

The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians

Head Coverings and Christian Conduct

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

1. **Headship is Directly Related to Orderly Relationships** (v.3)

Most of the time when “head” (κεφαλή) appears in the New Testament, it is used literally referring to a part of a person’s physical body. Only a few other times is it used metaphorically when describing a relationship between parties (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:22-24; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19). How one person behaves can bring honor or disgrace to that person’s head (cf. vs.4-6).

2. **Physical Head Coverings Had Moral Implications** (vs.4-6)

A woman wearing a head covering while in public was making a statement of modesty whereas a woman with an uncovered head was seen as soliciting the interest of men and resulted in the forfeit of some legal protections against unwanted attention. Consequently, with the exception of being in their own personal homes or the homes of close friends, Christian and non-Christian women alike would have their heads covered.

3. **Physical Head Coverings Had Theological Implications** (vs.7-12)

Both Adam and Eve were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and Paul is not contradicting this truth. He is emphasizing that Adam was created first and is the reflection of God’s glory in creation whereas Eve was created out of Adam and reflects his glory. And every person was to bring glory to his or her head, and in that way bring glory to God alone (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28). This does not reflect a difference in value or worth between men and women; we all have equal standing and value in Christ (Gal. 3:28; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11).

4. **Physical Head Coverings and Consistent Application** (vs.13-16)

The force of Paul’s argument in favor of women covering their heads while praying or prophesying was conclusive, and he assumed that the Corinthians would see that clearly (v.13; cf. 1 Cor. 10:22). And if there was any lingering uncertainty, Paul further appeals to what is apparent in nature (cf. Rom. 1:26-27). For this reason, it is the consistent practice of Christian churches within Paul’s sphere of influence that women cover their heads when praying or prophesying.