

Head Covering

This would seem to be a “hot topic” to some, but my purpose is not merely to get any one to start wearing, or stop, or change how they are doing it. This subject is a good example of how to put aside all traditional teaching on a subject and determine from Scripture alone what to think about a matter. You should be fully persuaded in your own mind and know that your behavior is based on the Word alone, not on “this is the way our church does it”.

I Cor. 11:3-16

Starting at the end (v.16) – this is not to be a matter of contention in the church. There are significant reasons for the practice, but it is not one of the major doctrines of the faith.

So then why bother thinking about it?

1. Just because it is not to be a matter of contention doesn't mean it doesn't matter, or it wouldn't have been included in the Bible at all.
2. Because many here have come out of “old order” churches that practice it, and they may be wondering if they should keep it up. Others may be wondering if they should start.
3. It is important for each person (or couple) to be convinced in their own mind what to do about it.

So what can we determine about the issue, from scripture?

1. What is headship? (11:3, see also Eph. 5:22-28)

Basically it means leadership. The head is what directs the actions of the body. Christ is the head of the church. The husband is the head of the woman; the head of the home.

Note that this does not mean dictator, or cruel task master. The head has concern for the whole body, and takes counsel from it (should, anyway). Sometimes the body suffers because of the decisions of the head.

2. What does a head covering signify?

- a. Modesty, a covering up of her natural glory
- b. A willingness to live in the divinely established order as a wife (or daughter); a visible acknowledgment that she is not the head, and is not usurping that role
- c. That she is in loving submission to husband/father
(Contrast with Moslem hijab, which is a sign of degradation, slavery and fear)
- d. Not to be an indicator of church association (Amish, Mennonite, German Baptist, ...)

3. When should it be worn?

11:5 and 13 imply that it should be when she prays or prophesies

A Mennonite once told me that that means all the time, because we are to “pray always”.

Questions:

- a. What about in the shower or when washing her hair? Can she not pray then?
- b. What about a man? Can he never wear a hat because he should be praying? (I do remove my hat when praying, or when inside, because I think it is proper, but I don't feel condemned for praying with a hat on when shovelling snow.) God knows the heart.

In one church we were in, the ladies would put a covering on when they got to the church meeting, and remove it when done. That way they could freely pray or prophesy without the distraction of having to put it on and take it off in the meeting.

4. What should it look like?

The Bible gives no indication of size, shape, material or color, because that is not the point. It can be whatever you want, consistent with modesty and not being a distraction. It should be something you think conveys the right attitude “to the angels”, and to those around you.

5. Some have said the passage ONLY refers to natural hair, not to an artificial covering. (11:15 – “... for her hair is given her for a covering”)

But then 11:4-7 wouldn't make sense. If covering just means natural hair, then “Every man praying or prophesying, (with hair on his head) dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth (with no hair on her head) dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she (had her hair cut off). For if the woman (have no hair), let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her (have hair). For a man ought not (to have hair), forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God ...”

Hair can be thought of as a natural confirmation of what we should know “even by nature”, but that does not eliminate the head covering as a separate entity.

6. What is the meaning of “power on her head because of the angels”? (11:10)

This is admittedly vague, but we know that angels can be around us, observing and ministering, without our awareness. They can be instruments of answers to prayer. Perhaps they find it offensive for women to pray without acknowledging their proper role in life. In this way the woman's prayers are somehow hindered, in the same way that a man's prayers are hindered if he does not give honor to the wife (1 P. 3:7).

7. Men and women are co-dependent (11:11-12)

Headship does NOT mean that the man is better than the woman, or that she is inferior. What good is one without the other? What is a head without a body? Or what good a body that doesn't obey the head (like Parkinson's disease)? Marriage is ideally to be a miniature picture of the relationship between Christ and His church.

8. What is “comeliness”? (11:13) To be pleasing, pleasantly attractive, proper, appropriate.

I think women with head coverings are attractive. But even if that were the general feeling among men (it probably isn't), that would be a horrible reason to wear one. It is not to make herself attractive in the eyes of men, but to express her modesty and submissive attitude.

9. How long should hair be?

Men – Bible doesn't say how long is too long, but that even nature teaches that long hair for a man is a shame. If it is so long that he is mistaken for a woman, it is too long.

Women – Bible gives no rules, but says that her long hair is a glory to her. Pentecostal types think it is a sin to cut the hair, but Bible doesn't say that. Similar to men, if hair is so short that she looks manly, it is a shame.

Part of this depends on the culture. When the Beatles came to America, their long hair was scandalous, because almost all men had crew cuts. Now the (early) Beatles hair looks short.

10. Not to be a matter of contention in the church

If you can't fellowship with someone because they don't cover, or because they do, you are wrong. If you look down on a woman because she has the “wrong kind” of covering (not the right size, shape, material, or color), then your view on head covering is denominational, not scriptural.