

Woman's Head Coverings

It has been brought to my attention by questions church people have asked me, that good people from another church, people who wish to please God, are applying to their Christian lives a certain interpretation from 1 Corinthians 11:2-17. Now, whether another church applies this section of Scripture differently to themselves is none of my concern. Nor will I attempt to correct their interpretation, as each church is autonomous from all others. What I do desire is a logical, Scriptural understanding of the passage so that the Christians of our church realize why our ladies do not practice the placing of a piece of cloth upon the top of their hair before coming to church.

Let Us Show Great Carefulness

First, let me say that if a person for conscience sake toward God wishes to wear anything on their hair, I would never be critical of that. If I thought I could do anything that would bring me in good favor with God, I would be anxious to do it. There are true Christians whose true Christian wives wear a cloth on their hair, others who wish to show love for brothers in Christ by washing feet, and still others who feel it is pleasing to have all the men sit on one side of the church and all the ladies on the other side of the church. I would go out of the way to never “speak evil” of a brother or sister in Christ who wants to practice those things. In a day and age when it is popular for Christians to take “pot-shots” at one another when we do not agree with small, personal convictions, let us take great care that we show love for all men, “especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

However, having said that, whenever a teaching comes along which tends to be a test of fellowship to other believers who hold not that teaching, then a defense of the Scriptures must come forth to kindly show why it should not be a test of fellowship.

I Believe in Spiritual Authority and Submission of Wives

Ephesians 5:22— *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.*

Colossians 3:18— *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.*

1 Peter 3:1—*Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;*

I believe, based on the previous Scriptures, that God commands a wife to be submissive to her husband's wishes. Therefore, if her husband wishes her to wear a cloth on her hair to church, or a dress down to her ankles, or a coat of many colors, she is to submit to his desires. (I do not want to enter into a discussion about a husband desiring his wife to wear something evil. I am speaking about men and women who desire to please God; the same type of Christians Paul was writing to in Corinthians.) I believe 1 Corinthians 7:34 sums up the desire of the wife: *There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.*

Let Us Look at the Head

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.*

The Greek word for “head” in the Received Text is “*kafalee*” (spelled “*kephale*” in Strong’s Concordance), and means either a physical head, or, according to Thayer’s Definitions, “anything that is supreme, chief, or prominent.” Its use in showing authority over someone or something is seen in how Christ is viewed in other Scriptures.

Ephesians 1:22 - *And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.*

Ephesians 4:15 - *But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.*

Ephesians 5:23 - *For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body.*

Colossians 1:18 - *And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.*

Colossians 2:10 - *And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.*

To me, it is interesting to note that in Ephesians, chapter 5, Paul describes in great detail the similarities between what Christ is doing to present His local church as holy and how a husband is to do the same for his wife. Is it too early in this dissertation to assert that Christ is concerned with the inward qualities of His church in Ephesians, chapter 5, and gives no outward requirement for the church (or the wife) to be covered by any outward conformity?

I believe the word “head” in 1 Corinthians 11:3 refers to an authoritative position. However, in following verses the word “head” refers to both the physical head in some phrases and the authority in other phrases.

Now, when I am speaking about the physical head, I believe the Bible identifies it as whatever is from the top of the neck and up. I believe it includes the face. In Numbers, chapter 5, a woman accused of adultery by her husband was brought before the priest. The priest was to “uncover the woman’s head” in verse 18 so that she may “drink the bitter water” in verse 24. The Jewish “covering” for the head was a veil which “covered” the entire head, including the face. If this were not so, she would not have had to take off her veil in order to drink the water.

We also find the boy David cutting off Goliath’s “head” in 1 Samuel 17:51, 54, and 57. Notice that David did not scalp Goliath, which would only be his hair, but David carried around the hair attached to the eyes, the nose, the mouth, and the chin.

Entire Head Covering: A Jewish Custom of Mourning

2 Samuel 15:30 - *And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.*

Someone may try to say, “Oh, but the Bible only says that David covered his head.” A person may reason from their own experiences that David merely grabbed a baseball cap and put it on “top” of his head. Well, that is not the way the Scripture explains it. Notice the way David mourned when he heard that Absalom had died.

2 Samuel 19:1-4 - *And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. 2 And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. 3 And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. 4 But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!*

Again, someone could say, “Well, these are two separate instances in the Bible. David must have mourned two different ways.” The only problem that person has is that they only mourned one way in the Bible, which included covering the face which was part of the head. Ezekiel explains to the people NOT to mourn. He tells them:

Ezekiel 24:17 - *Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead (which David did), bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet (like David did when mourning for Absalom), and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.*

Ezekiel tells the people not to do those mourning customs for the dead. Those customs provided taking off the shoes and covering the “head” which included the

“face” and the “lips.” Other times of “head covering” in the Old Testament are found in Esther 6:12, which reads: *And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered.*

Jeremiah tells of the nobles who mourned because of there being no water. He wrote in Jeremiah 13:3-4: *And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. 4 Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads.* It is understandable that their “ashamed” face would have been the part these plowmen would have wanted to cover.

A Man's Head Covered: An Entirely Hidden Head?

1 Corinthians 11:4 says: *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.*

The word “covered” in the Textus Receptus is “*kata*.” Its opposite is in verse 5 (and other verses) with the word “*akatakaluptoo*” for “uncovered.” The Greek prefix “*a*” means “not” and “*kaluptoo*” means “hidden.” According to both Strong and Thayer, “*akatakaluptoo*” means “unveiled.” For a man to pray or prophesy with his (physical) head entirely hidden would dishonor Christ and would show the man was “ashamed” of his head (Christ). There is much more in this verse than a modern understanding that when someone leads in prayer the men should remove their baseball caps or fishing hats.

The spiritual significance of a man uncovering his entire physical head is shown us in 2 Corinthians 3:13-18. Here Moses put a veil (“*kalumma*” from the same root word as “*kaluptoo*,” which means “cover” or “hidden”) over his face. The same veil is over the children of Israel's eyes, for they are “blinded” (verse 14). This veil is “done away in Christ” (verse 14). When a man turns to the Lord the “vail shall be taken away” (verse 16). This taking away of the veil brings us “liberty” (verse 17). Now, “we all, with an open face” behold the “glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image (Greek: “*eikon*,” where we get the word “icon”) from glory to glory” (verse 18). Man is not to pray or prophesy with a veil on his face.

This explains 1 Corinthians 11:7, which says: *For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image (Greek: “*eikon*”) and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.*

From these and preceding verses it seems to me that the covering is of the entire head, including the face, and that men should not cover the entire head, including the face, when they pray or prophesy.

The Bible Always Says What It Means and Means What It Says

Nearly every credible commentary states that this section of Scripture is a difficult one to interpret. Most of them stay away from any commitment to have a woman cover her hair and use this as a proof-text. So, since it is so difficult to know what it means, how do we interpret this passage? My approach is to interpret the Scriptures in a literal way. What are the words given in the text? What is the primary meaning of the words? Try to not have any pre-conceived notions when looking at the text. Now, what does it really say?

Someone approached Charles Spurgeon, that great English Baptist pastor of the nineteenth century, and asked him what a difficult verse meant. Spurgeon's reply was, "It means exactly what it says." So, if the Word of God wanted to tell a woman to put a piece of cloth on her hair, it could very easily have said just that. All those words were available to the Holy Spirit as Scripture was being penned... "piece," "cloth." "hair." The Bible did not say this, and it would be a stretch of the English language, much less one's imagination, to think that it says anything close to this. Scripture does say in 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.* If the man is not to cover his head, which includes his face, then let us be consistent and say that a woman is supposed to cover her head, including her face.

What Goes on Her Hair, Then?

Peter writes that there is nothing external which can be put on or worn which pleases God. 1 Peter 3:3 states: *Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel:*

Notice that Peter warns that the adorning should not be "outward," or something she can "wear" or "put on." In the next verse he emphasizes that it cannot be anything that is "corruptible." In other words, he says that her beauty is inward, "hidden" in the heart, "incorruptible," a "meek and quiet spirit." All these "incorruptible" things are "in the sight of God a great price.

This is also consistent with the words of our Lord when He told His disciples in Matthew 6:25: *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* Jesus explains that there is more to the disciple life than thinking about clothing. Besides, is not a lily more glorious than Solomon in all his glory? By the way, Jesus never mentioned a "hair cloth" for women. Someone may question this and say, "Yeah, but if it says it one time in the Bible it is true, and Paul said that woman ought to wear plain doilies in their hair." However, that person must remember that the Apostle Paul taught doctrine consistent with what Christ taught him. This is revealed in 1 Timothy 6:3-4, which states: *If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the*

words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

Jesus taught us not to think of our clothing. Paul taught us that we should “put on Christ.” In Galatians 3:27-28, Paul wrote: *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.* So, the Scripture tells both men and women to “put on Christ.” A good question posited to people who practice “hair covering” would be: Why would Jesus Christ want women to “put on” something corruptible when they can “put on” Him?

Paul sums up this desire of Christ for His disciples in Ephesians 4:20-24, when he writes: *But ye have not so learned Christ; 21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

Another “incorruptible” which both men and women can “put on” is outlined in Colossians 3:12-14, which states: *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.*

There is no place in Scripture where anyone is taught to be concerned with an outward piece of clothing, whether male or female. Christ desires to develop our inward qualities. There is not a better way to understand this than a study of circumcision.

What Is True Circumcision, Outward or of the Heart?

There were Legalists who were of the sect of the Pharisees who taught the Gentile Christians that they should be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. The disputation of the Apostles and elders in Acts, chapter 15 was concerning this teaching. Verse 5 reads: *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.* Now, circumcision was an “outward” sign of the flesh that a man was an Israelite. Paul’s teaching on circumcision showed that God was not interested in “outward signs” for righteousness, but was only concerned with the inward attitude of the heart. Consider the following verses which show that “outward circumcision” was replaced with “inward circumcision” or “circumcision of the heart.”

Romans 2:28-29 - *For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

Romans 4:10-12 - *How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision (remember this for later for the phrase “sign of power”), a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: 12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.*

Galatians 5:6 - *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*

Galatians 6:15 - *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

Philippians 3:3 - *For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

Colossians 2:11 - *In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:*

Colossians 3:11 - *Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

I believe there are many more arguments which these early Jewish teachers had to convince Gentile Christians that they needed to follow the “outward sign” and be circumcised, than anyone could ever dream up today to try to convince Christians that women should have an “outward sign” of submission to their husbands. Even Jesus Himself was circumcised. All His Apostles were circumcised. However, the Apostle Paul, who was circumcised himself, told these same Corinthian believers that it was the Jews that require a “sign” when he wrote them in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1 and verse 22: *For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom*. Please note that Paul used the word “sign” right here in his first letter to the Corinthian church. Paul even taught these same Corinthians that tongues was a “sign” for the unbelieving Jews when he wrote them in chapter 14 and verses 21-22: *In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. 22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. Again, Paul used the word “sign” here in Corinthians.*

So, What is This “Sign of Authority” on a Woman’s Head?

The so-called proof-text for the people who want women to cover their hair is the following in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 10, which states: *For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.* So, where is the “sign of authority” here?

Which translation of the Bible do we need to go to that states the phrase “sign of authority?” Well, we could go to the Jehovah Witness Translation of the Scriptures. That translation says “sign of authority.” There are other translations that use this and similar phrases. It should be interesting to the reader that every translation that uses “sign (or mark or token, etc) of authority” was translated from the corrupt Greek text that gave us Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation. The translations which tell us to have a “sign of authority” came from the Roman Catholic interpretations of Scripture, which also gave us “suicide” and “Mary Worship.”

Now, what has the Authorized Version said in every fundamental, Bible believing church for the last 400 years? Of course, it simply says “power.” Also, it could be argued that the Textus Receptus, which true churches relied on for 1600 years, has no special ending on the Greek word which would allow a translator to freely add the words “sign of” in front of the word “power.” The United Bible Societies New Testament Handbook states that “no Greek manuscript” has the Greek word for “veil,” but only the word for “authority.”

Let us for argument sake say that the Greek word used in the verse for “power” (*exousian*) could be liberally translated “sign of authority.” This would mean that every time the word “power” is translated from “*exousia*,” I can with confidence change the verse to read “sign of authority.” Because of the many times the word “power” is used in the New Testament, I will only use those verses relatively close to this verse above in Corinthians. These comments may seem a bit sarcastic, but when the true Word of God is discarded in favor of favorite modern translations that try to prove a doctrine, those who hold that doctrine need to see the fallacy of their doctrine.

1 Corinthians 7:37 - *Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power (a sign of authority) over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.* (What exactly can a man place over his own will which will show that he does well?)

1 Corinthians 8:9 - *But take heed lest by any means this liberty (sign of authority) of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.* (Since “*exousia*” here is translated “liberty,” I wonder how a sign which limits our liberty can also be used to show our liberty? This is not logical.)

1 Corinthians 9:4-6 - *Have we not power (a sign of authority) to eat and to drink? 5 Have we not power (a sign of authority) to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or I only and Barnabas,*

have not we power (a sign of authority) to forbear working? Now we would need a meal “ticket” in order to eat and drink at church functions, a nose “ring” to lead about a sister, and a “note” from our doctor so we do not have to work.)

1 Corinthians 9:12 - *If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.* (It seems to get more ridiculous with each verse. And, most of these verses deal with “power on” or “power over” something or someone.)

1 Corinthians 9:18 - *What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power (sign of authority) in the gospel.* What exactly was Paul’s outward sign that he could show people that could have signified his authority? Could it have been a General’s insignia? Of course not. Paul had no outward item which identified him as an Apostle.)

1 Corinthians 15:24 - *Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority (signs of authority) and power (Greek – “*dunamis*”).*

2 Corinthians 10:8 – *For though I should boast somewhat more of our (sign of) authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:* (What could possibly have been the Lord’s “sign of authority” which He gave us for edification?)

2 Corinthians 13:10 - *Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power (sign of authority) which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.* (Does anyone believe that someone can be justified in doing this to clear words of the Word of God? Can anyone add any phrase they wish to add to a verse just to prove their doctrine when neither the Authorized Version nor the Received Greek Text has even the slightest nuance which could allow such a gross liberality of translation? I do not believe anyone has the authority to do that.)

So, where exactly did the translation which would allow a “sign” or “token” of authority come from? The Douay Version? The NIV? The NASB? The New World Translation? How many others could be named? And what is the underlying Greek Text which provided the translators of these versions to place an extra word into the text? As shown, there is no other verse in Scripture which would back up this translation. There is no where in Scripture where “power” can be translated “sign of authority” and have any logical meaning. So, why would it be logical for some to do that in 1 Corinthians 11:10?

And besides this, if Paul wanted to use the word “sign,” he certainly had this word at his disposal. The Greek word for “sign” is “*seemion*” or “*seemia*” which he used in 1 Corinthians 1:22 and 14:22. The word “sign” is used in 23 New Testament verses a total of 29 times. Why didn’t he or the Holy Spirit just simply slip it in here in 1 Corinthians 11:10? That would have clarified it for everyone, would it not?

As it is, the word “power” would be the direct object of the entire sentence. An English student would diagram the sentence as the “woman” “ought” “to have” “power.” Nowhere does it imply the woman ought to have a “sign.”

According to the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge note on 1 Corinthians 11:10, the “sign or token” of being under the power comes from the Latin Vulgate manuscript, translated from the Sixtine Edition, which is the Greek manuscript in the Vatican Library. This Latin Vulgate has the Latin word “*velamem*” (which means “veil”) substituted for the word “power.” Imagine for a moment that all the hoopla about this verse originated from the Roman Catholic Latin Vulgate translated from a corrupted Greek text which has never been used before it was found in the fifteenth century in the Vatican. And still no one was allowed to see it to even check if the Greek is accurate. Could this verse be the same text which is the basis for Catholic Nuns wearing the hood which represents her submission and marriage to the Roman Catholic Church? The French Bible, which is heavily dominated by a Roman Catholic slant uses the phrase “*marque de l’authorite*” (mark of authority). It is no wonder that the corrupted Greek, Latin, and even newer English versions (Westcott and Hort’s 1881 revision, the ASV, the RSV, the NASB, and the NIV, to name a few), have a great tendency to destroy the simple meaning of the Word of God?

This verse means what it says. “*For this cause* (because the woman was created for the man, verse 8) *ought the woman have power on her head* (not “hair,” but to simply be under the authority of her husband) *because of the angels.*”

Christ is the “head” of the angels. Colossians 2:10 states: *And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:* Romans 8:38-39 says: *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Angels are certainly beholding us and are watching and weighing our every move. I do not believe it is far-fetched at all to think that godly wives who submit to their husbands and place themselves under their husband’s authority are examples to angels, who always submit to their Head, Jesus Christ. The question could be asked what do angels place upon their “hair” to show submission to their Head?

Another verse which shows the authority the husband has is in 1 Corinthians 7, and verse 4, which states: *The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.* This verse shows that both the husband and the wife has “power” of, or over, the other person’s body.

A good example of the authority of the husband being the “covering” of protection over the wife is seen in the lives of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis, chapter 20, when Ahimelech realizes that Sarah is Abraham’s wife, and not just his sister. Ahimelech stated in verse 16: *And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a*

thousand pieces of silver: behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved.

In other words, Scripture teaches us that the husband is the “veil” over his wife’s eyes. This is a good commentary of 1 Peter 3, when Peter writes: *For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.* It is so much more important to “do well,” “trust in God,” and be “in subjection unto their own husbands,” than to worry about what she is going to wear on her head to show everyone she does these things.

Let Us Talk About Glory

Jesus Christ is the “brightness of His (God’s) glory” according to Hebrews 1, verse 3. Our text in 1 Corinthians 11 tells us that man is the “glory of God” (verse 7). Verse 8 says that the “woman is the glory of the man.” Verse 15 says that a woman’s long hair is “a glory unto her.” We see the “glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” so states 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, and verse 6. We see the “glory of the Lord” in our “open face,” according to 2 Corinthians, chapter 3, and verse 18. So logically, why does it become unrighteous to see the “glory of the man,” which is his wife, or the “glory of the woman,” which is her “long hair?” Glory, a word which means “brightness,” is always to be seen or shown forth.

This Is a Sign of a Sign of a Sign of a Sign of a...

Circumcision was a “sign” that a man was a Jew. Each proselyte was circumcised before they could be considered of the Jewish religion. Assume, for argument sake, that a Gentile who proselytized and was in the process of becoming a Jew suggested that only a tiny bit of skin was “snipped off” as a “token” and a “sign” that he was circumcised. Would the Jews let this Gentile get away with only having a tiny bit cut off? Of course not. The Jews would not have even considered a replacement “sign” of the “sign of circumcision.”

Baptism by immersion in water is a picture (sign) signifying the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. There are certain denominations who teach that sprinkling or pouring water on a person can be a substitute for immersion in water. In other words, sprinkling becomes a “sign” of a “sign” (true baptism) which represents the death, burial, and resurrection. No true Bible believer would allow this type of interpretation. One reason would be, where would it end? A person could then substitute a single drop of water representing sprinkling, which in turn represents immersion, which represents death, burial, and resurrection. Then they could have a “picture” of a drop of water represent the drop of water which represents the

sprinkling which represents the immersion which represents the death, burial, and resurrection.

If the Christian wives at the church of Corinth did wear veils over their heads which included their faces (which, by the way, was a custom so that the Jews would not be offended because their wives were also veiled), and the complete veiling of the head was a sign of submission, then would not anything lesser than a complete veil covering the head merely be a sign of a sign of submission? Yes, it would. Proof of this would be the fact that ladies who try to show this sign of submission will use it as an opportunity for self-glorification. In other words, the hair coverings will be custom-made, or different colors to match the outfit, or as small as she wants or as large as she wants. There simply are no Scriptural guidelines for these kinds of “hair coverings.” If there are disputations already concerning hair (How long is long?), there will be the same disputations and strivings about “hair coverings.” This is why logically a total “head covering” would be the only answer for complete consistency for these people, but not an answer they would go along with.

If anything goes, and it is the decision of the woman as to what type of “hair covering” (what color, what texture, what material, what weave, how big, how little, on the top, on the side, all over, how much hanging down, etc., etc.), then how is this any different than the choices a woman has now? They certainly did not have these types of choices back in the Corinthian church. Must they be plain? White? Who makes the decision? The Pastor? The Church Board? The Ladies’ Shawl Committee? Who? God certainly did not dictate any instructions or information for any “hair coverings.”

So it Goes on the Top of the Head, or on the Hair?

In the Authorized Version of the Bible, the very top of the head is made plain in many places. Take these Scriptures for our examples.

Deuteronomy 28:35 - *The LORD shall smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head.*

2 Samuel 14:25 - *But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.*

Job 2:7 - So went Satan forth from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.

Psalms 68:21 - *But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.* (Here is differentiated between the “head” and the “hairy scalp.”)

Isaiah 3:17 - *Therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the LORD will discover their secret parts.*

Again, if God wanted the instructions to read, “Place the piece of cloth on the crown, or top of the head, or scalp,” He could have certainly arranged to have said that. All of those instructions could have been given in great detail if God wanted Paul to do so.

Troubleshooting Hair Coverings

If the wife is required to wear something on her hair which signifies her submission to her husband:

1. What is a daughter to wear? Where are her instructions? Does she start wearing something the moment she gets married? (How about if she just continues to wear her wedding veil?) It would be a manipulation of Scripture to try to assume that she should wear something to show submission to her father. Scripture is totally silent on this.

2. What does the wife of an unsaved man supposed to do (1 Corinthians 7:13-14; 1 Peter 3:1-3)? Should she follow her husband’s wishes and not wear a piece of cloth on her hair, or should she go ahead and wear one to show everybody else that she is submissive to her husband? In other words, should she submit to her husband or just show others that she submits?

3. What is an unsaved wife to do (1 Corinthians 7:12)? If she wears a “hair covering” to please her husband, does that mean that she is pleasing to God? Can an unsaved person do anything that is pleasing to God? “...For whatever is not of faith is sin,” says Romans 14:23.

4. What about a widow (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2) who is no longer bound by the law to her husband? Is there a time when she can cease to wear a “hair covering?” If God is a Husband to the widow, does she then wear a veil to show her submission to God?

5. What about a wife who is remarried and her former husband is still alive (Romans 7:2-3)? The Bible states that she is to be called an adulteress. Does she wear the veil to show her submission to her first husband who is still her true husband, or does she wear the veil to show who her new head is, her present husband?

So Exactly What is This Custom?

1 Corinthians 11:16 states: *But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.* The ritual of a wife wearing a veil over her entire head (including her face and chin, ala the Muslim women), is said here to be a “custom.” The Greek word for “custom” is “*suneethian*,” which is made up of two Greek words, “*sun*” (pronounced “soon”), which means “with, and “*ethos*” (pronounced “ay-thos,” and where we get the words “ethics” and “ethnic”), which means “manners.” The only other time the root word “*sunethia*” is used in Scripture is in John 18:39, which says: *But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at*

the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? This “custom” of releasing a prisoner which appeased the crowd is nowhere declared to be dogma, or doctrine. As a matter of fact, Pilate was under no law which forced him to release a prisoner. Even more, the people could have refused to call for a prisoner to be released. It was their choice and not a command in Scripture.

This “custom” was a temporary one which only the Jews observed in that locality and for a definite period of time. It was certainly “ethnic” in its characteristics, and is no longer in use by the Jews. Today, Jewish women do not stand in a crowd and expect a governor to ask them to choose a prisoner which they would like released.

The practice of women wearing a veil covering their entire head was a similarly described “custom,” for definite reasons (as a witness to the Jews who practiced this), and for a definite time period. Rebecca, in Genesis 24:65, before being presented to Isaac, “took a veil, and covered herself.” This affirms that the “covering” was not just a “token” piece of cloth upon the top of the hair. It at least had to cover her whole head, including her face, and perhaps even her whole body.

The Real “Bottom Line” of Verse 16

Again, the Authorized Version reads in 1 Corinthians 11:16: *But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.*

The New International Version, which was translated from the two most corrupted Greek texts (Codex Sinaiticus, found by Count Tischendorf at the Mount Sinai Convent, and Codex Vaticanus, brought to the Vatican in 1448 by Pope Nicholas V), reads this way: *“If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice – nor do the churches of God.”* (NIV of 1 Corinthians 11:16)

The phrases “*we have no such custom*” and “*we have no other practice*” totally contradict each other. The Authorized Version states that if a person shows contentiousness, to that person this is not a custom or a big deal, and the churches of God are not going to make it a big deal either. In the New International Version, the rendering is if a person is contentious, they must come in line with this because there is no option in that church or any of the other churches. This rendering flies in the face of the doctrine of “Soul Liberty.” This practice places an outward ritual upon a person which that person, notice, is “contentious” about, but cannot do anything else but comply. And that is what “legalism” is and does.

This is all because of that simple word “other.” Of course, this word “other” is nowhere found in the Received Text. It is nowhere hinted at by any Greek endings on words or jots or tittles in the “originals.” Now, the word “other” is found 134 times in the New Testament, of which 19 times occur in the Corinthian letters. If the Apostle Paul wanted to put the word “other” to totally change the meaning of the verse, he certainly could have done that. If the NIV translators wanted to be honest,

and not follow the Catholic traditional texts, they would have at least said, “we have no practice,” and left the word “other” out of it.

Parting Comments

There are some basic major doctrines that truly display the authority of Christ which I would place far above the teaching of ladies wearing a piece of cloth on the top of their hair. Two that come to mind here are the Inspiration of the Scriptures and the Lordship of Christ over the local church.

The Inspiration and Preservation of the Word of God is much too lengthy of a study for a short dissertation of this portion of Scripture. Suffice it to say that there are two lines of Bibles which have come down through the ages. One line has been corrupted from the first. This corrupt line flowed through Alexandria, Egypt, was fueled by Origen in the 4th century, settled in the Vatican, was borrowed by Wescott and Hort, and is now used to translate most modern Bibles, starting in 1881. The other line flowed through the church at Antioch, through the Byzantine Empire, and became the text used by true churches down through the ages. These texts were called the “Majority Text,” the “Universal Text,” the “Reformation Text,” the “Traditional Text,” the “Imperial Text,” and the “Textus Receptus,” where we got the Authorized Version of the Bible. This lineage of the Bible is the one who set people free, as the Truth is supposed to do. The other Roman Catholic texts are the translations that have always been used to bind people into more and more ritualism.

Finally, the local church is suppose to show submission to Christ in the same was a wife is to show submission to her husband. It is no longer a theory, but a proven fact of history that a church which incorporates is no longer solely under the Headship of Jesus Christ. The State the local church incorporates with is in reality the head of the church. Corporate laws run the institution and business meetings. Trustees, boards, secretaries, committees, and By-laws are the way of life for these corporations who call themselves churches. None of these items are even slightly hinted at in Scripture for us to do, and yet few see that these things have been added to the churches. It was not Scriptural, or even a “custom” for the Church at Corinth to be incorporated and recognized by the State of Corinth. It was not Scriptural or even a “custom” for the Church at Jerusalem to have Trustees. So why do so-called churches have these things now? It seems to me to be a pitiful contradiction of Scriptural logic to tell a wife she must wear a piece of cloth to show she is solely under her husband’s authority when the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is voluntarily entangled with another head besides Jesus Christ.