

Hair length in that society was apparently also connected with sexual morals and with prostitution. A female prostitute would demonstrate what she was by shaving her head. A male prostitute, usually homosexual or at least bisexual, would demonstrate what he was by growing his hair long, since that was so against the usual custom of the day. So in verse 6, if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn, means if she is not going to marry her man, she might as well start charging him for services like a prostitute. If that is disgraceful, then she ought to marry him. These are strong words, yet entirely fitting when it comes to sexual morality, which has always been emphasized as extremely important in God's commands throughout the Bible.

I Corinthians 11:10 does not read "because of the angels," but *diatous angelous*, literally meaning "through (agency of) the angels." It will always be helpful to us to realize that in Greek the word for "angels" is not the name of a race of beings, but is simply a Greek word meaning a messenger or agent. In Matthew 11:10 and Mark 1:2, John the Baptizer is called an angel, translated messenger in the NKJV. In Luke 7:24, John himself sent messengers or angels of his own. In the Acts period in which I Corinthians 11 was written, God had His messengers or agents on earth, His apostles. These were authorized to bind a thing on earth and it would also be bound in heaven. Any believer who wished to be married in God's sight could be married by God's own apostles, His human *angelous*. What believer in Jesus Christ then had any excuse for living together but not being married?

Regarding I Corinthians 11:13-14, could anyone deny that it is improper for a woman to be living in sexual sin with her man and yet pray to God as if nothing was wrong? Homosexuality was common in Corinthian society, yet the biological facts in the case show that sexual organs were designed and meant to function in a heterosexual, not a homosexual, manner. Society may like to approve and applaud homosexuality, yet this biological fact of nature cannot be reasonably denied.

Keeping clearly in mind the fact that Paul is speaking about Christ as the head of the man and the husband as the head of the wife allows us to conclude that Paul is speaking euphemistically about sexual morals in this passage. This highly relevant issue was raised since the Corinthians were notoriously lax in such things. Trying to find rules about head coverings and hair length in the passage is ignoring Paul's own definition of what he was talking about. Recognizing his stated figures of speech allows us to come to an understanding of the terms "covering and uncovering" in I Corinthians 11.

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Covered and Uncovered

By Nathan C. Johnson

I Corinthians 11 has been a catalyst for much controversy in Biblical circles because of its teaching regarding women, head coverings, and hair length. Many legalistic Christian groups have developed laws and rules for their members to follow from this portion of scripture. Yet the difficulties are many, and if we are to arrive at the truth of this passage, they should be squarely faced, and not ignored.

For example, consider the statements of verses 4 and 5 (*New King James Version* throughout). **Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.** Paul makes strong, definite, unequivocal statements. These are generally assumed to refer to women wearing veils, and to men removing their hats before praying.

Yet surely this is a very strange thing. One would peruse the Old Testament in vain for even a hint of a command regarding hats, veils, or head coverings. While God sets forth many rules and regulations for life, including clothing details, never once does he weigh in on women wearing veils, for or against, or for men wearing hats or any kind of head covering. Apparently, God considered this inconsequential when it came to setting forth His law to Israel. It is true we know that in Israelite culture they did have norms and traditions regarding these things. There are certainly indications in the Old Testament that people did wear head coverings and that women did wear veils. Yet we should never make the mistake of assuming that the Bible commands what it only describes. Israelites having cultural norms does not mean that God commanded those norms. Nowhere in God's law is there the least hint, as we already stated, of any law regarding head coverings.

Yet after the Old Testament was completely silent on head coverings, suddenly in the New Testament, after Christ's death on the cross and after the believing Israelites outside the land were "not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14), God commands through Paul in strong, inflexible language that not only are these commands regarding head coverings an absolute requirement, but that it is a dishonor not to follow them. Why this sudden, dramatic change? Why after not caring about head coverings

in the Old Testament did God suddenly find them to be an absolute requirement?

Another puzzling statement is found in verse 10. **For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.** This passage too has given many students difficulties. Why would it be necessary for a woman to wear head coverings because of the angels? What do angels have to do with it? Many have suggested this might be in light of Genesis 6:2 and the fact that the sons of God, apparently angels, saw the daughters of Adam that they were beautiful, and took wives of them of all whom they chose. Yet if this were the case and if it were necessary to veil women because of this, why did God not mention that fact through Moses? Why did He wait until Paul, more than fifteen hundred years later, to make this a requirement? Were the angels not affected by seeing women unveiled from Moses to Paul, and then after Paul were they suddenly being affected?

Another difficulty arises concerning I Corinthians 11:13-14. **Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?** If I had to answer Paul, I would say that the vast majority of women I have seen praying have done so with their heads uncovered, and I have never judged anything improper about that. I also see nothing whatsoever in nature to convince me that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him. In fact, as I look at nature, I see that among lions, the male has longer hair than the female. Did God make a great mistake when He made the lion? Nothing in nature would teach me men must have shorter hair than women.

As is often the case when we are struggling with a passage, we are creating our own difficulties by taking the wrong path from the start. I Corinthians 11:3 begins the passage with a very important statement. **But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.** To understand this verse, two facts should be considered. First of all, in Greek there is no separate word for a wife or a husband. Instead of saying "my wife," a man would say "my woman." Instead of saying "my husband," a woman would say "my man." Therefore, when translating to English, the translators must make a judgment call in every occurrence whether a man or a husband is being referred to, and whether a woman or a wife. In this case, while they have translated man and woman, we would suggest that they made a mistake in doing so. Romantic couples are at issue, not simply men and women.

Secondly, we would suggest that this verse, coming as it does at the very beginning of this passage discussing covered and uncovered, defines for us what the word *head* means in the remainder of the passage. Whenever a woman's head is spoken of, it means her husband. Whenever a man's head is spoken of, it means Christ. This verse is like the key on a map which explains what certain symbols on the map mean. If one fails to heed

the key, one might get very confused in trying to interpret the map. The same thing is true here. We read in verse 3 the key that the head of every man is Christ. But if we then read in verse 4 that a man dishonors his head if he prays or prophesies with his head covered and we conclude it means he should take his hat off when he prays, we are entirely wrong. We just read that his head is Christ. How is he to take a hat off of Christ before he prays? We have turned the passage into confusion by failing to heed the key. The same is true if we think we are talking about a woman wearing a veil when she prays. If her head is her husband, is she to cover her entire husband with a veil before she prays? This again is only confusion. The passage is not talking about hats or veils at all.

Yet while recognizing that verse 3 is a key does help us interpret the passage, it does not clear away all the difficulties. We cannot help but think that if we were ever going to understand the passage completely, Paul would have had to give us a second key, perhaps in verse three-and-a-half, telling us what covered and uncovered means, and what long and short hair means. These terms are obviously symbols for something else, yet what they are is never clearly stated. But whatever the meaning is, it has nothing to do with hats or veils, or with actual hair length.

We can go elsewhere in Scripture for help. In Genesis 3:7, after Adam and his wife sinned, they felt naked, which I believe in this case means exposed and without protection. They sewed fig leaves together to make themselves coverings, which were to offer protection. The same thing is true in Genesis 9:21, when Noah drank wine and became uncovered in his tent. He was exposed and without protection, and his son Ham greatly dishonored him in his helpless state. When Shem and Japheth took a garment, went into the tent backwards, and laid it over their father's nakedness, they honored him and restored his protection. Thus we get some idea about covering and uncovering. Finally, I Corinthians 11:10 states that a woman having her head covered is the same as having authority on her head. Shem and Japheth, then, may also have been recognizing their father's authority, which Ham ignored and disgraced.

If we interpret a woman having her head covered to mean a woman having authority "on" her man, suddenly the strong language and commands of these verses become much more understandable. Similar to our society today, sexual morals in first century Corinth were often ignored and violated. As in our society, men and women living together without being married was all too common. Yet if a woman who had not given her man the authority of being her husband prayed or prophesied in such a state, she dishonored her man by doing so. In II Corinthians 3:7, Paul says Moses' face was covered to obscure the glory leaving it from the children of Israel. If a man prayed or prophesied with a covering, as it were, obscuring his sexual life from his Lord since he had not subjected his life to His moral commands, he would dishonor Christ by doing so.