

## Should Women Cover Their Heads In Church?

(appropriate for High-Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily July 2018

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### I Corinthians 11:1-16

**Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. 2 Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. 3 But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. 4 Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. 5 But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. 6 For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. 7 For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; 9 for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. 10 Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.**

### Apostolic Traditions

The traditions that Paul is referring to in verses 1& 2 are not cultural traditions but are apostolic traditions. In other words, these are practices that Christians are to do as stated in verse 16 and to pass down to others as a command from God.

### II Thessalonians 2:15

**So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of *mouth* or by letter from us.**

### II Thessalonians 3:6-9

**Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. <sup>7</sup> For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; <sup>9</sup> not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.**

Notice that in most cases the traditions being referred to are in the category of imitating or following Paul's example. The examples he wants them to follow are things he wrote to them about in scripture as an Apostle and are, therefore, God's words.

### Doctrine or Historical Revelation?

When you test this passage of scripture to see if it is historical revelation or doctrine it comes back as doctrine because it reads like God is preaching a sermon to us.

### **Doctrine:**

*the universal truths of the Bible that apply to all people, living at any time in the past, present, or future, living at any place on the Earth in any culture. Doctrine is that part of the Bible that sounds like God is preaching a sermon to you when you read it.*

**Historical Revelation:** *the parts of the Bible that describe what happened to some guy at a particular place and time in history but it is not universal truth. It's like watching God's TV show or reading a book about someone else's life.*

For a detailed study on this topic please see, "How To Avoid False Doctrine" at:  
<http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

Notice also that Paul does not make references to culture here but instead makes references to more universal things, which is consistent with doctrine. For example, in verse 10 there is a reference to doing these things because of the angels. Angels have no interest in the cultures of men but they are very interested in universal spiritual truth.

### **I Peter 1:12**

**It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.**

### **Ephesians 3:8-10**

**To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,<sup>9</sup> and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;<sup>10</sup> so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.**

In verse 14 Paul makes reference to the universal truths of nature which God created. So, all the language and references in this passage are consistent with universal doctrine. For this reason the conservative theologians such as John MacArthur, R.C. Sproul, etc. will state that this passage definitely has doctrine in it. The next question is, "How much of the passage is doctrine and what parts are not?"

At a minimum, conservative theologians will agree that it is doctrine for women in church to wear a physical symbol of their voluntary submission to the spiritual authority of the men of the church. What is this symbol? Some will say that the symbol is a physical covering that women wear over their hair.

Let me read you a quote from the late R.C. Sproul, an American theologian and ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America. Sproul was one of the chief architects of the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and has been described as "the greatest and most influential proponent of the recovery of Reformed theology in the last century."

*"If Paul merely told women in Corinth to cover their heads and gave no rationale for such instruction, we would be strongly inclined to supply it via our cultural knowledge. In this case, however, Paul provides a rationale which is based on an appeal to creation not to the custom of Corinthian harlots. We must be careful not to let our zeal for knowledge of the culture obscure what is actually said." – R.C. Sproul*

When I was a child my mother always wore a scarf over her head in church. In fact, this practice was common from the beginning of the church age up to the middle of the 20th century. Christian women covered their hair in church. In the United States, this changed in the 1960s most likely due to cultural influences.

Other theologians will say that the symbol can be anything agreed on in the culture – it doesn't have to be a head covering. But that begs the question, if its not a head covering then what is it? In most churches, there isn't one! But you can't have it both ways. You can't say the symbol could be anything but that we don't have one. If it isn't a head covering then you have to be able to clearly state what it is for your church.

Some theologians will say that the symbol is the woman's hair itself. Verse 15 seems to support such a position. However, the verse also says that the woman's hair can only be a physical symbol of voluntary spiritual submission if her hair is long. So, for Christian women to obey this passage they need to be intentional about wearing their hair long and to be able to explain the reasons to the younger women.

### **Titus 2:1-5**

**But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. 2 Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. 3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, 4 so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, 5 to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.**

So, if the symbol is the woman's long hair, what is the definition of long? From verse 14, it's safe to say that the hair length of Christian women needs to be noticeably (significantly?) longer than the hair of the men. If this is not the case, something is spiritually wrong in the congregation. Either the men are being rebellious by having their hair too long, the women are being rebellious by having their hair too short, or both! Also, the phrase, "cover the head" in verses 6 and 7 is the Greek word *katakalypto*, which literally means "to cover downward" so the instruction refers to the hair not only being longer but coming down rather than being put up.

The way to make this easiest on the women is for men to have short hair. Just as husbands sacrificing for their wives makes it easier for wives to voluntarily submit to their husband's authority, Christian men wearing their hair short makes it easier for the women to voluntarily wear their hair longer than the men.

For a detailed study on why men should have short hair please see, "Why Jesus Had Short Hair & Why That's Important" at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

There are special cases where a woman has lost her hair or has to wear it short for a medical reason. In these cases the woman can, in fact, wear a head covering as her symbol of submission.

The next question is one of enforcement. In R.C. Sproul's church, his wife and daughter-in-law and some of the women of the church would wear head coverings to church but many women attending his church would not. What did he do?

His response was to teach on the topic of head coverings and their importance but he did not make it a requirement for church attendance. Why? The reason is similar to why husbands can't enforce the submission of their wives. Voluntary submission to human authority is commanded by God so wives are to voluntarily submit to the authority of their husbands. But what if they don't? In that case the husband is commanded to sacrificially love his wife. There is nothing in the Bible indicating he can do anything to force his wife to submit. Why? Because submission has to be voluntary. Because of its voluntary nature, wives do it because they love God. The husband is not really part of it.

In the same way, it makes no sense to force women in the church to wear head coverings or have long hair because then it would not be voluntary. Women need to do it because they love God. If they choose not to, it merely indicates their spiritual immaturity, ignorance of the command, or a rebellious spirit.

What if, when you go to church next Sunday, your pastor says, "As I was preparing this week's sermon, God broke my heart and showed me that we are in sin. I Corinthians 11 is a doctrinal passage that we need to be obeying. From now on I want the women of the church to wear a covering on their heads during the church services."

What would the reaction be? Would people obey? How hard is it to tie a scarf over your head or put a hat on? It's not hard at all - unless you don't want to. In the United States today, the reaction to a pastor doing this could be severe enough to split or destroy a church. Why? Where is that coming from? It's the remnants of depravity in the human heart, even among Christians!

For a detailed study on this topic please see, "Man's Depravity" at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

Some people might say that this issue of hair length is a small issue that can cause big problems. Better just to ignore the topic. But God included it as doctrine in the Bible so it is not a cultural or side issue. And for very little things that are non-negotiable doctrine, Jesus gives us instructions on how we are to handle them.

**Luke 16:10**

**He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.**

**Luke 19:17**

**And he said to him, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.'**

God measures our faithfulness in very little things in order to determine if we can be trusted in bigger things. Also, our level of faithfulness in little things has a big impact on the eternal rewards we will receive in heaven!

**Conclusion**

This passage is a doctrinal passage that is universally true for Christian women at all times in history and in all the cultures of the world. Christian women are to voluntarily wear a symbol of their submission to spiritual authority, for the edification of the angels, when involved in ministry. This symbol can either be a head covering or intentionally wearing their hair down and significantly longer than the Christian men. They also need to be able to instruct the younger women in the importance of this doctrine. Although men may teach the truths of this passage, it is not appropriate for men to try to enforce obedience to it due to its voluntary nature.

**QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD**

*JEREMIAH 15:16*

**THEME: *Should Women Cover Their Heads In Church?***

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Corinthians 11:1-16***

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Thessalonians 2:15, II Thessalonians 3:6-9***

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I Peter 1:10-12, Ephesians 3:8-10***

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