

Jason Upchurch - 1 Cor. 11:2-9 - Ancient Head Coverings in Modern Worship - Part 2

Alright, well as we work our way through 1 Corinthians we are finishing up our look at head coverings this morning. I know you are excited and not at all nervous. About the only thing more uncomfortable than a sermon on speaking in tongues is talking about head coverings and we get to do both!

In all seriousness, this is something that believers have wrestled with for 2,000 years, which is why this is even in here. And I encouraged us to show grace with one another as we work through this section.

So here's my summary:

Married women should wear a head covering when they pray or prophecy when the church is gathered together as a sign that they are under the authority of their husbands. Men should not wear head coverings when the church is gathered when they pray or prophesy.

So let me just be as plain as I can as to what this actually looks like.

If a wife were to stand up in the middle of our church and pray for the congregation using her words or give a word of encouragement to the church or or read a Bible passage as a way to comfort us, she's welcome to do that. It's clear ladies did that in Corinth; Paul doesn't tell them to stop.

The only catch Paul says is that she should wear a head covering. And she would wear a head covering to show that she is not taking authority or acting as a pastor, but she is doing this under the authority of her husband with his blessing.

And if a husband were to stand up and pray with his words or encourage the congregation or read a passage. he should not have anything covering his head.

For the most part, then, most of you ladies have no need to wear a head covering because you don't stand up in the congregation to pray or prophecy. And most of you men who do stand up to pray or encourage or prophecy don't wear head coverings or hats anyway.

That's not to discourage ladies from doing these things. I'd encourage you ladies to do this. Paul says they pray and prophecy in Corinth and in all the churches. This is the practice. But he teaches that the wives are to wear a covering.

I hope that's a really clear sketch for you. As best as I can tell, that's what he's getting at. In a little while I'll talk about how there are different legitimate views.

One thing to keep in mind is that humans love the path of least resistance. We don't like change, we don't like to be confronted with difficult doctrines. When I began wrestling with this 6 years ago I certainly didn't want to deal with this issue.

But as the people of God we should boldly seek the truth to be faithful with what God is calling us to.

Here, what's on the line is how God intends the roles of husbands and wives to be displayed in the contested of corporate worship. These roles are timeless, unchanging because God's design for men and women in marriage has never changed.

Remember from last week, that I said we really don't find anything in this passage at all that would indicate head coverings are just a cultural thing that died out. Or that they're only for Corinth of the first century.

There's a lot of people who say we need to understand prostitution and Roman culture and Roman marriage and Greek culture and 1st century homosexuality to understand this passage. But Paul doesn't address any of those issues. He could have - he's addressed cultural before. But he doesn't here.

Instead, he bases his commands about head coverings in timeless realities that the church acknowledges with the use of covering or not covering.

So let me do a quick recap of last week, then finish out our passage, and then do something like a lightning round of questions about head coverings.

We saw in **Vs. 2** that wearing a head covering was something the Corinthians were doing and Paul applauded them for that. It wasn't just a tradition, but it was part of the theology that Paul and the apostles taught the churches in every area. But it appears they didn't know **why** they were doing it. So this whole section is an explainer as to why they do this.

In **Vss. 3-6** Paul says it's to show the roles within the Trinity: The Father is the head - the authority of Christ. Christ is the head - authority - of husbands. And husbands are the head - authority - of their wives. **Read 3-6**

I tried to show that I think the context indicates that this applies to married men and women. We see this same language over in **Eph. 5:22-26** in the context of marriage.

Then we saw in **7-9** that ladies covering their heads - or men not covering theirs - is grounded in the creation order we see in **Gen. 2. Read 7-9**

This is a summary of **Genesis 2** where God creates Adam and Eve both in his image. But since Adam was made first, there is a sense in which he - and husbands - are head over their wives.

That's where we ended. And again, these are timeless truths. These are not cultural or specific to the first century. Marriage reflecting the roles within the Trinity and the creation order are eternal principles.

Here's another timeless truth about head coverings: head coverings matter to angels. **Read 9-10**

What in the world is he talking about with angels? Well, first let's make an important observation. The point of the head covering is to be a symbol. This is super important.

Head coverings aren't about modesty. They're not about fashion. One hundred years ago ladies would wear fancy hats to church, that's not the point. It's not about being married, per se.

It's a symbol. A symbol is something we look at that points to a greater reality.

A ring on your fourth finger is a symbol. What's it a symbol of? That you're married. Baptism is a symbol that you're a believer. The Seahawks logo on your shirt is a symbol that you won't be watching the playoffs.

Paul says the covering is a symbol of authority. Who's authority? Well, we know it's not the wife's authority because women don't exercise authority in the church. It's a symbol that she is under the authority of her husband.

So when she stands up in the congregation to pray or prophesy she's not trying to preach or teach or be a pastor. She's just praying, she's just encouraging or exhorting. And she's doing all of this under the authority of her husband; with his encouragement.

That's what the head covering is about. It's a symbol - a sign - to the congregation, to angels, to everyone, that she is not trying to undo God's order.

And then Paul says: Because of the angels. **Read 10**

We know very little about exactly what Paul means by this. But as one guy pointed, we know this isn't cultural. There's nothing about angelic activity that has anything to do with culture.

The best we can put together is that angels gather with us when we gather as a church. We can't see them, but they join us in worship. There's a couple other passages throughout the Bible that hint at this.

I believe they're here, they're watching us worship Jesus. See, they know Jesus, they can see Jesus. And they come to watch us and are part of our gathering because here we are praising the Triune God who we don't even see.

They see him, they know him. We don't see him, but we too know him and worship him by faith. And just like what we desire when we gather is that our corporate worship be rightly ordered, I think there's a sense in which angels want our worship to be ordered correctly as well.

Angels are all male - there are no female angels. And my best guess - and it's a guess - is that it seems that if a wife were to get up in the congregation to pray or prophesy they should cover their heads because it also honors male angels who worship with us. They see a church where the men and women honor the God they can't even see, by properly wearing symbols that they can see.

I mean, this is pretty cool. I don't know about you but there are weeks I come to church and it's not earth shattering. It's not amazing. I'm up trying to preach and kids are crazy, five of you are asleep and I'm just trying to get through a passage hoping we all come away a little more changed by the love of Jesus. You probably feel the same way.

But what we have to understand is that when we gather there is a cosmic spiritual reality happening that affects not only our worship and communion with Christ and with each other, but the worship of holy angels.

And it appears they care about symbols of authority. Again, that's not a cultural thing. That's timeless.

Now, just so we understand that Paul isn't creating some sort of male supremacy here, he says this. **Read 11-12**

Yes, Eve did come from Adam - so we see authority. But the balance is that the rest of humanity comes from ladies. It's not like we can just toss the ladies aside. There's a mutual dependency going on here that was designed by God.

Yes, Eve came from Adam, but every other man came from their mom. We are dependent on each other.

Alright, if head coverings weren't controversial enough...you ready for some controversy? Of course you are. **Read 13-15**

Listen, I'm just the reporter. I'm just telling you what the Bible says. This is Paul's argument from nature that women should wear head coverings.

The question in **Vs. 13** is rhetorical: Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray uncovered? The answer Paul is looking for is "No." No it's not proper. And he explains why.

Because nature teaches us that it's disgraceful for men to wear long hair. Long hair is for the glory of women. Wives are women, so wives wear long hair.

Nature just tells us this. I mentioned last week that just the molecular structure of women's hair lets it grow longer and look nicer than a man's hair.

A woman who has a shaved head or a man's haircut generally is trying to make a point either about their sexuality or about their role in the church or society. They're trying to elevate themselves to a man's position.

I know ladies have chemotherapy and lose their hair. That's an exception. But throughout history and in basically every culture men have short hair or no hair and women have long hair. God has made it such that nature teaches us that.

And of course some of you are going to ask: Well, Jason, what's the definition of short hair and long hair? And the answer is that I don't have a specific length to give you. But I've heard some people try to argue that since

we don't have a specific metric here that length is just a meaningless concept that we can ignore or simply debate.

That's really nonsense. At some point it goes from short to long, doesn't it? Otherwise these words are meaningless.

I don't think there's anyone who would argue that I have long hair. Not who was being serious anyway. And some of you ladies who have hair halfway down your back, I don't think there's anyone who would argue that your hair is short. Maybe to be cheeky or argumentative. But we know that at some point it's long or short.

When I was at Bible college the choir would perform at various churches and the rule for men in the choir was no long hair. Well, what's long hair? How many inches? And there was a guy in the choir who let his hair grow out and it got longer and longer all semester. And the minute it hit his shoulders he was told he needed to cut it. So he shaved his head bald. He did that as an act of defiance.

I'm not telling you it's shoulder length or a certain amount of inches. But, you guys, it becomes long at some point. I tend to think that if someone approaches you from behind and can't tell if you're a man or a woman, it's time to change the hair length.

I don't know that shoulder length should be the rule, but God designed men's hair to be short and women's hair to be long. There's just no way to dance around that.

And if we know that God teaches us through nature that men's hair should be short and women's hair should be long, I think it would be prudent for us to err on the safe side of that distinction.

Sometimes ladies have shorter hair but it's cut in a feminine style. It's not manly, no one would confuse them for being a man from behind. But it does seem as though God has given women long hair as a blessing. In fact, Paul says it is given to you for your glory. **Read 14-15**

Most every lady I know has beautiful hair. And they don't have to do much to make it look nice. Proverbs even says grey hair as we get older is to our glory. Why? Because it shows wisdom and hopefully maturity. God has given you a glorious head of hair.

God desires that women have longer hair and men have short hair. There's really just no other way around what Paul says.

And then Paul says this. **Read 15**

Wait a minute, is a woman's hair the covering that Paul is talking about? This is what I believed for a long time. This would help us dodge a bullet, wouldn't it? If the hair is the covering, we're out of the woods. No need to wear a covering.

But I don't believe that the woman's hair is the covering he has been talking about this whole time. We know that for 2 reasons. First, the word for covering here is different than what he's used all along.

Here he uses peribolaion- a covering or wrap.

Elsewhere he uses katakaluptw meaning a veil down from the head. They're very different words.

And I think his point is that a woman's long, beautiful hair is a **type** of covering and it's a glorious thing, but her glory should be covered when she prays or prophecies to show deference to her head, her husband.

Here's the second reason we know a woman's hair is not the covering he has in mind. **Look** back in **5-7**. **Read**

So when Paul says this he assumes the ladies have long hair. And he says you should cover it. If you won't cover it, then cut it short or shave it off. Which means he knows they have long hair. He says you need to cover your long hair. If you don't, cut it short or shave it off.

If the hair itself were a covering this argument wouldn't make any sense.

So a lady's long hair is a type of covering, but not the head covering Paul has been talking about all along.

Here's the last reason he gives: this is a universal practice in the church. **Read 16**

The ESV is kind of confusing here when it says we have "no such practice." It almost sounds like he's saying they don't have a practice of arguing about this issue. That's not the point.

The NIV and NASB are more helpful: we have no **other** practice. That's the idea because what he means is, "Look, you Corinthians can argue with us all you want, this is what we teach about head coverings and do with head coverings everywhere we go. We apostles teach this everywhere and all the churches do this everywhere. There's no exceptions, there are no other practices." The church in Jerusalem does this. The church in Asia Minor does this. The church in Alexandria, Egypt does this. The church in Rome does this. The church in Spain does this.

That's why when people say "Oh, well, this was just a cultural thing that applied to them" they miss this last verse. This spanned the entire cultural landscape of the world. Jews, Gentiles, Romans, Barbarians, Asians, Syrophonicians. All the churches practiced this and all the apostles taught this. There was no other practice.

So again, my contention is that everything we see in this passage is timeless and goes across cultures. We don't see anything related to culture or the culture of Rome.

So what I want I want to do is ask some questions that are related to this that maybe you have thought of.

1) Didn't Jesus have long hair?

I mean, every picture we see of Jesus is with long hair. Well, usually every picture we see of Jesus is a white guy with long smooth hair like in a Pantene Pro-V commercial. There's a lot of problems with the pictures of Jesus.

No, Jesus, didn't have long hair. We have a lot of pictures now, but ancient pictures of men and women around the time of Christ indicate that men had short hair and women had long hair.

2) Why do some ladies wear their head covering all the time?

Some ladies and men believe that the context here is not just for the church and so applies to any time a woman might be praying or prophesying. Prophecy in the Bible is a really big umbrella and includes singing, includes telling people about Jesus, and just even encouraging people and comforting them. It includes reading the Bible out loud or quoting Scripture or elements of the gospel, which is why in the past I've said it's okay for women to read Scripture in church.

So they would say since we don't have a direct statement that this is only happening in the church, that they should wear a covering throughout the day. And there's a good argument to be made there. On both sides of the issue we try to understand as much as possible from the passage but sometimes there are elements we wish were maybe a little clearer.

But God has given us what he's given us. Whether we'd like more information or not we need to make our best determination on this issue.

I lean toward it being only when a woman uses her words for praying or prophecy because the specific type of prophecy Paul has in mind is within the church context. When we go just 2 chapters over and Paul talks about prophecy it's all in the context of the church. So I think that guides our understanding.

3) What about men who had long hair in the Bible: Samson, and John the Baptist. Were they sinning?

Both John the Baptist and Samson were known for having long hair. Samson's downfall, if you remember, was that Delilah cut off his hair.

Why did they have long hair? Well, their long hair was a result of them being under vows that their parents had taken called a Nazarite vow. We see this vow explained in Num. 6. And basically it was a vow where the person could not do 3 things: cut their hair, drink alcohol, or touch a dead body.

And usually the Nazarite vow was a temporary thing that the person did for a period of time. At the end of this time they'd shave their head and bring their hair to the Temple and burn it on the altar as an offering to God.

The apostle Paul actually did this in the book of Acts. And so you could say, "Well, see, they had long hair and it's okay." Actually, this specific vow is the exception that proves the rule. John and Samson stick out to us because their vow was permanent because God mandated the vow to their parents. They didn't take the vow willingly, God commanded their parents to ensure they did the vow.

Paul did the vow of his own accord, like other Israelites. But what we need to understand is that this vow actually proves the rule.

4) Does it have to be a head covering, or could there be some other thing a woman does?

Remember the covering is a symbol of a greater reality. So some will argue that the issue isn't a head covering, per se. The issue is just that a woman wears some kind of symbol that everyone knows means she is under the authority of her husband. And that whatever that symbol is, a man not have that same symbol.

Greek scholar Daniel Wallace suggests maybe a modest dress would be the symbol. Others say a wedding ring would be the symbol. Still others say that just dressing in a feminine way is symbol enough.

The problem with that is that women are always to dress modestly, so are men. And women are always to dress like women. I mean if the issue were modesty, he could have just say what he says in other places: dress modestly. But the reality is that a modest dress is not a public sign of submission to one's husband. I know plenty of women who dress modestly but wear the proverbial pants in the family.

What about a wedding ring? All a wedding ring symbolizes is that you're married. It doesn't signify to anyone that you're submitting to your husband. Men wear wedding rings just like women do - so the ring itself doesn't indicate roles.

The problem with saying the sign doesn't matter is that then you have to come up with another sign. And the sign has to be universally recognized by all people as showing that a wife is under the authority of her husband. Who regulates that? Who decides that?

Usually once you change what the sign is, it becomes more complicated. Once it becomes more complicated, people stop doing it.

5) What kind of head covering does the Bible have in mind?

If you've noticed anyone who wears a head covering you know that there are a variety of types of head coverings. We have very little information here.

There are some who wear something very small and simple and could almost be confused with a head band that you might wear for fashion. I don't think the point is fashion. I also don't think the point is to make this so discreet that no one knows what you're doing. That misses the point.

On the extreme end is a view that says you can't see any of the woman's hair at all. I don't think the point here is that a woman's hair has to be completely covered.

And in between there are actually factions of churches that argue about whether the head covering should cover the ears or how far down it should go, what color it should be and so on.

I think the general principle is simply that it should cover most of the head - it is a **head** covering and that it should be on the simple side.

It should also be obvious to people that it has some sort of religious significance, otherwise it misses the point. That's why a hat doesn't quite do the job - a hat has no spiritual significance.

6) Do unmarried women need to wear a covering?

My short answer is I don't think so. The best I can tell this passage is speaking to a marriage situation. But there are good arguments to be made that what Paul is getting at here is the greater role of men and women in the church, not just husbands and wives.

But I believe that since the covering is a symbol of authority it likely refers only to those in marriage.

What we do with our heads and bodies and lives all reflects the glory of God. May we do so with joy.

Pray