

Assembly Basics

Session 3: A Basic Picture in an Assembly (1 Cor 11:2-16)

1. THE PICTURE AND ITS CONTEXT

• **An Outline:** Paul writes to Corinth to address issues in that Assembly: Ch 1-4 Divisions; Ch 5-7 Defilement; Ch 8-10 Decisions; Ch 11-14 Disorder; Ch 15 Declaration; Ch 16 Distributions. This comes in the section dealing with disorder in the gatherings.

2. THE PICTURE IS A COMMANDMENT (v2-3a)

• **PRAISE:** They are praised for keeping the “ordinances” correctly. The word is translated “traditions” elsewhere. Traditions can be Biblical and Binding (Apostolic Teaching-2 Thess 2:15; Apostolic Practice-2 Thess 3:6); Beneficial (1 Cor 14:40); Bad (Mk 7:8) (see AJ Higgins, Editorial, Truth & Tidings 2015 66(6)). Given that Paul praises the keeping of traditions these must be Apostolic Binding Traditions in question.

• **PROBLEM:** “But I would have you to know...” Something is going wrong with one of these traditions and rather than just correct he is going to ensure believers understand rationale of the tradition. The practice of headcovering is not optional.

3. THE PICTURE AND CHRIST (v3-6)

• **MEANING OF HEADSHIP:** (v3) “one bearing authority over another”. Christ head of every man (whether acknowledged). A man is the head of a woman in certain contexts and relationships. God (the Father) is the head of Christ. God’s headship mentioned to emphasise not a question intrinsic value or inequality as the Father and the Son are equal (Jn 10:30). Not a person’s **PRECIOUSNESS** but **PART** they play. God’s headship of Christ serves as a model of the Man’s headship over the woman.

• **MARK OF HEADSHIP:** (v4-6) “head covered” - lit. “something upon the head.” **It is about Submission to Christ:** Uncovered head of Males is God’s way of them declaring acceptance of the chain of Divine Headship. He will play his part and take the leadership role. Covered head of Females is God’s way of them declaring acceptance of the chain of Divine Headship. She will play her part and take the helpership role. Thus headcovering is about declaring that this group of people are functioning under the authority of Christ and according to divine headship. **It is Symbolically about Christ:** Man’s Spiritual Head is Christ, he must not cover his physical head otherwise he dishonours his Spiritual Head - Christ. He must be uncovered to show Christ is the ultimate authority in the Assembly. The Woman’s Spiritual Head is the Man. She must cover her physical head to show that her head, the Man, is not the ultimate Authority in the Assembly. Verse 5b-6 emphasises this by saying that if the woman refuses to take part in this visible display of acceptance of Headship she might as well remove the natural distinction. Since that was a disgrace Paul says “let her be covered.”

• **MOMENT OF HEADSHIP:** (v4-6) Headship a wider truth that affects more than the Assembly. God’s Headship of Christ will be acknowledged in a future day (1 Cor 15:28). Headship between a male and a female also impacts marriages (Eph 5:22-33). This visible display of headship applies in the context of “praying and prophesying” (v4-5). In 1 Corinthians the setting of praying and prophesying is the gatherings of the Assembly (1 Cor 14). Verse 16 confirms this by stating it relates to “the churches of God.” Paul is not envisaging a woman taking the lead (1 Cor 14:34). Praying and Prophesying are collective acts in Assembly Gatherings (1 Cor 10:16; 1 Cor 14:4) . The visible display applies where believers meet for the purpose of speaking to God or preaching to Man

4. THE PICTURE AND CREATION (v7-12)

• **ROLE OF MAN:** “for” (v7-9) indicates commencement of new part of reasoning. The order of creation is then advanced as a reason to maintain the distinction. Adam was given the glory of Headship. Eve was given the glory of Helpership. Headcovering in the Assembly indicates acceptance of this reality.

• **TESTIMONY TO ANGELS:** (v10) Headcovering is a lesson for watching angels of what God has done. All that was lost in Eden (Headship) has been restored through Christ and is visibly on display in the Assembly.

• **NECESSITY OF WOMEN:** (v11-12) In case males begin to get high thoughts about themselves Paul makes clear that women are essential to men’s very existence. He describes a relationship of mutual dependence.

5. THE PICTURE IS COMMON SENSE (v13-15)

• **REASONING:** (v13) Paul states that if they apply their thinking skills they will see that it is obviously shameful for participate in Assembly gatherings without a headcovering.

• **RECOGNITION:** (v14-15) In the culture of that time it was still the case that a man with long hair was a shameful thing, while a woman with long hair was a beautiful thing. Her hair is given to her as a “covering,” a different word from v4-6, sometimes used to describe a garment of beauty. If we can see and appreciate a distinction in the natural realm, why should we be surprised at the requirement for a symbolic covering for the spiritual sphere? (v15) “a covering” a robe wrapped around the body. Not a shameful badge of distinction.

6. THE PICTURE SHOULD BE COMMONPLACE (v16)

• This verse carries the idea “*If anyone disagrees then he should know that we do not have any custom of allowing women to pray uncovered in the churches of God.*” Paul is making clear that those who set aside this teaching have no right to consider themselves one of “the churches of God.” They have publicly denied God’s proprietorship.

7. THE PICTURE AND SOME CLARIFICATIONS

• **Is the long hair the Covering?** No (i) v15 a very different word - point is not that the long hair satisfies v4-6 but rather that if a woman does have long hair it is something beautiful; (ii) “covered” in v4-6 never used in Greek literature of hair, always something external placed on the head; (iii) Such a view would make v6 nonsense i.e. “if the woman has no hair, she should cut her hair short.”; (iv) would only allow women able to grow long hair able to obey this scripture.

• **Is it Cultural?** No, it’s about Creation not Culture (v7-12). Universally applicable (v16).

• **Can we Change the Symbol?** No, it depicts something through that symbol, the link with “the Head.” If yes, could change bread and wine in next part of chapter.

• **Should it be left to Conscience?** No, Paul uses language of legal obligation (v7, 10 “ought”) not optional and left to preference.

• **Is it not too Costly?** Mark of the Lord’s headship to the Father a crown of thorns. It is not too much to expect women to cover their head in the gatherings of the Assembly.