

Head Coverings

*"If you know these things,
blessed are you if you do them."*

—John 13:17

Head Coverings

What the Bible Teaches
about Head Coverings *for* Women

K.P. YOHANNAN



BELIEVERS CHURCH PUBLICATIONS

www.bcasia.org

Table of Contents



Head Coverings
© 2011 by K.P. Yohannan
All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form
without prior written permission from the publisher.

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by
permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-81-7941-234-3

Published by Believers Church Publications
St. Thomas Nagar, Thiruvalla – 689 105
Kerala, India

Printed in India

<i>Introduction</i>	7
<i>The Word of the Lord</i>	9
1. Traditions of Faith	11
2. It's about God's Government	19
3. A New Covenant Order	27
4. Wearing a Head Covering	33
5. Beyond the Visible	39
6. The Choice before Us	47
7. No Such Custom	59
<i>A Word of Caution</i>	61

Introduction



One of the earliest memories I have of my mother was her daily prayer time. She would wake up early in the morning to pray alone before waking the rest of the family for family prayer.

I remember how she would sit on a mat on the floor, put on her head covering and then pray. One could see the grace on her face as she prayed. Whether she was at home, on the street, in the church or anywhere, she would always put a veil on her head before praying.

I grew up in a small village on the southern tip of India and attended church regularly. In all those years, I always saw women and young girls wearing a covering on their

heads while in church. This was the common practice in the whole country, regardless of denominational differences.

With the influence of the West in the recent past, many Asian believers are now asking questions about head coverings, questions that should be answered. It is for this reason that we have undertaken the assignment of writing this booklet.

I have no intention of getting into a debate or an argument, knowing the Enemy would love to have us major on a doctrine such as this and have us ignore the weightier matters of the faith just as Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:23. This is a doctrine that may seem small and insignificant, yet it is still important. I don't believe the Enemy would oppose it so strongly if it were not.

Wearing a head covering is biblical, and as with all New Testament instructions, it is to be taught and obeyed. However, it must not become a source of division and disunity in the Body of Christ.

Let us seek the Lord and His Word with open hearts. May God create within us a deep hunger to be His completely, for time and eternity.

The Word of the Lord



¹Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

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

³But 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. ⁴Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. ⁵But 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.

⁶For 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.

⁷For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God;

but woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man is not from woman, but woman from man. ⁹Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

¹⁰For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. ¹²For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.

¹³Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? ¹⁵But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

¹⁷Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.

—1 Corinthians 11:1–17*

*I strongly recommend that you take the time to read this Scripture, meditate on it and ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind and spirit to understand the deep things of God.

1

Traditions of Faith



The Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the believers in Corinth out of his concern for their spiritual lives and conduct. They were struggling with issues that no other church struggled with.

Their problems included condoning sin, women not covering their heads in church, conducting the Holy Communion in an ungodly manner and abusing the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

As with all Scripture, it was the Holy Spirit who inspired Paul to write this epistle, which brought clarity and order to the believers in Corinth.

And it is within this epistle and context that Paul devotes 15 verses—a sizeable portion of Scripture—to explain the importance of head coverings.

Given by God

At the time Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, the common tradition and practice of Jewish people was for both men and women to cover their heads during worship. Greek men and women had no head coverings during a religious service.

Paul must have taught them about the practice of head coverings when he had been with them in person. Hearing that some in the church didn't obey the apostle's instruction, he was compelled to explain further why women are to cover their heads and men are not.¹ Some aspect of this practice was foreign to both parties, Paul included. Being a Jew, he would have covered his head in a religious service.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul starts his admonition by saying, "Keep the *traditions* just as I delivered them to you" (emphasis mine). What does Paul really mean by saying "traditions"? The Greek word for "traditions" is *paradosis*, which means "that which was delivered." Traditions are simply teachings or practices handed down from one person to another person.

There is a difference, though, between traditions of men that invalidate the Scripture and godly traditions that help us grow in godliness and in the ways of God. Jesus had

to rebuke the religious leaders of His day for invalidating the Word of God by their man-made traditions.² And Paul warned the believers at Colosse not to be led astray by man's traditions that hinder them from following Christ.³

On the other hand, Paul writes to the Thessalonian church and commands them to hold fast to the traditions that they were taught and to withdraw fellowship from every brother who did not want to walk according to the traditions that they received from the apostles.⁴

As an apostle, Paul handed this tradition of faith over to the Corinthians. Then in Galatians 1:11–12, Paul says, "The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul received what he taught directly from Christ,⁵ even as Moses received God's commandments directly from God.⁶

The teachings on Holy Communion, the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the teachings on love—all found in 1 Corinthians—are God's inspired Word. The teaching on head coverings is just as scriptural as all the other teachings found in this epistle.

This is a practice that the Church alone holds: a woman's head covered in a religious

service *and* a man's head uncovered. It is the New Covenant order, given to us by the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The tradition of head coverings has to do with God and His ways. It is the symbol He has chosen to represent His government.

Symbols of God's Choosing

Just as a flag represents a nation and a logo brings to mind a specific company, symbols represent abstract realities and make them visible and recognizable.

God has chosen to employ symbols to represent invisible divine realities. These godly traditions in Scripture are things the Church should obey as a visible witness to the world, both seen and unseen.

A biblical symbol ensures the endurance of spiritual truth and helps us embrace the truth that it stands for. As long as we see them and as long as we do them, we are constantly reminded of the fundamental truths of the Scriptures.

In the Church, under the New Covenant, we have five symbolic traditions that God has given to us to *do*. Each speaks of a significant truth that should not be forgotten.

Holy baptism speaks of cleansing from sin.⁷

Holy Communion speaks of Christ's death.⁸

Foot washing speaks of humility.⁹

Holy kiss speaks of fellowship.¹⁰

Head coverings speak of headship and God's government.¹¹

Because these symbols are a visible demonstration of people who choose to live in obedience to God, I'm sure Satan would like nothing better than for us to rebel against, deny or, better yet, ignore these God-given traditions.

A Message for All Time

For many millennia, the author of rebellion, Satan, has been seeking to perpetuate his spirit of rebellion against the Almighty and His authority. It began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and still continues to this day.

God wants us to be a witness to the world, both seen and unseen, of a people who choose to live in submission to the Living God. And God knows that until Christ returns for His bride, the Church will face this struggle. He knew *then* what is happening

now, that 21st-century believers will doubt the importance and relevance of the things the Corinthians faced.

I believe that is why He inspired Paul to pen some very important words at the beginning of the first letter to the Corinthians, a very unique sentence that is not found in his other letters.

Paul specifically addressed the letter, “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with *all who in every place* call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:2, emphasis mine).

Don’t forget the epistle of Romans was addressed to those in Rome. Philippians was written to the saints at Philippi, Galatians to the churches of Galatia, and so on with the other epistles Paul wrote. Whatever was written in these letters is relevant to all churches, everywhere, and for all time. The letters to Timothy and Titus were both written to specific individuals and no one else, yet they are certainly relevant for us today!

Yet in 1 Corinthians, Paul makes it absolutely clear that this teaching is for everyone, in every place, who calls on the name of the Lord.

Many people mistakenly believe that the context of this teaching was a cultural one

and thus, as such, is invalid for 21st-century believers. Still others misunderstand the Greek word for hair; some believe it is only a matter of conviction or only for husbands and wives. These misunderstandings lead some to believe this teaching is antiquated and irrelevant.

We must not fall into the trap of rejecting certain parts of Scripture while recognizing the rest of it—this is a dangerous road.

Think about it. If we apply this view of picking and choosing what is God’s Word and what is not, as many have done with 1 Corinthians 11:1–16, then our foundation falls apart. Much of the Bible becomes invalid, for much of it was written to a group of people based on their immediate problems and needs.

But the Bible says, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition” (1 Corinthians 10:11). And in 2 Timothy 3:16 it says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

God’s ways are higher than our ways. Expecting to understand God fully is like saying a soda bottle can hold enough water to understand the ocean. Our job is to simply

love and joyfully obey His Word. Remember, “His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

In reality, the matter of head coverings is far deeper and more significant than we may think. Its origins echo back to the beginning of time.

2

It’s About God’s Government



Paul wanted the believers in Corinth to grasp the true depth of this teaching, one that represents the very Throne of God and the foundation from where all God’s acts originate.

This foundation—the authority, the Government of God—flows from the Throne of God and is the basis for the teaching and practice regarding head coverings.

In the Beginning

As we humbly approach the mystery of God’s Government, we must put aside our human reason and logic, seeking instead to understand with our hearts what our minds cannot fully comprehend.¹

We must go back and look at what God has established even before the beginning of time itself.

God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of man; man is the head of woman. And in the order of creation, man was created first, and *then* woman was created from man.² This arrangement is His governmental order also called the “creational order,” the foundation for the teaching on head coverings.

As Watchman Nee said, “The matter of head covering belongs to God’s government. For those who do not know God’s government, it is impossible to exhort them to have their heads covered. They will not be able to understand how much is involved in this matter.”³

It is out of His love and wisdom that God established the world as He did.

It’s Not about Us

The matter of head coverings is not about women’s subjection to men or of man losing his authority by not wearing it—it has nothing to do with custom, culture, history, man, woman or Paul’s own ideas.

This symbol transcends the physical realm and represents a much deeper reality than what we see here on earth.

In the same way, Holy Communion is not

about us (although we are the ones doing it), but it’s a very important symbol given to us that speaks of Christ’s death 2,000 years ago.

In ancient Rome, Christians were scorned, rejected and some even killed for participating in the Holy Communion. They realized this tradition was not about them; rather, it was about *Him*. And that made all the difference.

It’s Not about Inferiority

Some misunderstand the purpose of head coverings, thinking they were instituted by men in an effort to make women feel inferior. This is not the case.

God is the One who ordained this authority structure in the beginning—a structure that can only work when we willingly submit to God’s authority. And we know that all authority is appointed by God.⁴

Man’s headship over woman is not the result of the Fall, but it was established in the Garden of Eden.⁵

Despite the connotations attached to it, subordination has nothing to do with inferiority, whether academically, anatomically, morally, socially, spiritually or anything else. Both male and female complement each other; both are interdependent of each other.

In the teachings on subordination found in the Bible, woman is subordinate to man

because of the *roles* that God has given, not because of intrinsic value.⁶

The Lord knew the Enemy would use this fear of being inferior to hinder obedience. In answer to this, the teachings in 1 Corinthians 11 include verses 11 and 12: "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 from God."

There is a spiritual equality between man and woman, an equality that will continue after the Church age has come to an end.⁷

Looking to the Godhead, we see that *all three Persons in the Holy Trinity are the same essence*. Yet for order to be maintained, there must be headship and subordination. The Son willingly subjected Himself to the will of His Father as the incarnate second person of the Holy Trinity.⁸

A woman displays this divine relationship and represents God's government to the world; her willing subjection to wearing a covering is likened to Christ's willing subjection to the Father.

The head covering then becomes a symbol for all to see, recognized and understood by the angels in heaven and the believers here on earth. What a privilege.

It's Not about Culture

Just as wearing a head covering is not based on superiority or inferiority, it is also *not* rooted in cultural influence or man's ideas.

There are some who believe that Paul mentioned the head covering in order to protect Christian women from being mistaken as prostitutes, and thus the practice is invalid for believers today. It is true; there was prostitution in the city of Corinth, like most places throughout the Roman Empire.

Some suggest prostitutes did not cover their heads in this era, and Christian women were being mistreated because of this confusion. More easily found in history books is that prostitutes in the Roman Empire wore little clothing, and it was definitely not the typical clothing for the respectable woman of that age.⁹ Simply said, prostitutes were easy to distinguish regardless of a head covering.

But think about it: If the reason Paul mentioned Christian women wearing a head covering was to protect them from being misunderstood as prostitutes, then Paul definitely would have said something about that in his letter to the Corinthians!

Just a little bit earlier in the epistle, Paul talks about eating meat offered to idols.¹⁰ There he says to the believers that, although it is perfectly OK for them to eat this meat,

they shouldn't do it if it troubles others. He was very careful to make the distinction that eating or not eating had nothing to do with a commandment of God, but that it was instead based on relations with other believers.

When he talks about the head covering, however, there is *no* mention of anything remotely cultural. Instead, Paul goes to lengths to describe its spiritual roots—the divinely ordained authority structure God established at the original creation and reaffirmed in the new creation of the Church. Paul's admonition for women to wear a head covering "because of the angels"¹¹ removes any doubt that this teaching is universal and timeless.

It Transcends Earthly Authority

Although the head covering is interlinked with the teachings on authority in general, and it does represent the authority structure of a nation, society, workplace or home, the reality of it reaches much further. The authority structure functioning in the Church is uniquely based on the creational order itself, on the truth of God's governmental order.¹²

Because the Greek words for *man* and *woman* in 1 Corinthians 11:1–17 can also be translated as *husband* and *wife* depending on the context, there are those who interpret this passage to be directed only toward the

marriage relationship. Thus, some believe that a woman only needs to wear a head covering if her husband tells her to wear one. There are also those who believe only a married woman needs to wear a head covering.

It is worth noting that it was *only after* liberal theology at the turn of the 18th century that some Western translations of the Bible used the word "wife" instead of "woman."

It is important to realize, however, that it is the *creational order* that is spoken about in these verses. And the context of these words goes back to the beginning when man and woman were created: "male and female He created them."¹³ The teaching on head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 is given for *all* sisters, whether married or unmarried. Nowhere in the teaching does Paul give even a remote hint for anyone to be exempted from doing it.

In all the Scriptures that refer to the role of a wife, there is *no* mention of a woman wearing a head covering as an indication of her submission to her husband. However, 1 Corinthians 11 does clarify that a woman should wear a covering because of the creational order, for the sake of God's glory and for the angels. The matter of head coverings transcends the husband-and-wife relationship and touches God's glory and His throne.

The Church is the only institution on

earth where God's glory is demonstrated. It's about Almighty God and who He created us to be. It's not about us or our demographics, but about Him who is worthy of all worship and honor and glory.¹⁴

3

A New Covenant Order



I know of a man from India who was traveling in the United States and had an interesting encounter at a church.

As he walked in, an older woman gestured to his head and said, "You are going into the worship service; you need to take that thing off your head."

He had forgotten to take off his hat! Of course, immediately he took it off, knowing that the Bible says men should not wear a head covering during a spiritual gathering.

But when he went inside, he was surprised to find that none of the women wore a head covering even though the Bible teaches this truth in the same passage.

Isn't it interesting how easily we can see one thing and be totally blind to another? The

woman outside the church clearly knew the Scripture in 1 Corinthians 11—otherwise she would not have known that men were *not* supposed to cover their heads—yet she seemed oblivious to the rest of the teaching about women *wearing* a head covering.

It seems that some in the Corinthian church faced a similar struggle, accepting Paul's teaching in part but being seemingly oblivious to the rest.

Established by God

Because the Corinthian church had a mixture of saved Jews and Greeks, I imagine there must have been bickering over this issue. I am sure it wasn't easy for the Jewish men to immediately adjust to praying without a head covering, while the Greek women had the same difficulty in wearing one!

The Corinthians were yet to grasp the mystery of a church made up of both Jews and Gentiles, all redeemed and made into a new creation by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the New Covenant order, a man who wears a head covering in church disgraces his head or authority, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ It continued that the woman who didn't have a covering on her head disgraced her ruling head or authority, namely, man.²

This includes her husband, her father if she is unmarried, and the shepherds who give oversight to the flock.

This apostles' instruction is based on God's established governmental order and authority, and thus the implication is of utmost importance.

When a woman doesn't want to obey the instruction given by God in wearing a head covering as a symbol of acknowledging God's order of government, she is dishonoring God and His Throne.

A Link to the Supernatural

So what's in a symbol anyway, and why make such a big deal about it?

Simply put, if symbols are not important, then God would not have commanded us to do them.

On the night of the Passover, the Jewish people in Egypt were told to put a symbol on their door post, marking it with the blood of the slain lamb. When the angel of death saw it, he passed over the house, leaving it in peace.³

Now suppose a family had said, "Who cares? It's just a symbol. Besides, we are children of Israel and God knows our hearts and our family lineage; He knows we are not Egyptians." Surely they would have fallen

under the same awful judgment the Egyptians faced.

Symbols are important to God, and following them puts things into play in the spiritual world.

When describing the difficulty of wearing a head covering, someone once said, "It's so hard for me to consider because I've always been so independent." The connection she made between losing her independence and wearing a head covering is not at all a practical, objective response to putting something on her head. How could wearing something on your head possibly affect your independence?

It cannot in the physical alone. But because it is a symbol instituted by God, it makes a loud statement in the spiritual world. The Enemy and flesh oppose the acknowledgment of God's authority and government.

Think about it objectively: How difficult is it to put something on your head? People do it for fashion all the time! It's almost ridiculous to consider how simple an act could possibly cause such conflict. This struggle is not over the physical act of putting something on your head, but for the impact that is made in the spiritual world.⁴

The Choice before Them

Some in the Corinthian church had difficulty comprehending the depths of this holy tradition. They struggled with the idea of it, probably not even aware of the true reasons for their inward reluctance.

Paul wrote this epistle, I am sure, in part as a preventative measure; he didn't want their actions to confuse other congregations and future generations. Although they handled some things correctly, overall their conduct needed correction—and fast.⁵

There were adjustments to be made in their conduct. The question was, Would they obey or disobey?

4

Wearing a Head Covering



The believers at Corinth *did* choose to submit to this teaching, for Tertullian, an early church father, writes more than 200 years later that the Corinthian women were wearing head coverings.¹ History further shows us that the issue of women not wearing head coverings did not resurface again until the middle of the 20th century, when the seeds of thought from liberal theology and higher criticism bore their fruit in this doctrine.

Following in Their Footsteps

The oral and written history handed down to us from the early Church is an example in these matters; we can look to the practical way they obeyed this command and do likewise.

In the second century, Hippolytus of Rome wrote the Apostolic Tradition—a collection of the customs of the early Church. It includes the statement “let all the women have their heads covered.”²

Furthermore, the catacombs (a system of burial caverns under Rome where early Christians hid during times of persecution), are full of pictures of women praying with coverings and men without.³

Not only was it an apostolic teaching, but various early church fathers such as Augustine of Hippo,⁴ Saint John Chrysostom,⁵ Tertullian⁶ and others taught and encouraged it.

John Calvin⁷ and Matthew Henry⁸ both taught and practiced the tradition of head coverings, and the Protestant reformer Martin Luther’s wife wore one.⁹ John Wesley¹⁰ taught it as well.

These are the kind of people we are following when we practice the tradition of head coverings. They were devout, God-fearing men and women who passionately sought the Lord in humble obedience to His call on their lives.

From the earliest pictures of the Church, the women covered their heads and the men did not in accordance with the Scriptures. This is how the Church continued for centuries. You can see pictures on the Internet of how women covered their heads throughout time.¹¹

Looking back over the history of the Church, many different kinds of shawls, scarves and handkerchiefs have been used for the past 2,000 years. In India, women will often put part of their *sari* over their heads while in church. Those who wear *salwar kameez* use the accompanying shawl as a covering. In Western countries, the Mennonites wear a doily or a scarf. And in Northeast India and Nepal, a small scarf is used as a head covering.

Exactly how believers in different cultures and groups have chosen to practically apply this teaching may look different throughout the centuries. Yet some things remain unchanged: a woman with a covered head and a man with an uncovered head.

When to Wear a Head Covering

Paul specifies that women cover their heads when they pray. The admonition here is for a woman to cover her head *whenever* she prays. This is what my mother always did.

Now Paul shared this teaching within the context of speaking about *spiritual gatherings*—a time when believers “come together” for worship, prayer, exhortation, teaching and the like.¹²

We know that prayer is not always vocal; it can be nonverbal, as in the case of Hannah.¹³ Even though a prayer may not be verbalized at

the gathering, all the believers are joining in prayer together. In essence, everyone there is in prayer, men and women alike.

So even if a woman herself is not praying aloud, she is still joining in with her brothers and sisters who are gathered.

Because of this atmosphere of prayer and because of the angels,¹⁴ a woman should have a head covering on during the entire church service, from the beginning until the benediction and dismissal.

There are churches that teach that women should wear a head covering at all times based on the instruction that we are to “pray without ceasing,”¹⁵ along with the Scripture in 1 Corinthians 11 for women to have a covering when they pray.

People also base the practice of wearing a head covering at all times on the fact that both Old Testament Hebrew women and Christian women throughout church history wore head coverings all the time and not just at spiritual gatherings.

One thing is certain, however; the Bible clearly teaches in 1 Corinthians 11:3–16 that a woman is to wear a head covering when she prays and prophesies, which would include any time during a spiritual gathering.

No specific instruction is given in the Bible for the *age* when a girl should start

covering her head, but logic and common sense tell us it should be from the time of accountability. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers around AD 200, affirms this guidance.¹⁶

As we submit to the Lord’s teaching, practicing the symbols He has given us, we begin to realize that this is more than a simple, physical action. As Jesus said when He washed the disciples’ feet, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:17).

5

Beyond the Visible



There is nothing God asks us to do that is not for our immense blessings. Yet often we cannot see or recognize the spiritual blessings of obedience to His Word. The reason is the simple, visible actions we do point to something much greater than what we can see in the physical world.

When we partake in the Holy Communion, for example, eating a piece of bread and drinking some wine, from what we can *see*, it is a very simple thing. Yet this act is linked to the mystery of redemption, something that transcends time and eternity. This symbol points us to “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”¹

“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the

things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3). Everything that we *can* see—the earth, ocean, stars—was made out of that which we *cannot* see.

In the same way, the symbol of a head covering is the *visible* means for us to glimpse into the *invisible* realities of God through our faith and obedience. Only by faith can we obey and inherit the blessings God has promised us through this visible connection to the invisible realm.

A Visible Sign

When police officers wear a badge, it is a symbol that points to the authority they have been given by a higher authority, the government of that land.

In the same way, a head covering is the sign that a woman is under authority. Like the officer, the veil does not make her inferior or superior *in herself*, but speaks of her acceptance of her rightful and God-appointed role. And with her acceptance, Almighty God and His grace are backing her.

This physical action is not only seen by the visible world around her, but it is also seen and recognized by the unseen world. It speaks of God and His angels, the whole host of heaven, backing her up, for she is in line with the established government of God.

All Glory to God

In 1 Corinthians 11:7 and 15, Paul speaks of glory; man is the glory of God, woman is the glory of man, and a woman's hair is her glory.

What is "glory"?

Simplified, the glory of God is that which demands admiration to Him. In the same way, the glory of an angel would be that which demands admiration to an angel.

The prophet Isaiah had an amazing encounter with the Living God, where he saw Him on His throne, surrounded by angels worshiping God Almighty and calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:3). The angels in the presence of God were seen covering their faces with two of their wings, and with two wings they covered their feet. Everything about them said, "Don't look at us—look at God."

All glory belongs to God,² and 1 Corinthians 1:29 tells us that "no flesh should glory in His presence." All throughout Scripture it speaks of letting God's glory be seen and proclaimed. God has given us a very practical physical reminder that His glory, man, should *not be* covered, but that man's glory, woman, *should be* covered.

For the holy angels, this truth is a way of life, for two-thirds of their wings are simply

for the sake of covering their glory in the presence of God. Their submission to God and His rightful position is absolute.

By covering her head, a woman covers both *her* glory and *man's* glory, allowing all glory to go to the Lord. She honors Him who sits on the throne.

I imagine it must grieve the holy angels when a woman comes before the Lord with her head uncovered. For you see, it is not she alone who is worshiping, but also the angels around her.³ St. John Chrysostom explains it this way: "For if the very air is filled with angels, how much more so the Church! . . . Hear the apostle teaching this, when he bids the women to cover their heads with a veil because of the presence of the angels."⁴

Robbing God's Glory

There are two kinds of angels who are aware of our life on earth. One kind are the holy angels who are assigned to protect and watch over us; the other kind are the fallen angels who fell with Lucifer.

These fallen angels became devils through rebellion along with Satan.⁵ Some time back in eternity, along with Lucifer, these angels worshiped God and were in line with God's authority.

But one day Lucifer decided he didn't

want to be God's subordinate any more, and he declared, "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14).

In the first act of pride and rebellion, Lucifer sought to project himself and his own glory. Perhaps Lucifer and his followers decided not to cover themselves with their wings any more.

Have you ever considered why there is so much tension and fighting over placing a small piece of cloth on one's head?

When a woman wears the symbol of God's government, a head covering, she is essentially a rebuke to all the fallen angels. Her actions say to them, "You have rebelled against the Holy God, but I submit to Him and His headship. I choose not to follow your example of rebellion and pride." As Watchman Nee said, "No wonder Satan persistently opposes the matter of head covering. It really puts him to shame. We are doing what he has failed to do."⁶

The Enemy constantly looks for some element of himself in us so that he can have claim on us. I wonder how many are living under the influences of the powers of darkness because of their passive rebellion in simple matters such as wearing a head covering.

But as a believer who chooses to walk in

obedience, we can say with confidence, “the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”⁷

A Desire to Please the Lord

Wearing a head covering can actually change your demeanor, *if* it is done out of a sincere desire to please the Lord. There is a transformation that takes place within the sister who chooses to submit herself to the Lord’s teaching; a softness and sweetness grows in her spirit.

However, when it’s done in resistance, it does not have the same effect, and the nature of the person remains unaltered.

Sadly, people can see the difference between what we *do* and who we *are*. This not only can be found in the area of head coverings, but it also applies to any spiritual activity. People can partake from the Holy Communion and not have any understanding what Christ really did for us. They can be baptized and not be born again. The Bible says that there will be people “in the last days . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power.”⁸

Notice, however, it *doesn’t say* we should not have the external, visible form of godliness. The implication is, while we have the form of godliness, we also need to care for the

inner life reality along with it. We should not stop wearing a head covering as a symbol of submission to God’s governmental authority, but we should instead give care to our inner life reality as well.

Consider the verse that says, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

What does it mean, “God loves a cheerful giver”? God loves everyone! *But* He takes special pleasure and it makes Him happy when we do what He asks with a humble, joyful heart.

Just as the Father loves a cheerful giver, He also takes delight in seeing His daughters gladly wearing a head covering out of child-like trust and love for Him.

6

The Choice Before Us



In light of the spiritual blessings that come from obedience to the Lord, how is it we still find an element of resistance within ourselves? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 2:14, where it says that natural man will not and cannot receive the things of God.

When we look at spiritual things from an earthly perspective, trusting in our human logic and reason, we will not find joy and excitement in obedience. We naturally don't like obedience because it takes dying to our ego and brings suffering to our flesh.

Why We Resist

Our flesh wants us to take the easier road, and our Enemy would like nothing better

than for us to deny the truth of the Scriptures and walk away from what God has ordained for us. As one author put it, “Satan works to keep us blind to little details of Biblical practice that may have far-reaching spiritual effects.”¹

Some say that they just don’t know what the truth about head coverings is so they decide it is best to do nothing. We easily come up with reasons, reasons that may sound logical on the surface, but when we get down to it are often excuses to justify our own willful disobedience.

The longer we find reasons to harden our hearts to the Word of God, the harder it is to obey Him.

What are some of the reasons we use for not obeying this commandment?

“Isn’t this just a principle? The externals don’t matter; it only matters that my heart is submitted, right?”

An exegesis of the 1 Corinthians 11 passage will acknowledge that Paul is speaking for the *practice* here and not simply the *principle*.

In James 1:22, we are told to be *doers* of the Word, not just hearers. When we look at Jesus, the One who is the essence of humility, we can see that He still demonstrated it visibly

when He washed the disciples’ feet. He *visibly took action* to display the *principle* of humility.²

Baptism is the same way; it is the *visible action* that shows the *inward conviction* of identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection.

By a woman wearing a head covering, a sister not only believes in the *principle* of headship, but also performs a *visible action* that is clearly spoken of in Scripture.

“Isn’t a woman’s authority her covering?”

In their position, yes, a woman’s authority—for example, her husband if she is married—is her covering.

However, *if* this is what Paul meant by a woman covering her head, then he wouldn’t have written specifically about women covering their heads when they pray. It would imply that a sister was not covered by her authority at other times.

This implication makes it clear that Paul is *not* talking about any human authority as a woman’s covering.

“What about Paul’s statement, ‘her hair is given to her for a covering’?”

After giving the theology and rationale behind this practice, Paul says, “Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to

God with her head uncovered? 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*" (1 Corinthians 11:13–15, emphasis mine).

There are those who interpret these verses to mean that a woman's hair itself counts as a covering, and she does not need a separate cloth or veil. The problem with such an interpretation is that it contradicts what Paul already said and causes a conflict within the Scripture. Obviously if Paul were trying to instruct the Corinthians that the woman's hair is her covering, there would be no reason for Paul to go into such a lengthy explanation. They all had hair and would have needed no instruction in the matter.

Think about it: If we take verse 15 to mean that a woman's hair is the same as the covering written about in the previous verses, then logically, we should be able to replace in the earlier verses the word "covering" with the word "hair."

However, when we try this substitution in verse 6, it becomes obvious that this replacement is both irrational and illogical. It would make the text read something like this: "For if a woman does not have hair [as in, she is bald], then let her be shaved [she should

become balder]; but if it is shameful for a woman to be shaved, let her have hair."

So what does Paul mean when he says in verses 14 and 15, "Does not even nature itself teach you . . . if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering"? He is saying that even nature itself dictates it is natural for a woman to be covered just by the fact that throughout time and without any rules of mankind, men generally have shorter hair and women generally have longer hair. He is not mentioning it in order that it takes the place of an actual cloth covering the head, but is instead making this statement to show that even in the way that God made us, it is the normal and right thing for a woman to be covered.

I have often been surprised by the uneducated tribal people whom I've met in all kinds of countries all over the world. They've not been exposed to any formal teaching—yet when you walk into their village, you see all the girls and women have head coverings. For them, who don't know otherwise, it is simply the normal and right thing to do.

"I don't feel convicted about it, so I don't want to cover my head."

Think about the driver who says, "I don't

want to stop at the signal light because I don't have any convictions about doing so."

Similarly, there are people who don't believe in baptism because they base their decision on their feelings and personal convictions, despite what the Word teaches us in Romans 6:1–3 and Matthew 28:19.

Sometimes we seek to do things based purely on our own understanding, not recognizing that the One who gave us these things is infinitely wiser than we are. God is the One who created us! Just as a child learns to obey his parents whether he understands their logic or not, so we must also learn to love, trust and obey our Creator.

A day is coming when we will stand before Him and be judged by the Word that He has given to us. Who would want to stand before Him and say, "I know You wrote this in Your Word, but I just didn't think it applied to me"?

"Wearing a head covering is legalism, and it causes people to come under bondage."

Legalism is a word that is thrown around liberally, but I often wonder how many people really know what it means.

Legalism is actually a perversion of self. It is seeking for righteousness, not from Christ, but by our own works. It is used to try to earn

acceptance from ourselves, from others and from God. It is a vain and empty religion. It is accompanied by excessive thoughts about ourselves—what people think about us, where we are in our "standing," and how we are doing. It is all about us. The fruit is discouragement, excessive introspection, pride, self-righteousness and a critical spirit toward others.

Obedience to God, however, should not be confused with legalism. It is not at all about us, how we feel about doing something, what other people will think about us or justifying ourselves through good works. It is about God. He is God. And He deserves our obedience. Often, in an effort to avoid the discomfort of obedience, we label obedience as legalism and use that as our reason not to do it. Think about the terms of discipleship Jesus asks of us, things like: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). True, it is challenging, but would you call the words of Christ legalistic and use that as an excuse not to obey Him?

The Word says we are called to be obedient children.³ When we obey the Word of God, we experience true freedom that brings peace that passes all understanding.

"If women wearing head coverings is so important, why isn't everybody doing it?"

With the age of reason, liberal theology and higher criticism, man put himself on the judgment seat. What is true, right and good is all based on subjective human understanding. This "new thinking" was a deliberate action by the founding liberal theologians to confuse the people of God at large. God no longer had the "right" to be God. He could only be what man found reasonable for Him to be.

When you read the theologians prior to the age of reason, there is such a childlike thirst to understand and apply whatever God gave us in His Word, regardless of human understanding. Whereas after the time when liberal theology began to permeate society and general thought, there is a sense of theologians trying to twist God's Word into their own thought.

This liberal theology traveled from Germany to the United Kingdom to the rest of the Western world. It ended up in commentaries, dissertations, definitions and Bible translations. This thinking, which started in the 17th century, has conditioned us to this day to question God and His Word so that we say under our breath, "God can't really mean that," and avoid the obedience that would transform us into His likeness.

The removal of the practice of head coverings in the middle of the 20th century was

prophesied of in Song of Solomon where the bride represents the Bride of Christ: "The watchmen who went about the city found me. They struck me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took my *veil* away from me" (Song of Solomon 5:7, emphasis mine).

The teachers, the shepherds of the last couple of centuries who were to be a guard for us, the Body of Christ, have struck us, wounded us and took away this precious symbol from His Bride.

"I don't want to offend those who don't wear a head covering, so I don't do it."

If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, radical in your walk with the Lord, then you will *not* please everyone. Jesus told us not to be ashamed of Him.⁴

Being His witness in this dark and sinful generation will bring persecution and suffering. The Word says, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer" (2 Timothy 3:12).

In the midst of a multitude, *one* man, Enoch, walked with God and pleased God.⁵

On the other hand, King Saul desired to please people, disobeyed God and was rejected by God.⁶

God is *not* looking for the majority, but a mighty minority.

“Does my not wearing a head covering make me less spiritual?”

The answer is a question. Does your not praying, not witnessing, not partaking in the Holy Communion, not being baptized or not obeying the many, many instructions God has given make you any less spiritual?

Two Options

The Scripture is written in such a way that only two options are given in 1 Corinthians 11:5–6: A woman can choose to obey, submitting herself to the order of God’s government by wearing a covering. Or, if a woman does not want to wear a covering, then she can be shorn. Paul is essentially saying that a woman should do one or the other.

It’s important to note the word for “shorn” is *keirō* in the Greek, which is only translated in the Bible as shorn or its derivative. This word is known best and used most in conjunction with shearing sheep. If you’ve ever seen a sheep shorn, you know there isn’t much wool left—in fact, it’s all gone. To shear means to remove hair, not simply to cut it short. So for a woman to be shorn, she would be completely bald.

But there is something sad and intrinsically wrong with the sight of a woman with a

shaved head. The Word calls it shameful.⁷ So where does that leave us?

If there is still a doubt in your heart as to whether or not a woman should cover her head, consider the words of Zac Poonen: “Isn’t better for her [a sister] to do *more* rather than less – especially so, when there is no inconvenience or cost involved. What will she *lose* by covering her head when she prays and prophesies? Nothing. But think of what she will *gain* by covering her head, if she discovers at the judgment-seat of Christ that this was indeed God’s command? She will have the joy of having pleased her Lord on earth, in spite what other Christians taught and practised.”⁸

God is a god of choices. He says, “Come, follow Me.”⁹ He doesn’t say, “Follow Me or else.” He does not force us to seek Him.

He loves us the same even when we wander away from Him, like the prodigal son in Luke 15. The Father’s love was always the same, both when the son obeyed and when he disobeyed.

Even when we suffer the consequences for our disobedience, the Father’s love never changes.

But how much better it is to be in the presence of the Father, experiencing His love and nearness through our willing obedience!

7

No Such Custom



When we look at all the other epistles, not a single other one mentions anything about head coverings. That is because all of the other churches practiced it.

Having explained in detail the reason why women should have head coverings, the Apostle Paul then poses the question to them: "Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" (1 Corinthians 11:13). Then Paul concludes by saying: "But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God" (1 Corinthians 11:16). William Barclay translates verse 16 as: "Let it suffice to say that we have no such custom as the participation of unveiled women in public worship, nor have the congregations of God."¹

Some have conveniently taken the phrase, “We have no such custom” to mean “we do not have any particular custom about women covering their heads so if you don’t agree with the teaching of head coverings, do as you please.” This view obviously goes completely against the context, and it is unthinkable that Paul would spend so much time articulating the importance of head coverings and at the end say it doesn’t matter!

Let us remember that God is still the head of Christ, and Christ is still the head of every man and man is head of woman. And too, in the creational order, man is still the first one created and woman was created from man. That has not changed either. God still deserves all glory, and the angels are still among us.

All the reasons for which a woman wears a head covering still remain valid. Time and culture have not touched them.

Lord, help us to hear Your voice and to be Your lambs. Give us the courage to do Your will and be all that You created us to be.

A Word of Caution



Our obedience and godliness should never cause us to criticize and alienate our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. The sins of the spirit are more serious than the external sins. And spiritual pride is the deadliest of all for it is what caused the glorious angel Lucifer to become Satan.

Avoid judgmentalism, but rather, with compassion and love, see your sister who does not cover her head. Hope and believe that the Lord will speak to her heart and that she too can experience the peace and protection that you found in wearing a head covering. She may not yet have light on this Scripture. And like all of us, it takes time and the work of the Holy Spirit to see the truth and to surrender in obedience.

Love is the greatest of all doctrines that binds us together in the Body of Christ. It is by our love and unity that we will draw the unbelieving world to our Lord. Remember, the *Holy Spirit* will have to change hearts, not our carnal reasoning.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. See 1 Corinthians 11:3–5, 7–10.
2. See Matthew 15:1–9; Mark 7:1–13.
3. See Colossians 2:8.
4. See 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 3:6.
5. See 1 Corinthians 11:23, 14:37, 15:3.
6. See Exodus 19:7.
7. See Romans 6:3–6.
8. See 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.
9. See John 13:5–17.
10. See 1 Thessalonians 5:26.
11. See 1 Corinthians 11:3–9.

Chapter 2

1. See Isaiah 55:9.
2. See 1 Corinthians 11:3; Genesis 2:21–22.
3. Watchman Nee, *Love One Another* (New York, NY: Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1975), p. 77.
4. See Romans 13:1.
5. See Genesis 2:18, 21–22.
6. See Ephesians 5:21–33; Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:24–28.
7. See Galatians 3:28.
8. See Psalm 40:7–8; John 10:18.
9. Thomas A.J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality and the Law in Ancient Rome* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1998), p. 159.
10. See 1 Corinthians 8:1–13.
11. 1 Corinthians 11:10.

12. See 1 Corinthians 11:8, 11–13.
13. Genesis 1:27.
14. See Ephesians 1:20–23, 3:1–21.

Chapter 3

1. See 1 Corinthians 11:3–4.
2. See 1 Corinthians 11:3, 5.
3. See Exodus 12:13.
4. See Ephesians 6:12.
5. See 1 Corinthians 11:2, 17.

Chapter 4

1. Tertullian, “*The Argument E Contrario.*” In *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth*, Minucius Felix and Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.).
2. Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, trans. Burton Scott Easton (Madison, WI: The University Press, 1934), p. 43.
3. Tom Shank, ed., *Let Her Be Veiled* (Eureka, MT: Torch Publications, 1988), p. 21.
4. Augustine of Hippo, “On the Holy Trinity; Doctrinal Treatises; Moral Treatises.” In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 2434.
5. John Chrysostom, Saint, *The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom*. In *The Oxford Translation*, ed. Philip Schaff, p. 192.

6. Tertullian, "Of the Reasons Assigned by the Apostle for Bidding Women to Be Veiled." *In Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.).
7. John Calvin, "1 Corinthians 11:1–16." *In Commentary on Corinthians*. 1 Vol (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.).
8. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, VI Vol (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2000), pp. 873–77.
9. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Portrait of Katharina von Bora, Wife of Martin Luther* (Warburg-Stiftung, Eisenach, Germany, 1526), oil on panel (<http://www.artgalleryabc.com/cranach/blog>). (Accessed October 7, 2011).
10. John Wesley, "1st Corinthians: Chapter XI." *In John Wesley's Notes on the Whole Bible, The New Testament*.
11. Scroll Publishing Co., *The Christian Woman's Head Covering Through the Centuries* (<http://www.scrollpublishing.com/store/head-covering-history.html>). (Accessed October 7, 2011).
12. See 1 Corinthians 11:17–20.
13. See 1 Samuel 1:13.
14. See 1 Corinthians 11:10.
15. 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
16. Tertullian, "Tertullian, Having Shown His Defence to Be Consistent with Scripture, Nature, and Discipline, Appeals to the Virgins Themselves." *In Fathers of the Third Century:*

Tertullian, Part Fourth (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.).

Chapter 5

1. Revelation 13:8.
2. See 1 Peter 4:11.
3. See 1 Corinthians 4:9; Hebrews 1:14.
4. Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and Their Mission* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2009), p. 73.
5. See Jude 6.
6. Nee, *Love One Another*, p. 84.
7. See John 14:30.
8. See 2 Timothy 3:1–5.

Chapter 6

1. Renée Ellison, *The Biblical Headcovering: Scarf of Hidden Power* (<http://crossover.ellison.net/Headcovering.pdf>). (Accessed October 7, 2011).
2. See John 13:3–17.
3. See 1 Peter 1:14.
4. See Mark 8:38.
5. See Genesis 5; Hebrews 11:5.
6. See 1 Samuel 15:24–26.
7. See 1 Corinthians 11:6.
8. Zac Poonen, "Head-Covering for Women." *Christian Fellowship Church* (<http://www.cfcindia.com/web/mainpages/articles.php?display=article39>). (Accessed October 7, 2011).
9. Luke 18:22.

Chapter 7

1. William Barclay, *The New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), pp. 345–46.