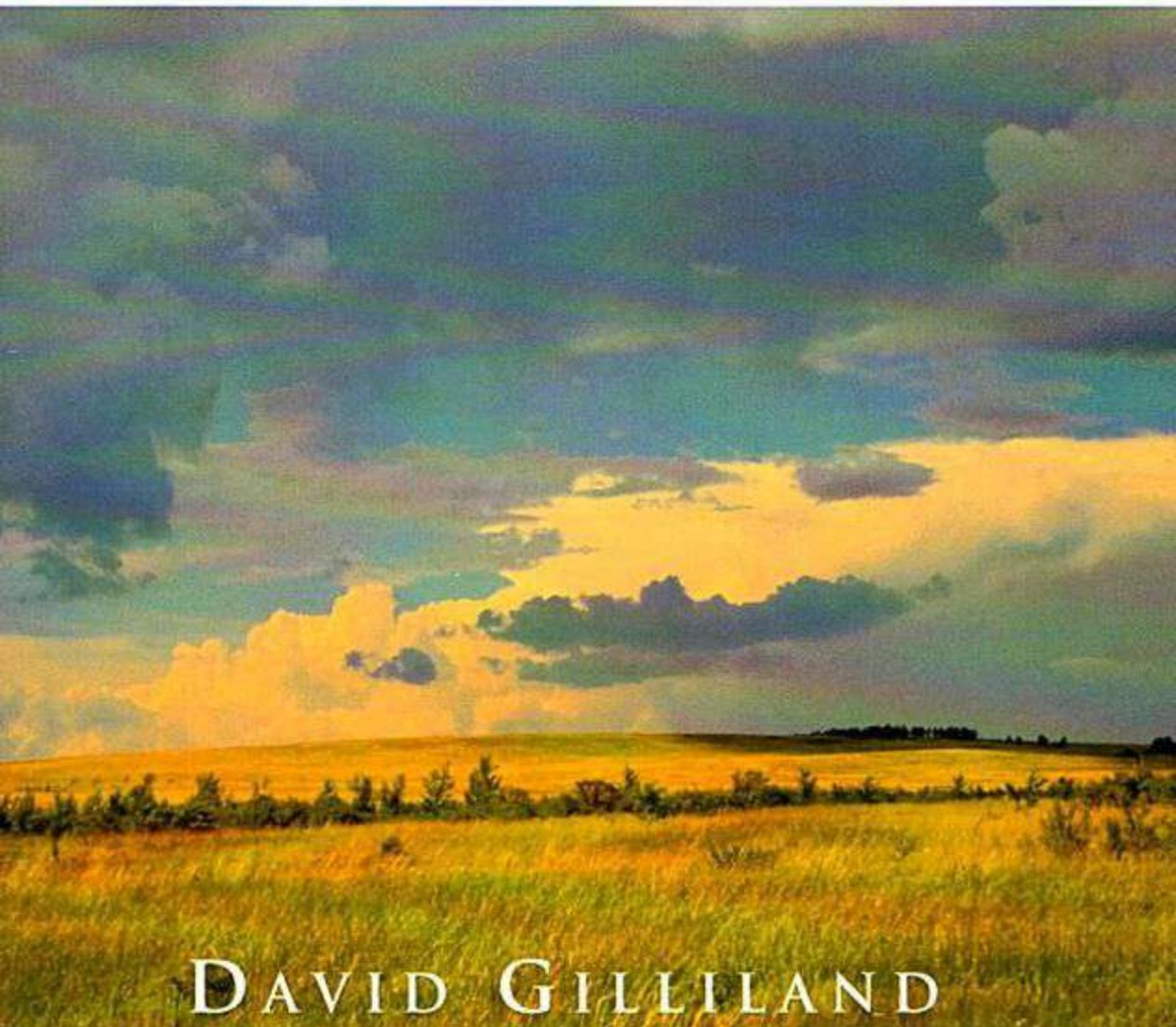


THE HEAD COVERING

ITS BIBLICAL BASIS AND SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE



DAVID GILLILAND

INTRODUCTION

SOME TIME AGO a Christian lady was leaving her home to meet with other believers to observe the Lord's Supper. As she went on her way she was met by a little girl from a nearby home who made the enquiry, 'Are you going to a wedding, Mrs T?'. 'What makes you ask that?' was the counter question. 'Because you have a hat on' was the reply, with all the innocence of a little girl.

Perhaps that is a fair reflection of public opinion. Hats are for weddings, funerals, visits to the Queen, or even Ascot. For many, a lady with a head covering is a relic from Victorian times; it is an evidence of respect, a mark of good taste, a fashion statement, or maybe even a symbol of snobbishness. If this is what society at large thinks, we cannot be surprised if the sphere of Christian profession, which used to almost universally practise head-covering for women when in church, has become affected by some form of diluted thinking.

In most circles of Christian testimony it is no longer considered necessary for women to wear head coverings in the public gatherings. With some these have been discarded in all the meetings, with others they are considered necessary for only certain meetings; but in general there is a growing dissatisfaction with a practice that had been accepted for centuries. Of course, the fact that something has been accepted practice for a long time does not automatically justify it. We must turn to the Scriptures and again ask what exactly does the Word of God say, since it must be our final arbitrator in this, as in all matters.

There are many Christian women who do not wear a head covering simply because they have never been exposed to the teaching of the New Testament. Many others do follow

the practice of wearing a head covering but are not really aware why this is so. Still others have deliberately dispensed with any head covering. Whatever the viewpoint and background of the reader, it is hoped that this booklet will cast biblical light on this important and neglected topic.

THE SIGNIFICANT NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE

THE NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE which deals at length with the subject is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, where the apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, gives us the apostolic teaching. This section of 1 Corinthians is located in a part of the letter dealing with order in the public, collective gatherings of the assembly. It is noteworthy to observe the references to 'order' in the chapters:

- 11:34 'And the rest will I set in **order** when I come'.
- 14:40 'Let all things be done decently and in **order**'.
- 15:23 But every man in his own **order**: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming'.
- 16:1 'Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given **order** to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye'.

Admittedly, these references to 'order' occur in various contexts but they do indicate that God is a God of 'order' and nowhere on earth should this be more in evidence than in the church of God. The paragraph (11:2-16) dealing with head covering is located in this very section of the epistle and is part of God's instructions regarding Divine 'order'. Incidentally, the balance of this chapter (vv.17-34) uniquely presents teaching on the Lord's Supper, so the whole of 1 Corinthians 11 is a key chapter in relation to assembly testimony and order.

Even though the teaching of this passage may seem to be very alien to those who live in a world of feminist agendas and ever changing cultural norms, we recognise this as God's Word and we must make the effort to understand what is said. The apostle demonstrates the necessity of the head covering for Christian women and, coming from four different angles, he presents his argument from the standpoint of:

- Divine constitution (vv. 3–6)
- Original creation (vv. 7–12)
- Natural comeliness (vv. 13–15)
- Apostolic custom (v. 16).

We will, in the following pages, consider each sub-section of the paragraph in order. It will be most important to keep a close eye on the actual text as we follow the development of thought in this passage, so the relevant verses will be quoted as we consider each point in the argument. There is no doubt that the passage is demanding, far-reaching, and contains densely packed argumentation; it will become very evident that this passage requires more careful thought than is often given to it. We will have to read many of its clauses more than once and think about them very carefully in order to grasp their meaning. Having examined the relevant Scripture text, we will, at the end of the booklet, consider some doctrinal and practical questions which are often raised in connection with this topic.

So, let's begin our examination of the inspired text of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, commencing with the commendation of verse 2.

V. 2 *Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.*

Paul begins by commending the Corinthian believers for their general adherence to apostolic tradition. He then proceeds (vv. 3–16) to deal with an irregular practice which was being accepted among them, and introduces his first

argument. Here the apostle gives commendation before applying correction, thus establishing a relationship with his hearers and gaining a favourable hearing. Obviously the whole issue was then, as today, a sensitive topic and had to be approached with care.

THE PROBLEM AT CORINTH

While details of the disorder in the assembly at Corinth are not stated particularly, it would seem that some of the women in the assembly were not only taking audible and public part by praying and prophesying in the gatherings of the saints, but they were doing this with uncovered heads. Perhaps they were exploiting their new freedom in Christ. Their reasoning may have been something like this – ‘As Paul has written in another letter “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28), why do we have to be different from the men? Do we not have liberty to be and act as the men folk?’ Such sentiments seem to have been behind the behaviour at Corinth, and similar ideas have found expression in our modern world in what is known as the ‘Feminist Movement’.

Earlier in the letter (see 1:10–12; 3:3; and, indeed, later in the second part of this very chapter – see vv. 18–20) the apostle rebuked the Corinthians for highlighting man-made differences and divisions between believers that they should not have countenanced. In this section they were obscuring a God-given difference, between male and female, which should have been highlighted. How we are creatures of extremes!

How then did the apostle Paul handle the difficulty, and does his teaching have any relevance to our contemporary situation?

THE ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE CONSTITUTION (VV. 3-6)

V. 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.

This first argument is based on order as it has been constituted by God in His arrangement of the universe. Hence we call it 'the argument from Divine Constitution'. We are conducted by the apostle into the great matters of relationships within the Godhead and introduced to an order which is basic to the existence and running of the universe. Without this there would be chaos and ultimate disorder.

Headship: relationships, responsibilities and roles

In this clear statement of Divine order it is most important to observe that before coming to deal with the negative aspects of the disorder, he first of all makes such a positive, direct and doctrinal statement. What he tells us in this verse is fundamental to the argument as a whole and the apostle does not want the great, basic truth of this verse to be overlooked. His introductory statement, 'but I would have you know that ...' implies the importance of knowledge and understanding in this area and the danger of ignorance.

In this verse the Holy Spirit details what we may call a 'hierarchy of headship' involving different persons, and covering different spheres. God is seen to be a God of order; as Governor of the universe He has established an order of headship as outlined in this verse. He is supreme in this pyramid of administration, and stands in ultimate authority. Subject to His authority is Christ, subject to Christ is man, and subject to man is woman.

It should be noted that headship is not something confined to the human sphere for even within the Godhead there is a recognition of the Father's authority by Christ Himself. This total submission of the Messiah to the will of

God involved Him in the shameful death of the cross. The recognition of headship in His case has not been a matter of mere theory; it has brought with it the most far-reaching and practical consequences. How grateful we are for the position He took when, in obedience to His Father's will, He 'bowed His head so low, underneath our load of woe'.

Furthermore, the fact that 'the head of Christ is God' demonstrates that being subject to a head does not imply inferiority; within the Godhead the Father and Son are eternally equal, of the same essence, yet in that same Godhead the Son is perfectly subject to the Father's authority. These considerations also make it clear that in 'headship' it is not a question of tyranny or superiority; rather, it is a matter of each one under God recognising his or her Divinely appointed place, and his or her responsibility in that place.

It is also remarkable, and indeed, many have considered it to be strange, that when we are given the hierarchy of headship in verse 3, the sequence we would expect is not the one used by the Holy Spirit. Instead of commencing with the woman and proceeding through man and Christ up to God, the order commences 'the head of every man is Christ'. It is important to discern the reason for this departure from 'normal' order. If the problem at Corinth lay with women, who in the exercise of their spiritual liberty were reluctant to acknowledge the headship of the man, we may have expected that the first matter to be emphasised would be 'the head of the woman is the man'. It is not so, however. Before the woman is told that the man is her head, the man is reminded that he himself has a head, even Christ. Therefore the man's authority is not autocratic or absolute, for he is under authority to Christ. His headship, therefore, must not be exercised in a tyrannical or abusive way, for he is accountable to Christ. For the man, headship means not only authority, but also responsibility and accountability.

It is very clear from the foregoing that when the Holy Spirit states that the head of the woman is the man, the

Christian woman is not being classified as inferior or second class. In *personhood* she is his equal; but in *position*, according to God's order, she is to be subject to the authority of the man. The woman is not, in this verse, being diminished as lacking in worth, dignity or intelligence. She is being located in God's structure of the universe and it is in that God-given position that she can achieve her full potential.

Many contemporary authors have attempted to prove that the word 'head' in verse 3 should not be read as having the meaning 'authority over'. We use the word with this significance when we speak of the 'head' of a company or a school. So did the Greeks use the term in this metaphorical sense. However, these authors say the word rather means 'head' in the sense of 'source', as when we speak of the 'head' of a river. But it will hardly do to say that God is the 'source' of Christ! This seems like sailing dangerously close to shipwreck on the rocks of error concerning the Lord Jesus.

Having established and expressed the proper order according to the plan of God in verse 3, it is an easy step in the argument to see the point in verses 4–6. Wherever this order is disregarded it leads to a situation of dishonour and disgrace.

V. 4 *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.*

V. 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.*

The Holy Spirit indicates, first of all, that since man has been set in a position of headship (v. 3) he would be bringing shame upon himself if he were to pray or prophesy with his head covered (v. 4). This is because in so doing he would in effect be dressing like a woman, and would thereby be refusing to take the position of authority in the assembly which has been given to him under Christ. A secular parallel to this would be if a commanding officer in the army

should appear in a parade in the uniform of a private; he would, in effect, by refusing to wear the badge of his office, be abdicating his authority. It is important to remember that the uncovered head of the man is as much a symbol as the covered head of the woman. With his uncovered head, he displays his position of authority; with her covered head she displays her acceptance of the place of submission to God's order.

Similarly, verse 5 stresses that if a woman prays or prophesies with an uncovered head she will bring dishonour upon herself because she is thereby assuming the place proper to the man, and is therefore stepping out of her God-appointed place in the order of headship.

'Praying' and 'prophesying' are mentioned in verses 4 and 5 as these were the forms of public communication when the church was assembled. 'Praying' refers to communication from man to God; 'prophesying' represents communication from God to man. These are mentioned as the representative activities in the public gatherings.

It seems that this was the area where the problem at Corinth really lay, so the apostle elaborates upon the situation. He draws a parallel between the woman who prays or prophesies with uncovered head, and a woman with a shaved head. Of course, it was commonly acknowledged that such an individual was a disgrace to womanhood, and hence the lesson taught was the more effective because it was so shocking. Indeed, it has been suggested by many that the only females at Corinth with shaven heads would have been slaves, adulteresses or prostitutes. Such a comparison would, of course, have been describing a situation totally repugnant to any Christian woman.

To further reinforce his point, the apostle draws the conclusion of the next verse.

V. 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.

The alternatives are clear. If a woman refuses to wear the symbol of her Christian subjection as expressed by her temporary head covering, she should be consistent and also discard the permanent covering of her long hair by becoming shorn or shaven. If, however, she finds the latter situation unacceptable because it is shameful, she should really have no problem about wearing her head covering also. In other words, the Christian woman has two coverings – her hair, and her head covering. If she is going to dispense with one of these, consistency demands that she let the other go also. But both are necessary, and should be retained in the gatherings of the saints. ‘Be consistent!’ says the apostle.

Some have considered that in verses 4 and 5 there is an additional principle being taught. In the expression ‘having his head covered, dishonoureth his head’ (v. 4), they understand the second ‘head’ here to refer to Christ, the man’s metaphorical head. Likewise in verse 5 – ‘with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head’ – they understand the second use of the word ‘head’ to refer to the woman’s metaphorical head, the man. However, this view is somewhat problematic since in verse 5 the apostle equates a woman praying or prophesying having her head uncovered with a woman whose head is shaven – ‘one and the same’. It is obvious that a woman with a shaven head does not dishonour man; she brings shame upon her own head, upon herself. Thus if the two uses of ‘head’ in verse 5 refer to the woman herself, the parallelism of the verses demands that similarly the two uses of the word ‘head’ in verse 4 refer to the man himself. Therefore the apostle is not, in these verses affirming that, by head covered or uncovered, the man dishonours Christ or that the woman dishonours the man. Rather he is teaching that each gender can bring dishonour upon its own self by refusing to take the position assigned to

each in God's order and by not displaying the symbol which expresses an acceptance of that position.

It follows quite simply from this opening argument that in the Christian assembly the Holy Spirit expects the males to have their heads uncovered; in effect, men would therefore be acting as men, taking their God appointed place. He also expects the females to have their heads covered; women would therefore be acting as women and similarly accepting their God appointed position. In this way the distinctiveness of male and female would be immediately discernible, and any reversal of their roles would be a serious upset of Divine order. According to this order men are not women, and women are not men; men are, in the assembly, in a position of headship and there should be visible evidence of this in their heads being uncovered and in the heads of the women being covered. This piece of cloth was invested with meaning and signified the order of gender relationships in the local congregation. The teaching here has nothing to do with the protocol of good manners where, in a western culture, a gentleman might remove his hat and gloves as a mark of respect. Neither has it to do with reverence in the presence of a superior, for then all would have their heads covered as in the case of the priests in the Old Testament when they were on sanctuary service and in the presence of God. Here it is neither respect nor reverence; it is a recognition of headship which is the subject in 1 Corinthians 11.

THE ARGUMENT FROM ORIGINAL CREATION (VV. 7-12)

V. 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.*

In verse 5 many ancient manuscripts remove all ambiguity and actually have, in their text the possessive pronoun, 'dishonoureth her own head'. Indeed, this is how the verse is translated by J.N. Darby and W. Kelly.

Now we come in the argument to a point where the Holy Spirit, as He often does in the New Testament, takes us back to the events of the early chapters of Genesis, and shows that the principles of the previous verses are not confined to the sphere of redemption but find their roots in the order of creation. Thus Christianity does not contradict God's creational order, it confirms it and conforms to it.

The wearing of the head covering by the woman, and its absence with the man, is now presented as a matter of *obligation*. It is not *optional*. It is not a matter of conscience. It is a matter of command because of creation.

Most emphatic in this paragraph are the repeated affirmations: verse 7 – 'for indeed a man **ought not** to ...' – and again in verse 10 – 'For this cause **ought** the woman to ...'. What the Holy Spirit teaches here is a matter of duty and Christian men and women will want to respect His will, despite contemporary or popular opinion to the contrary.

'Glory' is the new concept in this paragraph. The man is the glory of God, and the woman is the glory of man. Thus, just as 'head' had been the key point of the previous paragraph, 'glory' is the chief point of this new section.

The repetition of the word 'glory' in verse 7 is noteworthy. The truth of Genesis 1:26,27, that mankind is made in the image of God, is re-affirmed; but a further point is added which is not mentioned directly in Genesis – man is God's glory as well as His image. This means that it is man's responsibility to bring glory to God ('glory') by representing Him ('image'). In order to do this in the assembly he must function with his head uncovered. With uncovered head he occupies his God-given position of headship and authority, and he brings glory to God.

In the woman's case, however, the situation is quite different. The Holy Spirit, of course, does not deny that she is also made in the image of God, for this would be at variance with the plain statement in Genesis 1:26,27. This fact, however, is not brought forward here since it is not the

purpose of this passage to explore and express the relationship of the woman to her Creator, but her relationship to the man. It is therefore emphasised that she is *the glory of the man*. The sense in which this is true is then explained in the next two verses.

V. 8 *For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.*

V. 9 *Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.*

The woman has been created 'of' or 'from' man (v. 8), and created 'for' man (v. 9). As to her origin she was taken from him; as to her purpose she was created for him. These two considerations define her role in relation to the man. It is not that the man is 'better' than the woman. They need each other. They are interdependent. Without the man there would never have been the first woman; without the woman there would never have been another man (see v. 12)! She was the glory of man and this means that her responsibility, by creation, was to 'bring glory' to man as a helper suitable for him, and she does this by functioning in a position of submission to God's order and obedience. She was not created to compete with him, but rather to complement and complete him; she was intended to support him, not supplant him. In the church, by her submission the woman will bring this glory to the man since she honours his position as head, and by her support she will bring him honour and blessing. Her head covering is the symbol that she recognises and accepts her place in God's order.

If we bring together the teaching of the two paragraphs so far, we can easily discern that the teaching of each paragraph is complementary. The first section (vv. 4-6) rests upon the concepts of shame/dishonour, and the second section (vv. 7-11) rests upon the concepts of glory/honour, but the two paragraphs view matters from a different perspective:

Verses 4–6 – The bringing of ‘dishonour’

Verses 4–6 tell us that a man with a covering dishonours himself and a woman without a covering brings dishonour on herself.

Verses 7–9 – The bringing of ‘glory’

Verses 7–9 tell us that by not wearing a head covering the man brings glory to God and so honours God; likewise, by wearing a head covering the woman brings glory to the man, for in this way she honours him.

It is also clearly shown that, in creation, man and woman had two distinct ‘glories’:

man’s glory was the glory of **headship**;
woman’s glory was the glory of **helpership**.

It may be helpful, at this point, to refer to 1 Corinthians 15:41 by way of clarification for the use and meaning of the word ‘glory’ in this passage. We are told there ‘there is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon’. These heavenly bodies were assigned different functions by the Creator, and endowed accordingly with different glories. The superior, golden splendour of the sun is a manifestation of its leading role in the heavens; likewise, the distinctive and silvery splendour of the moon is a manifestation of its subordinate role in the sky above. What if the sun and moon, dissatisfied with their Divinely ordained positions, were to decide to exchange their respective glories? What an unprecedented disaster this would cause in the celestial and created order! Likewise, if men and women disregard their respective glories, chaos will inevitably ensue.

As in the celestial arena, so also in the spiritual sphere. There is one ‘glory’ of the man and another ‘glory’ of the woman. As the man, seen with uncovered head, manifests his glory as *head*, so the woman with covered head manifests her glory as *helper*. The order and design of their creation exemplified this important difference; and in keeping with

this creational distinction Paul is now teaching that, in the church, each should be seen with a visible demonstration of his and her respective glory. Therefore, the degree to which the man properly exercises the position assigned to him by God determines his ability to bring glory to God; and the degree to which the woman accepts the position assigned to her determines her ability to bring glory to the man.

V. 10 *For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.*

The argument in this verse has proved to be somewhat uncertain, due to two particularly difficult expressions in it:

Authority on her head,
Because of the angels.

These are obviously important matters, since the phrases '*for this cause*' and '*because of*' indicate that we are being given a further reason why the woman ought to be covered.

Authority on her head. This phrase has been taken by some as a reference to the woman's own authority, but such an interpretation is out of keeping with the context. The stress is upon the words *authority on her head*, and it is referring to the sign of her submission to the man's authority, which she wears on her head.

Because of the angels. We inevitably want to ask why angels are introduced. It may be that, having drawn attention to the order of creation in verses 8 and 9, we are now being reminded that angels are observers of creation. At 1 Corinthians 4:9 they have already been introduced as spectators of the indignities suffered by the apostles; and it is therefore not surprising to have them here as admirers of the order in God's assembly. The recollection of the results of insubordination in their own ranks may well cause them to value every expression of Divine glory and order here on earth.

Lest there should be any misunderstanding, the next two verses qualify the preceding teaching, and assure us that the woman's submission does not in any way suggest inferiority or inequality.

V. 11 *Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.*

V. 12 *For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.*

Whether we consider salvation, as in v. 11, or procreation, as in verse 12, men and women cannot do without each other. God has established a mutual dependence which must be kept in balance with the distinctions already taught in the passage. Their roles are equally valued and important but they are distinct roles!

From the argument of this paragraph at least two important conclusions should be kept in mind.

The Holy Spirit traces the teaching back to creation. These matters are not peculiar to something in Corinthian culture and therefore no longer relevant in our day. They are founded in Divine creation and thus transcend the boundaries of any culture, whether geographical or chronological. The principles which are taught here do not have any shelf life!

This paragraph alludes to facts which predate the Fall of man. Some have taught the headship of the male is only as a result of sin and the Fall. This is a wrong conclusion; for whether in headship as here, or in marriage as in Ephesians 5:22-33, the Holy Spirit goes back to the principles which God established in creation. These principles are seen in Genesis 1 and 2, prior to the entry of sin into the human race in Genesis 3. To be sure, the entry of sin has sadly meant that headship has often been abused and authority has sometimes degenerated into tyranny. However, it is important to be reminded that these abuses are one of the

results of Genesis 3, but the principle of headship goes back to Genesis 2.

It is often said that we must move with the times, that the teaching of head covering belongs to a primitive era and we have now moved beyond that. However, we need to be careful. In light of the reference here to Genesis, to dispense with the teaching of this chapter is not progress; rather it is a retrograde step which, instead of moving forward, actually is taking us back in time to repeat the mistake of Genesis 3.

THE ARGUMENT FROM NATURAL COMELINESS (VV. 13-16)

V. 13 *Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?*

V. 14 *Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?*

V. 15 *But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.*

In this section the form of the argument changes, and the apostle begins by saying 'Judge in yourselves'. We no longer have direct dogmatic statements, but rather questions are presented as appealing to the reader's own sense of moral judgment. It is almost as though the apostle, having presented the theological argument, is now calling upon the Corinthians to give a verdict on the issue and form a judgment. In making this judgment they will find their own inner sense of right and wrong will confirm the apostle's teaching. To the question of verse 13 'Is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?', the apostle expects an unequivocal 'No'. The reason he expects such an answer is explained in verse 14: 'nature itself teaches' us and, instinctively, we know.

This natural sense of propriety dictated that 'long hair' was unsuitable for men, and suitable for women. Indeed, so great was the commonly acknowledged difference between them, that what was seen as a 'shame' or 'disgrace' to men,

was actually evaluated as a 'glory' to women. In this way, the Corinthians already admitted an immediate and obvious distinction between males and females. This is not a reference to social customs and conventions but refers to an innate sense of what is proper. God has so 'wired' human beings that they intuitively recognise the difference between the roles of male and female – a difference reflected in the length of hair appropriate to the genders. The long hair, shameful and repugnant for one gender, is regarded as beautiful and befitting for the other.

Why, then, should a woman object to the teaching of the preceding verses, which are really calling for a further recognition of this same distinction? Why should she feel it irksome to wear a covering as a symbol of headship, when she is already wearing the natural covering of 'long hair'?

V. 15 *But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.*

It is made clear that 'long hair' is the manifestation of the glory of womanhood. The temporary head covering, as we have seen earlier (vv. 7–11), is the symbol of her recognition of the authority of man in the spiritual sphere; her long hair is the symbol of the recognition of that same truth in the natural sphere. Here it is said that her hair is given for a 'covering'. In this verse the term 'covering' (*peribolaion*), describing the woman's long hair, is quite distinct from the form of words used for the temporary 'covering' in vv. 3–7 (various forms of *katakalupto*). Here *peribolaion* is a term which signifies 'something cast around (as a mantle)'. Indeed, it is the very word translated 'vesture' in Hebrews 1:12, 'as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up'. It is referring to the fact that the woman's long hair can fall around her shoulders like a mantle.

V. 16 *But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.*

In this brief and final argument, the apostle appeals to the accepted and universal practice in the early churches of God, and any contrary behaviour would therefore have had no apostolic sanction or authority. These words are strong and, at the same time, affirming. The apostle was not asking the Corinthian assembly to do something not being practised in any other assembly. He recognised the fellowship of assemblies which followed apostolic order and he encourages the Corinthians to keep in line with such companies.

A case is often made that assemblies should be left free to make their own choice in these things. After all, we are told, 'love' is the Christian ethic and tolerance is the order of the day. This passage does not fit in with such sentimental notions. Obedience to His will expressed in His Word is what God desires among His people and this is what will have His approval.

It is probable that the custom of the churches in this matter was quite different from that in the surrounding culture. While firm evidence is scanty, it is most likely that among the Jews it was the custom for men to cover their heads in the synagogue whilst at prayer; Jewish women uncovered theirs; among the Greeks, both men and women usually worshipped with their heads uncovered; among first century Romans it was customary for both men and women to have their heads covered at public worship.

Whatever the case, it is clear that the apostolic instruction for the saints was not culled from surrounding society. They did not take their principles of behaviour from the spirit of the age but from the Spirit of God; and we should, of course, follow their example.

THE SITUATION WE FIND OURSELVES IN TODAY

We must readily admit that in modern society there is a general resentment of authority in every sphere. Internationally the authority of governments is continually being challenged; in industry the authority of the employer is often questioned; in education the pupil seems at times to have authority over the teacher; even in the domestic sphere the places of parents in general, and of the husband in particular, are often set aside.

If society is to function smoothly, it will be generally acknowledged that there must be some recognition of proper authority. There is no place on earth where this should be more evident than in 'the church of God', and it must be most grieving to the Lord when the spirit of the age creeps into an assembly.

In a world where God's order is rejected in so many ways, how important it is for His people to practise His Word. They will therefore be conspicuously different, and live for His pleasure.

CONCLUSION

IN CONCLUDING, it is worth reminding ourselves that while this is the only New Testament passage dealing with the Christian woman's head covering, this is not the only passage dealing with headship and in particular, the Headship of Christ. A number of headships are associated with the Lord Jesus and they are worth listing here. He is:

- 'the head of every man' (1 Cor. 11:3)
- 'the head of the body, the church' (Col. 1:18)
- 'the head of all principality and power' (Col. 2:10)
- 'the head over all things' (Eph. 1:23)
- 'the head stone of the corner' (Psa. 118:22)
- 'the head of the nations' (Psa. 18:43)
- 'the head above all' (1 Chron. 29:11).

When we understand how wide-ranging and far reaching the truth of headship really is, stretching out to include every corner of the universe of God, and impinging upon the glory of His Son, our minds marvel in wonder and worship. How privileged we are to be able to implement the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 and apply to our lives the very principle which God will employ to establish His authority universally and eternally! Then He will 'head up all things in the Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth' (Eph. 1:10, JND). At that point no subversive element or adversary will be left remaining and then shall 'the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28). The teaching in these verses is not some incidental, unimportant, tangential piece of apostolic advice. This is the principle upon which the restoration of equilibrium to the

universe depends. This is the principle which lies at the foundation of God's redemption programme. May such a consideration place this subject in the context of greater things and, consequently, make our acquiescence in the truth of headship a sublime delight and our obedience to this passage a joy!

QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIONS

What exactly is meant by 'headship'? Does the word 'head' have different meanings in the passage?

This is an important question, and quite a significant part of our understanding of the section depends on an accurate definition of the terms.

There are three applications of the word 'head' in these verses, and it is important to distinguish between them. They can be listed as follows:

a. **Literally.** The most obvious and basic one, of course, is in those references where the word is to be understood literally. For example, when we read of a man praying or prophesying with his *head covered* (v. 4), or a woman with her *head uncovered* (v. 5), it is obviously the literal, physical head of the person that is in view.

b. **Representatively.** Then there are those occasions where the 'head' is to be understood as representing the whole person. This is an instance of the fairly well-known figure of speech which is grammatically designated 'synecdoche', where a part of something is mentioned when the whole is actually intended. We are all familiar with the English phrase 'per head of population'; of course, the population is not just the sum total of actual heads: entire persons are in view, even though only one part of the body is mentioned in this description.

A clear New Testament instance of this usage is found in Acts 18:6 where Paul warns those who opposed the gospel 'your blood be upon your own heads'. He was obviously referring to the personal responsibility of the people involved, and not just to their literal heads.

This is also the case in 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5, where the apostle tells us that by a certain activity the man or woman will disgrace his or her 'head'.

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. 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. (vv. 4, 5)

He does not only mean that the literal physical head would be disgraced; it is the whole individual involved who will suffer shame.

c. **Metaphorically.** This brings us to the third and most important use of the word. When the apostle tells us in verse 3, for example, that God is the 'head' of Christ, neither of the two applications already considered will be suitable.

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 (v.3).

In seeking a meaning for the word 'head' in this verse, two alternatives have been proposed: 'source' and 'authority over'.

a. **'Source'.** Some have suggested this as a possibility. We can speak of the 'head' of a river when meaning its 'source', but to affirm that this is the meaning here would be fraught with difficulties because:

There is a language difficulty. In ancient literature the Greek word may, on a very few occasions, have the connotation 'source', but these are so few and far between that it is doubtful, to say the least, that they could help us here.

There is a theological problem. To say that the man is the 'head' of the woman, and mean that he is the 'source' of the woman, is, in itself, not far off the mark; after all, she was derived from Adam (as v. 8 asserts). However, it is rather more unsatisfactory to carry this meaning on into the next clause of verse 3 which tells us that God is the 'head' of

Christ. Surely it would be most unsuitable to say that God is the 'source' of Christ!

It is therefore not of very much help to our understanding of this passage to maintain that 'head' can have the meaning of 'source'.

b. '**Authority over**'. This much more common meaning of the word fits exactly the demands of the passage in every way.

It agrees with the usage of the word in Greek. The Greeks used the word in contexts parallel to our English usage when we speak of the 'head' of a school, meaning the person in authority; or when we speak of the 'head of state' meaning the ruler, governor, or whatever.

It also agrees with its usage in Scripture. The apostle elsewhere tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ is 'Head' over all things, with all things in subjection under His feet (Eph. 1:22). Obviously, in this case, it has the idea of authority and control.

It fits theologically, for in this sense it is not objectionable to say that God is the head of Christ. Did not the Lord Jesus always acknowledge His Father's authority?

When we then read that 'the head of the woman is the man', we are being told that, in relation to the woman, the man is in a position of authority and leadership. Such an idea may be distasteful to the feminist mind-set of our age, but it is the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Since 1 Corinthians 11 deals with husband and wife, does that mean that unmarried sisters are free from the ruling of this chapter?

The assumption of this question is incorrect. These verses in 1 Corinthians 11 do not refer to husband and wife, but to man and woman. It is true that in the original language the word for 'man' (*aner*) is the same as that translated 'husband'; similarly, the word for 'woman' is at times properly translated 'wife'. The same Greek term serves for both meanings. It is not the term itself which decides the meaning of the word, but the context in which it is used.

In the passage before us it is obvious that in verses 8 and 9, for example, the translation 'husband' and 'wife' would simply not do. We shall see this when we look at the verses like this:

For the man (husband?) is not of the woman (wife?); but the woman (wife?) of the man (husband?). Neither was the man (husband?) created for the woman (wife?); but the woman (wife?) for the man (husband?) (vv. 8,9).

Where would be the logic in saying (in verse 8) 'the husband is not of the wife; but the wife of the husband'? It would also be just as nonsensical to use the terms 'husband' and 'wife' in verse 9. Thus, by the context, we are assured that the fitting and correct translation is 'man' and 'woman'; hence the passage is comprehensive in its bearing upon all Christian men and women, whether married or not.

Do the instructions of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 refer only to public gatherings of Christians, or do they also apply to private devotions, etc.?

Because the 'coming together' of the church into one place is not mentioned until verse 17 and verses 20ff of this chapter, some have thought that the earlier verses are not referring to the public gatherings of the assembly, and that the directions apply to the behaviour of the Christian woman at home as well. This, however, seems to be unfounded.

In verses 4 and 5 the apostle refers to praying and prophesying. These two activities are obviously chosen as being representative of speech Godward and manward, and are most probably to be understood as public exercises. Certainly, the prophesying discussed in chapters 12 and 14 of this epistle refers to activity in the public gatherings of the saints, and there does not appear to be any justification for a different understanding here.

On the other hand, it is well known that quite a number of godly sisters have felt that for conscience sake, they should cover their heads even in the exercise of private prayer. No one would wish to interfere with their conscience in this matter except to say that such action is not demanded by the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

Accepting the teaching of this passage on headship, are we not at liberty to express this truth in our modern culture by some symbol other than a head covering?

Later in this chapter (vv. 17-34) we have instructions regarding the Lord's Supper. In that section we are given instructions concerning two emblems, the loaf and the cup, which respectively represent the body of the Lord Jesus given for us and the new covenant which was established in His blood. We would not feel at liberty to change either of those Divinely appointed symbols (and what they through Christ's instruction represent); neither have we the liberty to alter the meaning and the symbols of headship announced earlier in the very same chapter.

Why is 'long hair' introduced into this passage and if, as v. 15 says, the woman's 'hair' is given her for a 'covering', is not this one covering enough?

But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering (v. 15).

It is important to recognise that in this passage the apostle is not advocating that women should have long hair; he is assuming that they do have it. In the society of first century Corinth the women with either shorn hair or shaven heads would not have been found in the gatherings of the assembly; their place was rather at the idol's temple, or in the disreputable areas of the city.

The 'long hair' is introduced in the passage by way of analogy. Since the Corinthians would already recognise the propriety of long hair for a woman, a Christian lady should therefore find nothing burdensome about wearing a head covering.

To read verse 15 as meaning that her long hair is given her instead of a covering is, of course, to rob the passage of its content. Such a reading would make nonsense of verse 6. If long hair is the covering, then verse 6, which reads 'for if the

woman be not covered let her also be shorn', would come to mean 'if the woman has no hair let her also have her hair cut', which is not logical.

The word for covering (*peribolaion*) employed in verse 15 signifies 'something thrown around', 'a mantle', and refers to the fact that the long hair surrounds the woman's head (and shoulders) very much as a shawl would do. In the original language it is a completely different word (*katakalupt'*) that is used earlier in the chapter to denote the temporary covering.

We should also point out that the passage says nothing about covering the hair of the woman. It does command the covering of her head, but this does not necessarily mean that she also covers her hair.

There are some women who do not (cannot) have long hair.
How does this passage reflect upon them?

It is worth keeping in mind that the apostle says in verse 15 'If a woman have long hair' and this implies that perhaps not all women do have. This may be for a variety of reasons: medical, genetic or some, because of illness or advancing years and infirmity, cannot grow long hair. All of these genuine situations are allowed for in the 'if' of this verse and the Lord, Who is rich in mercy, knows the detail of every situation. There is, of course, a difference between a sister in such situations as have been suggested, and one who does not have long hair simply because she has chosen to have it cut short. Such action will find little comfort in the overall teaching of 1 Corinthians 11.

What precisely is the meaning of the statement in verse 7 'the woman is the glory of the man'?

The teaching of these central verses of the section has commonly been understood as involving the following stages of argument:

The woman is the glory of man;
Man's glory should not be seen in the church;
Therefore the woman must have a covering.

It then follows from this view that the woman's hair must be covered as well as her head. Since her hair is stated to be 'a glory to her' in verse 15, it must, on this reasoning, be concealed, because the manifestation of her glory is no more acceptable in the church than the man's glory would be.

However, this passage says nothing about glory being concealed. If God has given glory He expects it to be displayed. The woman is the glory of the man in the sense that she brings 'glory' or 'honour' or 'distinction' to him. She can only do this when she is subject to him, and in fulfilling this role she honours the man. Hence, her covered head when in the assembly is the demonstration of her readiness to honour the man by her displayed subjection. Similarly, the man is declared by his uncovered head to be the 'image and glory of God'. The meaning here is parallel. As the woman 'brings honour' to the man by occupying the place of helper, so the man 'brings honour' to God by occupying the position of head. He 'images' God as ruler, and his uncovered head is the visible display of his leadership in the church.

The fact that woman was created to bring glory to the man is substantiated by the two reasons expressed in verses 8 and 9. Have another look at these verses, and note those reasons:

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.

Note that verse 8 begins with a 'for' and is to be viewed as an explanation of the preceding statement of verse 7, that 'the woman is the glory of the man'; and in the original text verse 9 also begins with a 'for', thus supplying the second reason (though this is either obscured or missed by many English translations).

The first reason (v. 8) has to do with the *origin* of the woman; she was taken from man.

The second reason has to do with the *object* of the woman's creation; she was made for man's sake. She came into being to accompany and to assist him. In Genesis 2:22 this truth is expressed in the descriptive term 'a help meet for him'. When she is described as a 'helper' that is not a testimony to the inferiority of the woman as compared with the man; rather, it is an admission of the inadequacy of the man apart from the woman.

Is the ruling of this passage for a head covering best answered by a hat, a mantilla, or something like a scarf?

It is most remarkable that nothing is said in this passage about the particular type of head-dress to be employed and neither its shape, colour or material are mentioned. It becomes very clear that the apostle was more concerned with the reason for the covering, than with the type of the covering. He elaborates upon the 'why', rather than upon the 'how' and the 'what'.

Though the Greeks did have a term readily available with the meaning 'veil' (and one which the apostle Paul used in 2 Corinthians 3:13-16), it is not employed in this chapter. The rather unusual expression in verse 4, which is translated 'covered', is one which literally means 'something down upon the head'.

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head (v.4).

It is the very expression used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe that appearance of the disgraced Haman when he retreated to his house 'having his head covered' (Esther 6:12).

The only word in this passage which approaches anything like a technical term for dress is the term '*peribolaion*' in v. 15, which, as explained above, does not refer to the woman's temporary covering but to her own hair.

Since the terms of this passage are not specific, neither can we be. However, this much can be safely and firmly said - whatever the form of the head-dress, it must be a covering. The repeated references throughout the passage to 'covered' in verses 6 and 7, and 'uncovered' in verses 5 and 13, confirm this. These latter words are all from a common verb which means 'to conceal, hide'. A small bow or a little flower would not be sufficient since these are inadequate as coverings. Similarly, it is doubtful if a piece of see-through material will be adequate.

On the other hand, it must be said that a spectacular, eye-catching hat complete with bows, brims and blossoms will be equally out of place. It is to be feared that in many instances such pieces of fashion, instead of being symbols of a woman's submission, are in fact stylish symbols of status, and even show! Surely these should be discarded as being totally out of touch with the meaning of this passage.

Perhaps it should also be added in these days when some cultures of the world insist on their women wearing 'burkas' and 'hijabs' that there is nothing in this passage which demands the covering of the 'face'. It is very specifically a *head* covering.

Is not what we are inwardly more important than what we are outwardly? If the heart is right is the head covering really that important?

One readily admits that there is no sphere which has more easily lent itself to the practice of hypocrisy than religion. The Lord Jesus was trenchant in His condemnation of the pseudo-spirituality of the Pharisees, and all such externalism is abhorrent to God Who sees all things.

However, that granted, the teaching and practice of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 does not fall into such a category. One feels that in this case if the heart is right the head will also be right! Christianity is not just a matter of pious feelings in the heart. Where a person's heart is truly submissive to the doctrine of the passage before us, this will be evident in a ready attitude of obedience to its teaching. It is indeed ironic that a passage of Scripture, which has the theme of subjection as a main topic, should meet with so much resistance!

Many insist that men only see the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. That is true, and that is precisely the reason why the outward appearance is important. It is what men see and therefore the witness of the outward must be an accurate reflection of what is inward.

In Galatians 3:28 we are told that in Christ there is neither male nor female. Does this not indicate that the distinctions suggested in this booklet are now obsolete?

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28)

It is probably fair to say that this text has become the lynch-pin of the feminist argument on the matters we have been considering.

The verse is actually one of the great positive affirmations of our Christian freedom. It is a pity that it has so often been severed from its original and inspired context, and made to carry a meaning which was never intended. Let the verse be understood in its context, and it breathes an emancipating message into the soul of every believer. When it is a matter of the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, as enumerated in Galatians 3, there is absolute equality. Where there is true faith, neither race, gender nor social status make any difference whatsoever as to our blessings in Christ. In our salvation there is a glorious oneness; but in our service there are differences of role and responsibility, in keeping with the order established by our Creator at the beginning. These distinctions are not the subject of Galatians 3:28; to appeal to this verse in support of the removal of all gender distinctions in the local church and in the family is simply an interpretative intrusion.

If the directions of the passage refer to assembly meetings, what about non-assembly gatherings, such as funerals, weddings and children's events?

This has proven to be an area of great difference of opinion. In the writer's opinion, without dogmatism, it is judged to be best that the head covering is worn wherever the Word of God is publicly read and prayer to God is publicly offered. Especially in days when so many take a minimalist approach to Scripture it is good to bear testimony to biblical principles (in this context the principle of headship) at every possible opportunity. If there is any doubt, it is better to err on the side of extra obedience.

When did the wholesale rejection of the head covering for women begin? Is there anything to be learned from history?

It sometimes comes as quite a surprise to a person acquainted only with culture and practice in the twenty-first century, to learn that for over 1900 years men with uncovered heads in religious activities and women with heads covered was the accepted practice. It was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that changes began to appear. The first noticeable decline took place in the late 1920s and early 1930s. After that there was a remarkable drop in this practice of head covering in the 1960s and 1970s. It is quite interesting that these decades also happen to coincide with what has become known as the 'first' (in the 1920s) and 'second' (in the 1960s) waves of feminism. In fact, NOW ('National Organisation for Women', founded by famous feminist, Betty Friedan) organised a 'national unveiling' in 1968. They declared the following:

Because the wearing of a head covering by women at religious services is a symbol of subjection with many churches, NOW recommends that all chapters undertake an effort to have all women participate in a 'national unveiling' by sending their head covering to the taskforce chairman. At the spring meeting of the

task force of women and religion, these veils will be publicly burned to protest the second class status of women in all churches.

Such forceful opposition to the teaching of God's Word has left its mark on society and makes the teaching of 1 Corinthians most unpopular and its practice most uncommon. It was Dr Daniel Wallace (Professor of NT Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary) who wrote 'the real danger, as I see it, is that many Christians simply ignore what this text says because any form of obedience to it is inconvenient'.