian females in the churches.

[And the head of Christ is God] Christ, as Mediator, has consented to assume a subordinate rank, and to recognize God the Father as superior in office. Hence, he was obedient in all things as a Son; he submitted to the arrangement required in redemption; he always recognized his subordinate rank as Mediator, and always regarded God as the supreme Ruler, even in the matter of redemption. The sense is, that Christ, throughout his entire work, regarded himself as occupying a subordinate station to the Father; and that it was proper from his example to recognize the propriety of rank and station everywhere

1 Cor 11:4

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.

[Every man praying or prophesying] The word "prophesying" here means, evidently, "teaching;" or publicly speaking to the people on the subject of religion; see the note at Acts 2:17. See also the subject considered more at length in the notes on 1 Cor 14. Whether these persons who are here said to prophesy were all inspired, or claimed to be inspired, may admit of a question. The simple idea here is, that they spoke in the public assemblies, and professed to be the expounders of the divine will.

[Having his head covered] With a veil, or turban, or cap, or whatever else is worn on the head. To remove the hat, the turban, or the covering of the head, is a mark of respect for a superior when in his presence.

1 Cor 11:4

[Dishonoreth his head] Does dishonor to Christ as his head (1 Cor 11:2): that is, he does not, in his presence and in his service, observe the usual and proper custom by which a subordinate station is recognized, and which indicates respect for a superior. In the presence of a prince or a nobleman, it would be considered as a mark of disrespect should the head be covered. So in the presence of Christ, in whose name he ministers, it is a mark of disrespect if the head is covered. This illustration is drawn from the customs of all times and countries by which respect for a superior is indicated by removing the covering from the head. This is one reason why a man should not cover his head in public worship. Another is given in 1 Cor 11:7. Other interpretations of the passage may be seen in Bloomfield's Critical Digest.

1 Corinthians 11:5

But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.

1 Cor 11:5

[But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth] In the Old Testament prophetesses are not unfrequently mentioned. Thus, Miriam is mentioned (Ex 15:20); Deborah (Judg 4:4); Huldah (2 Kings 22:14); Noadiah (Neh 6:14). So also in the New Testament Anna is mentioned as a prophetess; Luke 2:36. That there were females in the early Christian church who corresponded to those known among the Jews in some measure as endowed with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, cannot be doubted. What was their precise office, and what was the nature of the public services in which they were engaged, is not however known. That they prayed is clear; and that they publicly expounded the will of God is apparent also; see the note on Acts 2:17. As the presumption is, however, that they were inspired, their example is no warrant now for females to take part in the public services of worship, unless they also give evidence that they are under the influence of

inspiration, and the more especially as the apostle Paul has expressly forbidden their becoming public teachers; 1 Tim 2:12.

If it is now pled, from this example, that women should speak and pray in public, yet it should be just so far only as this example goes, and it should be only when they have the qualifications that the early "prophetesses" had in the Christian church. If there are any such; if any are directly inspired by God, there then will be an evident propriety that they should publicly proclaim the will, and not till then. It may be further observed, however, that the fact that Paul here mentions the custom of women praying or speaking publicly in the church, does not prove that it was right or proper. His immediate object now was not to consider whether the practice was itself right, but to condemn the manner of its performance as a violation of all the proper rules of modesty and of subordination. On another occasion, in this very epistle, he fully condemns the practice in any form, and enjoins silence on the female members of the church in public; 1 Cor 14:34.

[With her head uncovered] That is, with the veil removed which she usually wore. It would seem from this that the women removed their veils, and wore their hair disheveled, when they pretended to be under the influence of divine inspiration. This was the case with the pagan priestesses; and in so doing, the Christian women imitated them. On this account, if on no other, Paul declares the impropriety of this conduct. It was, besides, a custom among ancient females, and one that was strictly enjoined by the traditional laws of the Jews, that a woman should not appear in public unless she were veiled. See this proved by Lightfoot in loco.

[Dishonoureth her head] Shows a lack of proper respect to man, to her husband, to her father, to the sex in general. The veil is a token of modesty and of subordination. It is regarded among Jews, and everywhere, as an emblem of her sense of inferiority of rank and station. It is the customary mark of her sex, and that by which she evinces her modesty and sense of subordination. To remove that, is to remove the appropriate mark of such subordination, and is a public act by which she thus shows dishonor to the man. And as it is proper that the grades and ranks of life should be recognized in a suitable manner, so it is improper that, even on pretence of religion, and of being engaged in the service of God, these marks should be laid aside.

1 Cor 11:5

[For that is even all one as if she were shaven] As if her long hair, which nature teaches her she should wear for a veil (1 Cor 11:15, margin,) should be cut off. Long hair is, by the custom of the times, and of nearly all countries, a mark of the sex, an ornament of the female, and judged to be beautiful and comely. To remove that is to appear, in this respect, like the other sex, and to lay aside the badge of her own. This, says Paul, all would judge to be improper. You yourselves would not allow it. And yet to lay aside the veil-the appropriate badge of the sex, and of her sense of subordination-would be an act of the same kind. It would indicate the same feeling, the same forgetfulness of the proper sense of subordination; and if that is laid aside, ALL the usual indications of modesty and subordination might be removed also. Not even under religious pretences, therefore, are

the usual marks of sex, and of propriety of place and rank, to be laid aside. Due respect is to be shown, in dress, and speech, and deportment, to those whom God has placed above us; and neither in language, in attire nor in habit are we to depart from what all judge to be the proprieties of life, or from what God has judged and ordained to be the proper indications of the regular gradations in society.

#### 1 Corinthians 11:6

For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.

[For if the woman be not covered] If her head be not covered with a veil.

[Let her also be shorn] Let her long hair be cut off. Let her lay aside all the usual and proper indications of her sex and rank in life. If it is done in one respect, it may with the same propriety be done in all.

[But if it be a shame ...] If custom, nature, and habit; if the common and usual feelings and views among people would pronounce this to be a shame, the other would be pronounced to be a shame also by the same custom and common sense of people.

[Let her be covered] With a veil. Let her wear the customary attire indicative of modesty and a sense of subordination. Let her not lay this aside even on any pretence of religion.

#### 1 Corinthians 11:7

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.

[For a man indeed ought not to cover his head] That is, with a veil; or in public worship; when he approaches God, or when in His name he addresses his fellow man. It is not fit and proper that he should be covered. The reason why it is not proper, the apostle immediately states.

[Forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God] The phrase "the image of God" refers to the fact that man was made in the likeness of his Maker (Gen 1:27); and proves that, though fallen, there is a sense in which he is still the image of God. It is not because man is truly or pure, and thus resembles his Creator; but it evidently is because he was invested by his Maker with authority and dominion; he was superior to all other creatures; Gen 1:28. This is still retained; and this the apostle evidently refers to in the passage before us, and this he says should be recognized and regarded. If he wore a veil or turban, it would be a mark of servitude or inferiority. It was therefore improper that he should appear in this manner; but he should be so clad as not to obscure or hide the great truth that he was the direct representative of God on the earth, and had a superiority to all other creatures.

[And glory of God] The word "glory" in the classic writers means:

(1) Opinion, sentiment, etc.;

(2) Fame, reputation.

Here it means, as it often does, splendor, brightness, or that which stands forth to "represent" God, or by which the glory of God is known. Man was created first; he had dominion given him; by him, therefore, the divine authority and wisdom first shone forth;

and this fact should be recognized in the due subordination of rank, and even in the apparel and attire which shall be worn. The impression of his rank and superiority should be everywhere retained.

[But the woman is the glory of the man] The honor, the ornament, etc. She was made for him; she was made after he was; she was taken from him, and was "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh." All her comeliness, loveliness, and purity are therefore an expression of his honor and dignity, since all that comeliness and loveliness were made of him and for him. This, therefore, ought to be acknowledged by a suitable manner of attire; and in his presence this sense of her inferiority of rank and subordination should be acknowledged by the customary use of the veil. She should appear with the symbol of modesty and subjection, which are implied by the head being covered. This sense is distinctly expressed in the following verse.

1 Corinthians 11:8

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.

[For the man is not of the woman] The man was not formed from the woman.

[But the woman of the man] From his side; Gen. 2:18. 22-23 .

1 Corinthians 11:9

Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.

[Neither was the man created for the woman ...] This is a simple statement of what is expressed in Genesis. The woman was made for the comfort and happiness of the man. Not to be a slave, but a help-meet; not to be the minister of his pleasures, but to be his aid and comforter in life; not to be regarded as of inferior nature and rank, but to be his friend, to divide his sorrows, and to multiply and extend his joys; yet still to be in a station subordinate to him. He is to be the head: the ruler; the presider in the family circle; and she was created to aid him in his duties, to comfort him in his afflictions, to partake with him of his pleasures. Her rank is therefore honorable, though it is subordinate. It is, in some respects, the more honorable because it is subordinate and as her happiness is dependent on him, she has the higher claim to his protection and his tender care. The whole of Paul's idea here is, that her situation and rank as subordinate should be recognized by her at all times, and that in his presence it was proper that she should wear the usual symbol of modesty and subordination, the veil.

1 Cor 11:10

For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

[For this cause ...] There is scarcely any passage in the Scriptures which has more exercised the ingenuity of commentators than this verse. The various attempts which have been made to explain it may be seen in Pool, Rosenmuller, Bloomfield, etc. After all the explanations which have been given of it, I confess, I do not understand it. It is not difficult to see what the connection requires us to suppose in the explanation. The obvious interpretation would be, that a woman should have a veil on her head because of the angels who were supposed to be present, observing them in their public worship; and

it is generally agreed that the word "power" exousian (NT:1849) denotes a veil, or a covering for the head. But the word power does not occur in this sense in any classic writer. Bretschneider understands it of a veil, as being a defense or guard to the face, lest it should be seen by others. Some have supposed that it was the name of a female ornament that was worn on the head, formed of braids of hair set with jewels. Most commentators agree that it means a "veil," though some think (see Bloomfield) that it is called power to denote the veil which was worn by married women, which indicated the superiority of the married woman to the maiden. But it is sufficient to say in reply to this, that the apostle is not referring to married women in contradistinction from those who are unmarried, but is showing that all women who prophecy or pray in public should be veiled. There can, perhaps, be no doubt that the word "power" has reference to a veil, or to a covering for the head; but why it is called power I confess I do not understand; and most of the comments on the word are, in my view, egregious trifling.

[Because of the angels] Some have explained this of good angels, who were supposed to be present in their assemblies (see Doddridge); others refer it to evil angels; and others to messengers or spies who, it has been supposed, were present in their public assemblies, and who would report greatly to the disadvantage of the Christian assemblies if the women were seen to be unveiled. I do not know what it means; and I regard it as one of the very few passages in the Bible whose meaning as yet is wholly inexplicable. The most natural interpretation seems to me to be this: "A woman in the public assemblies, and in speaking in the presence of people, should wear a veil-the usual symbol of modesty and subordination-because the angels of God are witnesses of your public worship (Heb 1:13), and because they know and appreciate the propriety of subordination and order in public assemblies."

According to this, it would mean that the simple reason would be that the angels were witnesses of their worship; and that they were the friends of propriety, due subordination, and order; and that they ought to observe these in all assemblies

1 Cor 11:10

convened for the worship of God-I do not know that this sense has been proposed by any commentator; but it is one which strikes me as the most obvious and natural, and consistent with the context. The following remarks respecting the ladies of Persia may throw some light on this subject-"The head-dress of the women is simple; their hair is drawn behind the head, and divided into several tresses; the beauty of this head-dress consists in the thickness and length of these tresses, which should fall even down to the heels, in default of which, they lengthen them with tresses of silk. The ends of these tresses they decorate with pearls and jewels, or ornaments of gold or silver. The head is covered, "under" the veil or kerchief "(course chef)," only by the end of a small "bandeau," shaped into a triangle; this "bandeau," which is of various colors, is thin and light.

The "bandalette" is embroidered by the needle, or covered with jewelery, according to the quality of the wearer. This is, in my opinion, the ancient "tiara," or "diadem," of the queens of Persia. Only married women wear it; and it is the mark by which it is known that they are under subjection "(c'est la la marque a laquelle on reconnoit qu' elles sont sous PUISSANCE-power)." The girls have little "caps," instead of this kerchief or tiara; they wear no veil at home, but let two tresses of their hair fall under their cheeks. The

caps of girls of superior rank are tied with a row of pearls. Girls are not shut up in Persia till they attain the age of six or seven years; before that age they go out of the seraglio, sometimes with their father, so that they may then be seen. I have seen some wonderfully pretty girls. They show the neck and bosom; and more beautiful cannot be seen"-Chardin. "The wearing of a veil by a married woman was a token of her being under power. The Hebrew name of the veil signifies dependence. Great importance was attached to this part of the dress in the East. All the women of Persia are pleasantly apparelled. When they are abroad in the streets, all, both rich and poor, are covered with a great veil, or sheet of very fine white cloth, of which one half, like a forehead cloth, comes down to the eyes, and, going over the head, reaches down to the heels; and the other half muffles up the face below the eyes, and being fastened with a pin to the left side of the head, falls down to their very shoes, even covering their hands, with which they hold that cloth by the two sides, so that, except the eyes, they are covered all over with it. Within doors they have their faces and breasts uncovered; but the Armenian women in their houses have always one half of their faces covered with a cloth, that goes athwart their noses, and hangs over their chin and breasts, except the maids of that nation, who, within doors, cover only the chin until they are married"-Thevenot.

#### 1 Corinthians 11:11

Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.

[Nevertheless] Lest the man should assume to himself too much superiority, and lest he should regard the woman as made solely for his pleasure, and should treat her as in all respects inferior, and withhold the respect that is due to her. The design of this verse and the following is to show, that the man and woman are united in the most tender interests; that the one cannot live comfortably without the other; that one is necessary to the happiness of the other; and that though the woman was formed from the man, yet it is also to be remembered that the man is descended from the woman. She should therefore be treated with proper respect, tenderness, and regard.

[Neither is the man without the woman ...] The man and the woman were formed for union and society. They are not in any respect independent of each other. One is necessary to the comfort of the other; and this fact should be recognized in all their contact.

[In the Lord] By the arrangements or direction of the Lord. It is the appointment and command of the Lord that they should be mutual helps, and should each regard and promote the welfare of the other.

#### 1 Corinthians 11:12

For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.

[As the woman is of the man] In the original creation, she was formed from the man.

[So is the man also by the woman] Is born of the woman, or descended from her. The sexes are dependent on each other, and should therefore cultivate an indissoluble union.

[But all things of God] All things were created and arranged by him. This expression seems designed to suppress any spirit of complaint or dissatisfaction with this arrangement; to make the woman contented in her subordinate station, and to make the man humble by the consideration that it is all owing to the appointment of God. The woman should therefore be contented, and the man should not assume any improper superiority, since the whole arrangement and appointment is of God.

1 Corinthians 11:13

Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?

[Judge in yourselves] Or, "Judge among yourselves." I appeal to you. I appeal to your natural sense of what is proper and right. Paul had used various arguments to show them the impropriety of their females speaking unveiled in public. He now appeals to their natural sense of what was decent and right, according to established and acknowledged customs and habits.

[Is it comely ...] Is it decent, or becoming? The Grecian women, except their priestesses, were accustomed to appear in public with a veil-Doddridge. Paul alludes to that established and proper habit, and asks whether it does not accord with their own views of propriety that women in Christian assemblies should also wear the same symbol of modesty.

1 Corinthians 11:14

Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?

[Doth not even nature itself] The word nature fuis (NT:5449) denotes evidently that sense of propriety which all men have, and which is expressed in any prevailing or universal custom. That which is universal we say is according to nature. It is such as is demanded by the natural sense of fitness among people. Thus, we may say that nature demands that the sexes should wear different kinds of dress; that nature demands that the female should be modest and retiring; that nature demands that the toils of the chase, of the field, of war-the duties of office, of government and of professional life, should be discharged by people. Such are in general the customs the world over; and if any reason is asked for numerous habits that exist in society, no better answer can be given than that nature, as arranged by God, has demanded it. The word in this place, therefore, does not mean the constitution of the sexes, as Locke, Whitby, and Pierce maintain; nor reason and experience, as Macknight supposes; nor simple use and custom, as Grotius, Rosenmuller, and most recent expositors suppose; but it refers to a deep internal sense of what is proper and right; a sense which is expressed extensively in all nations. showing what that sense is.

No reason can be given, in the nature of things, why the woman should wear long hair and the man not; but the custom prevails extensively everywhere, and nature, in all nations, has prompted to the same course. "Use is second nature;" but the usage in this case is not arbitrary, but is founded in an anterior universal sense of what is proper and right. A few, and only a few, have regarded it as comely for a man to wear his hair long. Aristotle tells us, indeed (Rhet. 1:-see Rosenmiuller), that among the Lacedemonians,

freemen wore their hair long. In the time of Homer, also, the Greeks were called by him kareekomooontes (NT:2863) Achaiou (NT:882), long-haired Greeks; and some of the Asiatic nations adopted the same custom. But the general habit among people has been different. Among the Hebrews, it was regarded as disgraceful to a man to wear his hair long, except he had a vow as a Nazarite, Num 6:1-5; Judg 13:5; 16:17; 1 Sam 1:1:11. Occasionally, for affectation or singularity, the hair was suffered to grow, as was the case with Absalom (2 Sam 14:26); but the traditional law of the Jews on the subject was strict. The same rule existed among the Greeks; and it was regarded as disgraceful to wear long hair in the time of Aelian; Hist. lib. 9:c. 14. Eustath. on Hom. 2:v. [It is a shame unto him?] It is improper and disgraceful. It is doing that which almost universal custom has said appropriately belongs to the female sex.

### 1 Corinthians 11:15

But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. [It is a glory unto her] It is an ornament, and adorning. The same instinctive promptings of nature which make it proper for a man to wear short hair, make it proper that the woman should suffer hers to grow long.

[For a covering] Margin, "veil." It is given to her as a sort of natural veil, and to indicate the propriety of her wearing a veil. It answered the purposes of a veil when it was allowed to grow long, and to spread over the shoulders and over parts of the face, before the arts of dress were invented or needed. There may also be an allusion here to the fact that the hair of women naturally grows longer than that of men. See Rosenmuller. The value which eastern females put on their long hair may be learned from the fact that when Ptolemy Euergetes, king of Egypt, was about to march against Seleucus Callinicus, his queen Berenice vowed, as the most precious sacrifice which she could make, to cut off and consecrate her hair if he returned in safety. "The eastern ladies," says Harmer, "are remarkable for the length and the great number of the tresses of their hair. The men there, on the contrary, wear very little hair on their heads." Lady M. W. Montague thus speaks concerning the hair of the women: "Their hair hangs at full length behind, divided into tresses, braided with pearl or riband, which is always in great quantity. I never saw in my life so many fine heads of hair. In one lady's I have counted one hundred and ten of these tresses, all natural; but it must be owned that every kind of beauty is more common here than with us." The men there, on the contrary, shave all the hair off their heads, excepting one lock; and those that wear hair are thought effeminate. Both these particulars are mentioned by Chardin, who says they are agreeable to the custom of the East: "the men are shaved; the women nourish their hair with great fondness, which they lengthen, by tresses and tufts of silk, down to the heels. The young men who wear their hair in the East are looked upon as effeminate and infamous."