
“Let Her be Covered . . .”

The **HATS**
of **CHRISTADELPHIAN**
SISTERS

a Biblical Consideration

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FORWARD

Is it essential that hats be worn by sisters today when social custom has changed so much? If they should be worn, when? At the Memorial Service only? Or whenever a sister prays, even when giving thanks for a meal? Such questions have arisen in the minds of many thoughtful sisters. Perhaps, too, some of the brethren have found difficulty in providing perfectly consistent answers.

The problem is not simply to find "pat" answers to satisfy any enquirer, but rather to follow faithfully the instruction of the Almighty. This must be done without adding doubtful burdens to be borne and without seeking to minimize or disregard requirements which He, Himself, has deemed necessary.

Recently, there has been a very marked decline in the wearing of hats by sisters to ecclesial meetings (extending in some areas to the Breaking of Bread service). The trend is not a local one, confined to Canada or the U.S.A., but is also evident in the larger Christadelphian centres of Australia and Great Britain. A similar pattern was seen among the churches of Christendom a few years ago. Today the head covering has almost totally disappeared as a symbol of religious significance. Modernistic clergymen have been vocal in support of "women's lib" and often foremost in dismissing the teaching of the Apostle Paul as "anti-feminist" and "retrogressive." Even the Roman Church with its age-old traditions no longer requires the head covering to be worn at Mass.

New converts to the Truth require positive instruction from Scripture to counter the destructive influences of the churches and the world. It can no longer be assumed that they understand the reasons *why* and *when* the head covering should be worn. Even within the Household a discussion on "hats" is sure to reveal some differences of opinion. There are sisters who wear their head coverings with resentment (perhaps unaware of the full Biblical reasons); others may be thinking of abandoning them (as the 'in thing' to do). Still others wear them unthinkingly, or seek further assurance that they are doing "what's right."

It is because of these concerns that this booklet, "Let Her be Covered," has been written. It is an attempt to set out clearly the Biblical reasons for the wearing of the head covering so that we might all "be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10, R.S.V.).

Ron Abel

THE HEAD COVERING: THE BACKGROUND

Bonnetted Priests Under the Law of Moses

Under the Law of Moses, the priests wore bonnets ('caps', R.S.V.) when ministering in the Tabernacle. This was a divine requirement (Exod. 29:9). The Jews have continued and extended this custom by requiring all males to wear skull caps during synagogue worship. In contrast, the Apostle Paul taught that a man ought not to cover his head "since he is the image and glory of God" (1 Cor. 11:7, R.S.V.). Why did God require such a distinctive break with Jewish practice?

The Male Head Covering — A Token of Humiliation

As with much of the symbolism of the Law of Moses, the reason *why* the priests were required to cover their heads is not explained within the Law itself. Elsewhere in Scripture, however, the head covering is identified with humiliation, servitude and wretchedness of spirit (e.g. 2 Sam. 15:30; Esther 6:12; Jer. 14:3, 4). In Christ Jesus, man attains in measure to the creative design — in "the image and glory of God" (11:7). In the new creation, although still blighted by sin, he is no longer a slave to sin (Rom. 6:5-7). This new status for man makes it inappropriate for him to cover his head — a token of servitude to sin and the Law. It is for this reason that man in Christ is forbidden to cover his head in worship. In contrast the Jew continues his servitude to sin and the Law by insisting that all male worshippers must wear a skull cap. His head is covered because his mind is veiled (2 Cor. 3:14-18).

The Female Head Covering — A Token of Subjection

"Let her be covered" (11:6) was the Apostle's instruction for sisters in Christ. It might be thought that this amounted to a denial of their new status in Christ Jesus. The reason why this is not the case is that for the woman an entirely different set of principles is involved in the head covering. The woman wears a head covering because it signifies her place in God's creative design — one of *subjection* to her husband. This point is easily seen once the structure of 1 Cor. 11 is set out as follows:

THE DIFFERENCES	MAN	WOMAN
1. AUTHORITY (11:3)	Christ is the head of the man	man ¹ is the head of the woman
2. GLORY (11:7)	man is the image and glory of God	woman is the glory of man
3. ORDER OF CREATION (11:8)	man not made from woman	woman made from man
4. PURPOSE OF CREATION (11:9)	man not created for woman	woman created for man
5. THE ANGELS (11:10)		"That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels." ² R.S.V.
6. APPEAL TO PROPRIETY (11:13)		"Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?" R.S.V.
7. A PARALLEL WITH HAIR LENGTH (11:14, 15)	long hair is degrading (R.S.V.)	long hair is her glory
CONCLUSION	THEREFORE HIS HEAD SHOULD REMAIN UNCOVERED (11:7)	THEREFORE HER HEAD SHOULD BE FULLY COVERED (11:6)

So important are these principles symbolized by the head covering that for a sister to do otherwise than to cover her head is to:

- dishonour her head — i.e., her husband (11:5)
- be a shame — disgraceful, R.S.V. (11:6)
- be unseemly — improper, R.S.V. (11:13)

The forthrightness of this language indicates the serious concern of Scripture. It would be misguided indeed for Christadelphians to treat the subject with any less concern. This point will not be missed by those thinking of abandoning the head covering as the "in thing to do," or by those who want reassurance that they are doing "what's right" by following a Scriptural practice, even if regarded by others as "out of date," "anachronistic."

¹ The Greek word "aner" can mean either "husband" (as the R.S.V. translates it) or "man" as in the A.V.

² A parenthetical section follows: "(Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.)" (11:11, 12, R.S.V.).

PROBLEM: Since social custom in respect to a woman's position has changed so much since the times of the Apostle Paul, must a covering be insisted upon today?

SOLUTION:

1. The reasons why sisters are required to wear head coverings have nothing to do with social custom in ancient Greece. The reasons relate to differences between man and woman with respect to authority (11:3), glory (11:7), order of creation (11:8), purpose of creation (11:9), and the angels (11:10). None of these reasons is culturally relative; they are not dependent upon the kind of society in which one lives.
2. The teaching of Scripture as to why a sister ought to cover her head is supported by two further appeals:
 - a) to propriety — “Judge for yourselves; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (11:13, R.S.V.).
 - b) to nature — “Doth not even nature itself teach you . . . ?” (11:14).

There may be differences in the standard of “propriety” and what can be learned from “nature” with the passing of time, but these do not affect the reasons *why* the head covering should be worn. The reasons *why* relate to God's creative design and angels.
3. It is sometimes suggested that the requirement of the head covering was intended to distinguish believers from temple prostitutes. The implication being, that the head covering served a useful purpose for the Corinthians, but is now merely a matter of social custom (for 20th century Christadelphians). There is *no* Biblical evidence for this view. There are a number of reasons provided in 1 Cor. 11 as to why a sister should cover her head, but to distinguish believers from heathen prostitutes is not one of them.
4. The reasons for the head covering are rooted in Scripture. They are not dependent upon social customs of the day, personal likes or dislikes, or whether one lives in ancient Corinth or modern America. The head covering is a divine requirement based upon divine revelation.

PROBLEM: When should a sister wear a head covering? Whenever there is an ecclesial meeting? When giving thanks for a meal? Private prayer?

SOLUTION:

1. The instructions of 1 Cor. 11 relate to ecclesial meetings not to private prayer. This is proven by the following:

a) "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head." (11:5). Prophecy was a gift which was public in its service: "He who prophesies edifies the ecclesia" (14:4, R.S.V., cf. 14:22). Similarly, but not as certainly, the "praying" refers to "praying in a tongue" (14:14). Although one might be personally edified by the exercise of this gift (14:4), its design was public: "to edify the ecclesia" (14:5). The head covering of 1 Cor. 11, therefore, relates to *ecclesial* meetings.

b) "If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the ecclesias of God." (11:16, R.S.V.). The fact that the Apostle concludes his analysis of the head covering by appealing to the standard practice in all the other ecclesias implies that the subject of his consideration is the wearing of the head covering to *ecclesial* meetings.

c) Chapters 11 - 14 of the First Epistle to the Corinthians relate to irregularities in *ecclesial* worship — the head covering, factions and abuse of the Spirit-gifts. This section of the epistle comes between chapter 10 — concerned with the rights and liberties of the believer in his personal life,³ and chapter 15 — concerned with erroneous beliefs about the resurrection. The 11 - 14 section of the epistle commences with a general commendation of the Corinthian believers: "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (11:1, 2, R.S.V.). This section has many references to *ecclesial* meetings:

- "... because when you come together"
(11:17, R.S.V.)
- "when you meet together . . ." (11:20, R.S.V.)
- "If, therefore, the whole ecclesia assembles"
(14:23, R.S.V.)

³ e.g. "If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner . . .", (10:27, R.S.V.).

The location of the head covering section of the epistle, therefore, implies an *ecclesial* problem.

2. Should a sister wish to extend the wearing of her head covering from public to private worship, this is her liberty, but care must be taken not to make a personal preference an *obligation* to be observed by others.
3. The Apostle did not list all of the occasions when a head covering *must* be worn. If such were the case, compliance would be an easy matter of simply following the list! In the absence of this precise instruction, there will arise occasions when only a small section of one's home ecclesia may be present, (e.g. Bible Class meetings in the home, Bible study sessions at Bible School, Study days, 'Weekends with the Word'), when indecision might arise as to whether a sister should wear her head covering. The following may prove a useful guide:

a) The subordination of woman to her husband was evident in the design of creation (Gen. 2:20-21; 1 Cor. 11:7-9), re-affirmed at the Fall — "Thy husband shall . . . rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16), taught by the Law (1 Cor. 14:34) and referred to many times in the epistles (e.g. Eph. 5:22-23). Is this subordination limited only to the Memorial Service? No, it is not.⁴ It is a divine principle, the symbol of which is the head covering.

The sister who seeks merely to satisfy the *minimum* requirements of a law has missed the spirit of the principles which the head covering symbolizes.

b) Among most of the churches of Christendom the head covering is no longer a symbol of religious significance. One reason for its demise is that the symbol has lost its meaning. It is no longer fashionable to teach:

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the ecclesia."
(Eph. 5:22, 23).

Such teaching is too incompatible with women preachers, "women's lib", career wives, uni-sex dress and "equality of the sexes." This is the environment of the world. Surely sisters of the Lord Jesus will wish to *extend* the wearing of the head covering which symbolizes an entirely different way of life.

⁴ Similarly, "I suffer not a woman to teach" (1 Tim. 2:12) is not confined to the Memorial Service but extends to the other ecclesial meetings such as Public Lectures and Bible Classes.

PROBLEM: What is meant by the verse, “For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels” (11:10)?

SOLUTION:

1. It should be noted that if one of the reasons for wearing the head covering is “because of the angels”, then this verse in itself indicates the seriousness with which this subject should be approached. How many sisters who come uncovered to ecclesial meetings have given thought to the *angels* as a reason for wearing a head covering?
2. “Because of the angels” is a difficult phrase because there is no explanation given in the chapter as to what it means. The context, however, of the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman, suggests the following two interpretations:

a) Angels are present as unseen witnesses in the assembly of the believers (cf. 1 Cor. 4:9; 1 Tim. 5:21; Heb. 1:14). The argument might be stated as follows: Let sisters who claim equal authority with the brethren remember that they are continually open to the gaze of God’s angels who were instrumental in establishing woman’s subordinate position at her creation.⁵

b) It was, in part, through Eve’s desire to be like the angels “to know good and evil” that the Fall occurred (Gen. 3:5, 6). As a result of the Fall, God said to Eve, “he [thy husband] shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16). The head covering is a symbol of this fact.⁶

3. What is meant by the expression “to have power on her head”? The word “power”, Gk: “*exousia*,” includes such meanings as “privilege, authority” (Yg.). It has been variously translated and interpreted as follows:

R.S.V. “veil” with an interpretive footnote: “Greek *authority* (the veil being a symbol of this)”.

⁵ E.g. “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26) was the work of the angels by divine appointment. Their appointment was to make man first (11:8) and to make woman from the man as a helper fit for him (11:9; Gen. 2:18).

⁶ Similarly, the Apostle Paul said, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; [cf. 1 Cor. 11:8, 9] and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived [literally, ‘utterly deceived’] and became a transgressor” (1 Tim. 2:12-15, R.S.V.). In this passage and in 1 Cor. 11 Paul is reasoning for the subordinate position of women from the Genesis record.

R.V. "A sign of authority on her head (mg. 'or, have authority over')".

A.V. mg. "That is, a covering, in sign that she is under the power of her husband." (also interpretive).

The woman wears a head covering as a sign of her subordination to man.⁷

4. The whole verse may be paraphrased as follows:

"For this cause ought the woman to wear a head covering because of her subordinate position as a helper fit for man, and because of her unlawful attempt to become like the angels 'to know good and evil'."

PROBLEM: Since Paul says, "For her hair is given her for a covering" (1 Cor. 11:15) why the insistence on a hat if the sisters allow their hair to grow long?

SOLUTION:

1. The issue at Corinth was not whether long or short hair was an acceptable covering, but whether or not the head was covered with a veil or hat. This is proven by the following:

a) "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head" (v. 4). The distinction here is obviously not between short and long-haired brethren, but rather between men with covered and uncovered heads.

b) Contentious sisters were provided with an alternative: either cover the head or be shorn or shaven (v. 6). But if long hair were the intended covering, then the Apostle's alternative is meaningless.

2. "Cover" (-ed, -ing) in the A.V. disguises the fact that different words for "to cover" are used in the Greek text. The distinction between two of these, "katakalypto" and "peribolaion" proves that a veil or head covering, and not long hair is intended. These words are as follows:

—"Katakalypto" ('kata' = 'fully'; 'kalypto' = 'to cover up'), "to cover fully" (Yg). This word occurs throughout verses 5 - 13 and is translated "veil" in the R.S.V.;

⁷ The authority of man over woman is the idea symbolized by the head covering. It is for this reason that the verse reads, "to have power [authority] on her head." The word "authority" or "power" is put in the place of the thing which symbolizes it — the head covering.

Nestle and Marshall's "Interlinear Greek-English New Testament" and many other versions. These translations make it plain that the issue relates to a head covering, not the growth of hair, long or short.

—"Peribolaion" ('peri' = 'around'; 'ballo' = 'to throw, cast'), "something cast around" (Yg). The long hair of a woman is her glory — like a mantle cast around (v. 15).⁸ But this is not to be displayed in the assembly of believers before the presence of God. The intended covering in the ecclesial meeting is the "katakalypto" — the head covering or veil.

3. When Paul refers to the long hair given to the woman as her glory, he is drawing a parallel with what "nature" or common-sense suggests. This can be seen from the following:

MAN	WOMAN
long hair is degrading	long hair is her glory
therefore, a parallel is evident with the spiritual:	
a man ought not to cover his head	a woman ought to cover her head

4. The mistaken interpretation⁹ evident in the question results from reading verse 15 as if it were the conclusion of the argument rather than an additional appeal to common-sense by a parallel with what "nature itself teaches."

⁸ "Peribolaion" in Hebrews 1:12 is translated "vesture", A.V.; "mantle", R.S.V.

⁹ The *Emphatic Diaglott* has contributed to the difficulty of verse 15 by its misleading translation. The *Diaglott* reads: "Because her hair has been given to her *instead* of a veil." The Greek preposition "anti" does not necessarily mean "instead of" and can mean "for." "For" is the usual translation adopted. The rendering of "anti" by "instead of" as a possible alternative in this verse is rejected by some commentaries.

PROBLEM: Paul says: "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the ecclesias of God" (v. 16), therefore the matter of hats should be left to individual judgment without attempting to establish a uniform ecclesial practice.

SOLUTION:

1. The A.V. translation of this verse has contributed to the problem. "We have no such custom" is inconsistent with the context. Is it reasonable that the Apostle, after setting out the relationship between God, His Son, man and woman, the divine design in creation and the angels, would conclude on such a casual, "take it or leave it" basis?
2. Other translations harmonize with the context and remove the ambiguity as to the meaning of the Apostle's words:
 - i. "If anyone is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the ecclesias of God" (R.S.V.).
 - ii. "Now if anyone is disposed to be argumentative and contentious about this, we hold to and recognize no other custom (in worship) than this, nor do the ecclesias of God generally." (Amplified New Testament).
 - iii. "If anyone presumes to raise objections on this point — well, I acknowledge no other mode of worship, neither do the ecclesias of God" (Moffatt's, 'The Bible: A New Translation').¹⁰
3. The word "contentious" means "a lover of strife".¹¹ It is fruitless to attempt to persuade a *lover* of dispute by reasoning. The only recourse is to argue on the basis of authority. The argumentative must know that only one practice was recognized among the ecclesias — that the sisters come to the assembly with covered heads. In addition, this ecclesial practice had the full support of the other apostles.¹²

¹⁰ See also Weymouth's *The New Testament in Modern Speech*: the N.E.B.; *The Twentieth Century New Testament* (1902).

¹¹ Greek: "philoneikos", "fond of strife, i.e. disputatious" (Stg).

¹² The "we" in verse 16 may relate to Paul's travel companions but more likely to the other apostles (see 1 Cor. 9:5; 2 Cor. 12:18, 19; 1 Cor. 4:9-13).

PROBLEM: Should the covering worn by sisters be a veil or a hat?

SOLUTION:

1. As long as the head is fully covered it does not matter whether this is done with a hat or veil. The word for “cover,” “katakalupto” means “to cover fully” (Yg). This is the only guide to the kind of head covering.
2. The head covering was intended to *fully* cover the head — the very place where the natural glory of the woman was displayed (11:15). Covering of glory, not its display, was its purpose.
3. Can a head covering which displays the wealth or social standing of the wearer at the same time be a token of her subjection? Individual conscience and responsibility must provide the answer. “Women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel” (1 Tim. 2:9, R.S.V.).
4. The head covering (whether a hat or a veil) is a symbol reflecting a woman’s subjection to her husband. A sister who wears a large hat in all the ecclesial meetings, but who constantly asserts herself by usurping the authority of the brethren, has complied with the requirements of the symbol, but has not accepted in her heart the principles for which it stands. Sisters who frequently engage in carping and nagging criticism of their husbands, and who attempt to run the ecclesia in private, “behind the scenes,” might reflect once again on the significance of the head covering.

THE HEADSHIP OF THE HUSBAND

Believers travelling inter-ecclesially have often noticed widespread differences in attitudes to the hair length of brethren and the head covering of sisters. The lack of regard for Scripture teaching on these issues is part of an over-all problem of “shrivelling Bible roots.” It is difficult for a sister to respect her husband as a spiritual head when his own interests are the TV and a Saturday’s golf “with the boys” — when to suggest that a Saturday or Sunday afternoon be spent in Bible Study together is to be regarded as having an “extreme view” of living the Truth.

The practice of working wives is now so well established in society, that the wife who does not work risks being considered "odd," "domestic," "unintellectual" or impervious to boredom. The practice, however, is now recognized to be harmful even by educators and social workers. It has been a factor in the breakdown of many marriages and families. The divine instruction is especially relevant:

"Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behaviour . . . ; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, [keepers at home.] A.V.] kind, submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited."

(Titus 2:3, 4, 5, R.S.V.).

While times of economic necessity because of extreme financial difficulties or spouse illness may require a temporary acceptance of something less than the ideal, brethren who choose to "let the wife work" as the "thing to do these days" are making decisions often fraught with unforeseen side-effects. Not only is his own headship as the provider of the house likely to be eroded by such an arrangement, but since both work the husband must devote more of his valuable study time to the domestic sphere. Bible Class attendance often suffers since "we are too tired to attend." The children may seldom do the readings as a family, and even the Sunday School lessons may be hastily prepared. Under such circumstances, "the headship" ideal set out for the man in Scripture may have little effect in practice.

Subordination and subjection are the role of the woman established by an all-wise Heavenly Father. She best functions in this role. Her complement is her husband, to whom God has given the *responsibility* of headship (of which the head covering is the token). He best functions in this role of headship. By wise and sympathetic leadership on his part, the husband can assist his wife to overcome the evil pressures of a Godless world and to avoid the disastrous precedents set by the churches of Christendom.

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