

## Of Head Coverings and Submission

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

*<sup>3</sup>But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. <sup>4</sup>Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. <sup>5</sup>But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. <sup>6</sup>For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. <sup>7</sup>For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup>for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. <sup>10</sup>Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup>However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup>For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. <sup>13</sup>Judge for 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 one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. (NASB)*

The issue of head coverings might have been a matter of debate in the Corinthian church. This issue could well have been the source of some of the divisions within the church. Knowing that his teaching on head coverings may still be resisted and debated in the church, Paul ends this argument with one final thrust in verse 16. For those who would be contentious over this issue, let them know that there is no other practice in any of the churches. For anyone to disregard and disobey Paul's teaching of the headship of man and the supportive role of women is for them to set themselves outside the Biblical teaching and church traditions of every one Paul established.

Nothing is clearer in verses 3-9 than that Paul wants women to wear a head covering because such adornment appropriately distinguishes women from men. That act by women is voluntarily surrendering to male headship. Verse 3 shows that Paul wants women to wear a head covering in order to show, to demonstrate, to illustrate that they are submissive to male headship, an attitude of one's heart. It is an act of obedience to God declaring that they are submissive to male leadership.

I understand Paul's teaching on the role of women to have at least these four major components:

(1) The conduct of Christian men and women is to be governed by the principle of male headship in the home and in the church. The political, business or other arena of life is not addressed.

(2) The principle of headship requires that women not be preeminent, that they not exercise authority over men, that they do not teach or even speak to the congregation in the church meeting.

(3) The principle of headship requires that when women pray or prophesy (teach other women or children), they must do so with their heads covered, to indicate their submission.

(4) The principle of headship is to be followed in the ways prescribed above, and this is to be done uniformly, that is without any exception, throughout every church.

While head covering was certainly applicable for Paul's day, it is no longer appropriate for our own. For Paul the issue was directly tied to a cultural shame (that of women who cut their hair—an act of shame and embarrassment). Those cultural messages do not prevail in most cultures today, certainly not in the western world.

Paul was concerned about head coverings only because of the message the covering of one's head sent to people in that culture, both saved and unsaved. Today, except in certain religious groups, if a woman fails to wear a head covering while praying or prophesying (teaching, but not to men), no one thinks she is in rebellion, although that would have been the case in Paul's day. Lack of head coverings sends no message at all in our culture. Catholic women wear head coverings for different reasons than submission to men. They wear them to show respect during the upcoming service. Although they would teach that they practice Paul's teaching in this passage, their reasons for doing so are far from the Biblical reasons established in the chapter.

Although we lack the cultural message head coverings sent to the observer, women are not released from the commandment to be "helpers" and submissive to men in their churches and to husbands at home. There are so many Biblical passages that command this, both in the Old Testament and in the New.

Therefore, women may choose any method to demonstrate that submission. They may, by word or activity, demonstrate their heart obedience to God and therefore demonstrate their submission within the boundaries God has established for their roles. Men are to demonstrate leadership not domination at home or at church. Domination uses force. Leadership demonstrates meekness and kindness.