

Head Coverings

A Study of 1 Corinthians 11:1-15

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Head Coverings

Q: Are Christian women commanded to have head coverings today?

A: Yes. However, the application of this answer is a little more complex than a one-word response.

For many, the question of head coverings is dismissed outright as an ancient cultural tradition that no longer has application. This is a great mistake. When a principle is rooted in the creation story, its authority often supersedes all cultural norms and is intended for the entire human timeline. (Example: Marriage between a man and a woman)

Notice the primary text around which the head covering debate often centers.

1 Corinthians 11:1-15 (NIV)

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. 3 But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. 5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. 6 For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head (NIV Footnote: Or have a sign of authority on her), because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. 16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

The Principle of Authority

As we work through the inspired instructions of 1 Corinthians 11, it is important that we first take note of the root from which the head covering principle originates its authority. Consider three phrases that directly connect this principle to the creation story.

1. "woman is the glory of man" - 1 Corinthians 11:7 (NIV). See the same principle in the creation story, Genesis 3:23.
2. "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man" - 1 Corinthians 11:8 (NIV). See the same principle in the creation story, Genesis 3:21-22.
3. "neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" - 1 Corinthians 11:9 (NIV). See the same principle in the creation story, Genesis 3:18.

Now notice the phrase that immediately follows this list of creation principles, "It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head..." (NIV, Underlining emphasis mine)

Application: Whatever we conclude about head coverings, one thing is contextually obvious, head coverings are rooted in creation not culture.

Then there is that odd little phrase, "because of the angels." (1 Corinthians 11:10, NIV)

Q: Why should a woman "have authority over her own head, because of the angels"? What does that mean?

Let's allow the context to answer. We have already established that the theme of this section is authority rooted in the creation story. Authority and order go hand in hand. Notice how Paul opens the chapter. He points to the authority of Christ, then he admonishes his readers to follow his example because his authority is rooted in the authority of Christ, which gives us order (Jesus, Paul, the reader). Just one verse later, he further illustrates the importance of order by citing God's authority chart, "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Corinthians 11:3, NIV) Perhaps the reason angels are mentioned here is that when order prevails among God's created beings, God receives honor. When disorder prevails among us, angels are tempted with dishonor.

Notice a similar conclusion in another text. "...urge the younger women to love their husbands ... and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God." (Titus 2:4-5, NIV, Underlining emphasis mine) The reason

women are commanded to be "subject to their husbands" is because their failure to do so "will malign the word of God."

God's honor, and perhaps even the submission He receives from angels, is impacted by our submission to His order of authority.

Conclusion 1: Head coverings are rooted in creation, not culture. Our submission to the principle of authority even impacts the heavenly realm.

The Principle of Authority Applied

Given the unholy trend of blurring the lines between genders, the application of obvious authority markers takes on an even greater importance for the Christians of today.

As Paul concludes this section, he points to one example of head coverings that is timeless and also rooted in the creation story.

In 1 Corinthians 11:14-15, the Holy Spirit inspired these words, "Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering." (NIV)

I believe it is those last few words which may provide the additional specifics for which we are looking, "...if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering." (1 Corinthians 11:15, NIV)

Q: If long hair is "given to her," who is the one that gives the long hair? Some might say it is the husband. But if we remain true to the contextual indicators of the creation story (vs 7,8,9) it seems that God is the more likely answer. God, the Creator, gave woman long hair for a covering. It was by His assignment, not culture, that she should have long hair. It was by His intent that long hair should be her head covering.

If that is true, long hair takes on a much deeper significance and gives an even greater meaning to the phrase, "it is her glory." (1 Corinthians 11:15, NIV) If God is the giver, then her glory (long hair) is both a gift from God and a Divinely sanctioned head covering.

Conclusion 2: A woman's long hair reflects the glory she has been "given" by God and indicates to everyone, including angels, that she has chosen to live within the Divine order by submitting to her husband.

Personal Note: While many will want to challenge this conclusion, and certainly that is appropriate, it is important that everyone ask one very important question, "Why am I unwilling to accept this conclusion?" If I truly believe that the Scripture teaches something else, that is one thing. If, on the other hand, I simply do not like the implications of this conclusion and am unwilling to make the changes it might bring to my life, that is quite another.

Someone might ask, "But how long is long?" My response: It depends upon how obvious a woman wants to be with the "glory" that was "given to her" by God. No doubt, the principles of Romans 14 must also be applied here.

The Principle of Authority Applied Within the Collective Worship Service

As we examine Paul's applications of head coverings, two contextual parameters must be acknowledged.

1. He is addressing regulations to be observed within the collective gatherings of the church. This is significant, because an ongoing theme of the Corinthian letters is the disorderly conduct of church members during worship. Unlike women within the heavily Jewish culture, Corinthian women were known for their more "progressive" ways which often led to conflict, both in the home and during worship. With this inspired text, Paul is attempting to bring greater order and dignity to the collective gathering. After all, what better place to see the working illustration of God's authority chart (God, Jesus, Man, Woman - 1 Corinthians 11:3) than within the worship service that is designed to honor Him? (See also 1 Corinthians 14:32-33.)
2. He is specifically regulating the times when a woman would be expressing herself openly during moments of prayer and prophecy within the collective gathering (1 Corinthians 11:4-5). This is significant for two reasons.

First, it shows that there actually were times in the First Century worship that women did speak aloud and openly. This fact must be understood in order to properly apply 1 Corinthians 14:34, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission..."

Which leads me to the second reason.

Q: Why would it be appropriate for a woman to speak in one context (1 Corinthians 11:4-5) and not in another (1 Corinthians 14:34)? I think the answer lies within the very next verse. "If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home..." (1 Corinthians 14:35, NIV) Women who are praying or prophesying through the Divine intervention of God (1 Corinthians 11:4-5) do not need to ask for input, God is speaking to and through them. They are free to speak, because it is actually God Who is speaking. On the other hand, women who are simply voicing their own opinion or inquiry (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) should exercise restraint.

Conclusion 3: In the context of 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, I believe Paul is addressing inspired women who speak on behalf of God. In that setting, an additional head covering other than long hair is necessary. Paul says a woman's long hair, which

is her glory and the obvious acknowledgement of her husband's authority, should also be covered with an additional covering in order to show her obvious acknowledgement of God's glory and His authority over both.

Summary

We live in a "progressive" culture, one that often dismisses the ancient paths as outdated principles.

On the other hand, we also live in a "suppressive" culture, one that fights against the order and freedom established by the ancient paths.

Head coverings is just one example of the way human culture continuously challenges the Divine order and opens the door for even greater offenses. While the discussion of veils and hair length is likely to go on until the Lord's return, one thing is abundantly clear, the overall reason that this and all other passages were written was to inspire order stemming from God's ultimate authority. To be right with God, women should go out of their way to communicate to the world their obvious respect and honor for their head. In so doing, she will not only disarm those who malign God's Word (Titus 2:4-5), but she will also communicate to the angels, "God's way works!"

Supplement 1

Women Teaching Boys

Many Christians forbid women to preach, then extend that same limitation to teaching a Bible class of young boys who have been baptized. This is a position I believe we must rethink. It is a conclusion that is both illogical and damaging to the Divine illustration.

Being born into Christ does not make a boy a man, it makes him a baby in Christ.

Notice an intriguing excerpt from the childhood of Jesus. Consider the parallels and implications for today.

Luke 2:49-52 (NKJV)

"And He (Jesus) said to them, 'Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them. Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."
(Underlining emphasis mine)

Notice the parallel between the adolescent Christ and boys today who declare through baptism that they have accepted the assignment to be about their Father's business. Notice also the underlined phrase and the importance of Jesus being subject to "them".

Q: Did the striking declaration of Jesus at the Temple rearrange the order of authority within Joseph's home? Did it render Mary unfit to be Jesus' teacher?

Consider the context. Jesus (age 12) had just been found engaging in a post-graduate level discussion with the finest teachers of Judaism. Yet within 4 verses of this impressive exchange and His declaration of identity, it says that Jesus went home and was subject to them (Joseph **and Mary**). He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:49-52, NKJV) Clearly, Mary's womanhood did not disqualify her from teaching or even bringing the teenage Christ into subjection.

Mature Christian women should not only be permitted to teach these boys, the example of Christ's childhood promotes it!

Earlier, we concluded that when a woman submits to her husband she honors

God by becoming a living illustration of Christ's position as head over the church (Ephesians 5:22-24) and by guarding God's image in the heavens (1 Corinthians 11:10). However, to be fair with the obvious intent behind these principles, the Divine logic must be followed to its equally obvious conclusion - the man's authority is based upon his relationship to his wife. A young boy, without a wife cannot have this authority. As such, a woman teacher should not be limited in her instruction of him based upon her gender. He is not a man or the ruler over a household. The living illustration of order within the church is not at risk. Mature Christian women should not only be permitted to teach these boys, the example of Christ's childhood promotes it!

In addition to that...

I would like to suggest that the image of God could be at risk in another way. When mature Christian women are forbidden to teach boys (baptized or not), the message of God's order is disrupted. When Paul wrote, "For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels," (1 Corinthians 11:10, NKJV) I believe he was indicating a heavenly struggle much like the one described in Job 1. God's honor is under attack. Satan and his angels mock the created sphere and they magnify any flaw their demonic schemes can bring about. Just as Job glorified God through perseverance and submission to the Divine order, our submission to God's design is equally important. For the sake of order and the honor of God within the heavens, an unmarried boy must not be allowed to outrank a mature Christian woman.

Conclusion

If the intent of gender-specific roles is to illustrate Christ and the church, then placing an unmarried adolescent boy into the parallel position of Christ is illogical.

If the intent of gender-specific roles is to defend God's honor from demonic abuse, then placing an adolescent boy's authority ahead of a mature Christian woman can only provide the demons with more ammunition to use against the image of God.

Should women be teachers? Absolutely! Their wisdom and nurturing should be applied in every area that promotes God's intent behind the man/woman relationship.

Supplement 2

Homemaker *A Holy Terror!*

“Be the type of woman that
when your feet hit the floor each morning
the devil says, ‘Oh no! She’s up!’”

I first saw this quote posted online and it has forever changed the way I look at the woman who stands guard over my home! She is indeed a holy terror.

Nothing is more important to the success of a Christian home than holiness. It is the key to our fellowship with God and the criteria upon which He basis our level of blessing. When a woman is free to pursue holiness, the blessing it incurs naturally flows over the entire family. Notice the following passage.

1 Corinthians 7:14 (NIV) “For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife... Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.”

Although some parts of this passage may be difficult to understand, the general message is clear - a holy woman shares her holiness with her family.

1 Timothy 4:5 tells us that a Christian impacts her surroundings by consecrating it through “the word of God and prayer.” (NIV)

This important verse offers two ways for a homemaker to pass along her holiness to her family.

First, she must be a loyal student of the “word of God”. Having time and taking the time for personal Bible study is essential to a woman’s protective powers over the home. To be effective, she must know her weapon - the “sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17).

Many men encourage their wives to carry a gun in order to keep themselves safe. But how many men arm their wives with time at home to immerse themselves in a study of God’s Word? Imagine the impact a woman could have on her circle of influence if she just had the time to study. She could plan daily family devotionals that have real depth. She could address her family’s questions with answers from Scripture rather than opinion. She could send inspirational messages to her children throughout the day as well as notes to inspire her husband’s spiritual focus. She could conduct online Bible studies with folks around the world and devote real time to her Sunday school classes as well as

becoming an outstanding ladies Bible class leader. She could actually challenge her family and her community rather than always playing catch up with her faith. The possibilities are endless. With a little vision, a woman could become a very intimidating sword-wielding guardian of the family. She could literally become a holy terror to Satan and his forces! Think of the protection she could offer if only she could stay home and study more deeply.

According to 1 Timothy 4:5, the second way a woman passes on her holiness is by blanketing her family in prayer.

What if, after rushing through the insane pace of morning preparations (wake up calls, bathroom conflicts, a thousand questions about "What should I wear?!", the rush to eat breakfast and the sprint out the door), someone on the team could remain behind? What if that person was designated to collect themselves and find peace on behalf of the rest of her family? What level of protective power could this team member generate if she had the time to calm herself, then blanket her family in prayer? Imagine the great impact she could have.

In the movie "Facing the Giants", a minister made it his habit to walk the halls of a local school stopping at each student's locker and praying for a blessing. The impact was overwhelming.

What if a domestic guardian had a schedule that permitted her to do the same in her home? What if each day, before the family returned, she had the time to visit each room of the house asking the Lord to place a special blessing on that part of the dwelling? In the bedrooms, she could ask the Lord to make the room a place of peace and rest. In the living room, she could ask the Lord to guard the family from unwholesome conversation and entertainment. In the bathroom, she could seek protection from vanity. In the kitchen, she could seek wisdom for nourishing the temple of the Holy Spirit. What if every home had a security system that blanketed the entire house in PRAYER?! Think of the blessings that would flow! Every home needs a full-time domestic prayer warrior - a holy terror of prayer!

The first and most important responsibility of a godly wife and mother is the passionate pursuit of holiness. When she is given sufficient time to grow in this area, the protection and blessing she brings to her home will be limitless.
A Shelter Guardian

Proverbs 14:26 (NIV) "Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge."

Husband

Every day Christian husbands travel into a world of intense sexual temptation, materialistic distractions and spiritual discouragement. From tanning salon

billboards and online pornographic popups to sex-filled TV shows, suggestive song lyrics and flirtatious co-workers, your husband is constantly being pulled toward a very dark world of infidelity. Having a safe haven to which he can retreat at the end of the day is priceless. Having a wife who understands this threat and makes it her full-time job to maintain this shelter is nothing less than Divine intervention.

Few things are more important to marital fidelity than a well managed fortress called the home. A full-time domestic guardian is essential to the maintenance of this safe haven.

Children

No one is more vulnerable to the social diseases of our culture than the children.

Insane non-stop schedules rob their minds of the opportunity to process and grow within a context of serenity and peace. Rapid sound bites, television commercials and fast paced movie transitions push their little brains to overload. Attention deficit disorders are the result.

The temptation to be sexually active begins in grade school. Beauty pageants, enticing superhero characters, boy bands, an entire television industry targeting their young minds, robs our children of their innocence. It pushes them past their formative years without allowing them to form sufficiently. As a result, a pattern of bad relationships builds until one day they apply this misinformation to their own marriage. A 50% divorce rate is the result.

Materialism is also preached from every medium. Cruel competition is found in every sphere. Humanism (the worship of self) is the unabashed god of the culture in which our children must survive. Nothing is more important to their development than a safe haven in which they can discover God.

The wise man said this about the godly woman who provides her family with a safe haven. "She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. ... she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. (Proverbs 31: 10-12, 21, 25, NIV)

One key word jumps out of this passage more than any other - "confidence". Why can this woman laugh at days to come? Because she knows that her home is a fortress of God. Her family has a shelter to run to in times of trouble. She is the manager of this fortress (1 Timothy 5:14) and she has made it her lifelong career to keep it strong.

An effective shelter depends upon two things, the barrier it presents to the enemy

and the quality of existence within its walls. Every day, a homemaker must assess the challenges her family will face when they leave the fort. She must then make preparations to encourage, console and close the gate securely behind them when they return home. It is no less than a full-time job to make these preparations. The moral crisis within our culture demands a strong fortress. A strong fortress demands constant attention. Imagine the intimidating fortress a woman can build when she is allowed to become a full-time shelter guardian. She could truly be a holy terror!

A Game Changer!

In every game there is a moment, there is a decision that changes the momentum and the direction of the contest. Very often, it is that single moment that alters the entire game and changes the final score. Many Christians are praying for America to find that game-changing moment.

On every front, God's plan for a civil culture is being undermined. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than the attack on the home. In this great contest for America's cultural dominance, the fundamentals of a Christian home must be reasserted!

Did you know that God's most ancient directives concerning a functional society centered not on kings, presidents, or even the church, it centered on the family? "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth...'" (Genesis 1:28, NIV) "...a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24, NIV)

When creation needed saving, God looked for a family - Noah and his family. (Genesis 6)

When His promise needed preserving, God looked for a family - Abraham and Sarah. (Genesis 12:1-3)

When His people needed motivating, God looked for a family - Joshua and his family. "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15, NIV)

When His Son needed placing into this world, God looked for a family - Joseph and Mary. (Matthew 1:18-25)

When His future relationship with us needed explaining, God used the family - "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" (Revelation 21:3, NIV)

From the very beginning, God has always placed His favor upon righteous families. One may ask, "What can we do to restore God's favor to America?" The

answer is ancient and it is obvious - restore the righteousness of the family!

In Titus 2:5, God places Christian women on the front lines of this battle for righteousness. In that passage, the Holy Spirit gives this assignment, be “keepers at home” (KJV), “workers at home” (ASV), “busy at home” (NIV) or to “take care of their homes” (NLT). He then concludes by pointing to the vital importance of their work “that the word of God be not blasphemed.” (KJV)

Q: Would you say the American culture typically honors or blasphemes the word of God? What does Titus 2:5 clearly say is the key to this cultural crisis?

If there was one person I could pull off the bench and put back into the game, it would not be a man. It would not be an elder of the church or a preacher in the pulpit. If I were looking for a game changer, my choice would be a woman. A woman’s influence in the home is unrivaled. Her impact on generational momentum is without equal. The most skilled game changer sitting on our bench is the full-time, God-fearing domestic guardian. Scripture calls her the homemaker! (Titus 2:4-5)

Whoever said “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world” captured one of the most profound truths of the human experience. God has placed within the heart of a woman the potential to not only shape a child, but revive a culture and move a nation.

Some are movers,
Some are shakers,
But none compare
To homemakers!

When Paul instructed women “to be busy at home... so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:5), he was affirming the world-changing impact of a homemaker. Guarding the home is a woman’s Great Commission. (1 Peter 3:1, Titus 2:4-5, 1 Timothy 2:15) The importance of a homemaker must not be underestimated. The hand that guards the home, shapes the world!

The first and most important step Christian women must take on the journey toward a restored culture is this, get off the bench. America needs a game changer and, in this situation, a woman is God’s star player.

Think of this book as God’s way of looking down the bench, catching your eye and calling your name as He points toward the court. It’s your turn to shine. You have been chosen by THE COACH. Our team desperately needs to have the ball in your hands! Please don’t wave Him off. Rush the court. Take the shot. Be a holy terror!