

# The Scriptural Headveiling

The City of Corinth was a great city in Paul's day. Its population numbered more than seven hundred thousand people. It was a city about the size of Boston. Since Corinth is located on a narrow neck of land that connects the southern part of Greece with the northern part, all traffic north and south in the country of Greece had to pass through the city of Corinth—there was no other way for it to go. And the extreme southern tip of Greece was a very dangerous cape in ancient times, so most of the traffic east and west also passed through the city of Corinth instead of going around the southern tip. Therefore its location made Corinth one of the greatest trading and commercial centers in the ancient world. It was the largest and most wealthy city in Greece. Its people lived in luxury, and the wickedness that goes along with prosperity and luxury abounded on every hand.

It was to this city that the Apostle Paul came in the year 51 A.D., and in weakness and fear and much trembling, he preached the Gospel, and the Bible says many believed. A Church was started there. And then many years later, Paul wrote a letter to these people, dealing with ten great ever-present problems, and one of the problems is that of the veiling for sisters in the Church.

The teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 is not an attempt to promote the Oriental custom of veiling the head. It is not an ancient Jewish tradition carried over into Christianity. The veiling for women (as given in 1 Corinthians 11) was a practice different from any previously existing social practice. It was a practice intended to symbolize a great **principle** of the Christian faith. It is a distinctive practice designed especially for Christian people. We want to look at the principle upon which the veiling is based, the reasons why the veiling is to be worn, and the problems that are closely related.

## 1. The Principle Upon Which the Veiling Is Based

The principle is stated in verse 3 (of 1 Corinthians 11), "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." Too often we fail to emphasize this great principle when we talk about the veiling. Paul says, "But I would have you know." In the Greek language there are two words for "know"—the one a strong word meaning "to know with certainty," and the other a weaker word meaning simply "to be aware of." It's the strong word used here. Paul says, "I want you to know with certainty (I want you to know for sure) that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man." The word "head" means "authority." The Bible says to Christian people, "The **authority** of every man is Christ, and the authority of the woman is the man." Every man who expects to be saved through the merits of Jesus Christ must be subject to His authority, and every Christian woman should gladly recognize her subordination to the man.

According to God's standard—headship, authority and leadership (as far as human relations are concerned) are vested in the man—and this standard must be observed within the Church. And the veiling is a symbol of the woman's acceptance of this subordination to man's headship.

Beware of the teaching which says that wearing the veil makes the woman equal to the man. Why the very reason she wears the veiling is because she recognizes that she is **notequal** to him, and that she wants to be **subject** to him. Wearing the veil gives her equal access to the throne of God, and (with the veiling) she prays directly to God—but wearing the veil does not dissolve her social and civil relationships to the man. She is still to be subject to him. In fact, she wears the veiling to show that she is. The man and the woman are equal in spiritual privilege, but they are not equal in social relationships.

The basic unit of society is not the individual, but the family. And every family (if it is to be united and operated successfully), like any other team, must have a captain. According to God's law, the captain of the family team, is the man. And notice too, that the Scripture does not speak in terms of husband and wife, but in terms of man and woman. This means that the principle applies not only to those who are wives, but to unmarried daughters and to widows as well. The man should have the place of leadership, whether it be the husband in the home, the father in the family, or the elders in the Church. The captain of the family team is the man. Final responsibility for making decisions must rest upon him, and the woman should graciously accept this place of leadership on the part of man.

To the men it must be pointed out that this principle is not intended to give license to become cruel and overbearing and unreasonable. The man is not to be a grumpy, bossy, domineering sort of person who thinks that all the wheels of the home must turn to suit **his** pleasure. Headship is not the same as lordship! The man is not to become a tyrant! Rather, it is a matter of shouldering responsibility.

The principle of headship is stated in verse 3. The man should recognize his subordination to Christ, and the woman should recognize her subordination to the man, and this should be done just as joyfully as Jesus Christ voluntarily became submissive to the Father, and came to this world as a Mediator between man and God. And then in verses 4 and 5, Paul says the man should **show** his subjection to Christ, and the woman should **show** her subjection to the man (not only recognize that this order exists), but **each should show it with a sign**. Verse 4 says the man should show his subjection to Christ by praying or prophesying with his head shorn or shaven, and uncovered. Verse 5 says the woman should show her subjection to the man by praying or prophesying with her head veiled.

Notice that the veiling is not only to be worn in times of public worship, but it ought to be worn at all times. The principle of headship is a continual, ever-present relationship, and therefore the veiling should be a continual, ever-present symbol of that relationship. This is true also when we consider the nature of praying and prophesying. Praying means "speaking to God on behalf of others," and prophesying means "speaking to others on behalf of God," and both these activities should be practiced many times daily, and not only during times of public worship. John Chrysostom (a Christian leader in the Fourth Century) says, "What will the woman who neglects this ordinance (of wearing the veiling at all times) do? Will she stifle the spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving? Will she meet temptation unarmed by prayer? Or will she wear the veiling during all her waking hours, and thus be qualified at any time to fellowship with her God, and to witness for Him?"

Paul says in verse 2 (of 1 Corinthians 11) that these ordinances are intended to be kept; they are not something merely to talk about; they should be literally observed and kept.

## **2. The Reasons For Wearing the Veiling**

Beginning with verse 6 (1 Corinthians 11), Paul was inspired to state seven reasons why the Christian woman's hair should be long and veiled:

### **(1) It is a shame to omit it (read verse 6)**

The Greek word translated "shorn" means "to cut." The word translated "covered" means "to veil." In Paul's day people knew that it is a shame for a woman to be shaven or shorn. Cut hair was a public mark of wickedness and prostitution, only women of the lowest type cut their hair. So long hair has been the badge of virtuous womanhood, and short hair has been the badge of harlotry. The harlot cut her hair because she had difficulty keeping it arranged neatly in her manner of living—that's where cut hair got its start. Therefore, everyone agreed that it was shameful for a woman to have her hair cut. But God says in verse 6 that refusing to wear the symbol of subjection (refusing to wear the veiling) is as shameful as cutting the hair. In fact, if she is not willing to veil her head, she ought to be consistently wrong and cut off her hair too. The one is just as shameful as the other. Verse 6 says, "For if the woman be not covered (if she will not veil herself) let her also be shorn." One later translation says, "If a woman will not veil herself, she should cut off her hair as well."

The Bible teaches that it is right and proper for the Christian woman to **veil her long hair**, and that it is shameful and disgraceful for her to cut it off. So you see, there is nothing more ridiculous than for a woman to cut her hair, and then attempt to wear a veiling over it. She already has become a shame by cutting off her hair, and the veiling will never cover the shame!

### **(2) God's order in creation calls for it (read verses 7-9)**

Paul says that even in creation, there is a difference between a man and a woman that puts the man in a place of leadership over the woman. God made the man first; the woman was created after he was. This is merely God's order way back at the creation, and it ought to be respected and honored.

God made Adam first, the woman was made after he was, and the veiling is merely a symbol that shows respect for this order established way back at the creation.

### **(3) The angels expect it (read verse 10)**

Angels are constantly watching God's people. They observe the conduct of the members of the Church. They rejoice when souls are born into the family of God. When the Gospel is preached and the invitation is given and a wandering sinner comes home, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels. And certainly, they are sorely grieved by any departure from God's plan.

Verse 10 says that the woman should have power on her head because of the angels. The Greek word translated "power" literally means "a sign of authority"—a sign indicating that she is submissive to the authority of the man. This is why a hat, or a handkerchief, or an ordinary hood is not acceptable. These coverings have no spiritual significance. They are not a sign of anything. But the veiling is a symbol (a sign) of the woman's subjection to God through man. It is a sign of submission to authority.

When an American ship sails (for example), it doesn't display any old piece of cloth from its masthead. A simple piece of cloth is not a sign of anything. Instead, the ship displays a red, white and blue flag. The flag is a recognized sign. It represents the greatest nation on earth. And any nation which insults the symbol, insults the nation that it represents. And just so the veiling is a sign that shows both heaven and earth that the woman is taking her rightful place in God's divine order. And if she refuses to acknowledge the authority of man (and refuses to wear the sign of authority), she offends even the angels.

#### **(4) Mutual inter-dependence requires it (read verses 11-12)**

There is a mutual dependence between the man and the woman. Each is necessary to the happiness of the other. Verse 12 says that the woman is of the man—that is, in creation the first woman was made out of the man. If it hadn't been for Adam (the first man), the first woman would never have been created. Therefore (in that sense) the woman is dependent upon the man. Verse 12 continues, "the man also is by the woman." That is, every man has been born of a woman. There could not be a man in the world today, if some mother had not given birth to him. And therefore (in that sense), man is dependent upon the woman.

The woman is of the man in the sense that the first woman was made from the man, and the man is by the woman in the sense that every man was born of a mother. And so, you see, the two go hand in hand. And wherever two or more parties belong together, the one must have the place of authority, and the other, the place of subjection. This is true in every avenue of life. It is true of a ruler and his citizens, elders and their congregation, a teacher and his pupils, the husband and his wife, the father and his children, etc. Where two or more parties are inter-dependent upon each other, one must have authority, one must be submissive. Paul simply points out the reasonableness of God's order, and we should gladly submit to this order.

#### **(5) Your own good judgment supports it (read verse 13)**

The Lord appeals now to our common sense. Everyone of us was born with a natural, inborn sense of what is fitting and right—and our common sense tells us that long hair is a glory for the woman. Even the heathen regard long hair as a glory for women. It's a native, inborn sense.

I taught a Sunday School Class in a neighboring church some time ago, and after class our little girls were sitting with us. We don't cut their hair, because it is our prayer that they will accept Jesus Christ when they reach the age of accountability (and that they will obey Him too)—and we don't want to make it hard for them to obey Him. Several of the ladies sitting in back of us said to one another, of our little five-year old daughter, "My isn't her hair beautiful? Look at that beautiful long hair." And then she leaned front, and said to our daughter, "Don't you ever let your mommy and daddy cut your hair." The point is simply this: Even though we are living in a time when our culture has drifted far from God's design, and wickedness abounds on every hand, and many have no respect for God's law—yet many people have enough common sense to see that long hair is a woman's glory, and that short hair is her shame.

### **(6) Nature teaches it (read verses 14-15)**

It seems that the woman naturally has longer, more beautiful hair than the man. Nature itself is a good instructor. The longer, more beautiful hair of the woman is an object-lesson in nature that teaches us that a man is to have short hair, and a woman is to have long hair. Many sincerely state, “But the Scripture doesn’t say how long a woman’s hair should be.” In this chapter God uses three words to describe the length of a woman’s hair: shaven, shorn, and long. Some ask how long the hair must be to be counted long, and the answer is this—if it is not shaven and if it is not shorn, then it is long. If you cut off an inch, then it’s shorn; if you cut it all off, then it’s shaven; if you don’t cut any off, then it’s long. That’s not too hard, is it?

I know that many say, “But verse 15 says the hair is given for a covering.” But verse 15 does not say, “Her hair **is** her covering.” It says, “Her hair is given her **for** a covering.” The Greek word translated “covering” in verse 15 is not the same as the word translated “covered” in verse 6. There it was “katakalupto” (meaning “to veil”), here it is “periboliaiou” (meaning “to cast around”). Verse 15 literally says, “For her hair is given her to be cast around (the head)” —**for** a covering to be put on, you see.

### **(7) Universal apostolic practice demands it (read verse 16)**

If there are some who are deaf to reason, and can’t be convinced by the weighty and logical arguments that have just been presented—then they’ll have to be silenced by apostolic authority. Paul is simply saying that neither he nor the churches founded by him, nor any of the churches in ancient times—none of them permit a woman to pray or prophesy unveiled. The sister’s veiling was a universal practice of the apostolic church. The catacombs of Rome, the sculptural carvings in the walls of buildings, the early historical records—all bear witness to the fact that the veiling was observed in every early church. This was the normal, universal practice in the churches of Greece and Rome and Antioch and Africa—everywhere.

Some teach that Paul was saying here in verse 16 that we must avoid contention, and that if this teaching causes contention, we should drop it. Why would the Holy Spirit use half a chapter in the Bible to teach the veiling and to point out the reasons why it should be worn, and then conclude by saying that it shouldn’t be practiced if it causes contention?

## **3. The Problems That Are Closely Related**

There are a few questions which are not touched upon directly by the passage here in 1 Corinthians 11. One of them is—“To whom does this teaching apply?” Many Bible teachers today dismiss this practice as a mere teaching for the culture of Paul’s day, and say it has no relevance for the Church today. But if you read verses 1 and 2 of 1 Corinthians 1, you’ll find that this chapter is not addressed only to the people of Corinth, but to “all that in every place call upon Jesus Christ as Lord.”

In our day, when women are tending to become more and more masculine and are assuming more places of authority, it’s all the more important that Christian women wear a symbol of submission. Even in some of our public schools, children are being taught disrespect for God’s order of headship. In one

elementary school a few years ago, the teacher lamented to her class that men run the world and that women ought to have more authority—and all this sort of thing. The girls in that fifth grade class (at the ripe old age of eleven) were so offended they refused to speak to the boys all afternoon. They walked around with their noses held high. They were going to show those boys who could run things. Certainly in our day it is necessary that Christian women wear a symbol of submission.

Another problem is this: “But I know good Christian women that don’t wear the veiling. Some are Sunday School teachers and even missionaries, and they don’t wear the veiling.” It seems mighty strange that some professing Christian people want to teach Sunday School classes, and want to go to foreign countries, and are eager to do great things for God—and yet they refuse to do a little thing that gives Him pleasure! It reminds one of Naaman. He came down to the prophet of Israel to be cured of his leprosy, but he became angry when he was told to dip in the Jordan seven times. His servant said, “Naaman, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, you would have done it—why not do this simple thing he asks you to do?” Naaman did, and he was healed. Those who want to do great things for God, but are not willing to do the small things He requests—surely their lives are not completely pleasing to God.

And always guard against a veiling that is too small. Those who drop the wearing of the veiling, usually don’t do it all at once, but rather, the veiling grows smaller and smaller, and then it’s worn less and less frequently, and then finally it’s discarded altogether. There are still many people who will inwardly and secretly respect you, if you are brave enough and humble enough to break with the fashions of the world—to practice the simple life and to wear this symbol of loving subjection. There are still many people who respect this Bible teaching, because they know that it is fitting and right.

True happiness comes from a right relationship with God, and we become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. One who meets the conditions of salvation, and receives Jesus Christ into his heart, becomes a new creation. If you will give your heart in full surrender to Jesus Christ, you’ll receive a new outlook on God’s Word; His commandments will not seem grievous; this chapter will not seem difficult at all. The Lord Jesus says, “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me,” Revelation 3:20. The invitation is yours.

-Harold S. Martin

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#### **BIBLE HELPS**

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