

Because 1Corinthians chapter 11:1-16 are in the Word of God it becomes necessary to consider it and reconsider it again and again, as we would do every teaching of the Word of God. Did I approach this without bias? It would be disingenuous of me to say that I did. And I don't expect that you can either. But we do prayerfully try.

From the beginning I will say that I have never been a subscriber to the teaching of an artificial head covering, but that doesn't mean that I have it all settled in my mind.

Below, in bold font, is the only text of Scripture which deals with this the topic of head covering. That will be our only consideration. All extra-biblical resources are laid aside. How can we discern what extra-biblical sources are correct if we do not first know what the truth of the very Word of God is?

Here is the text. In this I have inserted my own remarks, hopefully elucidating the thought that I believe is being communicated.

1Co. 11.1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

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

Paul begins with the spiritual instruction (vss.3-13) which must precede the extra-biblical example .(recourse to nature, vss. 14-15).

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 issue before us is the maintaining of our proper offices or roles as men and women in the Lord.

Head is used in this chapter in two ways. It either refers to an office or to that physical part of the human anatomy, which is called the head. Head, in this place means *office*, his role as a man. For example, we read *Christ*, not Jesus Christ, or Lord Jesus. Christ refers to the office which our Lord Jesus filled in His coming. He was the Christ of God, the Anointed One that

was to come. In this verse, Paul shows us *three offices*. They are Christ's, man's, and then woman's, in that order from superior to subordinate.

4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his (physical) **head covered, dishonoureth his head** (his office as a man in the Lord, superior to the woman and subordinated to Christ).

In other words, a man dishonors his office, the role that he has been given as a man, when he prays or prophesies while having his physical head covered. The matter of his office is dishonored.

Question: Does an apparatus being placed upon the head of a man distinguish the office of a man from the office of a woman? Or, is there a natural, observable element which makes this distinction between a man and a woman?

Throughout this discourse there is something notable which helps us discern this matter better:

The man is never commanded to uncover his head – but *not* to cover it.

The woman is never commanded to cover her head – but *not* to uncover it.

Sometimes it is what is *not said* that can be as important as what is said. Paul's *assumption* is that both the man and the woman already have a covering with which they must deal (naturally).

5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her (physical) **head uncovered dishonoureth her head** (office): **for that** (*that* is added to provide the sense; we could say *it*, meaning, for dishonoring her office) **is even all one as if she were shaven.**

And so contrarily, the uncovered, praying, prophesying woman dishonors her head. We are not told anything about the covering yet. So how can we determine what it means to be uncovered at this point? Those who

understand the covering as the hair would say that she has become uncovered because her hair has become less than that which a woman *customarily* wears for length. Those who understand that an artificial covering is applied to the woman's head will say that the device has been removed, or that the device is unsuitable for covering the head because it is *sheer*, or other reasons. All that anyone can say at the moment is that this woman has dishonored her role as a woman by whatever she has done to be uncovered. Paul says that this is equivalent to her head being shaved. What we can say is this: that this woman has not *maintained*,

Remember, she is never commanded to cover her hair, *but not to uncover it*,

a covering *suitable* to distinguish her office as a woman from the office of a man. Her role as a woman is *observably* a shame to her womanhood.

Another point to consider as we try to determine what the covering for the head is:

The covering is the same whether it is upon a man or a woman. There is not here a *man* covering and there a *woman* covering under discussion. The same covering relates to both the man and the woman. Either can wear this or not wear this covering.

6 For if the woman be not covered, (then) let her also be shorn (become sheered):

If the woman has removed from her that distinguishing thing which characteristically marks her as a woman, a present passive verb [be covered], then ... let ... *become* sheered, is aorist, imperative, middle. The only way to translate a 3ps imperative is like this. It looks like a subjunctive but it is not. It reads, For if the woman be not covered, then *also become shorn!*

This text, if it does anything, shows that being uncovered and being shorn are equal in bringing dishonor to the office of the woman, but the text also tells us that the woman being uncovered *might not be shorn*. Therefore,

for a woman to have less than that which would cover her physical head is a shame to her role as a woman.

Understanding the sense of this imperative: turn this from a third person singular, imperative into a second person plural imperative example while retaining the middle voice: if you are not covered, then also become ye shorn. That is the clearest sense of this text. Either become shorn or be covered.

but if it be a shame for a woman to be[come] shorn, (Gr. aor. infin. mid) **or shaven**, (to being shaven, Gr. pres. infin. pass.), (then) **let her be covered**. (Or, present, imperative, passive, be ye covered ... [if we turned this from 3ps to 2ppl.]

let her be covered ... for the honor of her office.

So, if it is a shame/dishonor for a woman to become sheered or being shaven, then she should cover her physical head.

Is Paul saying that it is not a shame for a woman to become sheered or shaven just as long as she covers her head with an external device? Surely this cannot be the meaning of this text. It has to mean that in contrast to being sheered or shaven a woman should have their hair as a woman's role has shown from the time of creation; she should have sufficient covering upon the head which says that she is a *comely* woman. The issue is to honor the God-ordained arrangement of nature for women, or else the sheered or shaved head confuses the otherwise plain distinction there ought to be between men and women. How can it be that we can read this to mean that if a woman covers her head with a veil that she has license to do with her hair as she chooses? That is, for all practical intents and purposes, what constitutes hypocrisy. (Pr.30.20) Peter rejects this notion altogether by telling the women not to overemphasize externals to the loss of the internal consideration of the heart. (1Pe.3.3, not the plaiting of the hair.)

Be assured that there are more ways than this in which men and women might dishonor their offices or God-given roles as men and women. (Ro.1.24)

It is a grievous thing that women dishonor themselves in the congregations. Many, on both sides of this issue, spend a good amount of time fixing their face and their hair, but take no thought to covering their bellies, breasts, and thighs. But this gross neglect does not negate the truth of our present topic in the least.

7 For a man indeed (v.14, even) **ought not to cover his** (physical) **head forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.**

Meaning, a man is bound not to cover his head ... to honor his office or role as a man: because he is the image and glory of God. So, the woman is the glory of the man. Perhaps the distinction between the roles of man and woman can be seen best in Genesis. God set men over the works of His hands (Ge.2.15; Ps.8.4-6), and women to be their helpers (Ge.2.18; 3.15)

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

'of' Gr. ek. from, out from; setting down the truth of woman's derivation from the man, as well as created order after the man. (Ge.2.21-23)

Proving the Divine origin of the roles of men and woman.

9 Neither was the man created for (Gr. dia, by, through) **the woman; but the woman for** (dia, by through) **the man.** (Ge.2.18)

Again, the appeal is to the Word of God. It establishes the roles of men and women, which can be placed all of the way back to creation week. Did the LORD create Adam and Eve so that they might do honor to the roles of men and women? Absolutely. He gave them what they needed to be an honorable man and an honorable woman, naturally.

10 For this cause

Gr. dia, for this cause ... Because of the order that God instilled in man and woman in creation week ... cited in the previous verses (8, 9) ...

ought the woman to have power, right or authority (implied, for her office or role)

ought, 3ps. pres. ind, meaning 'is bound'

Gr. exousia, authority, right, power.

on her (physical) **head because of the angels.**

Does this statement say that, Because of the created order of God, the woman is bound to have the authority (implied, of her office) upon her (physical) head, because, dia, the angels? At least it says that.

What the angels have to do with this is hard to say. The witness to the roles of man and woman goes beyond the human sphere. This, at the least, is being viewed by the angels, whether elect or fallen angels.

*1Pe 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; **which things the angels desire to look into.***

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

without, Gr. choris, apart ... in the Lord.

12 For as the woman is of (ek) the man, even so is the man also by (dia) the woman; but all things of God. (Ge. 4.1, women beget sons who become men)

While the truth is that woman originally came out of the man, man since then is come by the woman.

This completes the spiritual lesson, a teaching which was totally derived from the Word of God. The truth has been established without the aid of any external witness. Now Paul consults an outside witness which reinforces the above discussion.

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

Question: Can a woman in the Lord function in her office honorably by praying uncovered?

14 Doth not even (indeed, v.7) nature itself teach you,

nature, φυσικς, noun; KJV, nature, natural, kind of beasts; and mankind.

Doesn't even the natural order of things teach us ... [implied] *this same truth?* Settle this:

Is Paul teaching us two truths in this portion of Scripture, or one? Is there a truth about an artificial head coverings and then a truth about a natural head covering, or are we being taught one truth about this one covering?

Put the question into a statement: 'Indeed, nature itself teaches you.' Nature can only impress upon the mind truths by being observed. So, whatever nature teaches us, it is an observable phenomenon only. In other words, nature shows us something that we *see*.

Now, what is it that the natural order of things teaches? Nature says, look at God's order among humankind and you shall learn the truth of the distinctive roles of men and women. By observing nature we are impressed with the fact that men and women have a natural covering. To this we might also conclude that their offices or roles as men and women are honored when they have the *fitting* appearance of their gender. By observing nature we can see the God-ordained roles he has given to the man and the woman. So, nature teaches...

that (ὅτι, because, or the reason why), if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?

Is the shame to the role of this man for having long hair any different from the shame for the woman being covered? As we said before:

The covering for both the man and the woman are the same. There is not here a man covering and there a woman covering.

For the man:

If long hair brings shame to a man's office and being covered brings shame to that same office, then long hair and being covered must be the same thing.

For the woman:

If being uncovered is a dishonor to a woman's office, but long hair is her glory, then, being uncovered and having long hair must be the same thing.

The honor or dishonor that comes as a result of the covering affects both men and women equally. Yet many never consider the man's covering, but only the woman's. The Scriptures deal with both the man and the woman with equal force. The one is as important as the other.

Men having long hair, by the Word of God, *depreciates* (translated *shame*, ἀτιμία) the role that he should exhibit as a man created in the image and glory of God.

(ἀτιμία, KJV, dishonors, shames, reproaches; τιμή speaks of value, price, precious, sum, which with the negative particle, without; *long hair* is without honor to him.)

15 But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.

Again, if a woman having her head uncovered dishonors her office as a woman, and that having long hair honors it, then what else can we conclude from this but that the covering is always in reference to hair?

The woman's hair is given to her for a covering. The previous word translated *covering* has to do with concealing or not concealing. The Greek word, in this place translated *covering* is different. It is peribolaïou, which is literally 'a cast about.' So, long hair is given to the woman *for*,

(anti, translated either as against or for; an example: antichrist are those who are against Christ; Antichrist is one who pretends to *take the place* of Christ)

to answer for the issue of covering her physical head so that she may honor her office as a proper Christian-ordered woman.

Notice that the bulk of the discussion of the covering are negative statements.

Men being covered – bad; women being uncovered – bad.

It is not until the end of this portion of Scripture, and only once does it occur, that there is one positive statement made with regard to the covering/long hair. verse 15. *But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her ... (implied role or office.)*

If the covering is not the hair we cannot know what it is from the Word of God. What we do know is this: that whatever it is for the woman it is *also the same for the man.* Don't you think that that is a fair, biblical assessment of the covering?

16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

There are far worse ways to dishonor the roles that we have as men and women in the Lord. This verse trues the Christian spirit on this matter. We

ought to consider this again in light of Paul's words just before this chapter and subject begins:

1Co.10.31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Points to consider:

1. Can we prove by the Word of God that this practice is restricted to a congregational setting? There is nothing which says either way. What we do know is that the praying and prophesying is by the ones who should or should not be so covered. There is no reference this man and woman *sitting* and hearing others pray or prophesy. I take this text to mean that this applies to our every day life. i.e. *Pray always ...*

2. If hair is the covering under consideration here, then it is true that for men to cover their heads with things other than hair they still maintain the honor of their role as men. Removing our caps for prayer is an American tradition, not a Bible doctrine. Consider the following facts:

Aaron wore a mitre as the high priest. The priests all wore bonnets. Did they dishonor their heads by ministering in this way. Of course not. The external was not a consideration at all. I can assure you by the Word of God that these men honored their office or function as men by the way that they appeared with and without the mitre and the bonnets.

In the O.T. men and women covered their heads in times of great distress. Such a covering was not a disgrace or dishonor to their offices, because *this covering* was an added feature for a totally different purpose ... i.e. mourning.

3. What about children? Again, there are a lot of varying opinions. But this *text* clearly deals with adults. Those who say otherwise have *nothing* with which to contradict that fact.

4. When did the man and the woman receive their respective offices or roles to be a man and a woman? When they were saved? When they were baptized? Perhaps when they joined the church? No. It is an honor received at creation week. When did they begin to honor their respective offices? Immediately. So what must have been used as their covering? The only answer that we can give is hair. Why? Because they were both originally naked. After their fall God made clothes of skin to cover their nakedness. Hair was good enough then, and it is still good enough now.

Brethren, by the Word of God alone, is it my conclusion that it is the hair which God has given to us as a covering whereby we may honor or dishonor our offices/roles as men and women in the Lord. I do pray that this might bring an answer of peace to so many of the saints of God who have struggled for so long with this issue.

In Him because of grace,
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