

# **What Does It Mean That Women in the Church Should Cover Their Heads?**

**By Rev. D. Earl Cripe, Ph.D.**

There is some confusion in many parts of Christianity over St. Paul's instruction in I Corinthians 11 that women should cover their heads. Let's examine the scriptures in question and see what we can learn about the matter.

St. Paul starts off by praising the Corinthian's for paying close attention to the instructions that he has given them concerning how the church should be conducted in assembly. A serious commitment to the truth and a dedicated pattern of obedience is a large part of the battle:

**I Cor 11:2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.**

Even so, it is only part of the battle. Another important matter, and one of the major issues in Christendom since the beginning of the Church Age, is the importance of taking the spirit rather than the letter of truth. In his second letter, the Apostle will go into this doctrine in-depth. However, at this point he wishes to focus on the practicality of the matter rather than the doctrine behind it.

In particular is the teaching that in this world, while we walk by faith not by sight and we do not yet see God physically, the man is the representative of God on earth. We know that Christ is the Head of the Church, though He is not here now. In His physical absence, the responsibility of leadership has been committed to the elders, prophets, preachers and teachers of the Church. We have dealt with the issue of the man-woman relationship as God established it in the Garden of Eden in a number of contexts and commentaries. It is not exactly timely to take it up here, but the subject demands that we review it and

establish those divine mandates. The teaching here in chapter 11 is based upon those realities and we must have them clearly in sight.

### ***Man is to the Woman what God is to Man***

There were physical, domestic and social reasons for the structure that God put into place, but the theological and doctrinal issues are the ones that concern us now. God's program from the beginning was to bring into being a family that would dwell with Him in the perfection of eternity. Without going into all the nuances and philosophical issues, suffice it to say that this perfect world will include total submission of the children to the Father. Another way of putting it is the complete and willing subjection of the Bride to her Groom. All resentment and rejection of that system is brushed away by the Scriptures in the declaration that God is good, God is wise, God is loving, God is all-powerful, and the system that God has provided is the only one that can give rise to and sustain perfect happiness forever in a perfect family relationship.

Early on, in this creation of the human race and the program that God put in place to eventually accomplish His divine purpose, there was a realization that the man needed an intimate to live and share with. If the philosophers and reasoners of secular and religious humanism had drawn up the prospectus, it would have been written much differently. But of course it would have been wrong (even as it is today when the Scriptures are set aside in favor of those dark and disastrous theories). In God's Kingdom and realm, the man being in the image of God must be in charge of the relationship and the woman must willingly be subject to her man. Many things went into the making up of the structure that would guide that relationship. One important consideration had to do with hair. A man's head was not to be covered in order to show physically — in this natural realm before the eternal world is established — that there is no one above him in authority. This establishes the fact that the covering of one's head is a sign of being under authority.

### ***Man the Representative of God on Earth***

We would not want to be misunderstood here. Of course, man is under the authority of Christ and of God; but we are speaking about the physical

essence in this temporal realm. To dramatize this fact and to keep the testimony of the relationship on track, God ordained that men should wear his hair short. The woman would wear her hair long to cover her head. That would be a testimony of being in subjection to the man who was her living head. This is indeed what the Apostle is getting at in verse three:

**I Cor 11:3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.**

This is something that has been often recognized by Christian people and an effort has been made to comply with it. Even so, a problem has existed as the result of taking the letter rather than the spirit of this truth. The Apostle will soon say that *the letter kills and the spirit gives life*. As it applies to the Church and the aspect of men being leaders, the spirit of the teaching was never intended to tell us that a woman may not under any circumstances offer public prayers or get up before the assembly and talk. Depending on the situation and what the elders think is wise, this talking may even include teaching. In the give-and-take that God built into the man-woman relationship, as He intended for it to exist in the Church, there is flexibility to allow that type of development. It is exactly this that St. Paul is directing attention to shortly when he mentions, "every woman who prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head". The Catholic fathers have argued that every woman goes to the church to pray; therefore, this chapter requires that she cover her head. That legalistic approach to this commandment is simply off the mark. Most women, as indeed many of the men, do not go to church to pray. They go there to fellowship, to worship and to listen to the teaching and to public prayer being made by the leaders. If a woman is invited by her elders to get up before the assembly and offer a public prayer, or if she is invited to prophesy (this is a multifaceted gift and we will not go into all that is involved in it at the moment), she may do so. But in order to prevent confusion and the starting of resistance

movements among the women, she must wear on her head some covering to show that she is doing this by permission and that she is functioning under the authority of the leaders of the church.

**I Cor 11:4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head.**

**I Cor 11:5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.**

Some may point out that this is an additional covering beside her hair that was given to her by God. That is certainly true and the reason for the additional measure is the unusualness of the situation. Every woman in the congregation, unless she has some disease that prevents her from doing so, will have long hair. This woman must wear an additional covering on her head to meet the demands of that situation. If she refuses to do that, or if her elders and Christian leaders fail to require it of her, then the order of the woman being under the authority of the man has been breached and the relationship has been dishonored and perverted. If it is not right for a woman, who is invited to do some act of public worship or preaching that is normally reserved for the man, to wear a particular covering on her head to testify that she is under authority, then she might as well shave her head. Either she is under authority or she is not; and either authority requires her to cover her head, or it does not. In the normal situations of life we are talking about how a woman wears her hair. We are not giving elders the right to measure the length of hair or to get involved in hairstyles (though that has often and unwisely been done), but rather we are saying that the Bible requires a woman to wear her hair long.

**I Cor 11:6 For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.**

If the woman does not want to do that, or if she is being promoted by a constituency of the church who does not want her to do that because they want to breach the ancient rules, then she is denying her God-given position in the man-woman relationship. Why is she willing to wear long hair testifying that she is a woman under the authority of her husband if she does not want to wear something on her head when she engages in an act of public service to show that she is under the authority of the men in the church? As St. Paul points out, these two issues are one. We are not so legalistic in the Orthodox Christian Church that we do not allow women under any circumstances to participate in public ministry. But we are careful that the liberty we extend, and the generosity we show, does not start a movement of revolution and rebellion. If you think this is not an issue in the Church, you are not aware of what is going on in Catholicism, the Anglican church, the Presbyterian and Lutheran churches, the world of Charismatic Humanism, and now almost all professed fundamental and evangelical churches. The careless way in which women have not only been allowed but promoted to participate in public worship without being required to adhere to the proper testimony and structure has created a mass defection from the historic faith.

**I Cor 11:7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.**

Furthermore, in the perversion of truth in the West in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the same movers and shakers who have encouraged women to demand and brazenly assume leadership in the Church, have encouraged women to cut their hair short like men. They have also brainwashed our young men into the unisex mentality of wearing their hair long like women. Originally the philosophy was to create a sense of equality. In recent years, the truth has come out boldly. It is indeed to reverse the order of the sexes, to put the women in control, and to confuse and distort the role of men by dressing boys like girls,

by getting them that wear their hair like women, and by establishing only female authority over them until they have reached manhood.

### ***Good or Evil***

We have pointed out many times that there are only two forces at work in this world; there is no neutral ground. There is only good and evil; light and dark; the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. All of the thrusts that have to do with the role of women in the Church and the way both men and women wear their hair are attacks of Satan against the original order that God established when He created man in His own image. Say what you will, it is a perversion and a distortion for men to wear their hair long. It is effeminate and disgraceful.