

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

03-63

Dear Reader,

Several months ago I was in a southern city and in the paper was a large photograph of a service in a “church” of a denomination which, generally speaking, we would have very little in common. Yet what caught my eye was that every lady, including female children, wore a head covering. What passed through my mind was the thought that isn’t it strange that, even with the little truth they have, they had it right when it came to head coverings, whereas most groups who have much more truth have done away with head coverings or at least made them an option. Who is right? That will be our primary study in this issue.

Many years ago a brother who knew the truth of headship and head coverings, denounced to a group of us, the insistence on head coverings being worn in the meetings of the local assembly. When reminded of 1 Corinthians 11, he angrily retorted, “That is just the opinion of your sect.” If it is simply an opinion, then we rightly should be charged with being a sect because a sect is a grouping of people based on certain opinions. But if it is God’s Word, then it is neither an opinion nor can those who seek to maintain the truth be rightly called a sect because of seeking to maintain that truth. I believe this brother now fellowships where there is no insistence on head coverings.

I was recently at a non-assembly gathering where there was prayer and preaching of the Word. Many sisters came from assemblies where the truth of head coverings is known and practiced. Yet head coverings were conspicuous by their absence! Why? Is it a rebellious spirit? Is it pride? Is it not wanting to be different? Is it a protest demanding equality in every sphere? Or is it simply incomplete teaching? While every sister would undoubtedly have her own reasons, we will assume in this paper that we have failed to satisfactorily teach this God-given distinction between the sexes.

Is it any wonder that sisters are confused? A sister in my young adult Sunday School class asked for an in-depth study of the subject and her request forced me to study to give an in-depth answer. The following paper, herein slightly expanded, presents what I presented to the class. But we can’t just jump into head coverings because we first have to understand the Lord’s teaching on headship.

## HEADSHIP AND THE HEAD COVERING

1 Corinthians 11:3-16 is the apostolic – and thus the *Lord’s* (1 Cor.14:38) – instruction on *headship*. Headship has the

thought of direction, control and sustenance. The human head directs, controls and supplies food to the human body. If the body acts in ways other than as directed by the head (our brain), we say something is wrong: the person is sick. Christ our Head, spiritually, directs, controls and feeds each of us and the whole body of Christ through His Word as taught by the Holy Spirit in personal study and by the teaching of gifted teachers. When we go against the directions of our Head, we are spiritually sick! What then in God’s order for headship and what are the outward signs, if any?

1 Corinthians 11:3-16 is divided into several sections. Verse 3 gives the divine order or ranking of headship. Verses 4-6 give one outward sign: the head covering for the women and the lack of it for the man. Verses 7-13 give some of the divine reasons for God’s order or ranking and warn against abuse of that order by the men in particular. Verses 14-15 give another outward sign of headship: hair length. Finally, verse 16 warns against being contentious about these instructions, for the local assemblies of Paul’s day obeyed God instead of ignoring, attempting to explain away, or arguing over divine instructions. Let’s look at the details.

### Section 1: The Divine Order or Ranking of Headship (v.3)

Christ *as Man* has a spiritual Head, even though He is God. Christ, the eternal Son, took the place of dependent Man and thus always did those things which pleased the Father. So He submitted to the headship of God without question. See Isaiah 50:4-5. In this there obviously was no expression of superiority or inferiority between Father and Son. Neither should there be any such feeling with us. We should likewise submit to God’s order without any question of fairness or feeling of superiority/inferiority. Would you tell God He was unfair? Just as Christ has a Head, so does both man and woman. Man is the woman’s spiritual head, and Christ is the man’s spiritual head. From Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3, children are under the headship of both parents. This is divine order! None of us has any right to complain or question God’s order.

A Few years ago I heard a woman on the radio preach for half an hour against head coverings. First, she argued, it was simply cultural: uncovered women at Corinth were prostitutes, so the Christian women should be distinct from those! Secondly, she argued, Paul was a woman-hating bachelor who wanted to repress women. The Holy Spirit knew such charges would be made, so He inspired Paul to

write that “If anyone thinks himself to be ... spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor.14:37). The next verse says that if anyone wants to be ignorant of this fact, then let him be ignorant. Man’s ignorance doesn’t change God’s commandments. So the things that Paul wrote for the Church are neither cultural nor the “personal feelings” of any man or woman.

## **Section 2: Head Covering, the Outward Sign of Headship (vv.4-6)**

God begins with the man (whose spiritual Head is Christ) and says that when praying or prophesying (when God’s Word is being preached), he is to have nothing on his physical head, for to do so would dishonor Christ whom man represents on earth (Eph.5:23). It is not said anywhere in this portion that no covering applies only to the formal meetings of the assembly, but *wherever* and *whenever* there is preaching or praying.

I remember giving the talk at a Sunday School picnic. Only after seeing pictures of the event did I realize I had my hat on the whole time. I asked why people didn’t tell me. They didn’t want me to get my head burned. I was upset. Although unintentionally, I had violated God’s intended picture and it was wrong. Not being in an assembly setting had nothing to do with it.

Only after dealing with the man does the apostle turn to the women (vv.5-6). She does not physically pray or preach in the formal meetings of the assembly (1 Cor.14:34-35), but she does so *spiritually* as she agrees with the men who act as the mouthpiece of the assembly, and adds her “amen” to what they say. In other times she may physically pray or preach (Acts 21:9) when not in an assembly setting, or she may be at functions where there is prayer or preaching. Think of Sunday School, Childrens Meetings, Weddings, Funerals, etc. In all such instances she is to have a *covering* on her head.

The Greek word for “covering” is *kata-kalupto* with *kata* giving intensity to the Greek word (Vine). The form of the word in verses 6-7 is “to cover oneself up” and thus indicates a voluntary obedience to God’s plain will expressed in these verses. To not cover up her physical head is dishonoring to her spiritual head, man, who represents Christ. It would indicate that she seeks the man’s place and refuses submission (Eph.5:22-23). If that is what she wants, then she might as well cut off her hair and look like a man. Nowhere are men (or the assembly) told to actually cut off the hair of a woman who refuses to wear a head covering, although willful sin in the assembly would become a matter of assembly discipline.

While the Greek word seems to indicate a significant covering, God doesn’t specify the size or type and neither should we. But since it is a sign, it should be obvious. For example, a wig would certainly cover, but would give the impression to others of no covering and thus would be a sign to others of disobedience, not obedience.

*Could* many sisters take the man’s place? Of course! Often times a sister is smarter, more into the Word, more articulate than the man, and may well have a greater spiritual gift. *Should* she do so? Of course not! A godly sister maintains God’s order and His types (pictures, signs) of headship. To be shorn of her outward glory would be a shame for most women.

## **Section 3: Divine Reasons and Warnings (vv.7-13)**

Man shouldn’t cover his head because he is the image and glory [displayed excellence] of God: he is to represent [image] and display God and His attributes here on earth. Does he fail? Often miserably, but that doesn’t change God’s order. On the other hand, woman is the glory of man. She displays his excellencies. “Her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her .... She does him good and not evil all the days of her life .... Her husband praises her .... A woman who fears the Lord ... shall be praised” (Prov.31:10-31).

God takes the matter of headship back to creation in verses 8-9. Woman was created from Adam (his rib), to be his companion just fit for him physically, spiritually and emotionally. Then Paul explains in verse 10 that the woman’s head covering is a sign of authority: that she willingly takes the role God has assigned that she is under the headship of man and that Christ is Head of His Church, of which she is a part, and thus has divine right to make distinctions in roles (Eph.5:22-23).

We are also told in Ephesians 3:10 that the angels are watching the wisdom of God concerning His Church being worked out on earth, and part of this wisdom is the roles of headship which the Lord has assigned. These are earthly roles, not roles of the new creation where there are no distinctions between men and women (Gal.3:28). Both equally are going to heaven, both equally have the Holy Spirit and one or more spiritual gifts. Both equally belong to the Assembly. Both equally are part of the bride of Christ. Both equally will reign with Him as His wife.

Lest the man gets puffed up and demeans the woman, Paul reminds the brothers and sisters in verses 11-12 that today, for birth to take place, both a man and woman are needed, and although woman came from man in creation, today, man is born *from* the woman. This is all from God.

#### Section 4: Another Outward Sign of Headship: Hair Length (vv.14-15)

It seems that God has made it instinctive in people that long hair is naturally feminine and beautiful for women, but improper and effeminate for the man. The Greek word used here for “long hair” is *komao* (Strongs) and has the thought of “have tresses of hair” with the dictionary meaning of tresses being “long hair.” But note there is nothing to indicate how long, or that the woman’s hair is to be uncut (as some insist), but it is to be noticeably longer than the man’s. God obviously expects this to be a distinction of headship that both men and women should take to heart, as much as the head covering. Verse 15 says a woman’s long hair is a “displayed excellence” to her – her glory. Few men aren’t impressed by beautiful long hair on a woman.

But the last part of verse 15 creates a problem with many women and some men too. They argue that, despite all that is said before, the woman’s long hair *is* her head covering, so no other covering is needed. This is stated despite what God said above, that if the woman refused something additional on her head, she might as well have all that beautiful hair cut off and then look like a man if she was going to reverse divine gender roles and act like a man, that is, take outwardly the man’s place.

The fact is, the Greek word here translated *covering* in most translations is entirely different than the word “covering” or “covered” above. It is *peri-bolaion* (actually without the hyphen). I put in the hyphen to set apart *peri*, for it is the Greek word for *around*. Think of the peri-meter (perimeter) of a building – the distance all around it; or the peri-scope on a submarine, which gives the sub commander a 360 degree view of the water surface and the sky too. The Greek word *peribolaion* has many ways of being used, but here the thought seems to be “to cover around the head and face.” The natural, long hair of a woman is God’s natural covering to go around the head and face, and that beautiful natural “covering” is to be covered or hidden by another covering during preaching and praying.

Bob Costen relates that a 17 year old girl was asked by an older woman why she wore a head covering. She replied, “Even if I don’t fully understand everything about it, I would cover my head as my hair is my glory. But why should my glory be seen when I desire that Christ’s glory be seen.”

J.N. Darby and William Kelly both translate the end of verse 15 as “given her instead of a veil” – instead of something she would otherwise wear all the time to surround her head and face. It has nothing to do with what she adds on her head, over her natural covering, only during prayer and preaching.

#### Section 5: Contentions (v.16)

Many have read this verse 16 to say that if anyone becomes contentious – becomes upset over this perceived unequal act of adding a head covering for the women and no head covering for the man, or over hair length – it’s not very important, so forget about it. Indeed, that is the position of perhaps 99% of Christians today. But where in Scripture do we have a “commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor.14:37) that we are to ignore if our flesh (our sinful nature) doesn’t like God’s rules? Never!

Rather, the verse says the very opposite. It says that neither the apostles nor the assemblies had any custom of being contentious about God’s directions. At least in Paul’s earlier days, the assemblies heard and practiced the “apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) without question once they were assured it was God’s mind (Acts 17:11; 1 Thes.5:21). Won’t we do likewise?  
RPD

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In the space remaining I want to begin a subject that will take several *Assembly Messenger* issues. What does God’s Word say about our *attitudes*? As we normally think of it, my dictionary defines *attitude* as “a mental position with regard to a fact or state; a feeling or emotion towards a fact or state; a manner showing one’s feelings or thoughts.” We say that someone has a good or bad attitude. We mean *how* a person is perceived to react, mentally, physically and/or emotionally to a fact or situation or person, in comparison, for a Christian, to how Christ would act. Is the fruit of the Spirit seen, or the fruits of the flesh? Although perhaps it shouldn’t (for we should always seek to please God regardless of the attitude of others), the fact is that many have been driven away from practicing assembly truth because of the poor attitudes of others.

Although we plan to devote the majority of the next few *Messengers* to New Testament examples and teaching on this subject, a book could be filled with Old Testament examples. Much can be gleaned from Proverbs alone. Our starting verse is found in Proverbs 23:7, “As he thinks in his heart, so is he.” Although there is a specific application in the context in Proverbs, the principle is universal. How I think about something is how I will react towards it.

If I am self-centered and full of pride; if I don’t like someone; if I am envious; if I am controlling; it will come out in how I act, react and speak. People will see it as a bad attitude. I won’t be able to hide it. If I am God- and people-centered, with little pride (because I realize that there is nothing good in my sinful nature – Rom.7:18); if I love even my enemies (although not necessarily loving what they do or say); if I rejoice at the good that comes to others, it also will come out in what I do and say. I won’t be able to hide it. People will see it as a good, Christ-like attitude.

A remarkable story is told us in 1 Samuel 25, based almost entirely on attitudes. A rich man named Nabal had a wife named Abigail, a beautiful woman of good understanding, but Nabal was harsh and evil in his doings (v.3). David and his men had protected Nabal's household, but Nabal (meaning son of Belial) refused to give David any supplies. Nabal's own servants called him "a scoundrel" (v.17). He was a man with a rotten attitude!

David was angry and on his way to kill Nabal and others of the household when Abigail wisely intervened with kind and convincing words and deeds: she had a good attitude! "A soft answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness" (Prov.15:1-2). And it seems Nabal's attitude was responsible for his death (vv.37-38). And Abigail then became David's wife (v.42). Do you see any of Nabal in your attitudes? How much better to have attitudes like Abigail had!

Think of Cain and Abel. Cain, a self-centered man, didn't get what he thought he deserved (a really bad attitude) and as a result, killed his brother (Gen.4). Would we like to "kill" those who disagree with us?

Think of Abraham and Lot (Gen.13-20). Abraham was God- and people-centered, even interceding with God for any righteous in evil Sodom. Lot was self-centered, always wanting what he perceived to be for his advantage. But how wrong he was! As a result he lost everything. Lot had a really bad attitude!

Think of Joseph (Gen.37-47) and the good, God-centered attitude he maintained under the most trying of circumstances when it would have been very "natural" to give in to lust, discouragement and finally vengeance.

Think of Moses and the children of Israel (Ex.32-33). God said He would destroy Israel and make a great nation from Moses (32:9-10). What an offer to appeal to man's natural pride! But not Moses. He generally had a God-and people-centered attitude, so he pleaded for the people (Ex.32:11-14, 30-35; 33:12-17) and saved most of their lives. Throughout his history he devoted himself to Israel, although by natural right, he should have given up on them. It was a thankless task!

Going on many years, think of Nehemiah. He had a comfortable job serving the king, but a heart for God's people. So he took on the thankless and very difficult job to lead them back to Jerusalem and lead them in rebuilding the walls amid opposition from within and without. What a great attitude he had!

Think of Isaiah. Going to proclaim judgment on Israel was not the work of a self-centered man with a resulting bad

attitude. But Isaiah was God-centered, so he could say, "Here am I, send me" (Isa.6:8). And God said, "Go." His attitude reflected his godliness.

Think of Daniel who "purposed in his heart" not to defile himself, and at the same time how wisely he handled himself before the authorities. He was a man of good attitudes and thus God used him mightily.

We could go on and on, seeing the display of good attitudes to emulate and of bad attitudes to make sure they aren't also our attitudes! But we trust this whets your appetite for what is to come and that you will seriously consider how others see you – as one with godly attitudes or with fleshly attitudes? Under any circumstance, what would Jesus do? Then do likewise!

### Closing

We want to again remind you that current and past issues are available for downloading on our website, [www.assemblymessenger.com](http://www.assemblymessenger.com) and that you can write us at Dearborn Heights assembly, 24570 Ann Arbor Trail, Dearborn Heights, MI 48127-1780. We still have very limited copies of back issues for those in North America who cannot download them. There is never a charge for the *Assembly Messenger* and we strongly recommend copying and further distribution. RPD

### Letters

"... the Holy Spirit shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; wherefore the Holy Thing also which shall be born shall be called Son of God" (Lk.1:35, JND). We read of the announcement to Mary, by the angel, of that Holy One that shall be born, and how it will take place; it is by the Holy Spirit coming upon her and the overshadowing power of the Highest. Thus it was entirely apart from human means, except Mary was the vessel through whom the Son came into Manhood... It was by the overshadowing power of the Highest. *The Holy Spirit is never mentioned as being a father in any way.*"

Yours affectionately, Alvin Veitch (Arnprior, Ontario)

Thank you brother Alvin. This letter is in reference to the last issue, 03-62, page 3, under Luke 1:35, where we carelessly spoke of the Holy Spirit being the Lord's father. We agree with our brother and should have simply stated that God was His father (Jn.1:14; 5:18; 6:57; 16:28 and many similar verses). Brethren, keep your comments coming! We answer questions written in Christian kindness (showing a good attitude) and signed.

Also note on pg.4 of this same 03-62 issue that the heading **1 John 10:14** ought to be **1 John 4:14**.