

The Covering

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

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1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (KJV)

² Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. 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. ⁴ Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. 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. ⁶ For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. ⁷ For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. ⁸ For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. ⁹ Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. ¹⁰ For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. ¹¹ Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. ¹² For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. ¹³ Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? ¹⁴ Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? ¹⁵ But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. ¹⁶ But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

The Five Principles

Principle 1: Headship

- **1 Cor. 11:3-5** teaches a woman ought to be covered when she prays or prophesies because of headship.
- Headship was established in the beginning (see **Gen. 2-3; Rom. 5:12-21**).
- Is man still the head of woman? The New Testament says YES.
 - Paul repeatedly affirms God's creation first of Adam and then of Eve and establishes requirements with regard to the man's headship (**1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13**).
 - We see this hierarchy again in **Eph. 5:23**, where Paul writes that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.
 - This connotes both loving provision (**Eph. 5:25-29**) and authority (**Eph. 5:22**).
- The Bible says that if a woman prays to God uncovered, she dishonors her head (man).

The Five Principles

Principle 2: Image and Glory

- **1 Cor. 11:7** teaches a man should not cover his head because he is the image and glory of God, while woman is the glory of the man.
- It appears this covering is symbolic of a woman's power and could be why Paul uses the word "*power*" (authority, [ASV]), to describe it in **v.10**.
 - In other words, a woman wears a covering on her head as a symbol of the power belonging to her husband, signifying her as "*the glory of man*" (**v.7b**).
- God created man in His own image, but created woman from man (**Gen. 1:26-27; 3:21-23**).
- Is woman still the glory of man? **1 Cor. 11:7** says YES.
 - We have no evidence to say anything has changed, meaning God still recognizes this principle when assigning men & women gender-specific responsibilities for serving Him.

The Five Principles

Principle 3: Order of Creation

- **1 Cor. 11:8-9** teaches a woman ought to wear the covering because of the order of creation.
- Is the order of creation still in effect? The New Testament says YES.
 - This appeal to the order of creation is used in **1 Tim. 2:11-13**, which teaches women should not be in authority over men.
 - Since the order of creation is the reason behind both commands, if the instruction for a woman to have her head covered does not apply anymore, then neither does the instruction for women to be in subjection to men.
 - Women exercising authority over her head – man – is condemned due to God's order of creation. This is the exact same reason God commands a head covering for women.

The Five Principles

Principle 4: The Angels

- **1 Cor. 11:10** teaches a woman ought to wear the covering because of the angels.
- In Paul's own words, it isn't because of modesty or tradition that a woman is veiled while praying. He says a woman should be covered "*because of the angels.*"
- Is this principle still in effect?
 - Nobody even knows for sure exactly what this means, so how could we know this reason/rule doesn't apply anymore?
 - We do not know all of the "whys" of God's commands, but not understanding why God commands us to do or not do something does not excuse us from obeying Him.

The Five Principles

Principle 5: Nature

- **1 Cor. 11:14-15** shows that nature teaches us women are required to have their heads covered with their natural coverings.
- Nature teaches us that it is a shame for a man to have long hair, but long hair on a woman is to her glory.
 - Nature teaches us that since women should have long hair all the time, they ought to veil with an artificial covering whenever they pray or prophesy, and the opposite for men.
- Is the principle of nature still in effect? The New Testament says **YES**.
 - Reminding us why Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Paul shows how nature teaches us homosexuality is sinful (**Rom. 1:26-27**).
- Homosexuality is condemned and the head covering requirement is rooted due to nature.

The Result of Women Not Covering: Shame

Shame is a recurring theme in 1 Cor. 11:2-16.

“But if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered” (v.6b).

“Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?” (v.14).

- In **v.6**, we learn if a woman does not cover her head when she prays or prophesies, it is one and the same as shaving her head.
 - **NIV** – *“For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.”*
 - **GNT** – *“If the woman does not cover her head, she might as well cut her hair. And since it is a shameful thing for a woman to shave her head or cut her hair, she should cover her head.”*
 - **NLT** – *“Yes, if she refuses to wear a head covering, she should cut off all her hair! But since it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or her head shaved, she should wear a covering.”*

The Two Coverings Under Consideration

Some contend 1 Cor. 11:2-16 only requires the long hair as a covering on a woman.

- If that were so, the three phrases “*praying or prophesying*” found in verses 4, 5, and 13 would have no real significance. These three phrases tell us when women must be covered and when men must not be covered.
 - This clear distinction rules out the view that the long hair is the only covering required by the text because the woman’s long hair covering is worn all the time.
- There are two distinct types of coverings referenced in the original Greek.
 - “katakalupto” – refers to the covering a woman wears as a symbol of her subjection to man to glorify him and not herself (**verses 5, 6, 7**).
 - “peribolaion” – refers to the woman’s hair, which is the covering she wears daily and is her glory (**verse 15**).

The Two Coverings Under Consideration

Some contend 1 Cor. 11:2-16 only requires the long hair as a covering on a woman.

- Hair is most certainly given to woman as a means for covering, but remember what Paul says in **v.15**:
 - *“But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.”*
 - The verse does not say long hair is “*the*” covering, but “*a*” covering.
- There are two different coverings women are expected to adorn themselves with.
 1. Her natural covering is for her own glory (her physical head).
 2. The artificial covering is for her spiritual head’s glory (man).

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Spiritual Gifts Argument

- Many say 1 Cor. 11:2-16 does not apply since prophecy is a gift of inspiration we do not possess today.
- Yet, there are passages which mention “prophecy” along side things which do not involve inspiration which we are still bound to perform today (**see Rom. 12:6-8**).
- If we conclude that the covering does not apply since prophecy was a spiritual gift we cannot perform, we must say the following for consistency: **Any time a command is given in the context of spiritual gifts, no application of the instructions can be made today.**
 - This is the only consistent conclusion to draw!

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Spiritual Gifts Argument (cont.)

- If we conclude that the covering does not apply since prophecy was a spiritual gift we cannot perform, we must say the following for consistency: **Any time a command is given in the context of spiritual gifts, no application of the instructions can be made today.**
- Yet, this conclusion is not applied to the Lord's Supper (**see Acts 20:7**).
 - Paul was an inspired preacher; his sermon was inspired by God, which is a spiritual gift we no longer have today. Furthermore, Paul exercised a second spiritual gift that same night when he raised Eutychus from the dead (**v. 9-10**).
 - If we conclude that commands given during the context of spiritual gifts are not binding today, then the "*upon the first day of the week*" portion of **Acts 20:7** is no longer binding for us in regards to when we partake of the Lord's Supper.
 - Consistency demands it!

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Spiritual Gifts Argument (cont.)

- If we conclude that the covering does not apply since prophecy was a spiritual gift we cannot perform, we must say the following for consistency: **Any time a command is given in the context of spiritual gifts, no application of the instructions can be made today.**
- Yet, this conclusion is not applied in to conducting worship “*in order*” (1 Cor. 14:40).
 - The previous 39 verses speak about the use of spiritual gifts during the assembly, but we do not throw away verse 40, which says, “*Let all things be done decently and in order*” since the command is given in the context of spiritual gifts.
 - Consistency would demand us to throw away this command if we go under the pretense that no application of scriptural instructions can be made today if given in the context of spiritual gifts.

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Custom Argument

Some use 1 Cor. 11:6 to say God's covering instruction was just a custom of that time and locality and, therefore, is not binding today, but notice the following scholars who say the custom of those times was different than what Paul taught in this passage:

- **Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges** – “In the remarkable fact that the practice here enjoined is neither Jewish, which required men to be veiled in prayer, nor Greek, which required both men and women to be unveiled, but particularly to Christians.”
- **W.E. Vine** – “Among the Jews the heads of the men were covered in the synagogue. Among the Greeks both men and women were uncovered.”
- **Vincent's Word Studies** – “The Romans [the men], like the Jews, prayed with the head veiled.”
- **Pulpit Commentary** – “Having his head covered . . . The Jewish worshipper in praying always covers his head with his Tallith.”

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Custom Argument (cont.)

- We know the church at Corinth was made up of both Jews and Gentiles.
 - **Jews** – *“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor. 10:1-2).*
 - **Gentiles/Greeks** – *“Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led” (1 Cor. 12:2); “And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks . . . And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:4-8).*
- With all of this under consideration, how could Paul be referring to a local custom when the church would have been filled with multiple “customs?”

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Custom Argument (cont.)

Consider various other translations of 1 Cor. 11:16 which disprove the custom argument.

- **Amplified Bible** – *“Now if anyone is inclined to be contentious [about this], we have no other practice [in worship than this], nor do the churches of God [in general].”*
- **NET**– *“If anyone intends to quarrel about this, we have no other practice, nor do the churches of God.”*
- **NIV** – *“If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice – nor do the churches of God.”*
- **RSV** – *“If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God.”*
- **GNT** – *“But if anyone wants to argue about it, all I have to say is that neither we nor the churches of God have any other custom in worship.”*
- **NLT** – *“But if anyone wants to argue about this, I simply say that we have no other custom than this, and neither do God’s other churches.”*

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Custom Argument (cont.)

- Quite far away from the covering being “just cultural” in nature, we know this requirement was uniform throughout all the churches everywhere.
 - **1 Cor. 4:17** – *“As I teach every where in every church.”*
 - **1 Cor. 7:17** – *“And so ordain I in all churches.”*
 - **1 Cor. 14:33** – *“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.”*
- So, just a local practice or custom? Just the opposite.
 - 1 Cor. 11:2-16 was written *“unto the church of God which is at Corinth . . . with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:2).*

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Tradition Argument

- Similar to the custom argument, some argue the covering was just a tradition (**1 Cor. 11:2**) and we are not bound to keep traditions.
- The word translated ordinance/tradition is the Greek word “paradosis,” which Thayer defines as “what is delivered, the substance of teaching . . . to deliver in teaching. A tradition, doctrine or injunction delivered or communicated from one to another whether divine (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6) or human (Matt 15:2,3,6; Gal 1:14; Col 2:8).”
- In **Col. 2:8**, we see an example of human traditions.
 - *“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition [human traditions {ESV}] of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”*
- Human traditions are not what we see in 1 Cor. 11 because Paul praised them for keeping this tradition.

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The Tradition Argument (cont.)

- These ordinances/traditions that Paul spoke of were of the Lord, not man.
 - **1 Cor. 14:37** – *“the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”*
- The covering is an inspired tradition, something we also see exemplified in **2 Thess. 2:15**:
 - *“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or by our epistle.”*
 - Paul refers to divine tradition and apostolic example which we realize is binding for us today.
- Also consider **2 Thess. 3:6**:
 - *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”*
- In all these verses, you can substitute “command” for tradition and the point would remain the same.

Arguments Against the Covering Still Being Binding Today

The “Judge for Yourselves” Argument

Some also say the covering is not required since Paul says we are to “judge” for ourselves (**1 Cor. 11:13**).

- This is said is after Paul gave the command, and he essentially asks:
 - **“Now, what do you think?”** or . . . **“In light of everything I have said, does it sound like women should have their heads covered or uncovered?”**
- The Corinthians were earlier called upon to “judge” about another matter.
 - *“Judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ”* (**1 Cor. 10:15-16**).
- The command to “judge” does not imply we judge for ourselves what is right in our own eyes, but judge what is right in the eyes of God (**see Deut. 12:8; Ezra 7:18**).
- If God left us to make judgment in our own eyes concerning head coverings, then God would be a God of confusion, which He is not!
 - *“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints”* (**1 Cor. 14:33**).

Is a “Praying or Prophesying” a Synecdoche?

- Some argue the full context of 1 Cor. 11 indicates the phrase “*praying or prophesying*” is a synecdoche, which is a figure of speech where a part stands for the whole. They contend praying and prophesying are “part” of the public worship and the “whole” is the church/worship service, so the covering requirement is limited to the public assembly when the church comes together.
 - Although the covering instruction is given among various instructions specific to the worship service, the phrase “*when you come together*” never appears in 1 Cor. 11:2-16.
 - This phrase appears in one form or another five times in **v.17-34**.
- This argument is problematic considering women cannot speak during the public assembly (see **1 Cor. 14:34-35**). Women cannot lead a prayer or prophesy in the public assembly when the whole church is together in one place, so why would God give an instruction strictly limited for the public assembly when that particular act (women speaking via prophesy) could not be done in the public assembly?

Is a “Praying or Prophesying” a Synecdoche?

- The principles upon which the head covering requirement is commanded apply at all times. **Headship, Image and Glory, the Order of Creation, the Angels** (? I assume), and **Nature are all universal principles that do not stop being true once the public worship stops, so why would the head covering requirement stop upon the assembly ending?**
- If the female head covering requirement was only limited to the church assembly, that would mean the men’s requirement found in 1 Cor. 11:4 would also be limited to the assembly.
- It is an inference to conclude “pray or prophesy” is a synecdoche. Is that a necessary inference?

Conclusion

- To say the covering instruction is not binding today, we must do the following:
 - **Ignore all five principles.**
 - **Throw out every command contained within a passage that mentions spiritual gifts.**
 - **Disregard commands pertaining to when/how we partake of the Lord's Supper, order during the worship service, women's subjection, and homosexuality.**
 - **Ignore the fact that Paul's teaching went against the clearly documented customs of both the Jews and Gentiles who made up the church a Corinth.**
- We cannot truthfully say/do any of these things, so the command must still apply.
- We must beware the temptation to treat any New Testament command like one from the Old Testament. We cannot disregard the command and instead say the principle(s) are only what apply today.
- Let us accept God's commands on this portion of His Word just as we do His other commands.