

## THE COVERING OF THE HEAD

(1 Corinthians 11:1-16)

By Jerry M. Hunt, Sr.

Although I feel very unskilled, untalented, and overwhelmed by the difficulty of putting my thoughts on a subject into writing, I am moved to attempt to write about the topic of the “covering of the head”.

I suppose that the reason I am writing this pamphlet is because I have had quite a number of people ask my views about it over the years, and also because I have seen a wide variety of positions taken on this subject. I am always willing to express my understanding verbally, but I cannot always remember all of the important points every time I expound on this text. I hope this effort will be something from which anyone can glean some benefits.

Within the last ten years I have read many articles sent to me by various good brethren, attempting to convince me of the position they have taken on the subject. I thank them for loving me that much. If I were prone to believe something just because brethren that were very dear to me encouraged me to believe it, then I would embrace their belief because I have that much respect and love for these men. I do not feel that they are heretics or ignorant because I may disagree with them on this subject. I think that none of them would want me to accept it just because they said it. I feel the same way about those of you who read this study. If you cannot see that this position is supported by the Scriptures, then I wouldn't want you to take the position that I put forth just because it was I who said it. I hope that if any disagreement arises as a result of this study, those in disagreement will pray for me and continue to love me for Christ's sake.

For some time I have thought that I would use some of the material sent to me by my dear brothers or that I would spend a lot of time searching through books in my library so that I might present to you the views of some of the best Bible scholars of the last three hundred years. I have now decided to forego all that for two reasons. One is because their positions vary as widely on the subject as people do today. The other reason is that I would only be reviewing for you what someone else thought about it and would not be telling you what I understand that the Scriptures teach about it. I desperately want the leadership of the Holy Spirit to guide me as I use the Holy Scriptures as my only rule of faith and practice. (London Confession-1689 chapter 1) The scriptures I refer to are taken from the King James Version of the Bible, and since words are our means of communication, I will define the important words of our scripture from the Strongs Exhaustive Concordance as I feel it necessary to establish the true meaning of the text.

It is not my desire or purpose to attack any practice regarding this matter simply because I may agree or disagree with what my reader is presently doing about it. If our position about a Bible subject is soundly grounded within the Scriptures, then it will endure a close examination. If it is not, the sooner it is exposed as being of human origin the better off the children of God will be.

My dad used to say to me, “Two wrongs will never make something right”. I want to avoid encouraging people to violate one part of God's word in order to correct what you may think about another. An example: if a wife has a husband who wants her to cover (even symbolically) her natural head with a covering, and she does not see the necessity to do so, should she argue with him about who is right or wrong? One thing is clear, the wives are supposed to submit and subject themselves to their own husbands in everything. (Eph.5:22-24) It would be wrong for her to argue the point of head covering; even if she were right in her points, she would become wrong in her unwillingness to submit to him. I also think it important to submit to the local assembly if the majority of the congregation wants the symbolic covering of the head practiced, so that we may not cause strife within the church body, but rather “submit ourselves to one another”. (Eph.5:21) If a person knows that this is the established practice and she doesn't think that she can submit, then she should not join with them. She should either join an assembly where it is not required or where it is left to the discretion of the family head. I do not recommend that a woman marry a man who wants her to wear a

symbolic head covering unless she can accept that as part of being married to him.

All these statements are made for the sake of honoring what God's word teaches regarding submission and unity and not as an indication that the practice of covering the head with a symbolic covering is the proper application found in the Scripture.

#### FOCUS ON TEXT--I Cor. 11:1-16

If one does not remove these verses out of their context, it must be acknowledged that they are placed right in the middle of Paul's lesson to the Church at Corinth concerning the Lord's Supper (I Cor 10:16-33) and the eating of things offered in sacrifice to idols; how they were such gluttons and were eating and drinking damnation to themselves. (I Cor. 11:17-34) The rules of interpreting Scripture will not allow us to separate our text from the overall lesson, since the lesson about the Lord's Supper comes just before and just after the text. We cannot pull verses out of context just to prove whatever position we want to establish. **Since the Lord's Supper is given especially for us to discern and remember the blood and body of Christ, this subject is to prepare us for that solemn service, and my position on it will point the sinner to Christ, and Him only.**

If we were to assume that our only rule of faith and practice (the Scriptures) *did* teach us to observe a symbolic head covering, then I must say that I have never seen it done in any assembly according to the language of the verses themselves. At most people are only giving a service of symbolic gesture to an important lesson. To illustrate my point, I will now define the covering as defined in the dictionary of Greek words. (Strong's) In I Cor. 11:4, the primary meaning is "Down (in place or time)". In verses 5-7 and 13 it is defined, "To cover wholly, i.e. veil, cover, hide" and "To cover up--to conceal by covering, keep secret". In verse 15 it is defined, "Something thrown around one, i.e. a mantle, veil; covering." There is no way I can see that a symbolic doily or small napkin-type cloth placed on top of the head has anything to do with what the Apostle is teaching; any more than the practice of sprinklings with water will suffice for the burying out of sight underneath the water described in scriptural baptism. If we were really required to cover the natural head with a cloth covering, then to be consistent with this language, we would have to completely cover the natural head.

Another problem I have with the natural head covering as practiced by some is the time and place where it is done and not done. Most women I have observed will only wear it at their own assembly meetings. Many do not wear it when visiting other assemblies, although I have seen some trying to be consistent in this and a few do wear it at other assemblies. If any wear it in private when they are in the presence of the Lord only, I have not heard of it, although some may do so when alone in closet prayer. (All these problems make me feel that some wives are trying to submit to husbands who really need to reconsider their reasons for wanting her to do so. **God already knows whether the wife has a heart of submission, so it does not have any significance for Him. It is not any other husband's business whether another man's wife is submissive, so she does not need to wear it for their benefit. For example, my wife of fifty years has proved her submission to me in such matters by her behavior towards me. As her husband I am satisfied that she is submissive. The symbolic wearing of a head-piece will not change either her behavior or my understanding of her behavior.**) I do not find in Scripture any relation to the assembly of the saints as the place to wear a symbolic head covering. The Scripture indicates that this covering of the head by the woman is only required when she is praying or prophesying. (I Cor 11:5) It is not required for singing, hearing the preaching of God's word, or fellowshiping with other saints. As a matter of fact, this same writer states (I Cor. 14:34-35) that women are to keep silent in the church, and that it is a shame for them to speak in the church. The context has to do with prophesying and speaking in an unknown language. (1Cor.14:22,24,29,31,39) Can you not see the inconsistencies if you were to make a woman cover her natural head to prophesy and require her to do so in the public assembly, and then put her to shame whenever she did it?

Another reason clearly stated by the Apostle says "we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." (I Cor. 11:16) I have read some papers on that verse that tried to get me to accept the thought that it meant the opposite of what it actually said. Be careful that you do not try to get the Scripture to say what you

want it to say rather than what it does say.

Another problem I have with this practice is that I see no difference in the attitude towards submission between women who symbolically cover their natural heads and those who do not. Yes, I have observed quite a few bossy women who do not show a submissive spirit who do not cover their natural heads, but I have seen the same spirit sometimes among the ones who do. I also see some unmarried women trying to figure out what they are supposed to do about this. The question is, who is her head? (1 Cor. 11:3,5) Perhaps a young girl would look to her father, but I think the lesson applies to her husband only.

I have listed my main problems with this practice as I have viewed it. I have more, but not any that I wanted to present at this time.

Now I will go to the positive side of the lesson that is to me a far more important lesson than the covering of the natural head with a natural cover. **I hope to present this subject so you are able to rejoice in your liberty to approach God in the person of Jesus Christ. To be able to discern the body of Christ in such a way as you may never have before.** In 1 Cor. 11:3, the first thing the Apostle establishes is what head he is talking about covering. This is somewhat like working a problem in math. If you do not have some of the fixed values, then you cannot reach a correct solution to the problem. The fixed value to this problem has been given to us at the start by establishing just what head he is pointing us to.

No. 1 The head of every man is Christ

No. 2 The head of the woman is the man

No. 3 The head of Christ is God

1 Cor. 11:4, "Every man (whose *head* is Christ) praying or prophesying, having his *head* (which is Christ) covered," (look again at the definition of covered, "Down in place or time:") meaning to put Christ down or out of sight by covering Him fully, dishonoreth (Strong's Concordance) his *head* (which is Christ). This man would attempt to pray to God without going in the name of Christ, and also would try to prophecy without Christ being the reason. He would then build up a Christless religion, which many such as the Jews already have attempted to do. So by not covering his *head* (Christ) his *head* (Christ) becomes his all. "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." (Col. 1:16.17) We cannot pray or prophesy unless He intercedes for us. It is the absolute folly of a man to try to do anything in the presence of Almighty God without acknowledging the **blood and body of Christ**.

1 Cor. 11:5,6, Since the woman is to submit herself to her *own* husband, the man, (her head) she should not try to take the leadership of the family. If she were not allowed by the Lord to cover her head (her husband-man) then she would have to do her praying and prophesying through the husband, and he would be the one to intercede for her instead of Christ. Any response in spiritual things would have to come back to the woman through the man. **God has given the woman the same right to come to Christ, and for the same reasons, therefore she must cover her head (her husband-man).** Please read 1 Cor 7:3-5, where it speaks of defraud, consent, fasting and prayer. If the woman does not cover her head (her husband-man) she likewise dishonors him, putting him between her and Christ. By covering him, she then is in the same position as the man in 1 Cor. 11:4. If she will not cover her head (her husband-man), then it is such a shame upon her (1 Cor 11:6), as it would be even if she were shaven. In verse 6 we see the statement that the woman herself should be covered, since it is a shame to be shaven. The context of the covering in this instance is speaking of her hair as her covering, for it is the only thing that could be shorn or shaven.

1 Cor. 11:7 refers back to the man's head (Christ) and restates why he ought not to cover his head (Christ). It is because he is the image and glory of God. When God receives our prayers and honors our prophesying it is always through the **person of the Lord Jesus Christ** and is based upon His perfect sacrifice made in the body of flesh which represents the man and woman who are yet in their flesh. (Col 1:14-22) The **image** of God is

Christ (Heb.1:3), and that is why the man is the image and glory of God. Since the woman was taken out of man (Gen. 2:23), she is the glory of the man.

I Cor. 11:8,9 reaffirms that the man came not forth of the woman, but the other way around. In verse 9 we are informed why the woman was created. It was for the man. Those men who would try and take advantage of this truth, remember it was for His Bride that Christ gave His life. (Eph. 5:25,26) A woman that will not want to acknowledge the reason she was created should study this carefully so as not to be in rebellion to her Creator God.

I Cor. 11:10 The truth set forth in the preceding verses explains why the woman ought to have power on her head (her husband-man). Her particular ability, privilege, freedom, etc., comes upon her because she is the weaker vessel. When the woman considers the Scriptures (Heb. 1:13,14), she should be very careful to set her affection on the right object and attribute praise to the right person so as to not allow her mouth to cause her flesh to sin and have to backtrack before the angels, and thus anger God and have Him destroy the work of our hands. If we consider Heb 1:13,14, if the woman does not honor her head (her husband-man) by covering him, then Christ would not be her intercessor and the angels, who are not allowed to be seated on God's right hand, would not be edified by her placing her husband-man in the place of Christ.

I Cor. 11:11-12, teaches the importance of the man and the woman both looking to the same head (Christ) because the man does not have his head (Christ) covered and the woman does have her head (her husband-man) covered. They are thereby both doing honor to their respective heads, and are alike equal in the sight of God through Christ. They are both alike sinners, redeemed and needing the same one to intercede for them.

I Cor 11:13. It is not comely for a woman to pray unto God with her head (her husband-man) uncovered. You must judge based on the Scriptures for yourself whether the natural covering of the natural head is a thing God wants you to practice or if it is the traditions of some men for you to do so. If you will come to the conclusion that you should cover your head with a symbolic head covering, then for you to have any comeliness about you in that covering, and to be right with the definition, you must stop the symbolic covering and completely cover your head up, and do so even when you are in private prayer.

I Cor 11:14,15 As God does so many times, he will use a natural illustration to show us what the more important lesson is all about. These two verses do that for us. The Scripture says if a man has long hair (his natural covering) it is a shame to him, but a woman's long hair (which is given to her for a covering) becomes a glory to her.

## SUMMARY

It should be considered why Paul deals with this subject in the first place. According to most historians I have read, it is because the Corinthian Christians customarily consented to Greek traditions: the men had their heads uncovered and the women covered theirs, which was contrary to the Jewish tradition. Even to this day, Jewish men cover their heads at worship, while the women no longer do. The question which faced the Corinthians was what to do with the existing custom of their day. Paul's advice is to examine the symbolism of the custom and determine whether or not it is contrary to God's Word and His order in creation to do so. This is the reason Paul said "we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." (1 Cor. 11:16) You don't have to practice what the Jews or the Greeks are doing if you understand who your head is according to the Scriptures. Again, the context of this scripture begins in 1 Cor. 10:16, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: (both husband and wife - man and woman) for we are all partakers of that one bread." ( Christ)

This teaching continues through the rest of Chapter 10, then into Chapter 11 through the verses we have written about in this lesson, and is concluded in the last part of Chapter 11. Verses 24 through 29 are especially precious and puts the emphasis upon the blood and body of Christ. "And when he had given thanks, he broke it, (bread) and said, Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in **remembrance of me.** After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in **remembrance of me.**" For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." For a man to cover his head (Christ) and the woman not to cover her head (husband) when at this table they are not properly discerning the Lord's body.

May we all give praise to our Holy God and search the scriptures daily to see if these things be so. God help us to find His truth in all that we say and do. May He help us to repent and turn when we see that we are wrong, and help us to have strength to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, when we see that we are correct. I hope Godly men never get to the place where they feel that it is "us" against "them" as we try to come to the correct understanding of the Scriptures.