

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

3rd September 2006

Read: 1 Corinthians 11: 1-16

The Head Covering

Earlier this year I entered into a series of messages based on the great principle of Christ's Headship in the Church; and during the course of that study various issues were considered which essentially devolve from the truth of the Lord's headship in His Church. There are a few others topics on which I feel it is necessary to preach and it is my intention to do so over the next few weeks before entering into any new field of study and preaching.

A number of times I signified my intention to deal with the matter of the head-covering, and to that subject I want to bring your attention today. It is a subject that relates to both male & female for the simple reason that in this passage the Holy Spirit addresses both genders, revealing that in the worship of God men should not have their heads covered while women should. Thus, we deal with a passage and a subject that should be of great interest to us all and should be clearly understood by the whole congregation. It is a very full portion of Scripture, thus we wish to enter into a study of it without any further introductory remarks.

NOTICE THAT PAUL'S TEACHING ON THE HEAD-COVERING IS BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBMISSION.

See v.3 & note its teaching on submission. (a) The submission of men in the Church to Christ – "*the head of every man is Christ.*" (b) The submission of the woman in the Church to the man – "*the head of the woman is the man.*" Pause & note – the woman's submission is really to Christ also since she is to be in submission to the man who is in turn in submission to Christ. (c) The submission of Christ to God the Father – "*the head of Christ is God.*" Thus, it is clear that the basis of Paul's teaching on the head-covering is the principle of submission – a vital Biblical principle. God is the God of order & control in every realm including that of the Church where proper rule or government is to be exercised with due submission being given. Hence this issue of the head-covering is important in that it essentially pertains to the issue of recognising the respective roles of men & women within Christ's Church.

NOTICE ALSO THAT THE GREATEST EXAMPLE OF SUBMISSION FOR MEN & WOMEN IS CHRIST'S SUBMISSION TO HIS FATHER

The focus in v.3 on Christ's submission to His Father pertains to His work as the Mediator of His people, in which role He humbled Himself & submitted to the will of the Father. The NT makes it clear that this is the sense in which Christ became submissive to the Father -- in His role as the Mediator of sinners, Phil 2: 7 & 8. Thus Paul presents the greatest example of submission that could be given to both men & women in their respective positions of submission within the Church. Just as Christ submitted to His Father in order to save men and women then both male and female should gladly assume the roles the Lord has appointed.

NOTICE THEN THAT THE ASSUMPTION OF THESE ROLES SHOULD BE REFLECTED IN THE CHURCH WORSHIP SERVICE

It is the church worship scene that is in view in this passage, proved by references to praying, prophesying – v.v. 4 & 5; the presence of the angels, v.10; and the reference to "the churches" v.16. In Church worship men are to lead, while women are to take the submissive role, 1 Tim 2: 11 & 12; 1 Cor 14: 34.

But the point of this passage is that in the public congregation where male & female meet together to worship God, there is to be a sign of the distinction between their respective roles in the form of the head-covering; that is, the women wears a head-covering while the man does not. I propose to you that this is the simple meaning of v.v. 4 & 5. Note in v.4 that Paul teaches that for a man to cover his physical head in worship would be to dishonour Christ his spiritual head; while for the woman not to have her physical head covered is to dishonour her spiritual head, either her husband or church rulers but ultimately Christ Himself.

NOTICE THAT PAUL THEN PROCEEDS TO PRESENT TWO SUPPORTING ARGUMENTS FOR HIS BASIC TEACHING ABOUT THE HEAD COVERING IN WORSHIP

(a) **The argument of creation.** See v.v.7-9 – by virtue of creation there is a difference between male & female. Man was given a position of leadership – a position the woman was not given for the man was made first. Hence, he is said to be the glory of God. Here the word "glory" refers to that which brings honour. The man enjoyed a position of honour before God that the woman did not have because there was no woman. The woman's creation was different from the man's; and by her creation she became the glory of the man in the sense that she was given a position that belonged exclusively to her.

V.v. 8, 9 – woman is the glory of the man because her life was *derived* from his – "*the woman of the man.*" Moreover the *purpose* of her creation was to be his helpmeet – "*the woman for the man.*" Thus, on the basis of creation the woman is to be in submission to the man; and in public worship she demonstrates this creation principle by use of the head covering. Incidentally, v.v.11, 12, while connected with the subject of creation, issue a warning against drawing the wrong conclusion about the woman's submissive place in the light of creation.

Though her place is one of submission, it is not one of inferiority or indignity, for there is interdependency between male & female, as seen in natural generation.

(b) **The argument of nature.** See v.v. 14, 15. Nature teaches that there is a distinction between male & female. The word *nature* refers to the matter of natural characteristics by which male & female have been endowed. That difference in natural characteristics is evident in physical appearance, the example singled out being that of *hair*.

The term *long hair* essentially refers to a distinctly feminine hairstyle. The term “long hair” is one word in the original language, coming from a root word that means *to order* or *arrange*. The term, therefore, refers to hair being arranged in a distinctively feminine manner. In every day public life and in order to maintain the God-ordained distinction between male & female the man is not to adopt the feminine hairstyle. Paul, therefore, is speaking in v.14 of the shame & disorder of a man having a feminine hairstyle. By creation a woman has a natural covering for every-day life that distinguishes her from the man. Thus, in every day life the man is not to blur that distinction between male and female by adopting a feminine hair style.

But the reference by Paul to this matter of the natural distinction between male & female is for a particular purpose: it is to provide a supporting argument for Paul’s basic command – just as in the natural realm there is a distinction between male & female, so there is to be in the spiritual realm of public worship. Thus, the teaching of v.v. 14 & 15 is that nature by giving a woman a natural covering tells her that she should be covered in worship. And nature also tells the man that just as he is not to adopt the feminine hair style in every day life he is not to worship the Lord with a covered head.

Now, what I have set before you is Paul’s basic teaching in this passage. However, as many will be aware there is opposition to the position that I have sought to set before you, with the claim being made that the covering of which Paul speaks is the physical hair, with the final statement of v.15 having been the source of this common misinterpretation of this entire passage – “*for her hair is given her for a covering.*” Therefore, it is necessary that we understand v.15 properly and see that it does not teach a woman’s hair is her covering in the place of worship. What do these words mean? Note the following –

1. **The words of v.15b must be interpreted in their own context.**

That is, they are spoken in the context of the realm of nature that Paul is employing as a supporting argument. Thus they must be interpreted within that context. This is very important. The words of v.15 must not be taken back into v.v. 4-6 to be used in a way that undermines Paul’s teaching. V.15 is part of Paul’s illustration from nature and must be understood in that context.

2. **Second, the word covering is not the same word as is used in the main teaching in v.v. 4-6.**

There Paul uses a word that is descriptive of something placed *on the head* – as a sign of her submissive role. See also again v.10 – which means that the woman is to have a covering on her head, signifying that she recognizes the role that the Lord has given her in the congregation. She is to do this “because of the angels” – because the angels are present in the gatherings of the saints, watching on in amazement at God’s dealings with sinners in redemption, Eph 3: 10. There is also another thought – Scripture teaches that the angels cover themselves in God’s presence, thus teaching the women to do likewise. A woman therefore should have a covering that properly signifies her recognition of her submissive role.

But the word “covering” in v.15 is an entirely different which means “to put around.” See Heb. 1: 12 where it is translated *vesture*. It refers to something that could be wrapped right round the body. Now, in Paul’s time some heathen cultures required women to wear constantly a covering that enclosed their entire head & body. Such is what is in view in this word. It was a mark of degradation & humiliation

Now note the word *for* in the phrase “for a covering.” Original Greek word translated *for* means in stead of or in place of. It is the preposition *anti* such as in “antichrist” which means *instead of Christ* or *in place of Christ*. Thus v.15b reads, “*her hair is given her in place of a covering.*” Remember – *covering* here is that which could even be wrapped right round the body; and her hair is in stead of such a covering. What is Paul saying? Note the first part of the verse, “*But if a woman have long hair it is a glory to her.*” Paul is teaching that nature has given the woman a natural veil for everyday life, her hair, a glory to her in the sense that she did not have to wear the degrading cover used within pagan cultures. Her natural veil, her hair, was therefore a glory to her, signifying in every day life her femininity as created by God so that she did not have to go around constantly enveloped in the total covering of pagan custom.

But Paul is not saying that her hair is a substitute for the head covering which is to be worn in worship. Such a view causes v.v. 5-7 to become absurd. For example, v.6 would mean that if a woman does not have hair she should be shorn; and v.7 – a man ought not to have hair on his head when he comes to worship.

3. **This point of her hair being the woman’s glory raises an additional reason why she should have her head covered in worship**

See 1 Cor. 1:29, “*That no flesh should glory in His presence.*” A woman’s hair is a glory to her in the realm of nature, but when she comes into the immediate presence of God in worship, she should cover that natural glory. She is to do so that all the glory might be Christ’s. Men declare the same truth by not covering their heads. That it, they represent Christ Who is Lord of all. Thus, the man fitly represents Christ by refraining from wearing the head covering. To wear the covering is a badge of submission, but Christ is in submission to no one. All the glory is His, which the man signifies by not covering his head. Thus, by different actions, men & women in the worship service join together in testifying that all glory & honour belong to Christ.