

## **I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS**

### **XIV. The Issue Of Head Coverings For Women In Church**

**(1 Corinthians 11:2-16)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul addressed the issue of the veiling of women in church, an issue that affected not only believers in his era, but also believers today. We view this passage for our insight and edification:

#### **II. The Issue Of Head Coverings For Women In Church, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.**

- A. Interpreters of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 have differed over whether Paul meant that it was intrinsically wrong for a woman not to have her head covered in the church or whether he was addressing what was a social custom at the time, and that a believing woman was bound to heed the custom for the sake of testimony.
- B. Those who claim that women are intrinsically wrong in not wearing head covering argue as follows:
  - 1. Paul's reasons for head coverings "were based on theology (headship, v. 3), the order in creation (vv. 7-9), and the presence of angels in the meeting (v. 10)," *Ibid.*, Ryrie, ftn. to 1 Corinthians 11:5.
  - 2. Furthermore, "(n)one of these reasons was based on contemporary social custom," *Ibid.*
- C. However, one can also argue that head coverings for women are exclusively based on social custom:
  - 1. When God created Eve, He brought her to Adam to see what he would name her just as God had brought the animals to Adam to see what he would name them, Genesis 2:19-22.
  - 2. This act of naming "was, in the Semitic world, an evidence of lordship," *Ibid.*, Ryrie, ftn. to Gen. 1:10.
  - 3. However, in the context of Genesis 2 where the headship of the man over the woman was instituted, the woman did not wear a head covering as she was naked, Genesis 2:19-25. Veils were thus a cultural norm.
- D. This author thus holds that the head covering was a cultural practice, but since cultural practices convey one's role before God to observers, a believer must align with that practice that depicts his role before God to others:
  - 1. Paul stated that, based on the Genesis 1-2 creative order, in God's "chain-of-command," God the Father is head over Christ, Christ is head over the man, and the man is head over the woman, 1 Cor. 11:2-3.
  - 2. Thus, every man who prayed or prophesied with his head covered with a veil in the church service to convey in that culture that he was in the role of a woman dishonored his own head, and every woman who prayed or prophesied with her head uncovered in the church to convey in that culture that she was in the role of a man dishonored her own head, 1 Corinthians 11:4-5.
  - 3. Paul added that if her head was not covered in the church, her head should also be shaved of its hair, but that if it was a shame for her to be shaved of it, she should wear a veil to cover her head, 1 Cor. 11:6.
  - 4. Paul then repeated the roles of men and of women introduced at creation in 1 Corinthians 11:3 to teach that believers need to convey in public worship their proper roles in God's "chain-of-command," v. 7-9.
  - 5. The apostle then added the obscure claim that the woman ought to have power on her head because of the angels (1 Corinthians 11:10), what means that angels were spectators of the church (1 Cor. 4:9; Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:21), so violating one's proper role in God's "chain-of-command" would bring the wisdom of God as seen in the church by angels (Eph. 3:10) into disrepute before the angels, B. K. C., N. T., p. 529.
  - 6. Paul hastened to add that just because the man is in authority over the woman, this fact did not mean that a woman was less valuable than a man, for all men come from mothers who are women, and God has created men and women to need each other in a very practical sense, 1 Corinthians 11:11-12.
  - 7. The apostle added that nature itself taught that men were to have heads that were less covered than women, seen in most cultures worldwide and in history where men have shorter hair than women, and Paul claimed that this fact called for women to have long hair as a covering in align with the cultural practice of wearing veils in his day, 1 Corinthians 11:13-16.

**Lesson:** *Paul directed that men and women dress in line with their God-assigned roles with Him and one another.*

**Application:** *May we dress in ways that convey a good testimony of our roles in relation to God and other people.*