
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **Does the Bible require women to wear veils during worship services?**

In the NT there is a passage of Scripture that speaks of women wearing veils on their heads when worshipping God. If you have a NT available, please turn it to 1 Corinthians 11 and read along with me. I begin in verse 3:

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.

5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.

7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man.

9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

10 For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

11 Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.

12 For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God.

13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?

15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.

16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

TWO EXTREME INTERPRETATIONS

There are two extreme interpretations regarding this section of Scriptures.

FIRST: *There are some who say this passage has no relevance today.* They believe that this passage is dealing with a 1st century custom and since times have changed they believe this passage no longer applies. To support their interpretation they rely heavily upon verse 16 which mentions "customs" and they conclude that this refers to human "customs" rather than divine "customs."

SECOND: *There are others who say the passage is indeed relevant today, but it refers to women wearing artificial veils.* These people insist that when women pray, or participate in other forms of worship they must then cover their heads with an artificial veil.

Let's notice each position briefly and then draw some final conclusions.

THE FIRST POSITION

First, let's notice the interpretation that says the passage is not relevant today – that it's simply a reference to some 1st century custom that no longer applies. Is this what the passage is speaking of? The answer is, "No ... it's not!"

To prove that this passage is not referring to a 1st century custom, notice carefully the reasons given for a woman having her head covered:

Verse 4 – The first reason a woman needs to cover her head is to keep from dishonoring her head of authority which according to verse 3 is the man.

This reason has nothing to do with 1st century custom, but to showing reverence for divine authority.

Verses 7-9 – The next reason given is that a woman ought to be covered because she was created by God for the man.

Again, the Lord is not here appealing to 1st century customs, but to the creation of God.

Verse 10 – The next reason given is that a woman ought to be covered "*because of the angels.*"

This reason has nothing to do with mere customs.

Verses 11-15 – The final reason given is that a woman ought have her head covered because "*nature*" teaches that this is the only proper way for a woman to worship God – that is, it's unnatural for a woman to pray uncovered.

Now, had this passage been speaking of a mere 1st century custom, why appeal to the divine line of authority, the order of creation, the angels, and to the natural order of decency? My friend, these verses are relevant today. They are not speaking of a mere custom that is no longer binding. The arguments being used by the Lord in this passage are proof that He intended women of all ages to cover themselves with "something" when worshipping God.

THE SECOND POSITION

This brings us now to the second interpretation commonly given. Since this passage is relevant today does this mean that women today must wear artificial veils on their heads when attending worship? This is the position of the Catholic church and of certain Protestant churches. Is this what the Lord intended? The answer to this is, "No ... the Lord was not teaching that women must wear artificial veils during worship."

Look carefully at verse 15:

1 Corinthians 11:15

15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering.

Notice carefully that the woman's long hair was given to her "*for a covering*" – her long hair is to serve as a covering. Rather than having an artificial veil on her head for worship, God intended that the Christian woman have long hair to cover her head.

WHAT IS "LONG HAIR"

Now ... let's ask this question: **How long is "long hair"?**

In verse 15 of the King James Version, the words "*have long hair*" are translated from the Greek word komao which literally means, "*to let the hair grow, to have long hair*" (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, p. 354).

What does God mean when He tells someone to "*let the hair grow*," or to "*have long hair*"? The only other time that God told someone to "*let the hair grow*" was in the Old Testament book of Numbers:

Numbers 6:5

5 'All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

According to this, to "*let the hair grow*" means to "*let no razor come upon her head.*" This is what God means when He tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:15 that a woman is to have long hair. The Christian woman is instructed by the Lord to not touch her hair with a razor – to have long hair and this long uncut hair is to serve as a natural covering when she worships. Having long, uncut hair prevents her from dishonoring her head of authority (the man) and from dishonoring herself (verses 5-6).

According to verse 16 if anyone becomes contentious over this matter, instead of arguing with them we are told to simply inform them that there is "*no such custom*" among the churches of God. In other words, there is no other custom among God's people than men with short hair (verse 14) and women with long, uncut hair (verse 15). This is not a man-made custom, it is a divine custom and because it is a divine custom, Christian men today must wear their hair cut short and Christian women today must wear their hair long and uncut – there is no other custom among God's people.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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