

Membership Class 8

South Grove Free Presbyterian Church Tuesday 15th June 2010

1 Corinthians 11:1-15

There is a tendency for Christians and Churches to distance themselves from anything that is perceived to be unknown, misunderstood or that has a stigma attached to it. The subject of the head covering has been treated in this way particularly within the last number of decades. I came across one extreme case where a lady was looking into the matter and whether or not she should be covering her head; this is part of what she said,

“...I emailed my pastor yesterday to ask him his views on the woman covering her head and explained to him that I felt that this is what God wants because of 1 Cor 11. He told me that that was wrong, and border Islamic, and that if I did it and tried to wear it at church or to any church functions he would ask me to remove it”

Not everyone is as extreme in their objection as this and admittedly there are many evangelicals, reformed in their teaching, that see no need for this in our day and others though while holding to it do not make it a point of Church Membership. The Free Presbyterian Church does make it a matter of membership “...to us this is no legal bondage but a joyful gospel testimony to the sole glory of Christ in His church” (SUTG p35). Surely the approach we adopt ought to be that of the Bereans “...in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so”

Half a chapter of 1 Corinthians 11 is devoted to this and therefore it is not a matter of basing a teaching upon an obscure and remote text.

I will consider this by looking at some common objections that are made and through these we shall study the subject together.

Objection: Does it demean women when we say that they have to have their heads covered?

The above Pastor was wrong when he said that head covering is “border Islamic” –the teaching of the Bible in reference to women is different from Islamic teaching and so we reject such an accusation. **1 Corinthians 11:2, 3** touches upon the place and role of the man and the woman and in verse **2** Paul said that in the Corinthian Church there were areas that he *could praise them for* “**but**” (**v3**) there were other matters that needed addressing. The problem at hand is then highlighted in **verses 4, 5**. It is important at this stage to remember that the error was twofold: men were covering their heads when they shouldn’t have been and women were without one when they should have. Paul was addressing both men and women. In our day there isn’t a great problem with men coming in with hats and coverings on their heads – if that were the case then it too would be dealt with but women without head coverings is a common sight and therefore becomes a topic of debate. Now, how does he deal with this? He establishes a principle that has always been and shall never change and that is found in **v3**. We are to take notice of the fact that Paul refers to the submission of Christ “**and the head of Christ is God**”, the head covering is part of the woman’s submissive role. Paul is encouraging women here, not singling them out for attack, he is encouraging them by bringing into focus the submission of our Lord Jesus. He specifically says “...**and the head of Christ is God.**” Christ’s submission to the Father is not in essence or nature because He is equal with God but in role and function. Our Lord Jesus put himself in submission as to role when he took upon him the nature of man, he became Mediator and Saviour. The same is true in the role and function of men and women. What the scriptures are dealing with here is not a demeaning thing, “a putting down of woman” as to essence but rather dealing with the function, position and role of men and women in the realm of public worship. The man having his head uncovered and the woman covered is a symbol of this before God.

Objection: it is a cultural thing and local – not applicable to the Church today

Many think that only some churches or some countries practise this or that it only was relevant to Paul's time. Along these lines people will reason with verses such as **1 Thessalonians 5:26 greet all the brethren with an holy kiss**. Their argument seems convincing – *we rarely greet each other with a kiss in Church so why should we observe the head covering?* The answer is within the passages. When writing to the likes of Rome, Thessalonica and Corinth he brought in the matter of greeting each in such a way at the end of the letters. They were passing remarks by way of salutation and courtesy and not the main thought process of some correction of error within the Church. In Contrast to this **1 Corinthians 11** is a lengthy passage and the presence of such subjects such as “the role of men and women” **v3**; “praying and prophesying” **v5**; “creation” **v9**; “the presence of angels” **v10**; “nature” **v14** indicates that here is an issue that is being stressed from every angle and consequently has relevance for the Church in any age. The arguments that Paul employs are not cultural, therefore the subject is neither cultural nor local.

It should also be noted on this point that in Paul's day both the Jews and the Romans had the custom of requiring men to cover their heads in religious worship and so Paul was teaching against this common culture by forbidding men to do such. “*Clearly Paul was not addressing mere cultural questions. He was setting what is right and proper for Christians in whatever culture they live*” (SUTG p32). Further, the similarity in language when we compare **verse 2** with **verse 17** is striking. In the first he says “**Now I praise you...**” and in the latter he says “**Now...I praise you not**”. Nobody objects to the relevance of **v18ff** to the Church; in fact it would be seen as outrageous if the Lord's Supper was viewed as cultural! Then why should such an approach should be adopted in the first part of chapter 11? Clearly here is teaching for the Church in any age.

We don't perceive it to be a peculiar feature of the Free Presbyterian Church. It is a biblical view that has been taught throughout the centuries and held by such men as Calvin, Henry, Spurgeon and Knox.

Objection: Isn't the hair of the women her covering as we read in v15?

The more this objection is looked into the more absurd it becomes. To begin with it undoes everything else Paul has already written. What would be the need for him to go into detail about a head covering if the head covering is already present i.e. her hair? It is a bad exegesis of Scripture to make **v15** the main argument. Obviously Paul's main point is contained in **vs. 4-7** after which he brings in supporting arguments from creation and nature – to reverse this order to fly in the face of Paul's inspired argumentation. Probably the most obvious answer to this objection is to actually apply it to the passage in hand. If “hair” is the “covering” that Paul mentions from the outset then we have to adopt this in **verses 6, 7**. Verse 6 would then read: “**...if the woman has no hair on her head (be not covered) let her also be shorn**”. That doesn't make sense – how can a woman with no hair have her hair shaved off? Likewise with **v 7** “**For a man indeed ought not to have hair on his head (not to cover his head)**. Is Paul teaching that every man needs to be bald in order to be acceptable and reflect the glory of God? Verse 15 is not referring to her hair being a covering in public worship but the everyday distinction that God has given her. Therefore from this we conclude that the important fact is that a woman has this sign upon her head, note that it's the “head that is covered” not all the hair.

The Greek of “covered” and “covering” are different. **κατακαλύπτω (katakalypto)** is the Greek word for “covered” in **vs 6,7** and **περιβόλαιον (peribolaion)** for “covering” in **v15**. In verse 4 *covered* literally means “*having something on her head*” and that is Paul's theme. Her hair is a natural veil on a day to day basis and as Paul says “**it is a glory for her**” and such is to be covered in public worship. Incidentally “long hair” in **v15** is one Greek word of which the root

meaning is *to order, or to arrange*. Essentially it is not referring to hair as to its length. If it solely meant this then it would be unfair because there are many ladies who can't have very long hair. The Lord has given the woman a hair arrangement or a style so she can look like a woman.

Man is not to have an effeminate hairstyle and appearance, nature has put this distinction into place by hair type and arrangement. By creation and nature, women have a hair style in everyday life that is different from man. The extreme abuse of this is when a man changes and arranges his appearance to look like a woman and visa versa, the blurring of this distinction is an open denial of what God has established from Creation and in nature itself.

Verse 15 is a supportive argument and cannot be viewed as an objection to the head covering.

In closing we must evaluate the matter with grace and ask is this that which God has established or is it man's own teaching? The man has his responsibility; he is not to cover his head in public worship, he is to remember he is subject to Christ. The Women must worship with their heads covered. The type of covering is not dealt with. In Paul's time it was a veil because hats were not invented but any type of modest covering is acceptable but it must be practised not out of legal bondage but with joy knowing why these things are so and what they represent and therefore showing love and obedience for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some take **v16** where it says **But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God** and they will say *"teaching the head covering as a custom is contentious"*. But that is not what Paul says as he closes or else what would be the point of saying what he has said? Rather he means that the custom of women covering their heads has always been the case so those that object are being contentious.

As Matthew Henry said, *"It was the common usage of the churches for women to appear in public assemblies, and join in public worship, veiled; and it was manifestly decent that they should do so. Those must be very contentious indeed who would quarrel with this, or lay it aside."*

Notes on v10 "because of the angels" (Rev. J Greer)

Verse 10 seems to give people problems at times, especially the words **"because of the angels"**. The word "power" simply means "authority", that is, the woman is wearing authority of her head; in public worship the woman is to have a sign on her head to show that she is under authority of role. "Because of the angels", there is no difficulty as to these words; the angels of God are present when we are worshipping God. **Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12**, the angels of God desire, they long to look into these things. Unseen beings are present in our worship and watch in. Paul was saying here that when we gather or assemble for worship we are in the presence of angels who themselves **veil their faces, because they are in the presence of Almighty God (Isaiah 6)**, therefore if the angels veil their faces ought not women to do likewise and show their particular function and role.