

Head Covering – A Woman’s Symbol of Divine Authority in Messiah

Congregations have different views about the meaning and relevance of head coverings as recorded in 1Corinthians 11:1-16. Therein, Paul an Apostle of the Messiah wrote to the Congregation of Elohim in Corinth about keeping all customs he had taught them and proceeded to elucidate on the use of head coverings for praying and or prophesying. Today, some women have no problem with covering their heads, while others object to it or think the covering refers to their natural hair rather than a veil or hat. We can know exactly what Paul meant as a covering, its purpose, and whether it is necessary for the Congregation of Elohim today. By examining definitions of relevant words, their context, issue’s importance, Paul’s conclusions and directives, along with other evidence in the Old and New Testament, I’ve concluded that the head covering is a symbol of New Covenant women’s divine connection to Messiah and their authority in Him to pray and prophesy effectually. The following is an explanation of my findings and conclusions.

Definition and Context

In the process, I found it necessary to verify the meaning of some relevant words and how they are used in 1Corinthians chapter 11. The words are covered, uncovered, cover, on head, and covering respectively. The following are definitions as pertaining to head covering along with chapter references, Strongs’ concordance numbers, Greek transliterations, and definition of each word.

1. **Covered:** 11:4; G2596; *Kata*; about, against, over against
2. **Uncovered:** 11:5, 13; G177; *Akatakalyptos*; not covered, unveiled
3. **Covered:** 11:6; G2619; *Katakalyptō*; to cover up, to veil or cover oneself
4. **Cover:** 11:7; G2619; *Katakalyptō*; to cover up, to veil or cover oneself
5. **On Head:** 11:10; G1909; *Epi*; superimposition (action of placing or laying one thing over another), over, upon, at, on, across, over, against
6. **Covering:** 11:15; G4018; *Peribolaion*; a covering thrown around, a wrapper

As shown above, words numbered 1, 3, and 4 are similar in application and pronunciation while word number 2 is their opposite. Word number 5 denotes the action required to achieve

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the condition of being covered. The last word number 6 is the object used to cover. These words as found in Greek source documents may have additional meaning depending on situation. In this context, they are used to imply putting on or rapping something against something; in this case the head. So, by the definitions alone, we can see that the cover is a thing placed over the head; not something that is a part of the head such as hair.

Importance

In the chapter, Paul begins by teaching the Corinthian congregation “...that the head of every man is Messiah, the head of woman is man, and the head of Messiah is Elohim” (1 Corinthians 11:3). This is a description of the dynamics of the natural hierarchy of man and woman before Messiah. By nature, the man has no other higher authority or head between him and Messiah, while by nature the woman has her husband as head or authority between her and Messiah. To further lay his premise, Paul clarifies that “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head (1 Corinthians 11:4). Since a man’s only head is the Messiah, he should never cover his head when praying. If a man were to do that, he would symbolically be covering the Messiah and conveying that he has another authority or head other than Messiah leading to Elohim. Thus, men do not cover their heads when praying or prophesying in the assembly to show that Messiah is their only authority and Way to Elohim.

As it relates to women, Paul makes his point by stating “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” (1 Corinthians 11:5). By this statement, Paul teaches that if a woman prays or prophesies without covering her head, which is without symbolically covering her husband, she is showing that her husband is her spiritual head or authority rather than Messiah. This symbolically dishonors Messiah. However, by covering her head,

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symbolically, she is acknowledging and stating that Messiah is her Head and Way to Elohim rather than her natural husband.

Thus, from the start of the chapter, Paul taught that when praying or prophesying, a man should not cover his head as that would symbolically mean that he is covering Messiah his Head to acknowledge some other as the Way to Elohim. In regard to women, Paul taught that they should cover their heads to symbolically cover their husbands to testify that Messiah is the only Way to Elohim; not their husbands. In so doing, being opposites, the male honors Messiah by not covering and the female by covering respectively. In many other ways in nature, the female covers the male. Therefore, as this is the case it is important for both men as well as women to know what exactly Paul meant by head covered and head uncovered.

Paul’s Conclusions and Directives

A close examination of 1 Corinthians 11: 6-7 shows whether Paul meant putting on an object such as a veil or hat as a covering or having natural hair on the head as a covering. To set the context, Paul states “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**” (1 Corinthians 11:5). By that statement, Paul taught that in context of praying and prophesying, a woman should don a head covering when praying or prophesying in an assembly. He said that being uncovered is **as if** a head was shaved. Paul’s words “as if” imply that one condition is **similar to** another. It was not a mere attempt to say the same thing differently. He reemphasized his position by conclusively stating “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 11:6).

Making sense of this verse is critical to grasping Paul’s whole point in this matter. If we use the words “with hair” in place of “covered” found in verse 6, the statement would be “For if a woman is not with hair, let her also be shorn (*shaved*). Now, if Paul’s goal in this whole

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discourse was to teach women who cut their hair to stop and keep it long as a covering, but then tells them to shave it off, he would have achieved nothing. Not to mention, if it was a matter of discouraging women from cutting their hair, Paul’s conclusion for them to cut their hair as a deterrent would be pointless. *That would defeat his purpose* and would prove a waste of his time as well as that of the Corinthian disciples. Anyone who has read about Paul’s tremendous responsibilities for the congregations would know that he wasn’t the type or had the leisure to waste energy or time.

Thus, more reasonably, Paul’s teaching is that if a woman does not want to put a covering on her head when praying or prophesying in the assembly, she should be willing to shave off her hair. In the rest of the verse Paul continues, “But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.” In other words, just as women would find it embarrassing to shorten or shave their heads, let them be sure to place a cover on their heads when praying or prophesying. The fact that Paul used their own view that it is shameful for women to have shorn or shaved hair *shows that the women were not cutting their hairs* but rather were not putting a cover on their heads. To that point, according to the Law, a *Nazarite vow* requires a man to let his hair grow long in special consecration to Elohim. If it was a matter of hair length, then the man in a Nazarite vow should not pray or prophesy since his hair is long. The Old Testament has a few examples of devoted people who were Nazarites such as *Samson* who prayed with long hair. In the New Testament, we find the *Prophet John* the Baptizer who was a Nazarite, consuming only honey and locust as sustenance. Being a prophet, John obviously *prayed with long hair*. Lastly, *Paul himself* during his return to Jerusalem in union with the Congregation of Elohim in Jerusalem *took a vow* and was to *later shave his head* at the end of the vow. Considering these facts, it should be clear that Paul was instructing the women of the Congregation of Elohim in Corinth to cover their heads when praying and prophesying; not addressing hair length. This makes sense and is effectual.

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Contextually, when using the hair as the covering in those two verses, the whole discussion is rendered pointless. These two verses *only make sense* when the cover is understood as an object placed on the head. Paul’s references to hair was an analogy to demonstrate how the natural tendency for men to have short hair in comparison to women’s longer hair show that, while praying or prophesying, men should not cover their heads while women should. So, Paul was plainly stating women need to put on a covering on their heads when praying and prophesying. Paul also taught the head covering is a symbol of a woman’s Divinely given authority to pray and prophesy in and for the congregation. Since men were made first, by nature women became subject to men after their sin. So, Paul explains “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:10). We see *Elohim’s manner of giving symbols* to His people as He did in giving Abraham the sign of *circumcision*; a symbol of righteousness. In His New Covenant, Messiah has liberated devoted women and gave the *head covering* as their *symbol of authority*.

This means that the many Church groups that don't permit women to pray or prophesy during their assemblies, are going against the Eternal’s grace to women. It also means that those groups who allow or encourage women to pray or prophesy without covering their heads, in honor of Messiah, are hindering the efficacy of women’s prayers and their potential to prophesy. These groups are also breaking New Covenant instruction by taking on secular standards based on carnal pride masked as equality; rather than the Scriptures. Keep in mind, since Messiah is the direct Head over men, they must never cover their heads when praying or prophesying. Figuratively, men who cover their heads while praying or prophesying are covering Messiah Who is the Way to answered prayer and the Spirit of Prophecy. Since men are the natural head over women, when praying or prophesying, women need to cover their heads to symbolize their direct connection to Messiah. To this day, some men cover their

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heads when praying or reading the Scriptures. This is contrary to sound doctrine as Paul a former Pharisee implies in his *second letter* to the Congregation of Elohim in Corinth. He wrote “...unlike Moses, who *put a veil over his face* so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the *same veil remains unlifted* in the *reading* of the Old Testament, because *the veil is taken away in Messiah*. But even to this day, when *Moses is read*, a *veil lies on their heart*. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, *the veil is taken away*. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2Corinthians 3:13-17). The ancient Jews who didn’t believe the Messiah had a tradition of covering the heads when reading the Scriptures. It was not a command from Elohim. Paul used their tradition to reflect their ignorance of Messiah and their inability to understand what they read. Paul pointed out that when any of them turn to Messiah the blindness and veil are both symbolically and literally removed.

Again, when a woman covers her head, she is symbolically covering her husband who is carnally the authority over her to show her direct relationship to Messiah. Personally, when praying at home or during assembly, I do not cover my head. As those who know me are aware, my prayers are often effectual. By the Eternal’s grace, I don’t take any pills or medications. If I should get a cold, headache or other discomfort, I pray to the Eternal and the discomfort goes away; often before I finish my prayer. Literal miracles have been granted for those who genuinely requested my prayer. The Eternal permitting, I will soon put a paper about the many miracles the Eternal did for me, and lessons learned from them. By my own experience besides the New Covenant promises for answered prayers and miracles, I know prayer, if done right, will be answered above our expectations. In regard to the head covering, when it is done with understanding and faith, we promote the Reality and Way of Elohim.

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Other Evidence in Old and New Testament

The Old and New Testament scriptures convey the use and value of the veil through positive and negative situations. In *Genesis*, we find Rebekah donning a veil when she saw him who would become her husband. The account states “for she had said to the servant, “Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took a veil and covered herself (Genesis 24:65). Notice, with all her interaction with the servant, Rebekah did not once put on a veil. Yet, as soon as she saw Isaac, her husband to be, she put on the veil. So, in this situation the veil was used to denote a special covenant relationship between a woman and a man. Another symbolic meaning of the veil is found in the book of *Isaiah*. To the sinful women in Israel he wrote; “Take the millstones and grind meal. **Remove your veil**, take off the skirt, uncover the thigh, pass through the rivers” (Isaiah 47:2). In this case, the veil was intended to depict the precious value of righteous women; not the sinful. The scriptures also show that the ancient Israelites regarded covering the head as a symbol of authority. In ancient times the power of the symbolism was so understood that charlatans attempted to use it to deceive and or gain control over others. One such case is found in *Ezekiel* 13:17-23. Ezekiel recorded Elohim statements “Likewise, son of man, set your face against the *daughters* of your people, **who prophesy** out of their own heart; prophesy against them, and say, ‘Thus says My Master the Eternal: “Woe to the **women** who sew magic charms on their sleeves and **make veils for the heads** of people of every height **to hunt souls!** Will you hunt the souls of My people, and keep yourselves alive? And will you profane Me among My people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, killing people who should not die, and keeping people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies?’ ‘Therefore thus says My Master the Eternal: “Behold, I am against your **magic charms** by which you **hunt souls** there like birds. I will tear them from your arms, and let the souls go, the souls you hunt like birds. I will also tear off your **veils** and deliver My people out of your

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hand, and they shall no longer be as prey in your hand. Then you shall know that I am the Eternal. Because *with lies* you have *made* the heart of the *righteous sad*, whom I have not made sad; and you have *strengthened* the hands of *the wicked*, so that *he does not turn* from his wicked way to *save his life*. Therefore you shall *no longer envision futility* nor practice *divination*; for I will deliver My people out of your hand, and you shall know that I am the Eternal” (Ezekiel 13:17-23). In Ezekiel’s record, wicked *women were misusing* the authority symbolized by the veil to deceive and harm others.

Conversely, men have done similar evil things wearing a *coarse coat* to deceive. In the Scriptures we find that authentic mighty prophets of Elohim like *Elijah, Eli*, and *John the Baptizer* wore coarse garments made of camel’s hair. These garments were important as evidenced by the fact that Elijah gave his coat to Eli who succeeded him. The *coarse coat* was a *symbol of divine* prophetic authority. It’s possible, that even *Paul’s cloak* was of the like. In a *letter to Timothy* he requested his coat among other important items. He wrote “Bring the *cloak* that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come and the books, especially the parchments” (2Timothy 4:13). For Paul to have asked for his cloak among the important books and parchments, it must have been an important item of great use. These meek and devoted holy men did many good works through the power of Elohim’s Spirit in His honor. *However*, as also recorded in the Scriptures, some evil men tried to deceive others by wearing coarse garments pretending to be prophets. Of such *Zechariah* wrote “It shall be in that day,” says the Eternal of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the *prophets* and the *unclean spirit* to depart from the land. It shall come to pass that if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, because you have *spoken lies* in the name of the Eternal.’ And his father and mother who begot him shall thrust him through when he prophesies. And it shall be in that day that every *prophet will be ashamed* of his vision when

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he prophecies; they will not wear a *robe of coarse hair* to deceive” (Zechariah 13:2-4). The veil and coarse garments are good symbols, but wicked people used them to deceive and harm others. So, like the coarse garment of prophets, the veil is in fact a Divinely ordained symbol of New Covenant women’s authority to pray or prophesy in and for the congregation.

Conclusion and Aspiration

In conclusion, we saw that Paul admonished the Congregation of Elohim in Corinth to observe the doctrines or traditions exactly as he gave it to them (1Corinthians 11:2). In verses 13-16, Paul showed that the Corinthian women’s custom of praying or prophesying without a head covering is contrary to apostolic doctrine and not customary to the congregations in other locations. Texts such as 1Corinthian 11, Ezekiel 13, and Zechariah 13 imply that symbolic items such as veils and coarse garments were used as symbols of Divine authority. Specifically, the head covering/veil is a symbol of a woman’s Divinely given authority in Messiah to pray or prophesy in and for the Congregations of Elohim. Men are commanded not to cover their heads and women are commanded to cover their heads all in honor of Messiah. So, the purpose of the head covering is to symbolize a woman’s authority in Messiah; not to subjugate them to men as done in the world system. As it is written, in Messiah there is neither male nor female. My hope is that women everywhere will see the Biblical significance of covering their heads and will do so to *pray and prophesy effectually* in *honor* of the *Messiah*; their *Divine Head*.

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