

Tim Bouter

## Women's Head Covering

*<sup>2</sup>Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. <sup>3</sup>But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. <sup>4</sup>Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup>But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. <sup>6</sup>For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. <sup>7</sup>For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man is not from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup>Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. <sup>10</sup>For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup>Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. <sup>12</sup>For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.*

*<sup>13</sup>Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? <sup>15</sup>But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. <sup>16</sup>But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God (1 Cor. 11:2-16).*

The head covering is a symbol that a woman wears to indicate she acknowledges her place in God's order of creation. Man was placed on earth as God's representative, to exercise dominion over it. The woman was never given this place of headship. Subjection does not mean inferiority; Christ is subject to God the Father but He is not inferior to Him! Neither is woman inferior to man, though she is subordinate to him. God has designed different roles for men and women, and has equipped each gender with different characteristics to glorify Him in their roles. The headship of the man and submission of the woman portrays the perfect relationship between Christ and the Church. The woman should be submissive to the man, just like the Church should be submissive to Christ the Head.

<sup>1st</sup> Corinthians 11 was written in the context of *public* gatherings of the assembly, as verse 18 shows: **when you come together as a church.**<sup>1</sup> Head coverings are, after all, an outward symbol. It is important that these instructions are not merely obeyed in a suppressive, legalistic manner, but rather embraced as a privilege and opportunity to glorify our Lord Jesus. The following comments outline Biblical principles regarding head coverings in the assembly, women's ministry and private settings:

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<sup>1</sup> These principles extend to other public Christian services (even if they are not strictly assembly meetings), such as weddings, baptisms, gospel meetings, etc.

### Assembly Setting:

**The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.** (1 Corinthians 11:3)

**[Man] is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.** (1 Corinthians 11:7)

- Women ought to cover their heads in the assembly. The glory and prominence of man should not be visible in the assembly; together as believers we gather to display the glory of God and recognise Christ as our head.

**For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.** (1 Corinthians 11:10)

- Angels are watchers and attendants of the heirs of salvation. The manifold wisdom of God is made known to angels through the church (Ephesians 3:10). Angels should see God's order observed in the assembly. In the first creation, they saw how woman usurped the place of headship over the man. God does not want what happened in the old creation to be repeated in the new creation. When the angels look down, He wants them to see the woman acting in subjection to the man, indicated outwardly by covering her head. Angels themselves are in subjection and yield perfect obedience.

**Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray<sup>2</sup> to God with her head uncovered?** (1 Corinthians 11:13)

- Paul appeals to the Corinthians' instinctive sense. The suggestion is that it is not reverent or decorous for a woman to publically enter into God's presence unveiled.

**Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.** (1 Corinthians 11:14-15)

- Long hair is nature's symbol of submission; God gave women this natural covering of glory in a way that he did not give to men. What is true in the natural sphere should be true in the spiritual. The head covering is the spiritual symbol of submission.
- The head covering veils a woman's own natural glory<sup>3</sup> (covering her hair) and simultaneously veils the glory of man (covering her head). We assemble together as believers in order to focus

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<sup>2</sup> Although women are instructed to keep silent in the assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:34), they should actively participate in silent prayer. Acts 1:14 confirms this lovely fact, where it states that **these all continued in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers**. All were praying, although not all audibly. Similarly, Acts 4:24 says that the company there **raised their voice with to God with one accord**, and when Peter was imprisoned later on, it mentions that **"many were gathered together praying"** (Acts 12:12).

<sup>3</sup> It is striking that in wearing a head covering to glorify God, a woman also covers her own natural glory. When we yield our own sources of glory to God, He can be glorified through us (compare with Jeremiah 9:23-24; Philippians 3:7-8).

our attention on Christ Himself, and away from ourselves or any other distractions. There is a beauty and privilege in these principles that does away with all legality. By simply obeying God's instructions regarding head coverings, women may visibly demonstrate that Christ is the head of the assembly to the glory of God.

#### **Woman's Ministry Setting:**

**But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.** (1 Corinthians 11:5-6)

- A woman should be covered when she exercises a ministry in audible prayer or prophesying.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise she is saying that she does not recognise man's God given headship and will not submit to it.
- Paul says that if a woman does not want to wear a head covering, let her really be like a man — let her go to a barbershop and have her beautiful locks cut off!

#### **Private Setting:**

- In private or family settings, it is up to the personal exercise and conscience of the woman whether she wears a head covering. What is important is that the motives of the woman are pure and that she is seeking to do what best honours the Lord.

A general guideline which may be helpful for women who have difficulty knowing in which situation to wear a head covering is to simply do the opposite of the man! For example, a man would take his hat off during public Christian services, and a woman should do the opposite and wear a head covering. On the other hand, a man wearing a hard hat may have full liberty to pray privately while he is working, and a woman may likewise have liberty to pray in certain private settings without wearing a head covering.

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<sup>4</sup> The two spheres of such ministry mentioned in the New Testament are older women teaching younger woman (Titus 2:2-5) and in the instruction of children (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15). In mixed groups, it would not be appropriate for women to pray audibly — this is taught by Paul in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:8. Likewise, women are not permitted to teach or have authority over a man, but are instructed to keep silent in the assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11-12).

## Women's Dress

- A Christian woman should not seek to follow the styles of the world or draw attention to herself in the way she dresses.
- God has given different roles to men and women. He desires to see a distinction between genders, in the way they act and dress. A Christian woman should look feminine in the way she dresses.
- A Christian woman's clothes should be modest and not be revealing. Her clothes should not accentuate her shape or sexualize her body.

Traditionally, Christian women wore modest dresses or skirts meeting these three Biblical guidelines. In our day, many Christian women prefer to wear pants. A Christian woman should carefully consider how she can best honour the Lord through her clothing, and what the motives behind her dress are. Regardless of the type of clothing, she should ask herself:

- Am I trying to copy the world? Am I trying to draw attention to myself?
- Do I look feminine?
- Are my clothes modest? Are my clothes too tight or revealing?