

## Let Her Be Veiled

*"For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn: but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven; let her be veiled" (1 Cor. 11:6).*

Of the four common explanations of this passage, two were discussed earlier -- the "spiritual gift" argument and the "hair is the covering" argument. The remaining two arguments are those who see the passage as a binding command for all time and those who explain the passage as regulation of a custom intact in Corinth in the first century.

It was earlier observed that no explanation of the text is completely free of problems. This is as true of those who understand that a universal command is dictated -- a woman must always wear a covering in the assembly. We respect those who believe they must wear a covering in the assembly and would counsel them that just so long as they are convicted they must wear a covering, just so long must they wear a covering. Still, such a position does have problems. First, if the necessity for a covering is true today, then the covering must be what the text describes -- a veil, a complete covering of the head. A kerchief, hat, or ribbon will not satisfy the command *"let her be veiled (covered)"*. Second, where is this veiling to be done: in the public assembly or at home? The apostle did say, *"Every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonored her head"* and *"for this cause ought the woman to have a sign of authority on her head because of the angels"* (1 Cor. 11:5, 10). The apostle does not state "where" the praying or prophesying is done and while most likely he does refer to the public assembly, that is nowhere stated in the text. Third, the necessity that a woman is to be veiled rests upon the statement that *"if it is a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled"* (1 Cor. 11:6). Is it still a "shame" that a woman be shorn (have her hair cut) or even shaven? Does the fact that a woman "cuts her hair today" carry the same cultural implications today it did in Corinth in the first century? Is the covering a religious item put on when worship is begun or was it part of the Corinthian woman's natural attire which she was not to take off?

The final explanation of this thorny passage is that the apostle regulates a custom in existence in Corinth. Remember, the apostle does mention *"custom"* as he concludes his instructions. *"But if any man seemeth to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God"* (1 Cor. 11:16). Objections are raised to this explanation, objecting that at this period of time it was customary for the Jewish male to cover his head in worship: thus the apostle sets a command contrary to prevailing customs; rather than the male covering his head, he must uncover his head. But, this

objection cannot be sustained for best authorities on Jewish worship indicate that the practice of Jewish males covering their head in worship did not begin until 1,000 years later. In the first century it was the practice of Jewish males to have their heads uncovered. These same authorities tell that the custom of the oriental world was that the woman covered her head in public -- which would lend argument to the view that the veil was not a religious item put on when worship began; it was a prohibition that the woman was not to discard her covering when she prayed or prophesied. Further, while in our time a woman who cuts her hair is not viewed as loose or immoral, in the first century such not was the case: it was a sign of a shameless woman. Add to that the truth that in our day women wearing a covering say nothing about their recognition of the headship of the man, it did in the first century. In short, these two things argue that the apostle's command that the woman cover her head was an appeal that the prevailing Corinthian custom of women wearing a veil in public should be respected; but was not a universal command for all time and all places. To us, greater weight is found in this latter explanation than either of the three proceeding arguments. When Paul wrote, "*We have no such custom, neither the churches of God,*" he tells us that women in God's churches in the Eastern world did not violate the custom of their day lest an advantage be given to Satan who through it would reflect improperly upon the people of God.

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