



THE HEAD
COVERING

JOSIAH BONGIOANNI

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*To the followers of Christ who support
and practice head covering*

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Preface

For a large portion of my life, I have attended a conservative Mennonite church, one of the few churches in the West that expects men to take off their hats, and women to put on veils, before praying. This practice has led to questions from inquisitive outsiders. When answering these inquiries, I have explained we are merely obeying Scripture and then led them to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, where Paul lays out the command. At one point, I entered into a deep conversation about head coverings with my friend Tabor. As we continued the conversation from week to week, I began researching the practice in depth. After some time, I had filled my mind with so many facts and arguments, I had to get them out in some form. So I began writing articles answering common questions about head covering, and over time these articles evolved into chapters that make up the present book.

When I first began studying the subject, I do not think I fully understood how important the topic was: I knew that obedience to God was vital; but now I am

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additionally convinced that arguing for the practice of head covering is actually defending it from an intellectual monster that wishes to devour the entire Church. For the very same arguments that have led people to abandon head covering are those that are being used to challenge almost every other doctrine in Scripture and causing many Christians to renounce their belief in two genders, commit sexual immorality, embrace contraception, employ female pastors and accept homosexuality and transgenderism, among other things. What are these arguments? The most prominent is that Scripture must be understood in its historical context, and that context reveals that the Bible is no longer relevant to modern believers. But I affirm just the opposite: Scripture is not the product of cultural prejudices, but it is the infallible rule of faith and practice, inspired by the one true eternal and immutable God without regard to ancient social practices. But even when I have investigated the supposed cultural reasons for Biblical commands, I have found time and again that they were based on sloppy historical research or rationalizations with no historical foundation.

Besides discovering the intellectual monster poised to destroy the Church, studying head covering has also helped convince me that one of the main reasons revival seems so scarce and the blessings of God so far removed from the modern Church is because of general lack of obedience, as well as faulty religious teaching. Yet Jesus once said, “Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches

them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). It is therefore my hope to expose the sin of those who break, and teach others to break, God’s commands, however small those commands may be. And in this way I hope to bring honor and power back to the Church.

These things said, I ask you, O reader, to carefully read the words written in this book and receive them with an open mind and a willing heart. Also, if you find this treatise to be helpful and wish to pass it on to friends, let it be known that the author permits this work to be duplicated and distributed without charge. In fact, please join the author’s effort to promote truth by sending unaltered copies of this book to people you know. Furthermore, if you wish to bless the writer, consider praying for him and financially supporting him via the [donate page at josiahbongioanni.com](https://josiahbongioanni.com).

Lastly, I would like to thank both my parents for offering many helpful suggestions for the improvement of this book; and in the case of my father, for professional editing skills as well. I am also grateful for my four sisters who have encouraged me to complete the book throughout its various stages of development. And I am thankful for friends who have read and distributed the treatise to others, even when it was uncompleted, demonstrating the work was useful and thereby giving me the needed zeal to complete the writing. Most of all, I am indebted to God, without whom I would never have completed the book. He has answered all my prayers for assistance, and I am forever grateful for his love, power, wisdom and helping hand.

1

The Neglected Ordinance

The Bible says whenever a woman prays or prophesies she is to cover her head as a symbol of submission to male headship. And whenever a man prays or prophesies he is to keep his head bare to represent his position directly under Christ and over woman (1 Corinthians 11:2-16).

Today there are few Western churches that preach or practice this ordinance. However the situation was quite different during the early 1900s. My grandmother told me that when she was young, every woman was expected to cover her head when attending Mass at the local Catholic church. And according to R. C. Sproul, former professor of philosophy and theology at Reformed College, this was also true of the Protestant church he attended in the 1930s. “When I went to church

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on Sunday morning,” Sproul remarked, “I never saw a woman in that church (this was a mainline Presbyterian church) whose head wasn’t covered with a hat or veil. This is one of those customs that has simply disappeared for the most part from Christian culture.”¹

So why did mainstream Western Christianity abandon the Biblical and historical practice of head covering? What caused veils to disappear from most churches in the West? There may be multiple factors that contributed to the disappearance of head coverings. But according to a number of scholars, there is one reason that stands head and shoulders above the rest – the rise of feminism.

Historian David Bercot made the following comment regarding head covering in his book *The Kingdom that Turned the World Upside Down*:

From the early days of the New Testament church up through the mid-nineteenth century, virtually every church obeyed the Holy Spirit in this matter... But then the first feminist movement of the 1800s swept through society – and through the Church. In many churches, women quit wearing any type of prayer covering. In most churches, women still wore head coverings, but the coverings changed from veils or bonnets to stylish hats... But hats quickly disappeared with the new feminist movement of the Sixties.²

Jeremy Gardiner, in his book *Head Covering*, also saw the connection between feminism and the widespread neglect of head covering. He wrote:

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In North America, head covering was practiced in virtually all churches up until the beginning of the twentieth century. This date is interesting because it coincides with the first wave of feminism. Although the practice continued in most churches, from that time forward it was a symbol in decline. Then in the 1960s and 70s, the number of women who practiced this symbol radically dropped. Once again, this coincided with another movement of feminism.³

Now Bercot and Gardiner are not unsupported in their claims. Secular newspapers, magazines and other sources of history attest that the Christian practice of head covering did indeed fall into decline during the early 1900s, when the first wave of feminism swept destructively through the Western world.

First Feminist Movement

In 1905, an article entitled, “Hatless Women in the Church,” appeared in an English newspaper called the *Press*. This article provided an account of the change occurring in the English church and society in regard to head covering:

The hatless brigade is increasing. At the seaside and country health resorts this season, writes a London correspondent, scores of ladies have abandoned hats. The church or rather some of its priests and dignitaries, are shocked that women have dared to go into a consecrated building with their heads uncovered... The dispute began, and it has been no small one, by the Vicar of Crantock, in Cornwall, forbidding women to go into his

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church because they discarded the headdress. The doings of a country vicar would not have counted for much, if they had been alone; but the authorities of Canterbury Cathedral have also posted up a notice forbidding hatless women to enter that sacred building.⁴



Figure 1: Women's Suffrage Advertising Parade, 1913

In 1935, the article, “Hatless Women in the Church Approved,” appeared in a Canadian newspaper called *The Montreal Gazette*. It contained the following story:

The Rev. T. B. Scrutton, rural dean of Kingston and son of the late Lord Justice Scrutton, has announced... “No woman need worry about headgear in Kingston Parish Church whether during the service or at any other time. Nor need any person hesitate to join our worship because of

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clothes, so long as the clothes are decent. What is decent outside will be held decent in church.”

Mr. Scrutton explains that the custom that women should wear a covering for their heads in church was based on a statement made by St. Paul with regard to the veiling of women. St. Paul had bidden Christian women in Corinth to resume their veils in public prayer, as they had been criticized for having discarded them. “Ever since then,” says Mr. Scrutton, “his order to those Greek ladies has been taken as binding Christian women of all lands and through all ages.

“Any girl who enters a church to say her prayers in the hatless state in which so many now go out of doors is in danger of being bounced upon and turned out just because St. Paul warned Greek ladies not to cause talk by being unconventional. All that St. Paul did in this matter was to bid the Corinthian women to keep the convention of their time and place. That convention was based on ideas we now recognize as primitive, false, and superstitious.”⁵

Although Scutton did not support the practice of head covering, he admitted that ever since the time of Paul, the head covering ordinance “has been taken as binding Christian women of all lands and through all ages.” In other words, Scrutton acknowledged that wherever the gospel had gone prior to his time, Christian women had always seen the need to cover their heads in obedience to Scripture. It did not matter what country, culture or era they belonged to – the rule was understood to be the rule. By admitting this, Scrutton showed he was

promoting a completely new doctrine, one which not only failed to have support from the historic church, but actually contradicted what the church had been teaching for nearly nineteen hundred years. Even the arguments Rev. Scrutton made in defense of his doctrine were based on false premises and inaccurate historical material (as will be shown later in this book).

Second Feminist Movement

From the late 1960s through the early 1970s, another wave of feminism swept through America – the so-called Women’s Liberation Movement. During this time, a number of feminists strove to abolish the practice of head covering, because they recognized it was a symbol of female submission to male authority. In 1968, the National Organization for Women (NOW) assembled their supporters to take part in what they called a “national unveiling.” This is what they said:

Because the wearing of a head covering by women at religious services is a symbol of subjection with many churches, NOW recommends that all chapters undertake an effort to have all women participate in a “national unveiling” by sending their head coverings to the task force chairman. At the spring meeting of the task force of women and religion, these veils will be publicly burned to protest the second class status of women in all churches.⁶

A year later, a group of women from NOW’s Religious Task Force participated in what was later called the

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“Easter Bonnet Rebellion.” On Easter Sunday, they approached the altar in a Catholic church in Milwaukee to receive communion. Before receiving the elements, they removed their bonnets and hung them on the railing of the altar as an act of protest against the ordinance. The priest who was officiating the sacrament had been warned this would occur. Originally he had said he would not permit uncovered women to take part in the Eucharist. But when the event occurred, he permitted the women to partake of the bread and wine, although he afterward threw their hats on the floor.⁷ This incident made front-page news. And the leaders of the demonstration received about seventy phone calls and forty letters, most of which viewed the event disapprovingly.⁸

With these facts in mind, it should be clear that the practice of head covering did not innocently disappear from the West, but was deliberately abolished by feminists on account of their radically anti-Christian ideology.



Figure 2: Women's "liberation" march from Farragut Square to Lafayette Park, Washington DC, 1970

Head Covering Today

Times have changed, and feminist have now accomplished many of their objectives, including the general abandonment of head coverings in Western religious services. Today, multitudes of women go to church, take communion, pray and prophesy with their heads uncovered. Men are not helping matters as well. Even when face to face with Scripture, many Western men argue it is alright for women to pray unveiled, and some men have even joined the rebellion by praying with something on their heads. Furthermore, many leaders and teachers of the Church no longer care about the issue. The transgression of a Biblical command that once attracted the attention of newspapers, and caused offenders to receive a flood of opposition, is no longer considered worthy of correction – or even notice – by many church leaders.



Figure 3: Amish women wearing kapps

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But there is good news. Although the majority of Western Christians have ceased to observe the head covering command, many Christians in Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe still obey the ordinance.⁹ Even in Western countries, there continue to be a number of denominations – or at least segments of denominations – where women are encouraged to observe head covering to some degree or another. For instance, conservative Amish, Mennonites, Hutterites and Brethren, as well as some Catholics, Free Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Pentecostals and others, continue to observe the head covering command to this day.¹⁰ There are of course a number of individuals who also practice head covering in churches that do not officially recognize the ordinance.

One day I was searching the internet for testimonies of modern women who decided to veil, when I came across an article by Jessica Roldan of the Heavenly Hearth Blog. She wrote an account of how she came to head cover as follows:

Prompted by a woman's blog I was reading in order to learn more about modest dressing, I began to study the topic of head covering. I carefully read the passage itself several times. I devoured booklets on head covering which explained the passage and offered rebuttals to head covering objections. It now all made so much sense to me! ... The only question was: Would I be willing to take a bold step of obedience and faith in order to follow the Bible's teaching on this topic? Would I be willing to stand out from everybody else? Would I put God and His word first in my life? I

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talked with my husband about it. He gave me his full support! He personally remembered the day when nearly all the women went to church wearing a mantilla, or some other kind of covering (he's older than I am). Then, after the Feminist revolution of the sixties, that gradually changed. Nowadays, very few women cover their heads in church. To him, it seemed the change hadn't come about because we had made some great discovery about how we had misinterpreted the Bible's teaching on head covering for 1,900 years, but because the head covering was no longer palatable to women who had been influenced by Feminism. And, in order to keep the peace, the men followed along. I'm so glad my husband was willing for me to be different. The journey began. Ten years later, I still headcover in church, and I have absolutely no regrets.¹¹

So what about you? Will you cave into social pressure and disobey the command of God in order to conform to a culture intoxicated with the poison of feminism? Or will you follow the example of Jessica Roldan and other godly people who have had the courage to stand up to modern society and the wayward church in order to observe the head covering ordinance?

2

The View of the Early Church

Today there is little consensus, even among sincere Christians, regarding head coverings. Some say the head covering is a cloth veiling, while others say it is long hair. Some say it was an ancient cultural practice that has no relevance for today, while others say it is a symbol for Christians of every time and place. Some say it is an insignificant command that can be ignored, while others claim it is an ordinance of great consequence that must be obeyed. The list goes on. So with all these disagreements, how can we know with certainty what the Apostle meant when he wrote the command?

Studying how the early Christians viewed and practiced head covering is key. After all, many primitive Christians went to churches founded by the apostles,

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were under leadership originally set up by the apostles, and understood the same language in which the New Testament was written. Also, New Testament doctrine was communicated by the apostles mostly by word of mouth, and this oral tradition was carefully passed on from one generation of leaders to another in the early church. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe the head covering ordinance would be more accurately understood by early church leaders and their congregations than it is by modern believers separated not only by language but also by two thousand years of church history.

So what did the early Christians believe about the head covering? And how did they observe the command? These questions will be answered by looking at what early church leaders and teachers wrote on the topic up through the fifth century.



*Figure 4: Uncovered men and veiled women in prayer:
Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, early 2nd century*

Ante-Nicene Church

Irenaeus (130-220) was bishop at Lyons, France. He was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. And he is the earliest church leader to mention head coverings. But he does so only briefly when he cites 1 Corinthians 11:10:

A woman ought to have a veil upon her head,
because of the angels.¹²

What is interesting about this citation is that Irenaeus quotes Paul as saying a woman ought to have “a veil” (κάλυμμα) on her head, instead of “authority” (ἐξουσίαν). Although this is only a small deviation from the accepted text, this word substitution shows that Irenaeus recognized the head covering to be a cloth covering. Thus he contradicts the view held by some modern believers that a woman’s head covering is her long hair.

Tertullian (145-220) was an elder in the church at Carthage, North Africa. Around the year 204, Tertullian composed a tract *On the Veiling of Virgins*. In this treatise, he discussed an issue that churches disagreed on: Were married women the only females required to wear head coverings, or were virgins also required to wear them? Throughout the tract, Tertullian never considered the possibility of a married woman not being required to wear a veil. He took it for granted that she must, and all the churches of God were aware of this fact and practiced it. Nor did Tertullian ever consider the possibility of whether long hair might be the woman’s covering. He assumed that the head covering was a cloth

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veiling. In the opening of his veiling treatise, Tertullian wrote as follows:

I will show in Latin also that it behoves our virgins to be veiled from the time that they have passed the turning-point of their age: that this observance is exacted by truth, on which no one can impose prescription – no space of times, no influence of persons, no privilege of regions. For these, for the most part, are the sources whence, from some ignorance or simplicity, custom finds its beginning; and then it is successionaly confirmed into an usage, and thus is maintained in opposition to truth. But our Lord Christ has surnamed himself Truth, not Custom.¹³

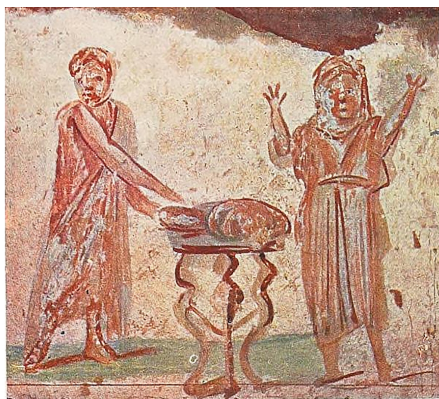
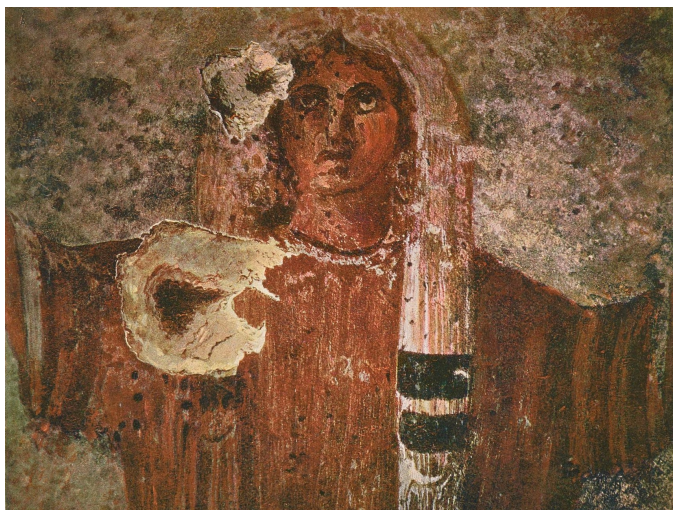


Figure 5: Celebration of the Eucharist: Catacomb of Callistus, Rome, second half of 2nd century

Note how Tertullian stresses that this ordinance is binding on all Christians in all ages, without regard to when or where they live – “no space of times” can change it. However, after describing the potentially evil



*Figure 6: Portrait of a consecrated virgin praying:
Catacombs of Priscilla, Rome, second half of the 3rd century*

influence of custom based on something other than truth, Tertullian goes on to talk about the good prevailing custom of the church in regard to veiling virgins:

Throughout Greece, and certain of its barbaric provinces, the majority of churches keep their virgins covered. There are places, too, beneath this (African) sky, where this practice obtains; lest any ascribe the custom to Greek or barbarian gentilehood. But I have proposed (as models) those churches which were founded by apostles or apostolic men; and antecedently, I think, to certain (founders, who shall be nameless).¹⁴

After providing numerous arguments why virgins should wear the veil just like married women, he goes on to

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exhort the married women to never give up wearing the veil, not even for a fraction of an hour, as follows:

But we admonish you, too, women of the second (degree of) modesty, who have fallen into wedlock, not to outgrow so far the discipline of the veil, not even in a moment of the hour, as, because you cannot refuse it, to take some other means to nullify it, by going neither covered nor bare. For some, with their turbans and woolen bands, do not veil their head, but bind it up; protected, indeed, in front, but, where the head properly lies, bare. Others are to a certain extent covered over the region of the brain with linen coifs of small dimensions – I suppose for fear of pressing the head – and not reaching quite to the ears. If they are so weak in their hearing as not to be able to hear through a covering, I pity them. Let them know that the whole head constitutes “the woman.” Its limits and boundaries reach as far as the place where the robe begins. The region of the veil is co-extensive with the space covered by the hair when unbound; in order that the neck too may be encircled. For it is they which must be subjected, for the sake of which “power” ought to be “had on the head:” the veil is their yoke. Arabia’s heathen females will be your judges, who cover not only the head, but the face also, so entirely, that they are content, with one eye free, to enjoy rather half the light than to prostitute the entire face.¹⁵

Again he says:

How severe a chastisement will they likewise deserve, who, amid (the recital of) the Psalms, and

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at any mention of (the name of) God, continue uncovered; (who) even when about to spend time in prayer itself, with the utmost readiness place a fringe, or a tuft, or any thread whatsoever, on the crown of their heads, and suppose themselves to be covered?¹⁶



Figure 7: Veiled woman praying: Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome, end of 3rd century.

Now the importance of these citations does not lie in Tertullian's individual opinion about how the head covering ought to be worn, but in what he reveals about the practices of early Christians at large. He shows that all of the early Christians, from everywhere around the world, understood Paul to have written about a literal cloth veil, and that they required all married women (and, in most cases, virgins as well) to wear one – at least when they were praying or prophesying. In some places, it appears the women were not very excited about

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wearing a head covering and would simply take a small piece of cloth and toss it on their head a moment before prayer commenced, which likely implies they came from cultures where it was not customary for women to wear head coverings. But Tertullian never says that believing women were ever so rash or disobedient to Scripture as to totally neglect putting something on their head before prayer.

Moving on, we come to Clement of Alexandria (150-215), who was an elder in the church at Alexandria, Egypt. He was put in charge of a school of instruction for new believers. One of his pupils was Origen, who later took over the school. Another was Alexander, who became bishop of Jerusalem. In *The Instructor*, Clement wrote:



Figure 8: Veiled woman praying: Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome, end of 3rd century

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It has also been enjoined that the head should be veiled and the face covered; for it is a wicked thing for beauty to be a snare to men. Nor is it seemly for a woman to wish to make herself conspicuous, by using a purple veil. Would it were possible to abolish purple in dress, so as not to turn the eyes of spectators on the face of those that wear it!¹⁷

And again, in the same book:

Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.¹⁸

Now in these passages, notice Clement goes beyond what is required by Scripture, and calls on women to wear the veiling for the sake of modesty. His opinion about the veil and modesty may or may not be correct, but what seems to be most important is that he references Paul's command about a woman being veiled as if it were binding on all females.

Origen (185-255) became head of the school for new believers in Egypt after the departure of Clement. He also authored more than two thousand works, including a book *On Prayer*. In the preface to this book, Origen remarked that it is not only necessary to pray to God, but also to pray "as we ought." He then went on to provide a number of passages from the Bible that described the proper manner of prayer, including the following:

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In Paul we find, “Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head” [1 Corinthians 11:4-5]. This makes explicit the “as we ought.”¹⁹

Thus Origen once again demonstrates how seriously the early Christians took the head covering ordinance, and how obedience to the command is necessary for prayer to be offered in the correct manner.

Hippolytus of Rome (170-235) was the bishop of Portus, as well as a writer and a martyr. He was a disciple of Irenaeus, who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John. In the *Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus wrote the following:

When the teacher finishes his instruction, the catechumens [or new believers] shall pray by themselves, apart from the believers. And (all) women, whether believers or catechumens, shall stand for their prayers by themselves in a separate part of the church. And when (the catechumens) finish their prayers, they must not give the kiss of peace, for their kiss is not yet pure. Only believers shall salute one another, but men with men and women with women; a man shall not salute a woman. And let all the women have their heads covered with an opaque cloth, not with a veil of thin linen, for this is not a true covering.²⁰

In the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, the following is written:

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After this let the sacrifice follow, the people standing, and praying silently; and when the oblation has been made, let every rank by itself partake of the Lord's body and precious blood in order, and approach with reverence and holy fear, as to the body of their king. Let the women approach with their heads covered, as is becoming the order of women.²¹

Now this citation comes from a work that many scholars believe was spuriously attributed to the apostles. It is being quoted here only because it was compiled during the early centuries of church history and likely reveals some of the attitudes, practices and beliefs of the early church.



Figure 9: Veiled woman praying: Coemeterium Maius, Rome, end of 3rd century

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Figure 10: Veiled woman praying: Catacomb of Callistus, Rome, second half of the 3rd century

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Figure 11: Veiled woman praying: Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome, first half of the 4th century.

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Figure 12: Veiled woman praying: Catacomb of the Vigna Massimo, Rome, first half of the 4th century.

Post-Nicene Church

Moving on to a later part of the early Christian period after the council of Nicene, we come to Basil (329-379), the archbishop of Caesarea. He wrote a letter to the clergy at Neocaesarea in which he warned them about contemporary heresies and then praised the former missionary-bishop Gregory the Miracle-Worker (who flourished around the year 270) using these words:

Gregory did not cover his head at prayer. How could he? He was a true disciple of the Apostle who says, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head."²²

John Chrysostom (347-407) was the archbishop of Constantinople. He has been called "the greatest pulpit orator and commentator of the Greek Church." In his commentary on First Corinthians, John Chrysostom said:

Perhaps some one might here have doubt also, questioning with himself, what sort of a crime it was for the woman to be uncovered, or the man covered? What sort of crime it is, learn now from hence.

Symbols many and diverse have been given both to man and woman; to him of rule, to her of subjection: and among them this also, that she should be covered, while he hath his head bare. If now these be symbols you see that both err when they disturb the proper order, and transgress the disposition of God, and their own proper limits, both the man falling into the woman's inferiority, and the woman rising up against the man by her outward habiliments.

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For if exchange of garments be not lawful, so that neither she should be clad with a cloak, nor he with a mantle or a veil: (“for the woman,” saith He, “shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garments:”) much more is it unseemly for these things to be interchanged. For the former indeed were ordained by men, even although God afterwards ratified them: but this by nature, I mean the being covered or uncovered. But when I say Nature, I mean God. For He it is who created Nature. When therefore thou overturnest these boundaries, see how great injuries ensue.

And tell me not this, that the error is but small. For first, it is great even of itself: being as it is disobedience. Next, though it were small, it became great because of the greatness of the things whereof it is a sign. However, that it is a great matter, is evident from its ministering so effectually to good order among mankind, the governor and the governed being regularly kept in their several places by it.

So that he who transgresseth disturbs all things, and betrays the gifts of God, and casts to the ground the honor bestowed on him from above; not however the man only, but also the woman. For to her also it is the greatest of honors to preserve her own rank; as indeed of disgraces, the behavior of a rebel. Wherefore he laid it down concerning both, thus saying, “Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoreth her head.”²³



Figure 13: Veiled woman praying: Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, Rome, middle of 4th century.

Perhaps the most striking aspect about this passage is Chrysostom's strong stance that the topic is not a light or inconsequential subject that may be ignored if one so pleases, but is one of heavy importance. It is also an ordinance that helps keep the natural order of things in place (which subject will be more fully discussed later in this treatise).

Jerome (347-420) was one of the three bishops at Antioch, and he is famous for his translation of the Bible into Latin, known as the Vulgate. In his letter to Sabinianus, Jerome wrote:

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It is usual in the monasteries of Egypt and Syria for virgins and widows who have vowed themselves to God and have renounced the world and have trodden under foot its pleasures, to ask the mothers of their communities to cut their hair; not that afterwards they go about with heads uncovered in defiance of the apostle's command, for they wear a close-fitting cap and a veil. No one knows of this in any single case except the shearers and the shorn, but as the practice is universal, it is almost universally known. The custom has in fact become a second nature. It is designed to save those who take no baths and whose heads and faces are strangers to all unguents, from accumulated dirt and from the tiny creatures which are sometimes generated about the roots of the hair.²⁴



Figure 14: Sarcophagus of Chaste Susanna, c. 340, from Sant Feliu, Girona.

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Interesting to note in this passage is the reference to women who had their hair cut off for hygienic reasons. Even though they did not have long hair, they still knew it was their Christian duty to wear a veil. Once again, this completely contradicts the claims of modern Christians who say the head covering is long hair.

Augustine (354-430) was bishop at Hippo Regius, a city in North Africa, and he is recognized to be one of the most famous theologians of all time. In his letter to Largus, Augustine wrote:

Let me say, however, in regard to ornaments of gold and costly dress, that I would not have you come to a precipitate decision in the way of forbidding their use, except in the case of those who, neither being married nor intending to marry, are bound to consider only how they may please God. But those who belong to the world have also to consider how they may in these things please their wives if they be husbands, their husbands if they be wives; with this limitation, that it is not becoming even in married women to uncover their hair, since the apostle commands women to keep their heads covered.²⁵

Theodoret (393-457), bishop of Cyrus, wrote a number of brief comments on 1 Corinthians 11:3-8, in which he made the following statement:

[Paul] demonstrated sufficiently from [her] long hair that being covered is fitting for the woman.²⁶

This is what Theodoret wrote, clearly demonstrating he understood the head covering ordinance to be still binding on Christian women of his day, even though

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more than three centuries had passed from the time of the apostles. And in this belief, Theodoret was in agreement with all the church leaders who had gone before him.



Figure 15: Veiled woman: Catacomb of the Vigna Massimo, Rome, first half of the 4th century.

Before concluding this chapter, it should also be noted that not only do the testimonies of early Christian writers confirm they obeyed the head covering command, but so does the artwork left behind by the early church. There are paintings in the catacombs at Rome in which Christian women are depicted praying, and these women are veiled.

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To conclude, much of the confusion that presently exists regarding the head covering can be easily resolved by looking at the records of the early church and seeing how they practiced the ordinance. The early church is important because, from one generation to the next, they carefully preserved in practice the teachings originally taught by the apostles word-of-mouth. According to the early Christians, the head covering ordinance was obligatory for all Christians, without regard to ancient cultural practices. Men were always required to go bare-headed, and women were always expected to wear a material head covering, when engaged in prayer or prophecy. These things being made clear, the question remains, what will you do? Will you choose to put aside your fears and follow the example of the early church in obeying the head covering ordinance?

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*Figure 16: The deceased Veneranda with St. Petronilla:
Catacomb of Domitilla, Rome, shortly after 356.*

3

Reasons for Veiling

Why should women veil, and men uncover their heads, when praying or prophesying? According to Paul, there are three reasons for this ordinance: The first reason is to symbolize male headship and female submission. The second is to avoid dishonoring the head by doing what is improper. And the third is contained in the semi-mysterious phrase, “because of the angels.”

Symbol of Submission

In the same way baptism and communion are symbols of spiritual truth, the head covering is the emblem of the vital teaching that woman is to be under the headship and authority of man. Now before you get up in arms

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about this statement (which I expect you may, if you have grown up in Western culture saturated with feminist ideology), consider the fact that good order cannot exist without authority structures. A large business would be unable to function without managers to direct the activities of associates. A school would not be able to operate without a principal and teachers to oversee the children. And the military would fall into chaos if there was no chain of command.

Focusing on the last illustration, observe that a commander in the military has the right and responsibility to give orders, and those under him are expected to obey. In spite of their inferior rank, the soldiers do not consider it demeaning or dehumanizing to submit. They do not complain it is unfair for someone to have a higher rank than they. For every soldier understands that if there were no authority structure, and no one was required to submit to anyone else, the army would be unable to function, and the result would be general chaos.

Now God in his infinite wisdom is also aware that good order cannot exist without various levels of authority. For this reason, God established the structure of headship, where God the Father is in a position of authority over Christ, Christ is in a position of authority over man, and man is in a position of authority over woman. As the Apostle Paul puts it, “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” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Paul then goes back to creation to prove man is in a position of authority over woman: He points out that

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man “is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” (1 Corinthians 11:7; cf. Genesis 1:27; 2:18). And he also observes that “man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Corinthians 11:8-9; cf. Genesis 2:18-23). In other words, if God had intended woman to have authority over man, he would have created her directly in the image of God and then taken a rib from her side and fashioned man in her similitude and for her sake. Or if God had intended them to be completely equal in authority, he would have created them separately and at the same time. However, the fact that God did neither of these is clear evidence that man was intended to occupy a position of authority over woman, although both are equal in value as humans.

Now in the same way it is not unfair for God the Father to have a greater rank than Christ, it is not unjust for man to have a higher position than woman. Nor is it demeaning or dehumanizing for woman to submit to man, since it is not demeaning for Christ to submit to the Father. On the contrary, it is a woman’s duty and honor to submit to man, and it is treason for her to rebel against him, since man’s rank in relation to hers is comparable to a commander’s in regard to his soldiers. (However, this is not a perfect analogy; for while it is possible for soldiers to move from one rank to another in the military, the ranks and roles of man, woman, Christ and God do not change.)

Now in the army there are not only different positions of authority, but there are also uniforms and rank

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insignia associated with those positions. It would be improper for a lower-ranking soldier to wear an emblem associated with the rank of a superior officer. And it would also be improper for a superior officer to wear a lower-ranking emblem of a subordinate. Yet military members are not always required to wear their uniforms or rank insignia. When on vacation with family or when visiting friends, they are not required to wear these items. However, while on duty, they are expected to wear their required uniforms and symbols of rank. It would be a serious offense if a junior soldier appeared before his commander out of uniform while on duty.

The same is true about the head covering. It is an emblem representing the position of a female under the authority of man. God does not expect her to wear this insignia all the time. However, there are certain times when he does require her to wear it: Whenever a woman is speaking to God in prayer, or whenever God is speaking through her in the form of prophesy, a woman is required to wear on her head the symbol of her rank, showing she is under the authority of man. The man, however, is required to abstain from wearing anything on his head when praying or prophesying, because to him the absence of a covering is representative of his position directly under the authority of Christ. When praying or prophesying, it would be improper and even shameful for a man to cover his head, or for a woman to uncover hers, because in these situations they would be exchanging the symbols of the ranks God has given to each of them. This would be a statement, even to the

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angels, expressing rebellion against the order of authority instituted by God.

Now it is important to point out that obeying the head covering command, and having some head knowledge regarding what it means, is not all that is needed to bring glory to God. If the veil is to have any true significance, the woman who wears it must live her life in accordance with the concept it symbolizes. It would be hypocrisy for her to do otherwise. If a woman wears a head covering as a sign of submission to male authority, yet holds a position in society where she exercises authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12), or speaks publicly in church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), or has an attitude of rebellion toward male authority, she is living in hypocrisy. Her head covering represents one thing, while her life represents another. So I ask my female readers: What kind of woman will you be? Will you wear a head covering but refuse to live your life in harmony with the principle it symbolizes? Or will you agree from your heart to submit to male authority and wear the head covering as a symbol of your commitment?

Avoiding Dishonor to the Head

Another reason to practice head covering is to avoid dishonoring the head. In the words of Paul, “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. 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” (1 Corinthians 11:4-5). But what exactly does it mean to

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dishonor one's head? Some Bible scholars think it means to dishonor one's authority figure. According to this view, when a man prays with something on his head, he is dishonoring Christ, who is the spiritual head over man. And when a woman prays uncovered, she is dishonoring man, her direct authority figure.

Although this explanation seems reasonable at first glance, a closer look at the text reveals it was not the intended meaning of the Apostle. Rather, when Paul speaks of dishonoring one's head, he is talking about the body part called by that name. For immediately after saying a woman dishonors her head by praying unveiled, he adds, "For that is one and the same as if her head were shaved" (1 Corinthians 11:5). Now the fact that Paul compares the dishonor done to a woman's head by praying unveiled with the dishonor done to her head by having her hair shaved off implies he is speaking about her natural head. He cannot be speaking about her authority figure, otherwise verse 5 would mean that dishonoring men by refusing to veil is the same as being shaved – an analogy that no longer makes sense.

But why is a woman's head dishonored by her neglect of the veil? And why is a man's head dishonored by being covered? The answer is because such actions are improper (1 Corinthians 11:13) according to apostolic tradition (1 Corinthians 11:2). If it is shameful for someone in an American restaurant to scoop up soup with his bare hands because Western tradition teaches him to use a spoon; or if it is disgraceful for a man to put on a hoop skirt, wear makeup and attach dangling earrings to his ears, because society teaches these items

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pertain to women; how much more shameful is it to transgress the divine traditions of the Bible (such as baptism, communion and head covering), which have been given as express commands to the people of God? According to Scripture, head covering during prayer is part of being a Christian woman, and praying bare-headed is part of being a believing man. Therefore, how can a man have something on his head when praying and not bring shame upon his head by doing so? For he is dressing his head in the sight of God, angels and saints as if he were a woman and not a man. And as for the woman, how can she neglect to veil when praying and not bring shame upon her head? For by her lack of headdress she has given up the submissive role of a female in the sight of God and she is grasping at manhood.

This may seem strange to you. But if you were to travel half way around the world and observe the traditions of another culture, would they not seem strange and unnatural to you as well? So should not the traditions of the kingdom of heaven seem odd to humans, especially since they do not originate from this world but from another? Is this not the very reason why Paul is obliged to spend so much time on the subject, explaining the purpose for head covering, the proper use of it, and defending the practice with arguments and analogies? If veiling had been an easy thing for humans to understand, he would not have spoken about it in such depth. Yet the fact that he did demonstrates the head covering ordinance is a concept foreign to humans, though also one of great importance.

Because of the Angels

Besides wearing the head covering to symbolize man's authority and to avoid dishonoring the head, Paul names another reason for women to veil. This reason is "because of the angels" (1 Corinthians 11:10). But what exactly does Paul mean when he says women ought to veil because of the angels? Why are angels a good reason for women to cover their heads?

Paul provides very few clues in the head covering passage to answer these questions. Perhaps this is because the Apostle had explained everything to the Corinthians in person, and now he was only briefly reminding them of what he had taught orally. Whatever the case, Paul does leave us with one clue. This is the fact that Paul did not write, "because of angels," but, "because of THE angels." The presence of the definite article "the" implies (in both Greek and English) that Paul had specific angels in mind, not just angels in general.²⁷ So what kind of angels was Paul referring to? This question has been answered in a variety of ways.

Some have taken the angels to metaphorically represent the holy men of the church, in whose presence women should veil to prevent sexual temptation. However, this view is hard to support since women are only commanded to veil when praying or prophesying. Does this mean that bare-headed women are a snare to men only when praying, but as soon as they are finished their bare heads cease to be a sexual stumbling block? If the head covering was a matter of modesty, and women were supposed to veil when praying so they would not

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cause their brothers to stumble, the Apostle would have urged women to veil all the time, or at least any time they were in public. But he did not. It should also be noted this view does not account for the fact that men are commanded to uncover their heads when praying or prophesying. If women are to veil to be modest, why are men commanded to keep their heads bare?

Others believe Paul was referring to holy angels. According to this view, angels are always watching, keeping records of our actions and giving an account to God. That is why Jesus said, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). And this is also why Paul appeals to angels, when he wrote to Timothy, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep the rules without prejudice, doing nothing from partiality” (1 Timothy 5:21). If angels are watching even our smallest actions and reporting them to God on a regular basis, this provides motivation for us to be careful to obey all God’s commands, including the head covering ordinance. Hence “the angels” Paul mentions might refer to the holy beings that inhabit heaven.

The third view holds that Paul was speaking of fallen angels. In verses 8 and 9 Paul refers to the story of Adam and Eve found in the first two chapters of Genesis. So it is possible that when Paul refers to “the angels,” he might be referring to the wicked angels mentioned in the sixth chapter of the same book. These angels (who are referred to as “sons of God”) took wives

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for themselves of the daughters of men and through them produced offspring in the form of giants. If Paul was speaking about fallen angels, he would be warning women to obey God's command to veil, because if they fail to do so, they are symbolically stepping out from beneath the authority and protection of man, for whom they were created, and opening themselves up to various forms of demonic attack. The demonic attack could include the physical marriage of women to demons, as well as other forms of oppression. Hence, for women, the wearing of the head covering might be a means of spiritual protection, while its absence during prayer or prophesy might be an open door for demonic attack.

A former pastor I know once told a story about one of his female relatives who had joined her friends as they were playing with a ouija board. The girl's friends asked questions, and the evil spirit provided them with answers. At last it came time for her to make an inquiry. Since she was a conservative Mennonite, she was wearing a prayer veiling on her head. When she asked her question, the spirit replied that it could not give her an answer while her head was covered. This response shook up the girl considerably. This story could be evidence that the head covering provides spiritual protection from demonic beings.

An Anabaptist woman named Kay Miller recounted the following story about a girl she knew who decided to head cover:

As a church, we had been working with a young teenage girl who... had come from a broken home, had been abused as a child... One weekend

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we were all gathered together for a time of special meetings. She responded at one of the invitations and her repentance was undoubtedly genuine...

Later... she was asked about wearing the head veiling – would she want to yield herself in this way to God’s authority over her life, and have the protection of the angels over her? She was full of doubts and fears at the very suggestion, so we didn’t press the issue.

But the turmoil within her continued. One moment she wanted to, and the next moment she didn’t. Somehow she couldn’t seem to lay the thought aside. Finally, on her own, she asked for a veiling, and when one of the sisters was putting it on her she began to cry. She cried so hard they came to ask the rest of us sisters what to do.

I asked her, “Don’t you want to wear it?” She insisted that she did, so I asked her, “Then why are you crying?” She didn’t know why – only that she felt so frightened. We asked her if we should take it off, and she said “No,” and then “Yes,” and then she didn’t know... Finally we decided to take the veiling off... Her violent crying stopped, but she was not at all happy; in fact, she looked simply miserable.

After talking to her for awhile, I gave her a hug. She began to cry again, and clung to me almost frantically. I didn’t know what to do. I said to her bluntly, “You will just have to tell Satan to leave you alone in Jesus’ name!” not knowing why I said it, or that I was going to. She took me literally and said it out loud. Then she began to scream it

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out with such violence that some of the sisters went after the brothers to help us.

While everyone gathered in prayer, she was delivered that evening from Satan's control. Her joy was so contagious and so complete, we couldn't help but rejoice with her. She was a different person. And before we had scarcely adjusted to this new young woman, she asked for the veiling again. This time her face was radiant as she wore it, and there was no fear.

The point I would like to bring out in this testimony is the rewards of a simple, uncomplicated obedience to God's Word. The power of wearing the veiling is evident. Even the demons tremble before it! We praise God for the way He used the veiling to bring out the evil roots that we had no way of knowing were there.²⁸

This being said, it is important to remember that the phrase, "because of the angels," is very short, and the clues we have to understand it are vague and few in number. It is therefore difficult to know what the phrase means with dogmatic certainty. However, it is important to note that this phrase does make one thing obvious: The head covering is not, and cannot be, a symbol that was only relevant to humans living thousands of years ago in a specific cultural context. Rather, it must be a timeless symbol that has significance in the spiritual realm, which women ought to wear now, just as much as they did in Paul's day, "because of the angels."

4

Make-Believe History

Today a number of Bible teachers claim Paul wrote the head covering ordinance because he wanted Christians to conform to the practices of their day so they would not offend unbelievers. Which culture were they supposed to conform to? Some Bible teachers affirm the veiling was a practice of the Greeks and Romans. Others hold that it was a practice especially important in Corinth to distinguish good women from prostitutes. And still others claim that it was an ancient Jewish custom. But in spite of their differences, they all come to the same conclusion: Now that culture has changed, Christians can discard the head covering ordinance. But the questions remain: Did non-Christians of the first century actually practice head covering as described in 1 Corinthians 11? And did Paul really write the head covering command to make sure Christians were socially appropriate?

Greco-Roman Culture

Some Bible teachers argue that women do not need to observe the head covering ordinance because it was originally based on Greco-Roman culture that has now changed. In Paul's day, they say, it was considered shocking for a Greek or Roman woman to appear in public without a veil. Therefore, the only reason Paul commanded women to cover their heads was because he wanted them to be sensitive to the culture around them and avoid offending non-believers unnecessarily. However, since culture has changed, they conclude the need to obey this command has passed away.

The first thing you should notice about this argument is that it is not supported by Scripture. In his discussion on head coverings, Paul never says anything about culture or custom being the basis for his command. In fact, what the Apostle does write completely flies in the face of this belief. Paul explains that the head covering is a symbol of a woman's position under the authority of man (1 Corinthians 11:3, 10); is based on distinctions in human nature and purpose (1 Corinthians 11:7, 9-10); and is to be worn by women on account of the angels (1 Corinthians 11:10). As you can see, none of these statements have anything to do with Greco-Roman culture or social customs.

Secondly, if it really was shocking for a woman to go into public unveiled, and that was the only reason Paul wrote about head coverings, the Apostle would not have written that it was a dishonor for a woman to be unveiled specifically when praying or prophesying, since these

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activities can be performed in private just as well as in public. It would have made much more sense for him to have said, “Whenever a woman goes into public, she must cover her head, because, as we all know, it is dishonorable for a woman to appear in public with her head uncovered.” However, Paul did not say this. Instead, he wrote that it is dishonorable for a woman to have her head uncovered when praying or prophesying.

The belief that the head covering was based on Greco-Roman culture also faces another problem: Contrary to the pseudo-history taught in many commentaries on 1 Corinthians 11, the Greeks and Romans did not consider it indecent for a woman to appear in public without a veil. According to David Bercot, a scholar of early Christian history and beliefs, there are many portraits, dating back to around the time of Paul, that depict Greek and Roman women with unveiled heads. This archaeological evidence implies it was not considered indecent or shocking for a woman to go into public without a head covering.²⁹

Other scholars of antiquity agree with Bercot. For instance, Dr. W. J. Gill, in his writing on “The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head-Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” made the following statement:

Public marble portraits of women at Corinth, presumably members of wealthy and prestigious families, are most frequently shown bare-headed. This would suggest that it was socially acceptable in a Roman colony for women to be seen bare-headed in public.³⁰

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It should also be noted that Tertullian, who had traveled through many parts of the Roman Empire, made the following observation: “Among the Jews, so usual is it for their women to have the head veiled, that they may thereby be recognized.”³¹ Now if Jewish women could be recognized simply because they wore veils in public, this implies that most Gentile women did not cover their heads. Once again, this is clear evidence that Greek and Roman culture did not require women to have their head covered in public.



Figure 17: Marble portrait of a young woman, said to be from Greece, c. 98-117 AD

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Figure 18: Roman portrait of a young woman, 55-60 AD



Figure 19: Portrait of a woman with ornate braids, 81-100 AD

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Figure 20: Portrait of a woman, attributed to Solon, 1st century BC



Figure 21: Bronze portrait of a Roman matron, 20-50 AD

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Figure 22: Fresco of a woman: from the Villa Arianna at Stabiae, 1st century AD

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Figure 23: Greco-Roman style portrait of a woman: from Egypt, 54-68 AD

In addition to the foregoing arguments, it should be remembered that the head covering command does not apply only to women. Paul also wrote that it is shameful for a man to have his head covered when praying or prophesying. Therefore, those who argue it was culturally unacceptable for a Greek or Roman woman to go into public with her head uncovered, must also contend that it was culturally unacceptable for a Greek or Roman man to go into public with something on his head. But once again, this is simply not the case. In fact, besides being inoffensive for men to cover their heads in public,³² it was actually a Roman custom for men to veil their heads specifically during religious ceremonies.

Dr. Richard Oster Jr., in his writing on the “Use, Misuse and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians,” wrote that it was very common for Roman men to cover their heads during religious ceremonies, and that this practice is depicted on monuments, statues and coins from all around the Roman world.³³ The writings of ancient Roman authors, such as the poet Virgil (*Aeneid* 3.403-409), the biographer Plutarch (*Moralia*, “The Roman Questions,” 10), the poet and philosopher Lucretius (*On the Nature of Things*, 5.1198-1201) and the historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*The Roman Antiquities* 12.16.4), also show it was customary for Roman men to veil their heads during pagan worship rituals. Since Corinth was a Roman settlement, it is only reasonable to believe this widespread element of Roman religious culture was also prevalent in that city.

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So as you can see, it simply is not true that Paul commanded Christian women to cover their heads because he wanted them to be culturally appropriate and avoid offending non-believing Greeks and Romans unnecessarily. There is no Biblical, rational or historical support for this belief, and all the evidence we do have contradicts it.



Figure 24: Roman priest with a toga drawn over his head, 2nd or 3rd century AD

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Figure 25: Portrait of Nero: from Corinth, Greece; 60 AD



*Figure 26: Detail of a relief depicting Marcus Aurelius
sacrificing before the temple of Jupiter on Capitoline Hill, c.
176-180 AD*

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Figure 27: Augustus Caesar with his head covered during a religious ceremony, Imperial era

Prostitutes at Corinth

We now arrive at the next argument people use to explain why Christians no longer have to obey the head covering command: At the time Paul wrote his Epistle, many Christians will argue, Corinth was an extremely immoral city, full of temple prostitutes who distinguished themselves from the common women by going into public without veils. The only reason Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and commanded their women to wear head coverings is because he did not want Christian women to be mistaken for prostitutes. Since modern women do not face this issue, they conclude it is no longer necessary for Christians to observe the veiling command.

Those who make this argument have overlooked a very crucial detail: The head covering command does not apply only to women, but also to men. Therefore, if Paul wrote about head coverings solely because he did not want Christian women at Corinth to be mistaken for prostitutes, why did Paul also say that men should refrain from having their heads covered when praying or prophesying?

Besides overlooking the fact that the head covering command applies to men as well as women, the argument that Corinthian women were told to veil so they would not be mistaken for prostitutes also runs into a number of other problems: First of all, as stated previously, it was very common for Greek and Roman women to go into public without veils on their heads. Therefore, it simply is not true that prostitutes

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distinguished themselves from the common women by not wearing a veil. Nor is it true that Paul commanded the women at Corinth to wear head coverings so they would not be mistaken for prostitutes, since the Apostle himself provided other reasons for the ordinance. Nor is it true that Paul gave the head covering command exclusively for the Christians at Corinth, since the writings of the early church fathers reveal that churches all across the world obeyed this command. In fact, it is not even true that first century Corinth was an especially immoral city, teeming with prostitutes.

So why do so many commentators and other Bible scholars believe that Corinth was an extremely licentious city, full of prostitutes? Where did the rumor begin? The story has been traced back to a small passage in the writings of an ancient geographer named Strabo, who lived about the same time as the Apostle Paul. This is what Strabo wrote:

The temple of Venus at Corinth was so rich, that it had more than a thousand women consecrated to the service of the goddess, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated as offerings to the goddess. The city was frequented and enriched by the multitudes who resorted thither on account of these women. Masters of ships freely squandered all their money, and hence the proverb, "It is not in every man's power to go to Corinth."³⁴

At first glance, you may conclude that Bible scholars are correct in saying Corinth was an extremely immoral city, full of prostitutes. But if you take a closer look at the text, you might notice that Strabo did not write in the

present tense. He did not say that “the temple of Venus at Corinth **is** so rich, that it **has** more than a thousand women,” but that it “**was** so rich, that it **had** more than a thousand women.” Nor did he write that “the city **is** frequented,” but that it “**was** frequented.” So why is it so important that Strabo wrote in the past tense? This fact is important because it implies that Strabo (who lived about the same time as the Apostle Paul) was not describing what Corinth was like at his time, but how it had been in past ages.

This fact is also clearly brought out by reading what the geographer has to say later in his account. Strabo wrote:

The Corinthians, when subject to Philip, espoused his party very zealously, and individually conducted themselves so contemptuously toward the Romans, that persons ventured to throw down filth upon their ambassadors, when passing by their houses. They were immediately punished for these and other offenses and insults. A large army was sent out under the command of Lucius Mummius, who razed the city... Corinth remained a long time deserted, till at length it was restored on account of its natural advantages by divus Caesar, who sent colonists thither, who consisted, for the most part, of the descendants of free-men.³⁵

In other words, the Greek city of Corinth, which had been famous for its temple to Venus and cult prostitutes, was completely demolished in 146 BC, and the place “remained,” as Strabo wrote, “a long time deserted.” Nearly one hundred years later, in 44 BC, Julius Caesar

built a new Corinth – the city that Paul visited.³⁶ According to Strabo, 1st century Corinth only had a “small temple to Venus,”³⁷ instead of the one that had contained “more than a thousand women consecrated to the goddess.” And it does not appear, from Strabo’s account, that this new Corinth was famous for its prostitutes or licentiousness.

Hence, although it is commonly taught that Corinthian women were urged to wear veils so they would not be mistaken for prostitutes, this position fails to have any Biblical, rational or historical evidence in its support. The theory appears to have been based on a misunderstanding of Strabo’s description of Corinth, as well as a number of other faulty assumptions. And all the information we have on the subject stands in direct opposition to the theory.

Jewish Tradition

Those who believe the head covering was based on ancient culture are now forced to turn to a different argument: They will say the head covering was based on ancient Jewish custom. But this makes no sense at all. Why would Paul command the church in Corinth, Greece, to observe a custom of the Jews? This is completely absurd, especially since all throughout the New Testament Paul argues that Gentile Christians do not have to follow Jewish customs – even those that were once ordained by God.

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On one occasion, Paul confronted Peter for trying to “compel the Gentiles to live as the Jews” (Galatians 2:14). And in his Epistle to the Colossians, Paul wrote, “Let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” (Colossians 2:16-17) So as you can see, it would make no sense for Paul to impose an exotic Jewish custom on the Greek and Roman believers in Corinth, when he himself taught that Gentiles should not be obligated to observe Jewish customs.

There is also another difficulty with the belief that the head covering command was based on Jewish culture. While it is true that Jewish women wore head coverings, there is no evidence that Jewish men were forbidden from covering their heads. If you visit a modern Jewish synagogue, or any other place where there is a large population of Jews, you will find that many Jewish men



Figure 28: Modern Jewish men wearing kippot

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actually wear a small covering on their heads. And this is not merely a modern custom. For even in ancient times, Jewish priests were expected to cover their heads (Exodus 28:4, 36-40; 29:6; Ezekiel 44:18-20). Scripture even records an instance where King David covered his head before praying (2 Samuel 15:30-31). Again, these passages provide clear evidence that the head covering command was not based on Jewish custom or culture.



Figure 29: Depiction of an ancient Jewish high priest

Before concluding this section, one last thing should be noted: As it was stated previously, Paul not only neglects to name culture as the reason for the head covering ordinance, but he also provides reasons that directly contradict this view. So what are the reasons Paul provides for the command? “A man,” Paul wrote, “ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man

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created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels” (1 Corinthians 11:7-10).

So who should we believe? Should we believe modern scholars who say Paul based the head covering ordinance on the culture of his day? Or should we believe what Paul himself wrote by the inspiration of God? According to the Apostle, the reason why a man should not cover his head is because “he is the image and glory of God.” And the reason why a woman ought to cover her head is, first, because “man was not created for the woman, but woman for the man;” and second, “because of the angels.” None of these reasons have anything to do with ancient culture or social practices.

5

The Long-Hair Interpretation

Near the end of the head covering passage, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Judge among 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” (1 Corinthians 11:13-15). Historically, Christians have always interpreted these verses to be an analogy: Paul is comparing the dishonor of a man’s head being covered, or a woman’s head being uncovered, during prayer or prophecy, with the shame of a man having long hair, or a woman having short hair. However, some modern Bible scholars no longer believe the Apostle was making an analogy. On the contrary, they view Paul’s words to be an explanation that long hair is the required head covering.

So which interpretation is correct? There are several reasons to believe the Apostle wrote about a fabric covering and not long hair.

Historical Interpretation

One reason to believe Paul wrote about a material covering is because this has always been the universal teaching of the Christian church from its inception through the mid-1800s. However, the belief that long hair is the only head covering required of a woman is a recent invention. Even notable defenders of the long-hair interpretation, such as writer and scholar A. Philip Brown, admit that this was not the historical position of the church but received scholarly defense only in relatively recent times.³⁸

The writings of early church leaders and teachers, such as Irenaeus (130-220), Tertullian (145-220), Clement of Alexandria (150-215), Hippolytus of Rome (170-235), Basil of Caesarea (329-379), Chrysostom (347-407), Jerome (347-420), Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and Theodoret of Cyrus (393-457), as well as depictions from early Christian art, clearly indicate the early church was in complete agreement that the head covering was a cloth covering, and the use of a fabric veiling was the universal practice of the primitive church. Tertullian, in the eighth chapter of his book *On the Veiling of Virgins*, makes it apparent that even the church at Corinth understood Paul to be writing about an artificial head covering, and not long hair.

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So who do you think is more likely to be correct? Are the early Christians (especially the believers at Corinth, who originally received verbal instruction from Paul, were under leadership initially put in place by the apostles, and spoke in the same language in which the New Testament was written) more likely to have known the truth about head coverings? Or is the segment of the modern church (separated from Paul by language and nearly two thousand years of church history) more likely to be correct in its belief that long hair is the woman's head covering?

But taking this argument a step further, not only was the early church in agreement that the head covering was a cloth veiling, so was the entire Christian church throughout the centuries until the modern era. David Philips in his book *Headcovering Throughout Christian History* cites from numerous Christian leaders, teachers and scholars from a variety of backgrounds and doctrinal persuasions on the subject of head covering, and it is interesting to note that they all viewed the head covering to be a fabric covering. So once again, the fact that the long-hair interpretation was invented so late in history (probably several decades after the Book of Mormon was written by Joseph Smith) is a clear indication it is a false view.

Logical Consistency

Another reason to believe Paul wrote about a fabric covering is because this explanation logically harmonizes with the passage. However, the long-hair

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interpretation causes serious logical inconsistencies. If you read through 1 Corinthians 11:4-16 with the preconception that long hair is the woman's head covering, you will soon find the passage ceases to make sense. To illustrate the truth of this statement, replace the words "covered" and "uncovered" in the passage with "long hair" and "short hair," and this is how the passage reads: "Every man praying or prophesying, having long hair on his head, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with short hair on her head dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. For if a woman does not have long hair on her head, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her have long hair."

Do you see the inconsistencies created by this reading? In the first place, if the head covering were long hair, Paul would have written that a woman must keep her head covered, and a man must keep his head uncovered, at all times and in every circumstance – not only when engaged in prayer or prophecy. However, the Apostle writes that these actions must be performed specifically when a man or woman is praying or prophesying. This implies a man is free to cover his head, and a woman to uncover hers, when not engaged in these activities. So is Paul saying that every time a man kneels down in prayer, he must first take off his long hair, and once he is done praying he can put it back on? And every time a woman decides to speak to God, she has to quickly grow her hair out to a suitable length, but as soon as the prayer is over she is free to shave it off again? This is absurd!

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Clearly, Paul cannot be speaking about hair lengths, but must be talking about a cloth covering that can be put on or taken off at will.

The view that long hair is a woman's head covering causes the passage to become even more illogical at verse 6, where Paul wrote, "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." The obvious meaning of this verse is that if a woman refuses to veil when praying or prophesying, she should also be shamed by having her hair cut off. But if she does not want the disgrace of short hair, she should wear a veil. However, when one replaces the words "covered" and "uncovered" with "long hair" and "short hair," the verse reads: "If a woman does not have long hair on her head (meaning she has short hair or no hair at all), let her also be shorn (which is to say, let her hair be cut off). But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved (meaning if it is shameful for a woman to have short-cropped hair or a bald head), let her have long hair."

Observe how illogical this verse has become! If a woman does not have long hair on her head, she has already been shorn, in which case it makes no sense for Paul to say, "Let her also be shorn." Furthermore, it is unreasonable for Paul to try to convince her to have long hair by having her hair cut off. If a woman made the choice to have her hair shorn off, apparently she does not consider it disgraceful to have short hair, in which case it is illogical for Paul to appeal to her sense of disgrace at being shorn a second time to convince her to

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have long hair. As you can see, the long-hair interpretation completely twists the head covering passage into a senseless jumble of words!

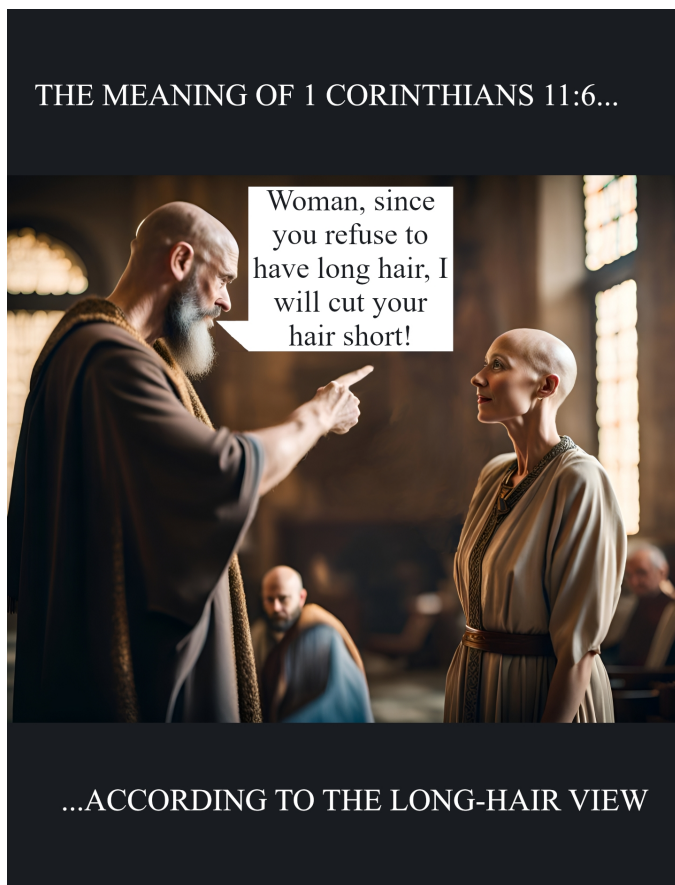


Figure 30: If the long-hair interpretation is true, 1 Corinthians 11:6 becomes an absurd exhortation by Paul to cut off the hair of a woman who chooses to have little or no hair as a means to convince her to have long hair.

Symbolizing Submission

The third reason Paul must have written about a fabric covering is because it is a more fitting symbol of female submission to male authority than long hair. In the head covering passage, Paul describes long hair as a woman's "glory" (1 Corinthians 11:15). It is something that women generally take pride in, view as one of their most prized adornments, spend a lot of time preparing before going out into public, and even use as a means to draw attention to themselves. If it were to be used as a symbol at all, long hair would represent something exactly opposite to the head covering; for the head covering is meant to symbolize a woman's position under the authority and rule of man and is supposed to be a means of fostering such character traits as humility, modesty, reverence and submission.

Amber Rose, a Catholic girl who was interviewed by Matt Fradd of the YouTube channel *Pints with Aquinas*,³⁹ explained that when she was a child she never wanted to veil for Mass when her mother forced her to do so. But years later, she made the decision to veil and found that head covering was an act that truly humbled her and reminded her that the worship of God was not something that revolved around herself. She explained that she could spend time before Mass or other activities doing her hair and getting herself all "glammed up" and ready so that everyone around her would look and think how attractive she was; but the moment she covered her hair by putting on the veiling, she felt she was temporarily resigning her rights to get involved in the "dating game" and was instead recognizing there was

something more important going on than herself. So as you can see, when a woman puts a veil on her head, she is covering her “glory” to some degree, which is an act of modesty, reverence and humility, and thus a much more fitting symbol of submission to male authority than her hair.

Greek Word Usage

When Paul first speaks of a man “having his head covered,” (1 Corinthians 11:4) he uses the phrase *κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων* (*kata kephalēs echōn*). This phrase is employed outside of the New Testament in the Septuagint version of Esther 6:12 and in Plutarch’s *Regum* 82.13. In both cases, it was used to refer to an artificial head covering, implying this was the natural meaning of the phrase in the minds of Greek readers.⁴⁰ Throughout the rest of the head covering passage, Paul uses variations of the word *κατακαλύπτω* (*katakaluptō*) for his five other references to a man’s or woman’s head being “covered” or “uncovered.” Now the word *κατακαλύπτω* (*katakaluptō*) means “to veil or cover one’s self.”⁴¹ After giving some examples of how this word was used outside of the New Testament, Jeremy Gardiner concludes that when this word is used in its positive or negative form with reference “to the human head, it always refers to a material head covering.”⁴² Therefore, based on the word usage of the day, any native Greek reader from around the first century AD would have understood Paul to be speaking about a fabric covering.

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However, when Paul writes, “Her hair is given to her for a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:15), he suddenly drops the word κατακαλύπτω (*katakaluptō*) and instead uses the Greek word περιβόλαιον (*peribolaion*). This word is defined as “a covering thrown around.”⁴³ Although this word has a similar, though distinct, meaning in Greek, the fact that Paul consistently used the word κατακαλύπτω (*katakaluptō*) throughout the head covering passage but then abruptly employs an entirely different word when talking about long hair implies Paul wanted to show the “covering” he is now talking about is not the same as the one he spoke about earlier in the passage. In other words, the Apostle wanted to carefully guard his readers against all misunderstandings, including the view that long hair is the woman’s head covering. And judging from the writing of the early Christians who were native speakers of the Greek language, there was no confusion – until more than seventeen hundred years later, after Scripture had been translated into English and other languages, and the subtle differences in Greek words were often left undifferentiated.

Although many popular translations do not make this distinction apparent to the English reader, there are a number of translations that do endeavor to render in English the distinction of words made in Greek. For instance, the New Revised Standard Version (1989) uses the words “veiled” and “unveiled” throughout most of the head covering passage until verse 15, where the word “covering” is employed. (Note: Applicable quoted words are rendered in bold typeface by the author below.)

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1 Corinthians 11:4-7, 13-15 – Any man who prays or prophesies with **something on his head** disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head **unveiled** disgraces her head – it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not **veil** herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a **veil**. For a man ought not to have his head **veiled**, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man... Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head **unveiled**? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a **covering**. (NRSV)⁴⁴

Thus the New Revised Standard Version demonstrates in English the word distinction Paul made in Greek, eliminating potential confusion for readers, and of course helping to rule out the long-hair misinterpretation.

In conclusion, the required head covering cannot be long hair, because this stance first, fails to agree with the view of the early church, as well as the position of the church in general throughout history; second, causes the passage, especially verse 6, to become hopelessly illogical and contradictory; third, is a less fitting symbol of submission than a material veiling; and fourth, ignores the important distinction Paul made in Greek between the “covering” in verse 15 and his other

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references to the head being “veiled.” Hence verses 14 and 15 must be an analogy from nature illustrating the need for the veiling ordinance and the shame of disobeying it.

6

Miscellaneous Objections

A wide variety of objections have been raised against the head covering command. Christians argue the veiling may be abandoned in the face of contention; the head covering is a sign of legalism; believers should have the freedom to choose if they wish to practice veiling; obeying the command weakens Christian witness by making them unapproachable; and head covering is not a salvation issue, but a topic of little importance. But are these arguments true? Or are they baseless claims without proof or substance?

Contention

The belief that contention is a good reason to abandon head coverings is based on the last verse of the veiling passage, where Paul wrote, “If anyone seems to be

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contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16). The word “custom” is seen as referring to the practice of head covering, and Paul is viewed as encouraging Christians to discard veiling once people get into heated arguments over the issue. However, this interpretation is unreasonable, since it implies the head covering command is an issue of little importance that can be ignored whenever it becomes inconvenient. However, the fact that God inspired Paul to carefully explain, defend and command the use of head coverings in the Holy Scriptures proves that God views the subject as one of value, and therefore we should hold fast to it in spite of contentious arguments. In addition, Paul does not say, “You SHALL have no such custom” (using the command form), but rather, “We HAVE no such custom” (using the present tense), implying that the custom he spoke of was not generally practiced by the apostles or the churches of God at the time he wrote – a statement that would not be true if the word “custom” referred to head coverings.

However, there is a far more reasonable explanation: When Paul wrote, “We have no such custom,” he is not referring to head coverings, but to contentiousness. In other words, the Apostle is reminding Christians it is inappropriate to argue contentiously against head coverings or any other Scriptural practice, since contentiousness is a custom that was, and ought to be, unfamiliar to the church. This is the view that was held by Cyprian (200-258), bishop of Carthage, as you can see from the following citation:

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We, as far as in us lies, do not contend on behalf of heretics with our colleagues and fellow-bishops, with whom we maintain a divine concord and peace of the Lord; especially since the apostle says, “If any man, however, is thought contentious, we have no such custom, neither the Church of God.” Charity of spirit, the honour of the college, the bond of faith, and priestly concord, are maintained by us with patience and gentleness.⁴⁵

Note that Cyprian quotes the Apostle without any reference to head coverings whatsoever. Apparently, he did not think the verse meant the custom of wearing veils should be abolished as soon as people start arguing about it. On the contrary, he understood Paul’s statement, “We have no such custom,” to refer to contentiousness. Nor is he alone in this view, for Chrysostom takes a similar position on the subject when he writes:

“For we... have no such custom,” so as to contend and to strive and to oppose ourselves. And he stopped not even here, but added, “Neither the Churches of God;” signifying that they resist and oppose themselves to the whole world by not yielding. However, even if the Corinthians were then contentious, yet now the whole world hath received and kept this law. So great is the power of the Crucified.⁴⁶

Therefore, do not misunderstand Paul’s words as permission to cast away the veiling ordinance. Rather, recognize his words to be a warning to those who argue vehemently against head coverings, or any other Biblical

teaching. For those who do so engage in a custom that was shunned not only by the apostles, but by all the churches of God. Therefore, woe to those modern church leaders and teachers who have contended against the need to obey the veiling command, as well as other injunctions of Scripture, both in their sermons and in their books! And woe to those who join their ranks! For they are committing that very crime which Scripture has openly denounced.

Legalism

Christian women who head cover are often accused of being legalistic. When my mother decided to dress modestly and put on a head covering, one of her close friends accused her of being a legalist. And when I was in a mission's program, a guest teacher singled out one of my classmates and used her as an example of legalism because she was wearing a head covering. So why do Christians accuse head-covered women of being legalists? Although there may be several answers to this question, the main reason seems to be because they do not know what the word means, and therefore they use it to refer to anything other Christians believe or practice they do not wish to believe or practice. So how can the word be properly defined? In its broadest sense, legalism is the inappropriate use of law.⁴⁷ In its more restricted and commonly used sense, legalism is seeking salvation by works instead of through Christ.⁴⁸

To clarify this definition, imagine two men who strive to live moral lives. Both pray and read their Bibles daily,

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attend church twice a week and serve at a soup kitchen on the weekends. However, one person does all of these good works out of selfish motivation, hoping to earn for himself a place in heaven by his actions. He puts his faith in his works for salvation, not in Jesus. Meanwhile, the other man has been saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, and now he performs good works because he has a heart overflowing with love and gratitude toward God for what he has done. Although the actions of both individuals are the same, notice that the first man is a legalist, because he performs his works from the wrong motives, while the other man is a true Christian, because his actions are borne from love and thankfulness.

It should now be clear that a woman who covers her head is not necessarily a legalist. Of course, it is possible for a veiled woman to have legalistic tendencies. But the same could be said of a woman who does not veil. The point is to be careful of your motives. Are you selfishly obeying God's commands in the hope that you can earn your way to heaven? If so, you are a legalist and must repent. Or have you recognized the depth of your sins, cried out to God for mercy, received salvation through Jesus, and now you are obeying God's commands out of a heart of gratefulness and love? If so, you are a true Christian and not a legalist, no matter what people say.

Freedom

Some Christians argue they have freedom in Christ to choose if they want to practice head covering or not, and

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no one should judge them for their decision. They base their claim on passages such as the following:

Romans 14:2-6 – One believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another person esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes a day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

In this passage, Paul points out that we may have various opinions about topics the Bible does not speak definitively about. For example, should we be vegetarians or meat eaters? Should we celebrate certain holidays or not? Since these matters have no clear answer in terms of right and wrong, and we are given no command in Scripture regarding them, Paul says they are to be left to the discretion of each individual believer, and we are not to judge other people's decisions. However, there are things that the Bible clearly commands and prohibits, which Christians are not free to come up with differing opinions about. For example, the Bible commands us to pray and help the poor, and forbids us from worshiping idols or

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committing adultery. So the question is, what type of issue is head covering? Are we free to neglect veiling, because Scripture does not speak clearly about the practice? Or is it a topic that is clearly established in the Bible, and we are not free to do whatever we please with it?

There are at least three reasons to believe Christians may not do whatever they please in regard to head covering: First, Paul writes about head covering in the command form, saying that “a man indeed OUGHT not to cover his head” (1 Corinthians 11:7), and, “the woman OUGHT to have a symbol of authority on her head” (1 Corinthians 11:10), implying Christians are obligated to obey. However, if Paul had intended believers to have the freedom to choose to practice head covering or not, he would not have written that Christians “ought” to practice this ordinance, but rather they are free to choose for themselves what they wish to do. Second, Paul says, under the inspiration of God, that it is dishonorable and shameful for any Christian to neglect the veiling ordinance (1 Corinthians 11:4-6). Yet if it were true each Christian could choose whether to practice head covering or not, Paul would have said it was only dishonorable for certain believers to neglect the ordinance, if any at all. Third, Paul appeals to a variety of arguments about angels, creation order and nature (1 Corinthians 11:7-10, 14-15), in order to convince his readers to practice head covering. But if it truly was a matter of Christian freedom, there would be no reason for Paul to debate so earnestly for the practice. So all this to say, it does not appear that head covering is an issue

such as eating meat or observing holidays, where Christians can have opposing beliefs and practices and both be blameless. Rather, the head covering is established in Scripture as an ordinance that must be observed by all Christians, and those who refuse to obey are guilty.

Relevance

Some believers argue they do not have to obey the head covering ordinance, because doing so would make them irrelevant and unapproachable in modern culture, weakening their ability to reach people with the gospel. They point out that Paul became a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles, for the purpose of winning each class of persons to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:20-21). They affirm they should likewise become like the world in order to reach the world, even if it means neglecting the head covering command.

While this argument may sound good on the surface, it actually promotes sin. The Bible defines sin as the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). When God instructed Moses to miraculously produce water for Israel by speaking to a rock, but he instead struck the rock with his rod, God punished Moses by not allowing him to enter the Promise Land (Numbers 20:8-13). Although Moses' action was only a small deviation from God's instruction, it was sinful because it was disobedience to God's command. In the same way, disobeying the head covering command (however trivial it might appear) is sinful behavior since the ordinance

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was given by divine inspiration. Christ never transgressed God's commands to be relevant. And even though Paul became like those who did not have the Law of Moses in order to reach them, he carefully affirmed he was not "without law toward God, but under law toward Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21).

Moreover, God commands his people to "be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17), "not love the world" (1 John 2:15), and "not conform to this world" (Romans 12:2). Since Satan is the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31), the values and standards of secular society are often contrary to God's will and word. The head covering is one practical way to fulfill God's command to be separate and nonconformists, because it shows Christian women are not as influenced by worldly trends and fashions as they are by Scripture. However, neglecting the head covering command is a way of becoming one with the world, instead of separate from it, because it shows Christian women are more concerned about pleasing people than pleasing God.

Contrary to the claim that veiling is a hindrance to the gospel, the head covering is a good conversation starter about spiritual matters. My mother, sisters and friends have many stories to tell about curious people who have approached them to ask questions about their headdress. Instead of making Christians unapproachable, the head covering opens doors for conversations about God, Scripture and the Christian faith. Therefore, instead of shying away from this command for the sake of cultural relevance, Christians should embrace it as a counter-cultural tool for evangelism and spiritual dialogue.

Salvation

While one of my sisters was at a Christian retreat, a certain girl asked her why she practiced veiling. After my sister explained, the other girl said she still did not feel compelled to observe the head covering command, because veiling is not a salvation issue. Even if God did require women to veil, she reasoned God would not send her to hell simply because she had failed to obey him in this one matter. And there are many other Christians who take the same view. However, the question must be asked: Will God refrain from punishing anyone who neglects the veiling command? Will he welcome everyone into heaven who refuses to head cover? And even if he is gracious enough to do so, is God's grace a good reason for us to rebel against God's commands?

Contrary to the hopes and views of many Christians, there is no reason to believe God will not punish people for disobedience, even if the command seems trivial. There are many examples in Scripture of God punishing individuals for actions we might consider innocuous. For instance, Ananias and Sapphira were put to death for lying about their finances (Acts 5:1-11). A prophet was killed by a lion because he ate bread and drank water contrary to God's instructions (1 Kings 13:1-32). And God rejected Saul from being king because he did not wait to offer sacrifices with Samuel as he was told (1 Samuel 15:10-31). Therefore, even if you do not consider the head covering important, these Scriptures demonstrate there is no guarantee God will not discipline you for disobeying him even in trivial matters.

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But the truth is, there are reasons to believe the head covering is not a minor matter, but a topic of great importance. The fact that God inspired Paul to describe, demand and defend the use of head coverings at length in the text of Scripture (1 Corinthians 11:2-16) is proof enough that it is extremely vital. It should also be noted that God has only given a few symbolic commands to Christians, including baptism and communion. The fact that head covering is one of these few ordinances speaks to its significance. Hence, disobeying the head covering command is a great offense, comparable to refusing to get baptized after professing Christ or always neglecting to take communion.

Furthermore, because disobeying Scripture is sin, refusing to veil is a salvation issue. The Bible warns, “If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment” (Hebrews 10:26-27). And again, “He who despises the word will be destroyed, but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded” (Proverbs 13:13). You may find it difficult to believe God would send someone to hell for neglecting to veil. But consider the subject carefully: If you refuse to obey God’s commands because you do not think you will be punished, what does this reveal about your relationship with God? Does it not demonstrate you have a lack of love for the Lord, and your desire to please self is stronger than your desire to please God? And does it not also show you have a rebellious and stubborn heart? Ask yourself truthfully: Are these the signs of a zealous

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Christian headed for heaven? Or are they rather the marks of a false believer headed for perdition?

This said, God is gracious, and he knows the Christians who have never been taught about the veiling command, as well as those who have been misled by Christian teachers into thinking it is no longer necessary. These Christians may have very submissive hearts to God, but they lack proper instruction. These believers will likely be spared. But Scripture is clear that God will be much harder on the teachers who have misled them, as well as those who had knowledge of the truth yet trampled it underfoot. So have you been deceived? Have you neglected the head covering command because of lack of instruction in the past? If you have a submissive heart, turn now from your error, and obey the command of God, or else be aware your rebellious heart may very well lead you into the fires of hell.

The Practice of Veiling

Among those who practice veiling, there are many differences in application. Some only require wives to cover their heads, while others insist all adult females must veil. Some women only veil in church, while others use it in both public and private situations. And some are confident that only certain styles of head coverings are appropriate, while others do not view the type of veiling to be essential. So how should the head covering be properly practiced?

Who is required to practice head covering?

Paul wrote that “every woman” (1 Corinthians 11:5) ought to veil. The Greek word translated “woman” is γυνή (*gunē*) and can have two meanings. On the one hand, it can denote “a wife.”⁴⁹

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Mark 6:18 – John said to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s **wife** [γυνή].”

Acts 18:2 – He found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come with his **wife** [γυνή] Priscilla.

Although the word γυνή (*gunē*) can be translated “wife,” in the New Testament it often refers to “a woman of any age, whether virgin, or married, or widow.”⁵⁰ Consider the following passages to illustrate this truth:

John 4:16-18 – Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” The **woman** [γυνή] answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

In the foregoing passage, notice the word γυνή (*gunē*) is applied to a woman who had been married, but did not presently have a husband.

Luke 4:26 – But to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a **woman** [γυνή] who was a widow.

Matthew 22:25-27 – Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all, the **woman** [γυνή] died also.

In the proceeding passages, notice the word γυνή (*gunē*) is applied to widows.

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Luke 1:26-28 – Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one; the Lord is with you; blessed are you among **women** [γυνή]!”

In the foregoing passage, notice the word γυνή is used to refer to adult females in general, and the virgin Mary is included as one of them.

Because γυνή (*gunē*) can refer to any adult female, or wives in specific, Christians have long debated who is required to observe the veiling command. Did Paul require all women to wear a head covering? Or did he only intend wives to observe the ordinance? The early Christian bishop Tertullian faced this question around the year 200, and he answers it very eloquently in his book *On Prayer*:

The declaration is plain: “Every woman,” saith he, “praying and prophesying with head uncovered, dishonoureth her own head.” What is “every woman,” but woman of every age, of every rank, of every condition? By saying “every” he excepts nought of womanhood, just as he excepts nought of manhood either from not being covered; for just so he says, “Every man.” As, then, in the masculine sex, under the name of “man” even the “youth” is forbidden to be veiled; so, too, in the feminine, under the name of “woman,” even the “virgin” is bidden to be veiled. Equally in each sex let the younger age follow the discipline of the elder.⁵¹

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In his book *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian further argues that all of the arguments and analogies Paul provides for the head covering are applicable to virgins as well as wives, and therefore it stands to reason Paul wrote the command to all adult females, not married women alone:

If “the man is head of the woman,” of course (he is) of the virgin too... unless the virgin is a third generic class, some monstrosity with a head of its own. If “it is shameful for a woman to be shaven or shorn,” of course it is for a virgin... To her, then, to whom it is equally unbecoming to be shaven or shorn, it is equally becoming to be covered. If “the woman is the glory of the man,” how much more the virgin, who is a glory withal to herself! If “the woman is of the man,” and “for the sake of the man,” that rib of Adam was first a virgin.⁵²

Tertullian also points out that the church at Corinth, which had originally received verbal instruction from Paul on the subject of veiling, understood Paul to require all adult females to practice head covering, for he says:

So, too, did the Corinthians themselves understand him. In fact, at this day the Corinthians do veil their virgins. What the apostles taught, their disciples approve.⁵³

So according to Tertullian, there are at least three reasons to believe that the head covering command applies to all adult females, and not just married women: first, because Paul deliberately used the phrase “every woman” in regard to head covering, instead of “married

women”; second, because all of the arguments and analogies Paul used to explain and defend the practice of head covering are applicable to virgins as well as wives; and third, because the church at Corinth, where Paul had gone in person and taught with his own mouth, practiced veiling all adult females, whether married or unmarried – a tradition which they likely received from the apostles.

When are women supposed to veil?

Some Bible scholars believe women are not required to veil when praying in private, but only when they are at church. They argue that the head covering command was written in the context of public worship. However, it is important to note public worship is not mentioned in the head covering passage or the preceding chapter. There are some instructions on fleeing from idolatry and not eating meat sacrificed to idols. But these topics have nothing to do with the church service, and ironically they have everything to do with life in general. Hence, contrary to the claim that context proves head coverings only need to be worn during public worship, context actually indicates that women should veil whenever praying or prophesying, both in public and in private.

After Paul concludes the veiling passage, he goes on to speak about division in the church, and the abuse of the Lord’s Supper, using these words: “Now in giving these instructions, I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that

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there are divisions among you” (1 Corinthians 11:17-18). Notice there would be no need for Paul to introduce the subject of communion by letting the reader know the context is now church, if the Christian assembly had already been the established context. Hence, the fact that Paul found it necessary to say “when you come together” implies he did not have the gathering of believers in mind when he previously wrote about head coverings. Thus the context before and after the head covering passage both indicate the veiling ordinance was meant to apply to life in general – not only to the inside of a church building.

It should also be observed that in 1 Corinthians 14:26-38, Paul forbids women from speaking publicly to believers in the church: females are not even allowed to ask questions for the sake of learning. Therefore, it makes no sense to say women must be veiled when prophesying in the assembly, when women are not allowed to prophesy publicly in the first place. Once again, this is very clear evidence that Paul did not have, and could not have had, public worship in mind when he wrote about head coverings. And this of course means women are required to wear head coverings not only in church, but whenever and wherever they pray or prophecy.

While some restrict head covering to the inside of a church building, others argue women should wear the head covering all the time. They point out women are to veil when praying, and prayer is to be offered “without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), concluding veils are to be worn continuously. However, this is misinterpreting

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the Bible. Praying without ceasing does not mean we are required to pray every moment of every day, taking no time to eat, sleep or work. Rather, it means we are to offer prayer on a regular basis and should be careful to never allow long intervals of prayerless time to occur in our lives. With this in mind, it should be easy to see that requiring women to wear head coverings as a permanent part of their clothing is an unreasonable application.

The belief that women should veil all the time is also illogical because it is virtually impossible to fulfill. Taken literally, it would mean women are required to wear a head covering when in bed, in the shower, when swimming, and in every other circumstance. Yet even among those who theoretically believe the veiling should be worn all the time, I have never met someone who actually practiced this teaching in a literal manner. Hence, the impossibility of this doctrine should be an indication that it is false.

Finally, if it were true that women should cover all the time, it would be equally true that men must never cover their heads, because the head covering command applies to men as well as women. Yet among churches that teach women must veil without ceasing, I have never found one that forbids men from covering their heads in all circumstances. On the contrary, I have witnessed many men from these congregations wearing hats or other headgear on a regular basis. Therefore, the requirement for women to always veil is a double standard that must be corrected. However, it is important to note that although women are not commanded by God to cover all the time, it is always necessary for them to

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have a head covering on hand, so they can be ready to pray or prophesy whenever the need arises. And in many cases, women may decide the best way to have a head covering on hand is to have a head covering on the head.

How are women to cover their heads?

Some churches have precise requirements for the head coverings worn by women, calling for women to wear head coverings of a specific shape, color and design. However, this practice lacks Scriptural warrant, since the Apostle Paul does not demand a particular style of head covering in his writings. In fact, requiring a certain style of head covering may be compared, in the words of Jesus, to straining out a gnat (Matthew 23:24), since it is putting disproportionate emphasis on a non-essential aspect of the ordinance. It is also “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,” an offense which Jesus sternly denounced (Matthew 23:24). Furthermore, churches that regulate head covering style may be worthy of the unfavorable description Jesus gave about the religious leaders of his day: “They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders” (Matthew 23:4).

Mandating a particular style of head covering is not only unsupported by Scripture but also impractical. Different coverings may be suitable in various circumstances. For instance, a warm cap might be appropriate for a woman in the chill of winter, while a wide-brimmed hat might be a better choice for a woman with sensitive skin on a sunny day. A bandanna might be

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suitable for a lady going to an informal gathering, but may be less desirable than a headscarf or chapel veil when attending a more formal meeting. One woman may feel that head coverings of a certain color complement her hair and skin tones, while another female may prefer coverings of a different color. A missionary's wife might find it helpful to wear the Indian sari when sharing the gospel with Indian nationals, while the same woman might discover the traditional Jewish tichel or snood to be a more suitable headdress when approaching Orthodox Jews. Therefore, because different styles of head coverings have various advantages and disadvantages, it is only reasonable to allow women to express their creativity by choosing the type of head covering that best suits their needs and tastes at a given time or place.

Enforcing a specific head covering can also have negative effects on Christian community and witness. First, it may lead to unnecessary division in the church. It is always a sad thing to hear of churches that are contending about issues such as the proper color of the head covering. On the other hand, permitting freedom in the choice of head coverings can help foster an environment of acceptance and respect for individual expressions of faith. Second, such strict and unnecessary rules may hinder people from joining the church, or even scare potential members away completely. And third, enforcing a specific head covering style can distract from the real purpose of head covering as the Biblical symbol of submission to male headship, turning it instead into the emblem of a religious subculture.

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Churches that mandate a particular head covering argue that such actions are necessary for unity; but in truth, it is for the sake of uniformity rather than genuine unity. True unity is produced by love. However, forcing people to wear a specific color or shape of head covering does not produce unifying love, any more than requiring two enemies to wear blue shirts and white pants creates peace and affection between them. Meanwhile, diversity within a congregation, including the use of various head covering styles, can be a beautiful testament to the power of God to bring people of different backgrounds, personalities and preferences together into a unified, loving community.

Therefore, from a Biblical, rational and practical perspective, there is no compelling reason for a church to impose a standard regarding the style of head covering. Certain limitations may be appropriate, such as prohibiting overly small or showy head coverings, since they display lack of respect or humility. However, as long as the choice of headgear is reasonable and continues to symbolize Biblical submission to male headship, it is only right and logical to allow women the freedom to select the style of covering they wish to wear.

These things being said, be assured, O reader, that it is your duty to put into practice those things you have learned from Scripture and this book. It is your responsibility, O man, to remove any covering from your head before entering into prayer or prophecy. And it is your responsibility, O woman, to veil your head while engaging in the same activities, remembering always the

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purpose for which you do so – to be obedient to God and his holy commands, and to show you are in submission to man, whom God has placed in authority over you. And it is not enough to wear the head covering, but you must also live a life that agrees with the concept it symbolizes – a life of submission to man, both outwardly and inwardly. Outwardly you must refrain from having any position of authority over men in society, the home or the church; inwardly you must choose to have a heart of submission to male authority. But if anyone reads the words here written, and knows they are truth, yet refuses to obey what Scripture commands, woe to that man or woman! For God does not consider disobedience a small matter, but as terrible as the sin of witchcraft. Yet if anyone chooses to obey the head covering ordinance out of love for God and regard for his glory, may the Lord pour out his favor and blessings upon that individual! To God be all the glory and honor now and forever. Amen.

APPENDIX

Pictorial History of Head Coverings

Today there are few Western women that practice head covering. However, this was not historically the case. Throughout most of church history, it was common for women to wear some type of headdress for prayer or church services. And this practice appears to have spilled over into secular society as well and impacted the history of fashion; for in many countries it was, at one time or another, quite usual for women to cover their heads in public settings (although this was not always the result of Christian principles alone). There is perhaps no better way to demonstrate the truth of these statements than to produce images of women wearing head coverings throughout the ages, for as the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Hence, the following pages consist of a brief visual history of head coverings. The pictures are by no means comprehensive. They are meant to concisely demonstrate a point and whet your appetite for more study on the subject.

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Figure 31: Mary is depicted veiled with baby Jesus: Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome, first half of 2nd century



Figure 32: Christian woman praying with her head veiled: Catacomb of Callistus, Rome, end of 3rd century

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Figure 33: Detail from the Sarcophagus of the "Good Shepherd": Salona, early 4th century



Figure 34: End-times scene with a veiled woman in the center: Doors of Santa Sabina, Rome, early 5th century



Figure 35: Procession of Female Martyrs: Mosaic from Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, 6th century

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Figure 36: Depiction of Noah and his family: Illustration from the Ashburnham Pentateuch, late 6th or early 7th century



Figure 37: Woman in a palla saluting a light from a window representing Jesus: Stucco decoration from Tempietto Longobardo, Cividale del Friuli, Italy; mid 8th century

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*Figure 38: Charles the Bald (823-877) with veiled women:
Dedication page in the Bible of San Polo fuori le Mura,
late 9th century*

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Figure 39: Portrait of Emperor Otto II (955-983) attended by four veiled women with crowns, symbolizing the four parts of his empire: Registrum Gregorii, late 10th century

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Figure 40: Depiction of Saint Radegonde: Life of Saint Radegonde, 11 century



Figure 41: Head-covered mother with daughter: Codex Falkensteinensis, mid 12th century

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Figure 42: Personifications of Mercy, Truth, Justice and Peace on the left; and the visitation of Mary on the right; in medieval attire: Peterborough Psalter, early 13th century



Figure 43: Women wearing the barbette headdress: Great Heidelberg Song Manuscript (Codex Manesse), Zürich, Germany; early 14th century

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Figure 44: Detail from the Arnolfini Portrait by Jan Van Eyck, early 15th century

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Figure 45: Profile portrait of a young woman by Piero del Pollaiuolo, mid 15th century

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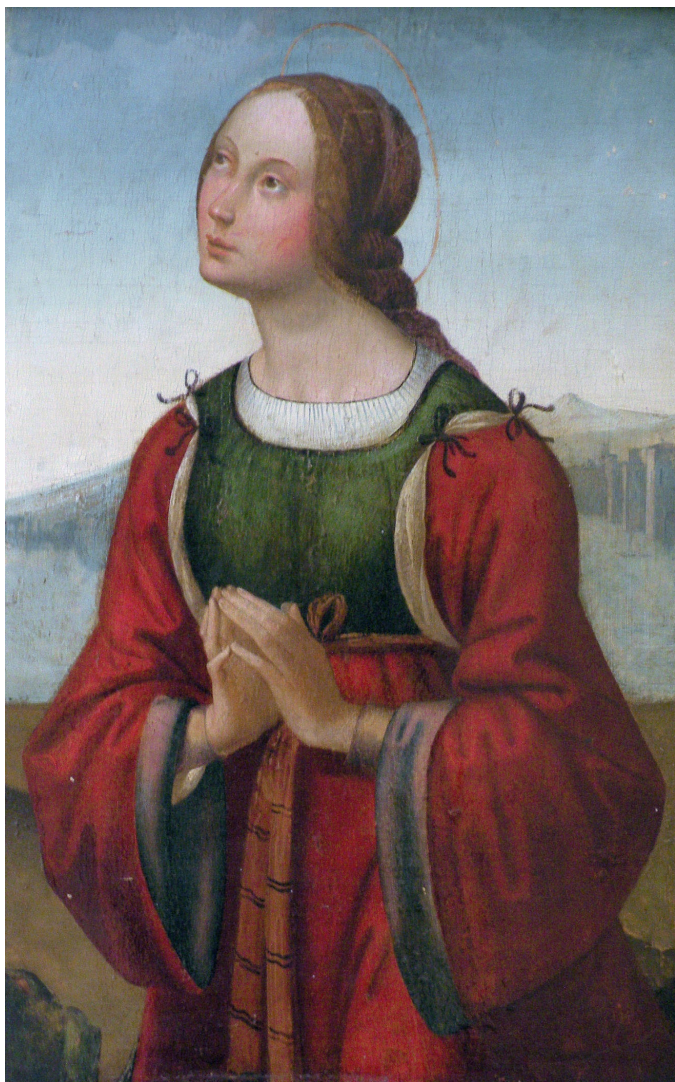


Figure 46: Infant baptism with women wearing the horned and the heart-shaped headdress: Seven Sacraments Altarpiece, by Rogie van der Weyden, mid 15th century



Figure 47: Detail of Mater Dolorosa, by Luis de Morales, late 16th century

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*Figure 48: Saint Margaret Praying, by Lorenzo Costa,
16th century*

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Figure 49: The Prayer of the Spinner, by Gerrit Dou, mid 17th century



Figure 50: A Praying Woman, by Willem de Poorter, 17th century

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Figure 51: Detail of Portrait of Madame Emilie Seriziat and her Son, by Jacques-Louis David late 18th century



Figure 52: The Kitchen Maid, by Jean Siméon Chardin, early 18th century

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Figure 53: Lady Hamilton, by George Romney, late 18th century

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Figure 54: A Young Girl at Church, by Anton Thiele, 19th century

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Figure 55: Detail from Sunday Morning, by Thomas Waterman Wood, on left; detail from A Spanish Girl Praying, by Edwin Long, on right; late 19th century



Figure 56: Elderly women in church: Modlące się kobiety, by Mieczysław Reyzner, late 19th century

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Figure 57: Female YMCA worker, early 20th century

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Figure 58: Intencja, by Antoni Piotrowski, early 20th century



Figure 59: Women taking tea beside the Bay of Quinte in Prince Edward County, Ontario, early 20th century

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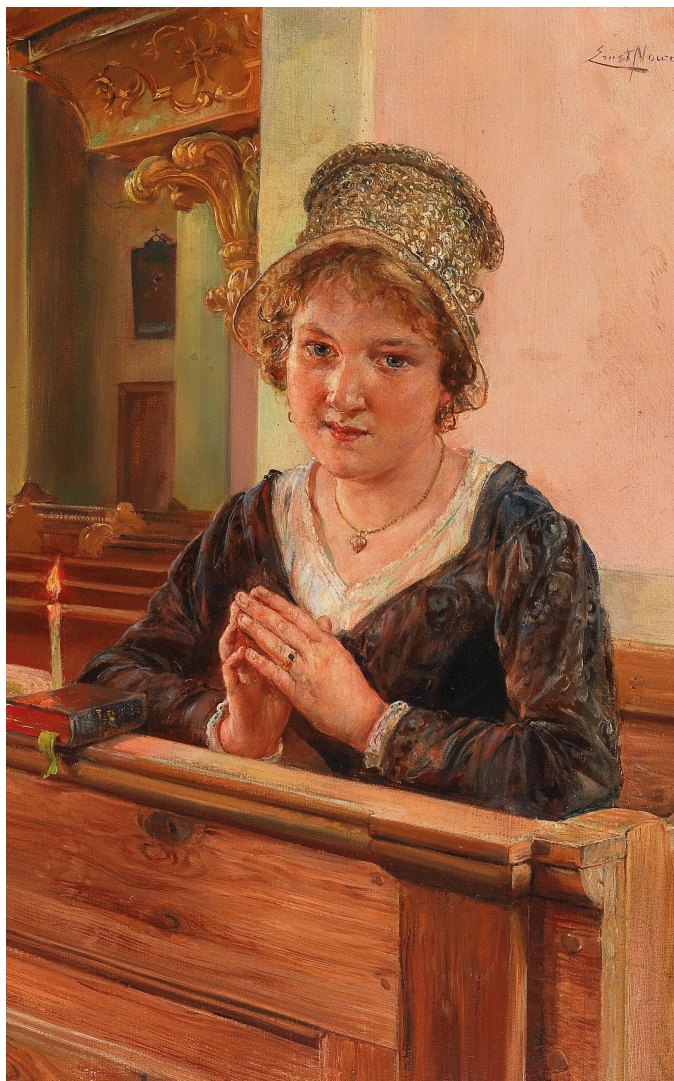


Figure 60: Devotions, by Ernst Nowak, early 20th century

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Figure 17: *Marble portrait of a young woman,* from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gallery 162. Public Domain. <https://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/252919>

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Figure 22: *Fresco depicting a seated woman, from the Villa Arianna at Stabiae, 1st century AD.* Naples National

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Figure 23: *Panel painting of a woman in a blue mantle*.
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Figure 26: *Relief representing Marcus Aurelius and the members of the imperial family sacrificing before temple of Jupiter on Capitol (detail)*, photographed by Jean-Pol GRANDMONT. Image was cropped. CC BY-SA 3.0 license:

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Figure 30: Produced by the author in NightCafe AI image generator and edited in Gimp 2.10.34.

Figure 31-32: Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms (The Paintings in the Catacombs, Vol. 2)* (Roma, 1903), Table 22 and Table 111, respectively. Public Domain.

https://archive.org/details/gri_33125010959860/page/n547/mode/2up

Figure 33: *Sarcophagus of the “Good Shepherd” from Salona (cir. 300); Collections of the Split Archaeological Museum*, by TimeTravelRome at

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Figure 34: *File:Arkyves 185. 'Parousia' wooden door panel. Rome, Santa Sabina (c. 422-32). Author's photograph.jpg*, by RightLeft Medieval Art. Sharpened and cropped. CC BY-SA-4.0 license:

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[_%E2%80%9D_wooden_door_panel._Rome,_Santa_Sabina_\(c._422-32\)._Author%E2%80%99s_photograph.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arkyves_185._%E2%80%9D_wooden_door_panel._Rome,_Santa_Sabina_(c._422-32)._Author%E2%80%99s_photograph.jpg)

Figure 35: *Procession of the virgin, detail, St Apollinaire neuf, Ravenna, Emilia-Romagna, Italia*, by Roger Culos. Cropped. CC BY-SA 3.0 license:

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Figure 37: *Cividale Tempietto Longobardo – Westwand Figur*, by Wolfgang Sauber. Cropped and sharpened. CC BY-SA 3.0 license:

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cividale_Tempietto_Longobardo_-_Westwand_Figur.jpg

Figure 38: Dedication page of the Carolingian Bible.

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Figure 41: “Codex Falkensteinensis. No known copyright restrictions.

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Figure 42: Peterborough Psalter. Public Domain.

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Figure 43: Heidelberg University Library, Cod. Pal. Germ. 848, Great Heidelberg Song Manuscript (Codex Manesse). Public Domain.

<https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg848/0595/image,info>.

<https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.2222#0595>

Figure 44: *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) by Jan van Eyck. Public Domain.

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Figure 45: *Profile portrait of a young woman (1465)* by Piero del Pollaiuolo, photographed by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie / Christoph Schmidt. Public Domain.

<https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/862702>

Figure 46: *Seven Sacraments Altapiece* (between 1445 and 1450), by Rogie van der Weyden. Public Domain.

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Figure 47: *Mater Dolorosa* (1570) by Luis de Morales. Public Domain.

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Figure 49: *The Prayer of the Spinner* (1645) by Gerrit Dou. Public Domain.

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Picture 51: *Portrait of Madame Emilie Seriziat and her Son* (1795) by Jacques-Louis David. Public Domain.

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Figure 52: *The Kitchen Maid* (1738) by Jean Siméon Chardin. Public Domain.

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Figure 53: *Lady Hamilton* (1791) by George Romney. Public Domain.

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Figure 54: *A Young Girl at Church* by Anton Thiele (before 1874). Public Domain.

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Figure 55: Left: Detail from *Sunday Morning* by Thomas Waterman Wood (circa 1877). Public Domain.

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Right: Detail from *A Spanish Girl Praying* by Edwin Long (between circa 1875 and circa 1885). Public Domain.

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Figure 56: *Modlące się kobiety* by Mieczysław Reyzner (1892). Public Domain.

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Figure 58: *Intencja* by Antoni Piotrowski (1912). Public Domain.

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Figure 59: *Three women taking tea beside the Bay of Quinte in Prince Edward County, Ontario* (1901). Public Domain. From [Flickr Commons](#).

Figure 60: *Devotions* by Ernst Nowak (by 1919). Public Domain.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After Josiah Bongioanni gave his heart and life to God, he became filled with desire to reach the unsaved, which led him to go on a six-month-long missionary training program in Romania and Moldova in 2018 and another five-month-long missionary program based in California in 2021. Throughout the years, he has worked a number of jobs and helped with various teaching roles at his church. In 2023 he started a [YouTube](#) and [Rumble](#) channel, consisting of videos relating to Christianity. He has also been working on a plan to evangelize and disciple the world in a period of 21 years. In fact, this treatise is intended to be one means of preparing the way for that plan. Please join the effort by distributing copies of this book to people you know. If you have benefited from the non-commercial distribution of this book and would like to support the author financially, please send your contributions to him via his website's [donate page](#). To learn more, check out [josiahbongioanni.com](#).