

The materials attached to this sheet were used in a special presentation to the Elder/Preacher Symposium on the above date. Emphasis was placed on the study of the head coverings of women as described in 11:2-16.

1CORINTHIANS 11 (with special emphasis on v2-16)

- I. Women Praying and Prophesying
 - A. The Apostolic Traditions (11:2).
 - B. The Christological Argument (11:3-6).
 - C. The Creation and Angelic Arguments (11:7-12).
 - D. The Sociological Argument (11:13-15).
 - E. The Ecclesiastical Argument (11:16).

- II. Selfishness at the "Love Feasts" (11:17-22).

- III. Abuses at the Lord's Supper.
 - A. First, we should look back (11:23-26a).
 - B. Second, we should look ahead (11:26b).
 - C. Third, we should look within (11:27-32).
 - D. Fourth, we should look around (11:33-34).

COMMENTS

Some Introductory Thoughts

Several factors contribute to making 1Corinthians 11 especially difficult to understand. A first difficulty is that we do not know the customs of the times and of the ancient world as well as we would like. A second difficulty is that we do not know enough about the specific problems in the Corinthian church. Men and women were endowed with extraordinary gifts of the Spirit (1Cor. 12:4ff). These gifts included the gift of prophecy, the gift that enabled one to give teachings inspired by the Spirit. Women, too, could prophesy. Should they exercise their gift in the presence of men? If so, should they give a divine message under a veil? Or should they use their freedom in Christ, remove their veils, and prophesy freely among those who constitute the one family of God? [Lightfoot]

A common idea that has served as a presupposition to many exegetes of 1Corinthians 11:2-16 is that the passage is filled with hypothetical allusions. Another misunderstanding often brought to this text regards the notion that 1Corinthians 11:2-16 was intended to serve as a general dress code for Christian women. A final presupposition is one which argues that since Paul is himself Jewish and that since Acts 18 mentions the origins of the Corinthians church in the synagogue, one ought to presuppose a Jewish cultural context for the issues mentioned in 1Corinthians 11:2-16. I would suggest that Paul's real concern in 11:2-16 is what we might call his fear of unisex comportment in the worship service, a comportment (i.e., improper head coverings) which blurred certain divine distinctions between the genders. In my judgment, this and this alone is the historical occasion for this section of chapter 11. [Oster]

The Apostolic Traditions (11:2)

An apostolic tradition is not bad like a tradition of men. Here Paul praises the Corinthians for holding firmly to the traditions. But tradition itself is neutral, neither good nor bad. A tradition is simply a teaching which is "handed down" or "delivered." The "tradition terminology" is used to describe such teachings as head coverings, the Lord's Supper (11:23), and the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (15:3). [Terry]

The Christological Argument (11:3-6)

Let us observe three facts about 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. First, certain practices related to the human head evoked Paul's discussion in this section. Second, the word "head" occurs with unusual frequency in this section (nine times). Third, the theological statement of 11:3, which is universally acknowledged as providing the basis for Paul's argumentation in 11:4-16, is itself unusually dominated by the term "head." [Oster]

He (Paul) first discusses the natural order of headship: God, Christ, man, woman; however, the fact that God is the head of Christ is not central to the question of head coverings, and so he mentions that relationship last. The reader will also want to consult Phil. 2:5-7 and 1 Cor. 15:28 regarding this relationship. Paul concludes that a man should not have anything on his physical head when he prays or prophesies. If he should be wearing something on his head, he is disgracing his head. Here head is used in a double sense. It is a disgrace to the man himself to pray or prophesy with his head covered, but more than that, it is a disgrace to Christ, who is his figurative head. [Terry]

Prophesying done by women is to be understood in the light of the restriction in 14:34; Paul does not have reference to women prophesying in the public assembly, but to such occasions in which they might employ this gift. [Kelcy]

Paul concludes that a woman should have her physical head covered when she prays or prophesies. If she is not covering her head, she is disgracing her head. Here again "head" is used in a double sense. It is a disgrace to the woman herself to pray or prophesy with her head uncovered, but more than that, it is also a disgrace to the man who is her figurative head, whether he should be her husband, father, or whatever. [Terry]

The point is that Christ is over man, man is over woman, and God is over all. Since covering the head is a sign of subordination, then, Paul reasons that it would be disgraceful if the man is veiled and disgraceful also if the woman is unveiled. If the woman is to appear unveiled, she might as well have her hair cut or shaved off--which at Corinth was a symbol of immodesty. [Lightfoot]

The Jew and the Roman worshipped with covered, and the Greek with uncovered, head. Naturally a dispute would arise as to which custom was right. For a man to worship with a covered head was an act of effeminacy, a disgrace to his head, and for a woman to worship with uncovered head was likewise disgraceful, for it would at once be looked upon as a bold assertion of unwarranted independence, a sign that she had laid aside her modesty and removed from her sphere. From this passage it is plain that it was intended that Christianity should needlessly vary from the national customs of the day. Paul does not *command* that unveiled women be shorn, but he *demand*s it as a logical consistency, as a scornful *reductio ad absurdum*. For a woman to wantonly lay aside her veil was a open repudiation of the authority of her husband, and such a repudiation lowered her to the level of the courtesan, who, according to Elsner, showed her shamelessness by her shorn head, and likewise to the level of the adulteress, whose penalty, according to Wetstein and Meyer was to have her head shaved. [McGarvey]

And if a woman should appear in public without a veil, she would dishonor, her head--her husband. And she must appear like to those women who had their hair shorn off as the punishment of whoredom, or adultery. [Clark]

I assume that believers from both Greek and Roman backgrounds were in the Corinthian assemblies. Consequently, there would be some men veiled (Roman) when performing prayer and prophecy and some men unveiled (non-Roman). There would have been some women veiled (Roman) when performing prayer and prophecy and some women unveiled (non-Roman). Since Roman women had been covering their heads during

prayer, prophecy and sacrifice centuries before the advent of the gospel in Corinth, they were, albeit for the wrong reasons, already complying externally with Paul's wishes. Greek men, who for centuries had been worshipping with their heads uncovered, were also complying with Paul's wishes. In this light one sees that Paul is not having a lot of trouble with inappropriate haircuts among his converts. He is not combating women who have shaved their heads or teen-age boys who have hair hanging down to their shoulders. These points are only there as supporting arguments to buttress, in an *ad hominem* way, his theological position of 11:3, a position which in turn was constructed to oppose the practices of 11:4,5. [Oster]

The Creation and Angelic Arguments (11:7-12)

Paul continues his argument on the natural order of things, no longer looking to the order of headship, but now to the order of creation. [Terry]

Christ is God's equal in nature and essence (cf. Phil. 2:5,6); he became subordinate to the Godhead for the sake of a particular function. Woman is man's equal in nature and essence (cf. Gal. 3:28); she is subordinate to him for the sake of a particular function. [Shelly]

Man is the image and glory of God, while woman is the glory of man. Note that woman is not said to be in man's image--she too is in God's image (see Gen. 1:26,27), but being second in creation she is man's glory, not God's. This implies two things: (1) a man ought not to have his head covered (11:7), and (2) the woman ought to have authority on her head (11:10). [Terry]

Given the use of *gune* and *aner* in 11:3 and its subsequent use in Paul's recounting of the Genesis creation story (vs. 8,8,12), there can be little doubt that throughout the section Paul is discussing men and women in general and has no special interest in this context in discussing husbands and wives. [Oster]

Hence, women ought not to do away with the veil while in places of worship, because of the symbolism; and they cannot do away with the subordination which it symbolizes, because it rests on the unalterable facts of creation. To abandon this justifiable and well-established symbol of subordination would be a shock to the submissive and obedient spirit of the ministering angels (Isa. 6:2) who, though unseen, are always present with you in your places of worship. [McGarvey]

A likely view is that the angels in question are good angels who are present when the Christians gather for public worship and whose presence demands a certain respect. The point is that the holy angels are present in assemblies for worship (1Cor. 4:9; Psa. 138:1; LXX). Therefore those things which are shameful should not be allowed in the assemblies. Now under the New Covenant, being blind, lame, etc., is not disgraceful, but Paul has just said that every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head; it is just as shameful as if she had shaved her head. Thus a woman should not pray with her head uncovered in the presence of angels. Ramsey is right in asserting that it is the woman's own authority that Paul is referring to, but Paul is not here discussing the woman's dignity--in fact, he is not discussing social customs at all. Rather, he is saying that since the woman is the glory of man rather than the glory of God, the head--covering is the symbol of her authority or right to communicate with God. For her to do so without this symbol of authority is shameful, for this is a sacred time when angels are present. The last of 11:9 and 11:10 may thus be paraphrased to read: "Woman should have a covering over her head as a symbol to the angels of her right to pray." [Terry]

In Western countries a woman's hat has never had any symbolism whatever. We see nothing in Paul's argument which requires us to make it symbolic. The problem in Western assemblies is how best to persuade women to take their hats off, not how to prevail upon them to keep them on. The principle, however, still holds

good that the woman is subordinate to the man, and should not make any unseemly, immodest, vaunting display of an independence which she does not possess. [McGarvey]

The Sociological Argument (11:13-15)

Paul starts this argument by appealing to the Corinthians' own ideas about what is proper. He tells them to judge for themselves and asks them if they think it proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered. Now at first glance, it appears that Paul is asking them to decide on the basis of their cultural sense of propriety--that is, according to the way that they were brought up. But it is obvious that Paul is expecting them to judge it improper. This leads one to think that the appeal is not to what is proper in light of their upbringing, but rather to what is proper in light of their Christian teaching. This may be illustrated by considering the answer that a gospel preacher would get today if he should ask the congregation whether it is proper for a woman to preach publicly. The answer he would receive would hopefully be "no." But this answer would not be based on the practice of American culture; rather, it would be based on the teachings of the Bible. [Terry]

Paul is not so sure that the Corinthians will answer his question in 11:13 right. For he goes ahead to argue that their answer should be that it is improper for a woman to pray uncovered. He does not, as some would suppose, leave the answer up to the whims of culture; rather, he proceeds to ask a rhetorical question regarding the natural order of things. Paul's argument here is not that the woman who has long hair may dispense with the head-covering, but rather that the fact that she already has one type of covering shows she is to wear a head-covering. [Terry]

The Ecclesiastical Argument (11:16)

This cannot mean, "If anyone strives over this or causes trouble, then dismiss the whole subject." Paul would not give prolonged reasoning for the veiling of women and then drop the subject with one statement. Nor is it likely that he means--"If anyone wants to dispute about it still, remember that it is neither our practice nor the practice of the churches to dispute." His intention is not so much to censure the contentious spirit as to supply an additional answer for any possible objection. "If any further objection is raised about women wearing veils," he says, "I would add that it is neither the apostolic practice nor the practice of the churches in general to do otherwise." [Lightfoot]

Having presented three theological arguments and one sociological argument as to why men should pray bareheaded and women covered, Paul sums up by saying in effect, "And if you don't like it, I'm sorry, but that's the way it is." In doing so, however, he throws in a fifth argument at the end of the discussion: this innovation that someone is teaching isn't practiced in any of the other churches of God. Some have mistakenly taken the phrase "we do not have such a custom" to mean "we do not have any particular custom." They say that Paul is saying that if a person wants to disagree, he may do as he pleases. Paul is not saying, "we do not have ANY custom"; rather, he is saying, "we do not have a custom like this one I have been discussing." [Terry]

A much better and clearer translation is one such as is found in William Barclay's translation of the New Testament: "let it suffice to say that we have no such custom as the participation of unveiled women in public worship, nor have the congregations of God."

That these translations are correct is shown by studying the following chart:

CUSTOM	COMMAND
v4 "man who has something on his head"	
v5 "woman who has her head uncovered"	
v6 "woman does not cover her head"	"let her cover her head"
	"a man ought not to have his head covered"
v10	"the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head"
v 13 "a woman...with head uncovered"	

It is not the practice of the churches in the right hand column that Paul refers to in 11:16. He never refers to the churches' practice without commanding it. On the other hand, when he refers to the non-Christian custom, it is always with disapproval ("disgraces his head"; "disgraces her head"; "let her also have her hair cut off"; "is it proper?"). And it is the disapproval of custom to which he refers first, last, and the majority of times. Thus when he says, "we do not have such custom," the custom to which he is referring is the one that he has discussed with disapproval--the custom which the one who what to be contentious is trying to introduce. It is the custom of women praying bareheaded, just like they did in pagan Greek religions. But Paul says that this practice of women praying bareheaded is simply a Greek custom, and in the churches of God there is no such custom as this. [Terry]

Some Concluding Thoughts

The principle lesson of 11:3-15 which is relevant for all times is that the fact of distinction between man and woman, a distinction rooted in the fact of creation, must be recognized. Woman must ever recognize the headship of man, and both man and woman must recognize that "all things are of God" (11:12). In Paul's day the veil had come to symbolize womanly modesty and was a badge of her subjection. Paul teaches the Corinthian women to respect the custom because of its symbolism and because of what the discarding of it indicated. The early Christians found the veil in use and were to respect its significance. The fact which it symbolized is ever true; however, Paul is not legislating regarding women wearing a veil to the extent that he is making it a law for all times and for all peoples. [Kelcy]

What I am pointing out, then, is that in regard to 1Cor. 11:4-16 I am only preaching what we in churches of Christ already practice in regard to 1Pet. 3:1-6 and see at work in our culture at large. Namely, we should begin by looking for the doctrinal foundation and intent of a practice and not the particular details of how that doctrine was enacted in a different culture when the whole enterprise is labeled as "custom" (1Cor. 11:16). While John Calvin rightly noted on this text that one should avoid "all those who destroy good and useful customs where there is no need to do so," it is also worth reminding ourselves that it is an odious and lamentable situation when those who speak on God's behalf "teach as truth the customs of men" (Mk. 7:7). [Oster]

How does Paul's teaching on the wearing of veils apply today? In my opinion it does not. For Corinthian women to be in the assembly unveiled was shocking and disgraceful in their society, so immodest that they might as well cut off their hair like harlots. Today in our society it is not shocking or immoral either for a woman to be without a covering or for her to have her hair cut. "Greet one another with a holy kiss" is a custom that has changed; and so here Paul speaks of a custom that is unmeaningful to our society. [Lightfoot]

The latter part of 11:6 speaks to me about this matter and how to resolve it today. If it is disgraceful (as determined by society and culture) for women to pray and prophesy with uncovered heads, they are to cover their heads. If it is not disgraceful for a woman to worship with her head uncovered then she needs no covering.

This would make the entire section based on the present culture but would solve the problem in a very simple way. Two problems with this view are that 1) the veil was very symbolic of subordination whereas hats, scarves, etc., denote only fashion, and 2) it seems difficult to know where to draw the line between what doctrines can be written off as cultural (Rom. 16:16a) and which ones cannot. The entire text remains a difficult one at best. [Swango]

Selfishness at the "Love Feasts" (11:17-22)

Since the beginning of the church, it was customary for the believers to eat together (Ac. 2:42,46). It was an opportunity for fellowship and for sharing with those who were less privileged. No doubt they climaxed this meal by observing the Lord's Supper. They called this meal "the love feast" since its main emphasis was showing love for the saints by sharing with one another.

The "agape feast" (from the Greek word for "love") was part of the worship at Corinth, but some serious abuses had crept in. As a result, the love feasts were doing more harm than good to the church. For one thing, there were various cliques in the church and people ate with their own "crowd" instead of fellowshiping with the whole church family. While Paul condemned this selfish practice, he did take a positive view of the results: at least God would use this to reveal those who were true believers. [Wiersbe]

Another fault was selfishness: the rich people brought a great deal of food for themselves while the poorer members went hungry. The original idea of the "agape feast" was sharing, but that idea had been lost. Of course, the divisions at the dinner were but evidence of the deeper problems in the church. The Corinthians thought they were advanced believers, when in reality they were but little children. Paul did not suggest that they abandon the feast, but rather that they restore its proper meaning. The "agape feast" should have been an opportunity for edification, but they were using it as a time for embarrassment. Scorning others is certainly not the way to remember the Savior who died for all sinners, rich and poor. How important it is that we prepare our hearts when we come to the Lord's Table! [Wiersbe]

Abuses at the Lord's Supper

First, we should look back (11:23-26a)

The broken bread reminds us of Christ's body, given for us; and the cup reminds us of His shed blood. It is a remarkable thing that Jesus wanted His followers to remember His death. Most of us try to forget how those we love died, but Jesus wants us to remember how He died. Why? Because everything we have as Christians centers in that death.

This "remembering" is not simply the recalling of historical facts. It is a participation in spiritual realities. At the Lord's Table, we do not walk around a monument and admire it. We have fellowship with a living Savior as our hearts reach out by faith. [Wiersbe]

Second, we should look ahead (11:26b)

We observe the Supper "until He comes." The return of Jesus Christ is the blessed hope of the church and the individual Christian. Jesus not only died for us, but He arose again and ascended to heaven; and one day He shall return to take us to heaven. Today, we are not all that we should be; but when we see Him, "we shall be like Him" (1Jn. 3:2). [Wiersbe]

Third, we should look within (11:27-32)

Paul did not say that we had to be worthy to partake of the Supper, but only that we should partake in a worthy manner. If we are to participate in a worthy manner, we must examine our own hearts, judge our sins, and confess them to the Lord. To come to the Table with unconfessed sin in our lives is to be guilty of Christ's body

and blood, for it was sin that nailed Him to the cross. If we will not judge our own sins, then God will judge us and chasten us until we do confess and forsake our sins.

The Corinthians neglected to examine themselves, but they were experts at examining everybody else. When the church gathers together, we must be careful not to become "religious detectives" who watch others, but who fail to acknowledge our own sins. If we eat and drink in an unworthy manner, we eat and drink judgment (chastening) to ourselves, and that is nothing to take lightly. [Wiersbe]

Fourth, we should look around (11:33,34)

We should not look around in order to criticize other believers, but in order to discern the Lord's body (1Cor. 11:29). This perhaps has a dual meaning: we should discern His body in the loaf, but also in the church around us--for the church is the body of Christ. "For we being many are one bread, and one body (1Cor. 10:17). The Supper should be a demonstration of the unity of the church--but there was not much unity in the Corinthian church. In fact, their celebration of the Lord's Supper was only a demonstration of their disunity. [Wiersbe]

The Lord's Supper is a family meal, and the Lord of the family desires that His children love one another and care for one another. It is impossible for a true Christian to get closer to his Lord while at the same time he is separated from his fellow believers. How can we remember the Lord's death and not love one another? "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1Jn. 4:11). [Wiersbe]

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