

Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

Volume XVII

September 1996

Number 2

Must A Woman Worship With Her Head Covered?

By
Brian Kenyon

[This article is in response to the "anti" questions that were written to the school for help. It is hoped that by having this material others might be helped. We appreciate brother Kenyon's response. Editor]

Some in our brotherhood would answer the above question in the affirmative. However, such an answer shows a lack of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). If the Bible teaches that every woman must cover her head in worship, then she sins by worshiping with her head uncovered. However, if the Bible does not teach that every woman must worship with her head covered, then all who bind such a law sin by adding to the word of God (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-2; Rev. 22:18).

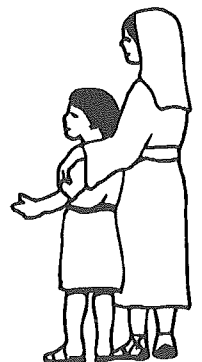


Before considering First Corinthians 11:2-16, a few preliminary observations

must be made concerning customs in Corinth. The basic lesson in these verses is the woman's subjection to the man (11:3 cf. 1 Tim. 2:8-15). In first century Corinth this subjection was symbolized by long hair and a veil for women. This custom is still evident in some cultures of the world today. Corinth was a city known for its prostitution. This abominable practice was used as a part of idol worship. The prostitute's "trademark" was an unveiled face and short (or shaven) hair. Thus the uncovered head was a sign of looseness and independence from any man. A custom therefore emerged from this practice that forced decent women to wear a veil and have long hair. As we will see, Paul is not binding the custom, but is regulating it when and where it is in force (cf. "the holy kiss," 16:20). God binds the principle, not the custom. Human customs are not bound by God because human customs change. In the time of Judah and Tamar the custom was the opposite-- prostitutes wore a veil (Gen.

38:14-16)! Had such a custom prevailed in Corinth, Christian women would have been prohibited from wearing veils. Obviously, the wearing of a veil does not inherently represent a woman's submission to the man.

God's immutable principles of authority and submission are the basis of Paul's teaching. Paul praises them for remembering him and keeping the "ordinances" that he has taught them (11:2). He then gives the principle of subordination: *"the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God"* (11:3). Aside from its literal meaning the word translated "head" (κεφαλή) is used in the New Testament "in the case of living beings, to denote superior rank . . . head;"¹ "anything supreme, chief, prominent; of persons, master, lord"²



(cf. Eph. 5:23). The principle of authority and submission is necessary for any system to function properly. The principle is not one of superiority/inferiority, but of God's instrumental design in creation. Every "man" (ἄνθρωπος = males in contrast to females; men in contrast to boys)³ is subject to Christ's authority (cf. Mt. 28:18). The woman is subject to the man's authority. Although men and women are morally equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28), their roles and relationships determined from creation are not abolished in Christ. In subjecting herself to man, the woman is subjecting herself to God (cf. Eph. 5:22-24). Christ, as the Son, is subject to the Father's authority. The Father and the Son are inherently equal as God (cf. Jn. 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5-11), but they each have a different role in salvation in which the Son is subordinate to the Father (cf. 15:27-28; Jn. 14:28; Heb. 5:8-9). If the Son of God can faithfully discharge His role of subordination, then surely we can willingly fulfil our role of subordination (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21).

Having laid these immutable principles, Paul declares to the Corinthians that only women are to cover their heads. *"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered dishonoureth his head"* (11:4). The term *"having his head covered"* literally means *"having down from [his] head"* (κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων) and may refer to long hair (cf. 11:14) or, most likely, an artificial covering. In either case, for a

man to worship with his head covered dishonors Christ, his *"head"* (11:3), because it shows that he does not accept his headship over the woman. The woman, on the other hand, dishonors the man (and ultimately Christ) by worshiping with her head uncovered (11:5). She dishonors the God-given role of the man by appearing insubordinate. Under the circumstances that allowed for women to pray (cf. Acts 16:13) and prophesy (cf. Acts 21:8-9), they were to do so in full recognition of their subordinate role. Paul says if a woman in Corinth is to worship with her head uncovered, she might as well shave her head completely (11:5b-6); but since *"it is a shame for a woman to be shaven, let her be covered"*!

What is worn on the head in Corinth reflects a recognition of God's instrumental plan for the sexes in creation (11:7-12). Man (ἄνθρωπος) was created first and thus should not cover his head (11:7-10). He is *"the image and glory of God"* (11:7 cf. Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 8:5; 16:9). This *"image and glory"* is obscured by covering the head. The woman, however, is *"the glory of the man"* (11:7b). Man was created from dirt (Gen. 2:7), but woman was made from the side of man (Gen. 2:21-22). She was created to be his *"help meet"* (Gen. 2:18). Although neither is complete without the other, the man was not *"created for the woman; but the woman for the man"* (11:9). For this reason, a woman in Corinth must wear a veil (11:10). *"Power"* in *"power*

on her head" (ἐξουσίαν . . . ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς) is also translated *"sign of authority"* (ASV). Recognizing her submission to the man (signified by wearing a veil) gives the woman authority to worship God. Without this recognition she cannot worship God acceptably (Jn. 4:24). Although the man was created first, he still needs the woman (11:11-12). Neither the man nor the woman is complete with out the other (11:11-12). *"In the Lord"* (11:11) must mean *"according to the Lord's plan"* (cf. 7:39[?]), because the principle is true of Christians as well as non-Christians.

Given God's plan for the sexes from creation and the customs of the first century, Corinthian women must have their heads covered. *"Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering"*

The Harvesters

Published Monthly by
Florida School of Preaching
1807 South Florida Avenue
Lakeland, Florida 33803
(941) 683-4043

Editor: Jackie M. Stearsman

Board of Directors

Gordon Methwin, President	Carl Fairles
Paul Thornhill, Vice President	Kenneth W. Franklin
J. H. Blackman, Jr., Secretary	George K. French
E. Robert McAnally, Treasurer	Dick Mechling, Jr.
B. C. Carr, Director Emeritus	Samuel J. Roney
Glenn Burgess	Dale Spung
Elmer Burgett	David Spurlock
Jack C. Cronk	Gene Sibwell
Maurice Davis	Jackie M. Stearsman

(11:13-15). Culture shows that "long hair" shames a man, but gives "glory" to the woman. "Nature" (φύσις) (11:14a) can refer to that which is innately built into the regular natural order (Rom. 2:14),⁴ or it can refer to a mode of feeling or acting which by long habit has become nature (i.e. "second nature") (Eph. 2:3).⁵ "Nature" in this context takes the second meaning. Because of the cultural connotations, long hair should not be worn by men (cf. 11:4-6). "Long hair" (11:14-15) is not explicitly defined and is therefore subjective. The point is that it is degrading for a man to appear as a woman because it dishonors God's plan of submission and authority. "Long hair," however, is "a glory" on a woman and is given her by God for "a covering" (11:15).

Paul anticipates that some might try to force the issue of liberty and abandon the custom of wearing a veil. However, the exercise of one's liberty in this regard would not be appropriate (cf. 10:23). "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God" (11:16). The church must not abandon customs when such significance is placed upon them. "No such custom" (τοιούτην συνήθειαν οὐκ) may also be translated "no other practice." Hence, Paul and "the churches of God" practice the custom of women covering their heads. What Paul taught to one congregation he taught to all congregations (4:17). However, one must not assume that everything he taught to the

churches was binding in every culture (cf. the "holy kiss"). One must in every context "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

Let us note these considerations if the custom of a veil is binding upon all cultures, including ours. First, how shall we define the cover? Artificial? Natural? If we are to be true to the text, we must define it as a veil. The first century veil at the very least covered the entire face (except the eyes), but usually covered the entire body, from head to ankles. Therefore, a hair or hairpiece will not meet the textual demand. Second, if we are to bind the custom on women, we must also bind the custom on men. Remember, Paul said it dishonors Christ for man to worship with his head covered (11:4). I know some brethren who wear toupees. Does this mean they dishonor Christ by wearing them in worship? Does God require these men to worship bald? Third, why would we limit the wearing of veils only to worship services? Every reason given by Paul for wearing them in worship applied also in the public setting. A Corinthian sister would not go about her public activities unveiled and then wear a veil to worship. It was because of what the unveiled woman in public represented, that called for her to be veiled in worship.

When a command is directed to a cultural setting which ceases to exist, the command is no longer binding. The veil in our culture is not a

sign of submission nor an expression of decency. A failure to wear a veil does not dishonor a woman in our society. There is nothing inherent in a veil that means a woman is in submission to the man (cf. Gen. 38:14-16). It was the customs in Corinth that forced decent women to wear a veil. To bind the wearing of a veil for all women in worship is going beyond the authority of God.

The principles remain, but the specific applications in cultural settings do not always remain the same. Women are to be in submission to men (11:3); the sexes are to be distinct in appearance (11:7-10); and the sexes are mutually dependent upon one another (11:11-12). May God help us all to bind where He has bound, to loose where He has loosed, and to always pursue a proper understanding of His will.

ENDNOTES

¹ Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, rev. by Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 430.

² Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1885; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 345.

³ Bauer 66.

⁴ Bauer 869.

⁵ Thayer 660.

MEMORIAL

Sister Audrey B. Daye died Friday, August 9, 1996, in Titusville, Florida. The Daye's have been regular supporters of the *Florida School of Preaching*. We extend our sympathy to brother Leonard and the family.

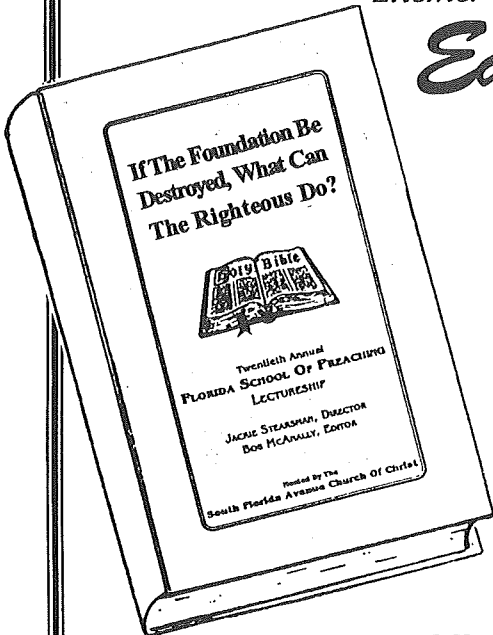
Brother Leonard Day expresses his appreciation to all who have sent contribution to the school in memory of sister Audrey

1997 Lectureship Book

Theme: "If the Foundations Be Destroyed, What Can the Righteous Do?"

Early Bird Prepublication Price

\$13.00



SPEAKERS			
V. P. Black	Guy Dickinson	Brian Kenyon	Richard Sain
British Carlton	Roy Dicks	Joseph D. Meador	Walter Slayden
B. C. Carr	Kenneth Franklin	Flavil Nichols	Bernard Smith
Jimmy Clark	J. Kenneth Gossett	Ulysses Richardson	Dan Wheeler
Winfred Clark	Greg Harmon	Samuel Roney	Windell Winkler
Robert Clemens	Terry M. Hightower	Paul Sain	William Woodson
Derrel Davis			Joseph M. Worndle

**Early Bird Book Offer For The 1997 Lectureship Book (offer expires January 1, 1997).
Regular Price \$15.00 – Early Bird Price \$13.00 (plus \$1.75 postage /handling per book).**



Call 800-320-9780



FLORIDA SCHOOL OF PREACHING - 1807 S. Florida Ave. - Lakeland, FL 33803

Please send the following:

- _____ copies of "If the Foundation Be Destroyed What Can the Righteous Do?" (1997) \$14.75 each. _____
- * Please reserve _____ copies for me at \$13.00 each. Will pick up at Lectureship and save postage. _____
- _____ copies of "You Have Heard It Said... But The Bible Says" (1996) @ \$15.75 each. _____
- _____ copies of "Good News That Troubles the World" (1995) @ \$13.75 each. _____
- _____ copies of "The Doctrine of Christ" (1994) @ \$13.75 each. _____

Total _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Florida School of Preaching

1807 SOUTH FLORIDA AVENUE
LAKELAND, FLORIDA 33803-2653

DIRECTOR: Jackie M. Stearsman
Phone (941) 683-4043

Address Correction Requested