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Head Covering

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"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. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. 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. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." 1 Corinthians 11:3-6; 13-16

This verse seems so misunderstood by so many, so let's address various aspects of the passage which may be confusing.

We begin by noticing that the purpose of the headcovering is because of a woman's place in the natural order: G-d, man, woman:

"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. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels." 1 Corinthians 11:7-10

We can also deduce from this 'headship' that it can only apply to married women, since single women are directly under G-d, without a husband between her and G-d (unless we assume every man is over a woman [like her father, brother, uncle, etc. and then as she ages, her son, nephews, etc]). Clearly only husbands are meant here.

There are several passages indicating headcovering was a common practice among married/betrothed women:

"And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore *she took a veil, and covered herself.*" Genesis 24:64,65

Another verse showing the practice of wifely headcovering was an established practice is in the case of a woman before the priest when her husband suspects infidelity:

And the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and *uncover the woman's head*, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering: and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse." Numbers 5:18

The point being, in order to uncover, she must have been previously covered. The passage makes the assumption that any wife brought before a priest **will** be covered. From Sha'ul's comment in 1 Corinthians 11:16 "But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such

custom, neither the churches of God" it seems clear he is referring to the custom that wives *do* cover their heads.

Now, what kind of covering is deemed appropriate? Is a woman's hair sufficient? No. This is because Sha'ul used different Greek words for the natural hair covering and the headship covering. Let's look at the Greek words in the passage:

Sha'ul said that men should not cover/*katakalupto* (Strong's 2619) their heads. And in verse 11 Sha'ul contrasts that with: "Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered/*akatakaluptos*/" (Strong's 177) Note that 'uncovered'/*akatakaluptos* is the opposite of 'to cover'/*katakalupto*. *Katakaluptos* basically means to UNcover or UNveil. So far, we have a 'men uncover, women cover' command. Now for where the confusion comes in: When Sha'ul refers to a woman's natural hair covering, he uses an altogether different word: "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering/*peribolaion*." (Strong's 4018). *Peribolaion* means something thrown around (loose items like a veil, a mantle, a vesture). Hair is more like a glorious decoration given to woman. Now if Sha'ul had meant the naturally occurring hair covering and the headship-type covering to be one and the same, he would have used the same word for each. Instead, a woman's natural hair covering (*peribolaion*) is being contrasted to this other covering (*katakalupto*) that women wear. In fact, the *katakalupto* actually *covers* the *peribolaion*.

Sha'ul has begun this passage showing the contrasts between men and women in this passage: men are uncovered, women are covered. Then Sha'ul supports his case for headcovering by pointing out that even in nature a woman is given a covering -- by her long hair. But Sha'ul never makes the leap that hair itself *is* a suitable headcover alone. If such a natural covering sufficed, then Sha'ul is wasting his time teaching this since the women already had a natural hair covering. Sha'ul deliberately used different words for the two coverings so we would understand they were complementary to each other but not identical. So there is *no* choice offered in this passage that one may choose to either shave one's head and cover it, or to leave one's hair long and remain uncovered. The natural order is to either wear a covering over the hair or to fully exploit the shame of being uncovered by also shaving off one's hair too. Better: if you resist submitting to the customary female headcovering, you may as well reject your natural hair as well.

Now among those who agree a married woman should wear some sort of covering, there is always the one who argues this headcovering is due to modesty. That somehow hair is too much of a sexual turn on to men and therefore must be covered to keep a man's libido under control. While long hair can be attractive, I'd argue the command has little to do with attractiveness, but instead only represents a husband's headship over his wife. Let me demonstrate why:

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Yochanan/John 12:3

If hair is so sexy that it must be kept covered, then the above verse reads tackily -- as if Mary was trying to arouse Yeshua. Clearly hair did not have any such deep sexual connotations attached to it. Furthermore (assuming hair's sexiness was the reason for the covering) the command to cover is given only to married women (again, notice single Mary wore no such covering). Yet wouldn't many single teenage girls be the ones more likely to entice with their appearance? In fact wouldn't they be the ones most needing this modest head covering? While certainly a woman's hair is attractive and a delight for her husband, I cannot agree that the command to cover a woman's head is strictly because of its attractiveness. The headcovering Sha'ul refers to is less about looks and modesty, and more about showing a woman's 1) marital status and 2) her submission to her husband's headship over her and finally, 3) as evidence for the angels to witness this submissive act (possibly also as a positive example for fallen angels to see -- those who had rejected G-d's headship and refused to submit to Him).

I'd like to address the issue of *when* to cover one's head. There are many who feel headcoverings only need to be worn during congregational services (i.e. 'praying and prophesying'). Sha'ul says we are to 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17) -- so apparently, there is no time when a woman should not be praying, therefore, no time when a woman should be uncovered.

In conclusion, nothing in 1 Corinthians indicates hair (or lack of hair) replaces a proper headcovering on married women. It is this writer's own personal opinion that most any headcovering will be adequate; from a headband, to a scarf, to a hat, to a full veil. The exception to *most any covering* would be a wig, since a wig defeats the whole purpose of the command by giving the illusion of being uncovered. Other than a wig, most any covering will adequately fulfill this command, since *katakalupto* simply means 'to cover' and doesn't specify a particular accessory. For myself, I prefer a modest look, and so I don't choose headcoverings that would draw much attention to myself. To be overly modest and covered up in the society I live in could either lead to false modesty or give others the impression I want to be noticed for extreme piety. The purpose of the covering isn't to attract stares at the supermarket but to show submission to G-d's natural order.



Readers ask.....

Q "I read the article about Headcovering and Women. I was wondering, however, does this concept of headcovering for married women apply just to Jewish women, or does it apply to Gentile women as well. Gentile women used to cover their heads with modest scarfs and such small pieces of cloth, however modesty is Not part of the modern American woman's lifestyle! As a young gentile woman, should I live by this concept when I get married?

Young Gentile Believer."

A One thing I hope this website conveys is that there aren't two ways to G-d -- there is one way for all people. Therefore, if something should be done, it should be done by Jewish and Gentile women. My conclusion from studying Scripture is that married women should wear some sort of covering (regardless of how small or token it is -- even a headband or bow) and that unmarried women are exempt from this command.



Q "Are women forbidden to wear pants? Seems like a simple question, but sometimes it torments me as I wear slacks (and yes, blue jeans too) but when I read Deut. am perplexed. Thank you"

A Unless you are shopping in the men's department, you shouldn't worry about women wearing trousers. At the time Deuteronomy was written, neither sex was wearing trousers in Israel --both were wearing garments more like gowns and robes. My own research (not vast or complete by any means) seems to indicate pants originated in China -- and women wore them. I would apply common sense to this passage and derive that what G-d is saying here is that He doesn't want men to dress like women or women to dress like men -- He is not addressing any particular style of clothing, just that neither should be dressed in such a way as to appear to be imitating the opposite gender. I think it's fairly obvious when men are wearing women's garments and vice-versa. Modern pants are designed to fit the sexes (since waist and hips tend to be in differing proportions), so, as long as you purchase ladies pants from the women's department, you'll have obeyed this command.



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