

THE COVERING

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he discusses many matters about which they had questions, as well as other matters about which they needed to be informed. Christianity not being limited in time or to society, his writings are equally applicable to us today.

In the eleventh chapter Paul writes of authority and submission, designating in order God, Christ, man, and woman. He does not elaborate in this chapter on the submission of Christ to God, but he does so in detail regarding Christ, man, and woman. This chain of submission is symbolized by the absence of a covering between man and Christ and by the presence of a covering between woman and man.

Symbolism is Frequently Used in Scripture

Baptism - example of flood, with water as symbol (I Pet. 3:21).

Baptism - example of burial, with water as symbol (Rom. 6:3).

Lord's Supper - body and blood, with bread and fruit of vine as symbols (I Cor. 11).

Subjection - covering, with hair as the symbol (1 Cor 11).

Subjection is not expressed without proper hair covering any more than obedience is expressed without proper baptism or Scriptural communion without bread and fruit of the vine.

Much Misunderstanding Centers Around Verse 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."

An analysis according to my own understanding is here given:

"But if the woman be not covered
[with the veil God intended, her hair],
let her also [even] be shorn:
[it is the same as if she were shorn]
but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven
[and it surely is a shame]
then let her
[resign herself to]
be covered
[with the veil God intended and provided]."

that the word "also" in verse 6 suggests a covering in addition to the hair.

This word is KAI in the Greek and is defined by Strong (2532) as: "and, also, even, so, then, too, etc." Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines this word as used in 1 Cor 11:6 as,

"It marks something added to what has already been said, or that of which something already said holds good; accordingly it takes on the nature of an adverb...In this use it generally throws an emphasis upon the word which immediately follows it...1. used simply, a. *also, likewise*" (page 316d).

According to Thayer, therefore, emphasis is placed by use of the word also upon "shorn" as in agreement with and being equal to "not covered." The idea of a covering in addition to the hair is something not at all implied in this verse but rather an idea which has been improperly inserted through human tradition.

But rather than Greek (which, as English, is often mishandled to sustain a biased view, or commentaries which often have the same effect) the Bible is its own best interpreter. Allowing the Scriptures to define the meaning and intent in this matter, let us note:

Verse 4, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head,"

is self-explained in verse 14, "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"

Verse 5, "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"

is self-explained in verse 15, "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering."

This approach results in a simple, self-explanatory understanding.

The Phrase "a Covering"

In referring to "a covering" Paul neither stated nor implied that the hair was one of two coverings. To so understand would be to again improperly insert a human tradition. The hair in all four verses is the covering under consideration.