

Why She Wears The Head Covering (and Why I Don't)

By David F. Sims

My wife and my baptized daughters wear the head covering. They do this because of our belief in the scripture that describes it in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Please take a moment to read the passage for yourself. I use the 1995 New American Standard Bible and will quote from it in this article.

The head covering they wear is discreet. Occasionally someone asks us about it, and so we thought it prudent to put in writing our reasons for believing Christian women should wear the head covering in the local church assembly.

Most Christians are at least aware that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 exists, but many don't understand it. My wife and I do not claim to have perfect understanding, but our research has given us a better understanding than we had before. We have found that the head covering is the very simplest command to obey in the entire Bible, and it is accompanied by more reasons for the woman to wear it (nine) than ANY OTHER PRACTICE in the Bible. You don't even have to understand it to obey it, but can comply on simple faith.

Our reasons for believing in wearing the head covering begin with a deep respect for the word of God. We believe, in accordance with 2 Timothy 3:16-17, that "All scripture" (which includes 1 Corinthians 11:2-16) "is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

We believe every word in the Bible was chosen by God and inspired to be written down (1 Corinthians 2:13). We believe 2 Peter 1:20-21 describes the source of Paul's teaching on the head covering...that he was "moved by the Holy Spirit" to issue divine instructions to regulate the conduct of saints, which included the wear of the covering. Paul's inspired words about the head covering are there in the Bible because God put them there, and God put those words there for one or more reasons.

We believe that the wear of the covering by Christian women "is profitable" in accordance with 2 Timothy 3:6-17. Does the wear of the head covering afford an opportunity to teach something about God? Yes it does. If a person who does not wear it sees her wearing it, perhaps that person will venture to ask her (or me) about it. That gives us an opportunity to preach Jesus to them. Does the head covering afford the opportunity to reprove or correct some misunderstanding about God? Yes it does. Since it demonstrates God's headship hierarchy (1 Corinthians 11:3; more on that later), we can use it as a starting point to correct anyone who does not know about authority in the spiritual realm. Does the head covering help a woman train in righteousness? Yes it does. It reminds her of her role in God's headship hierarchy, and reminds other women of their same role. Does it help equip the woman for every good work? Yes it does. Its underlying principle, the headship hierarchy, equips her to be a better servant to God, to Christ, to man, to her husband, to her fellow saints, to her children, and even to angels.

We believe that every instruction given in the Gospel is applicable to us if we are capable of obeying it. Since we no longer have miraculous gifts today, we are not bound by the regulations placed on the exercise of miraculous gifts, though we can learn about orderly worship from the

principles of those commands. But we all have heads, and head coverings are readily available, and there is no reason why a woman should not be able to cover her head in accordance with 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, if the command to wear it applies today. There are some today, just as there were in the first century, who deny Paul's authority to bind and loose what God has bound and loosed. To them Paul wrote, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment" (1 Corinthians 14:37). My wife and I believe the head covering is one of the Lord's commandments.

We believe that the head covering is part of the doctrine of Christ. 2 John 9 says, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son." If the head covering is not part of the doctrine of Christ, then Paul went too far in commanding it to the Corinthians. Paul would be guilty of violating 1 Timothy 6:3-5: "If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain." If it is not part of the gospel, then Paul has certainly incited a controversial question and dispute that has given rise to the aforementioned problems that exist today between brethren who disagree on this topic. Furthermore, if we cannot trust Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:1-16, how can we trust the rest of his words in the chapter, which describe the Lord's Supper? How can we trust any of his words in that book, or any of his epistles? Perhaps this is one of those teachings of Paul that Peter said was "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16), but the fact that it is difficult to comprehend does not exempt us from obeying it if possible.

The apostle Paul founded the church at Corinth (Acts 18:1-11) and spent at least one and a half years there. Paul had plenty of time, while there, to establish a local church. To that local church we believe he gave, at a minimum, instructions on their personal conduct and the activities they were to perform as a local church. He imparted the gift of the Holy Spirit to them, and the Spirit distributed miraculous gifts as He deemed fit (1 Cor. 12:11). By the time Paul left, the saints of Corinth, composing the local church there, were well-equipped with the instructions he gave them and the guidance of the Holy Spirit through their prophets. One of the customs he gave them was to observe the Lord's Supper, which is a divine tradition that comes from God, not from man (more on the relevance of that later).

Since we know the church in Corinth had prophets (1 Corinthians 14:29-32) (prophets were people who received and spoke the direct revelation of God's will through the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:21), surely they could have answered the problems about the head covering, right? Especially if, as some say, this was **only a local custom** that existed **only in Corinth**, surely the Holy Spirit could have given direct revelation only to those prophets there to be implemented only among the saints in Corinth, and spared the rest of us any confusion on whether or not such instructions were meant for all churches everywhere of all time. Yet that is not what happened. What actually happened is that the Holy Spirit issued commands through the apostle Paul, with the full intention that the instructions given through the apostle held universal sway to all the saints in all the local churches, and with full knowledge that what Paul would write would circulate among all the churches, and that such traditions that Paul delivered would be practiced by all churches. And so we believe that the Holy Spirit fully intended all churches to know about the head covering and observe this divine tradition in the same way.

There are differences between human traditions and divine traditions. The Bible frequently makes mention of human traditions, such as wedding ceremonies, farming practices, and the first century Jewish custom of the governor releasing a prisoner on the Passover (John 18:39). Such human customs are incidentally mentioned merely to give context, and God offered neither regulatory guidance nor approval/disapproval of such human customs except concerning how the practice of those customs might conflict with divine law. God commanded us to obey the laws of the land (render to Caesar...) as long as we do not disobey God, and so our practices in marriage procedures must conform to the law of the land (though not necessarily to human customs) and to God's divine law on who may marry. If God had given the saints a divine pattern for how to perform a wedding ceremony, we would be compelled to comply with it, whether we liked it or not. But God did not give such a pattern or command, and has left the wedding ceremony itself as a human tradition.

Most will agree that the Lord's Supper is not a human custom, but that it is a divine custom of the church given by direct command of the Lord. The Lord's Supper is a divine tradition that started when Jesus first instituted it to His 12 apostles, and continued in practice among all the churches of Christ. God gave clear regulatory guidance on the Lord's Supper. He told both why and how to do it.

My wife and I believe the head covering fits into the same category as the Lord's Supper: it is a divine tradition, given to the saints, to be observed in the assembly of the local church. The doctrine is accompanied with both divine explanations for why it is worn and divine regulatory guidance on its type and meaning. It is not mere coincidence, therefore, that Paul wrote of both the head covering tradition and the Lord's Supper tradition in this epistle to Corinth, side-by-side in virtually the same breath, in chapter 11, for they were both "traditions" that he had delivered to them previously. We find it safe to say as well, and will demonstrate with scriptures, that Paul gave the same instructions and divine traditions to the church in Corinth that he gave to the churches in Ephesus, Philippi, Galatia, Rome, and elsewhere.

We believe that when the apostle Paul wrote about the head covering to the Christians in Corinth, he taught that same doctrine of the head covering in every church. The second verse of chapter one tells who the epistle is addressed to: "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." So Paul has addressed the letter, not just to the saints of Corinth, but also to all saints everywhere who call upon Jesus. He knew when he wrote it that it would circulate among the churches. Now read 1 Corinthians 4:17, 1 Corinthians 7:17, and 1 Corinthians 16:1. If Paul taught the same doctrines in every church as he claimed, then he taught the head covering in every church. If not, why not? It is not difficult for us to understand that Paul taught acapella singing, the Lord's Supper, giving of our means, baptism, church discipline, and other doctrines in every church, even though these specific topics are not mentioned in every letter of his in the New Testament. How are we to know today to "break bread" on the first day of the week, if the one (and there is only one) mention of it occurring on that day (Acts 20:7) was not binding on everyone, and was not taught and practiced everywhere? Is it too hard to believe that Paul also taught the head covering everywhere, even though it is not mentioned in any other inspired epistle today? Or are we to believe, as some contend, that the head covering only applied to Christian women of Corinth, which made it possible for them to commit a sin (by not wearing it) that no other Christian woman could commit? Did the Holy Spirit give them a different commandment than the rest of us?

The fact that it is called a “tradition” does not in any way diminish the authority with which it is bound. The Lord’s Supper would be a human tradition if God had not commanded it, as would our singing and other acts of worship. Paul told the Thessalonian saints, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us” (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Paul told the Philippians, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us” (Philippians 3:17). The fact that a commandment of the Lord is called a “tradition” or a “pattern” or a “custom” does not reduce it or free us from the obligation to comply with it if we are able to comply with it. God did not bind human customs on Christians anywhere, He bound heavenly customs on all Christians everywhere.

Regardless of whether or not anyone in Corinth or anywhere else had already been wearing or not wearing the head covering (modern “experts” and “scholars” are divided on that matter), we believe God made it a part of the woman’s duty to wear it. In 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul wrote, “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.” Traditions? What traditions did Paul deliver to them, and when? Notice that the word is plural...Paul delivered more than one tradition to Corinth. Two traditions are mentioned in this very chapter: the Lord’s Supper tradition and the head covering tradition. The two traditions came from the same source (heaven), both were subject to misunderstanding and abuse in the local assembly, and both were addressed with divine regulatory guidance. Paul delivered those traditions on some occasion before he wrote this letter, obviously. He was not giving them brand new instructions or traditions in this letter...the Lord’s Supper and the head covering traditions had already been established in the church in Corinth before Paul wrote this epistle.

We believe that the divine guidance on the head covering applies in the same context (application setting) as the divine guidance on the Lord’s Supper, because it is the same type of tradition, a divine tradition commanded to the local church. When do we observe the Lord’s Supper? When we assemble together as the local church. Since the head covering is the same type of divine tradition as the Lord’s Supper, the occasion to wear it (and for men to not wear it) is the same occasion as the Lord’s Supper: when assembled together as the local church. If there is an exception to this, or if there is a specific command to extend the wear of the covering outside the local assembly, such a command should be explicitly stated (and it is), and we shall examine that momentarily as well. The fact that the command does have a specific extension beyond the local assembly does not negate the authority to wear it within the local assembly.

We believe Paul described in chapter eleven the underlying reason for the head covering: the hierarchy of headship that exists between God, Christ, man, and woman. The covering itself is a symbol of the woman’s acknowledgement of that divine hierarchy of headship. Did Paul praise them in verse 2 for holding firmly to the tradition of the head covering? Yes he did, but they had some misunderstandings about it, and some contention among themselves (vs. 16). We could only speculate about the nature of those contentions, so we won’t. Suffice it to say that Paul clarified their misunderstandings and addressed those contentions in what he wrote by divine guidance. This entire epistle was written to correct the numerous problems experienced by the saints of Corinth, and serves as guidance for all churches everywhere when they experience the same problems.

Why then is the doctrine of head covering not mentioned in any other epistle? There are two possible reasons: the other churches didn’t have a problem with it, or they had a copy of this epistle to Corinth to settle their problems. We can use it today the same way.

We believe that Paul listed several (nine) reasons for the woman to have her head covering, and that even if just one of those reasons still applies today, then the woman should wear it. We will examine the reasons listed there in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in detail next.

In 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul praised the Corinthian saints for holding firmly to the traditions as he delivered them. But in verse 3 he says he wants them to understand something more about it. Apparently he had previously taught them the “what” of the head covering but not so much the “why” of it. Maybe they had asked him a question about it, and this is his response. Maybe he heard of their contentions among themselves and decided to resolve such contentions with clear instructions. Regardless of whether or not they fully understood the “why,” they were already doing well to comply with the “what.” And they could have continued doing well without ever knowing why. For us, the mere fact that it was delivered as God’s instruction should suffice as the one and only reason we need today to comply with it. But, for the sake of our understanding, let us ask such a question: “Paul, why should we hold firmly to the tradition of the head covering which you delivered to Corinth?”

Reason #1: Because of the Hierarchy of Headship

1 Corinthians 13:3 says “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” The head covering is somehow related to this hierarchy of authority. God is head over Christ, Christ is head over man, and man is head over woman. We believe that rejection of the head covering is rejection of God’s hierarchy of headship.

Reason #2: Because It Is A Disgrace For Women To Appear Like Men

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 says, “Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved.” There are two clear commands in this passage, one to the men and one to the women. God is showing us that just as the roles of men and women differ, so also their appearance should differ while praying or prophesying. So we believe that a man who covers his head while praying or prophesying is sinning. We believe that a woman who uncovers her head while praying or prophesying, making herself thus like a man, is also sinning.

We believe that the occasion for the observance of this divine tradition is the assembly of the church, and therefore such praying and prophesying took place in the assembly of the church. Since women, including females prophets, were forbidden to speak in the church assembly (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:12-14), the wear of the covering does not grant authorization to a woman to speak in the assembly, to exercise authority over men, or to otherwise deviate in any way from her divinely-appointed role as a woman. If a woman prophesied, therefore, we believe she had to exercise the gift outside the church assembly, such as when having personal studies with unbelievers, and this scripture required her to cover her head while doing so. This verse, therefore, extends the general practice of wearing the covering in the church assembly to the occasion of praying or prophesying outside the church assembly as well. Prayer is not a miraculous gift, but is a command given to all saints and identified as one of the five acts of worship performed in the local church. I’ll address that in detail shortly.

Reason #3: Because It Is Disgraceful For A Woman To Have A Shaved Head

1 Corinthians 13:6 says, “For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off, let her cover her head.” In this

sentence Paul is making a rhetorical statement to show the disgrace of a woman who does not cover her head. Of course it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shaved off like a bald man. But if she isn't going to comply with God's expectation for her to wear a head covering, she may as well shave her head. We believe she is just as wrong for not wearing the covering as she is for shaving her hair.

Reason #4: Because She Is The Glory Of Man

1 Corinthians 11:7-8 says, "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man." Again Paul contrasts the man and the woman to show that the man must not cover his head because he is God's image and glory (a reference to the first man, Adam, whom God personally created out of the dust of the ground), but woman should have her head covered because she is the glory of man and came forth from man (a reference to Eve, who was fashioned from a rib taken out of the first man). Just as man came forth from God, and is a glory to God, so also woman came forth from man, and is therefore a glory to him. For this reason, we believe the man must not cover his head, and the woman must cover hers.

Reason #5: Because She Was Created For Man's Sake

1 Corinthians 11:9 says, "for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake." This is a reference to the relationship between Adam and Eve, showing, as we believe, that the woman ought to cover head because of her relationship as a helper suitable to Adam. Compare 1 Timothy 2:12-13, which commands her silence in the church assembly for the same reason.

Reason #6: Because Of The Angels

1 Corinthians 11:10 says, "Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." We believe spiritual beings (God, angels, and demons) are always watching this world. Peter wrote of angels who sinned (2 Peter 2:4), as did Jude (verse 6) who spoke of "angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode." The human woman wearing a head covering is a constant reminder to angels of respecting their position in the hierarchy of God. Perhaps, o woman, if you wear the head covering, you will help some angel to refrain from sinning as well. On the other hand, if it is defiance against God to not wear it, what message are you sending to those angels, and to your fellow sisters in Christ? The wear of the covering also reminds the woman that, if angels can fall by abandoning their position, so also women can fall by abandoning their position in the headship hierarchy. As long as angels exist, we believe the Christian woman should have her head covered because of them.

Reason #7: Because Of The Interdependence Between Man And Woman

1 Corinthians 11:11-12 says, "However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God." We believe the woman who wears the head covering is showing her dependence upon man for her very birth; the man who does not cover his head shows his dependence upon woman for his very birth. And both them, by obeying the command applicable to their gender, show their dependence on God who created them both.

Reason #8: Because Nature Shows That It Is Improper For Her To Not Wear It

1 Corinthians 11:13-15 says, "Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her as a

covering.” Paul uses another rhetorical statement, and the answer is implied affirmative that nature itself does teach the woman to cover her head. Nature shows this through the natural honor bestowed upon a man with short hair, which does not conceal or fully cover the head, and the natural honor given to a woman with long hair, which does conceal or fully cover and hang down over the head. Hair is nature’s covering, and we believe Paul is comparing it to the separate covering for women to wear in the church assembly.

Reason #9: Because There Is No Other Practice Than This

1 Corinthians 11:16 says, “But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” The Revised Standard Version translates it, “If anyone is disposed to be contentious we recognize no other practice, neither the churches of God” (Note: some translations render it “no such practice” rather than “no other practice”, which causes some to conclude that no one outside of Corinth had the head covering practice. If that translation is correct, I must ask why God through Paul gave the Corinthians this tradition according to verse 2 but did not teach the same doctrine in every church.) There were saints in Corinth who disputed against the head covering practice. Such people still exist today. What is Paul’s answer to them? “we have no other practice.” We believe the head covering is the doctrine taught by Paul to show headship hierarchy, and he had no other practice by which to show it. Also, none of the churches of God had any other practice...because this was the same doctrine they all practiced, just as Paul had delivered the same doctrines to all the churches.

And so the Holy Spirit has fully explained the head covering tradition, giving 9 separate reasons why it should be worn by women and not worn by men during the church assembly. If any one of those reasons still applies today, and if it is still possible for us to comply today, then we believe the command is binding today and the tradition is ours to uphold today.

These are 9 facts from God for the head covering tradition. These are not based on human traditions or customs of men. (1) It is a fact from God, not a custom of men, that God is the head of Christ, Who is the head of man, who is the head of woman. (2) It is a fact from God, not a custom of men, that it is a disgrace for a woman to look like a man (today’s culture has an emerging custom of glorifying cross-dressers and transgender people). (3) It is a fact from God that the woman who does not cover her head is the same as the woman’s hair is shorn or shaved. (4) It is a fact from God that the covered woman is the glory of man and the uncovered man is the glory of God. (5) It is a fact from God that woman was created for man’s sake. (6) It is a fact from God that a woman should cover her head because of the angels. (7) It is a fact from God that man and woman are dependent upon one another for birth. (8) It is a fact from God that nature teaches a woman to cover her head. (9) It is a fact from God, not a custom of men, that neither Paul nor the other churches of Christ had another practice to symbolize the headship hierarchy for women. We believe the head covering tradition is not, therefore, based on any custom of man or culture, but is a divine custom based on these facts from God.

How does one obey these facts from God? The same way one obeys “that form of doctrine” in Romans 6:17, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus: participate in the symbol of it. The symbol of the doctrine of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, is baptism. The symbol of the doctrine of the headship hierarchy is the woman’s head covering. We have symbols for several things in our worship: the cross; unleavened bread as a symbol of His body; grape juice as a symbol of His blood. We do not find it hard to believe that there is a God-given symbol of authority in the headship hierarchy as well.

Now let us consider what is meant by the phrase “while praying or prophesying.” Some say that praying in this context must refer to a gift of the Holy Spirit because it is listed alongside prophecy, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. A miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift that gives the recipient the ability to do something he cannot do naturally (such as prophesying, tongue-speaking, interpreting, healing, or casting out demons), or that supplements his natural ability to a supernatural level (such as Samson’s great strength, Elijah’s super running speed in 1 Kings 18:46, or the friends of Daniel who became fireproof in Daniel 3:23-27). Furthermore, one cannot “obey” a gift; one uses the gift. Prayer is a command given to all believers (1 Thess. 5:17), and all believers are commanded to pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Jude 1:20). We pray in the Spirit by praying in accordance with the Spirit’s instructions given in scripture (in Jesus’ name, in submission to God’s will). Prayer, therefore, is not a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, and is not of the same class of things as prophecy. Prophecy and other miraculous gifts have ceased on earth today; prayer has not ceased. We believe that when Christian men pray in the church assembly, they must not cover their heads, whether they are leading the prayer aloud or earnestly praying silently along with the one who speaks aloud; we believe that when Christian women pray silently in the church assembly with the man who speaks the prayer aloud, the women must cover their heads, for they too are praying in their spirits and in their minds.

Furthermore, we believe prayer and prophecy in this text are representative of two kinds of activities that occurred in local churches in the New Testament: the non-miraculous worship events and the miraculous edification events. Prophesying, tongue-speaking, and interpreting were miraculous activities that took place in the local church assemblies in the first century to edify every member (1 Cor. 14:5). Those events do not occur today. Likewise there was non-miraculous preaching, non-miraculous congregational singing, non-miraculous observance of the Lord’s Supper, non-miraculous taking up of a collection for needy saints, and non-miraculous prayer, which is a synecdoche (a figure of speech in which a single item in a class represents all items in that class) for all such non-miraculous worship activities. Therefore we believe the women must cover, and the men must not cover, their heads, during all non-miraculous activities of the assembled church, from the moment the assembly is called to order until the moment it is dismissed. By saying “while praying or prophesying” Paul was telling the Corinthians that the head covering doctrine applied during all parts of the worship of the assembled church, and was not something to be put on and taken off at different moments during the assembly.

Some have tried to liken the head covering to the “holy kiss” saying they are merely traditions of a time period that do not have the same meaning today. There are many ways to perform a holy kiss, and I rarely see a brother kiss a brother (or another man’s wife) when they meet at the church building. God did not give further instructions on how to perform a kiss or what its purpose was. There are also, perhaps, many ways a man or woman might demonstrate submission to God’s headship hierarchy, but God did give specific instructions on doing it with the head covering. So it is not the same as a holy kiss.

What constitutes the Biblical head covering? Some have said the hair itself is the covering, but we believe the context makes it quite clear that Paul is describing something that a person can put on and take off at will, an external object that one can choose to wear or not wear at a given moment. You can certainly choose to take your hair off at any given moment, but you can’t choose to put it back on...you have to wait for it grow back. Hair is nature’s symbol of the glory of woman, and is meant to be on display at all times; we believe the head covering is heaven’s symbol for the woman to wear in the church assembly. Besides, if the hair is the covering, then every man must not just cut his hair short, he must shave his head entirely, and the text certainly does not suggest such a thing.

When it comes to hair, how long is long, and how short is short? Long and short are relative terms, and I can't define that for you. One may as well ask, "How big of a piece of bread must I eat with the Lord's Supper" or "How much juice must I drink?" But God has not left us totally in the dark concerning the length of the head covering.

The primary Greek word for the covering (*katakalypto*, Strong's #2619) chosen by the Holy Spirit literally means, "cover with a veil." This Greek word is a compound of two words, *kata* which means "down" and *kalupto* which means "cover over." A decorative hat does not proceed down, but sits atop the head. A feather, ribbon, or bow in the hair does not cover over the head. To conform with the specific word of scripture, we believe the covering must cover the head and hang down from it, such as a cloth veil or turban with an end hanging free, just as unbound hair hangs down from and covers the head. In verse 15, the Spirit used the Greek word *peribolaion* (Strong's #4018) which is literally a covering that is thrown around, and the thing it is thrown around is the head, like a turban.

We believe the covering itself is a symbol of the wearer's submission to God's headship hierarchy. It is not intended to draw attention to the woman, nor to make a fashion statement, nor is it an accessory to complement one's color scheme or outfit. It is a religious symbol. Decorative hats on the other hand, draw the attention of the eye in a non-religious manner. Wearing a decorative hat just because of its appearance, or as a functional sun-block, or just because one can, and not for the purpose of respecting God's headship hierarchy, does not demonstrate compliance. God knows the heart when that happens, and men know by her fruits whether or not she respects authority. If you aren't going to do it for the right reason, you may as well not do it at all...such a woman may as well shave her head bald. To degrade this holy symbol into a fashion statement is as heinous as degrading the Lord's Supper into a common meal, yet another similarity between these two divine traditions.

Can a person take a neutral position on the head covering matter? We don't think you can, and here is why. In Matthew 21:23-27, it is written that the chief priests and elders challenged Jesus' authority. So He asked them a question: "The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" The Jews didn't like the implications of their possible answers. They couldn't admit it was from heaven because they feared what Jesus would say, and they couldn't say it was from men because they feared the crowds. So they said, "We don't know." The fact of the matter is, though, there was a right answer, and they knew it. They just didn't like it, so they tried to ride the fence, the neutral position between truth and consequences. Jesus established a principle here, the principle that all authority either comes from heaven or from men. Now let's consider the head covering. From what source does authority for the head covering come, from heaven or from men? Be honest now, would you today know anything at all about the head covering in Corinth if it wasn't in the Bible? If you say from heaven, I must ask why you don't believe it. And if you say from men, then you deny that Paul was a prophet. And if you say, "I don't know" then you stand in the same crowd with those chief priests and elders. If not, why not?

You'll note that we are not calling for a change in the policy or practice of any congregation. We do not believe a church ought to force a woman to cover her head, or force a man to uncover his, during the church assembly. You may think we are inconsistent then for having such a firm conviction about it and then declining to compel its practice to others. But we are not inconsistent, at least not any more inconsistent than brethren are in enforcing other commands of the Lord. Here is why. Is the Lord's Supper a command from God? Most Christians will say yes.

If it is a command, when it is served in the church, do we command saints to partake and compel them to partake? No, of course we don't. We let each choose for himself whether or not to partake, and none of us would dare to force participation against one's will. Is singing a command for the church? Yes it is, but we don't post enforcers around to room to make sure every member is singing, we just let each one choose whether or not to sing. What about giving...is that a command? Yes it is, but we don't stand before each member observing the individual contribution to force compliance, or keep account of who gives how much. Strange it is, that we agree these are commands, but we don't enforce them as commands; rather, the church provides each one the "opportunity" obey the command if he chooses to obey it. Why is that? It is because your personal choice to partake, or not partake, of the Lord's Supper, does not hinder mine.. Your personal choice to sing, or not sing, does not interfere with my singing. Your personal choice to give, or not give, does not stop me from giving. Your personal choice to say "Amen" at the end of group prayer, or say nothing, does not stop me from praying silently along with the one leading group prayer. Your personal choice to not search the scriptures while the preacher preaches does not impact my usage of the Bible during the sermon. And likewise, your personal choice to wear, or not wear, the head covering during the church assembly has no bearing on my choice to do so. Furthermore, it would serve no purpose to compel woman to cover against her will. If one won't submit to God of one's own free will, why submit at all?

If you ask me whether I believe a woman who does not wear the cover today will go to hell, I reply that it is not worth the risk to find out.

We would love the opportunity to discuss your questions and objections to what we have written.