

# PLAIN SPEECH

Volume 2 – Issue 20 – 1 March 2009

“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech” (2 Cor. 3:12)

By Scott Parker

## WAS THE COVERING JUST A CORINTHIAN CUSTOM?

On a couple different occasions since I've been preaching at Palmer Road the subject of **1 Cor. 11:2-16** has been hit upon. That text reads as follows:

*“Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. 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. 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. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. 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.”*

Now, in the congregation here we have some very genuine and very sincere people who see the covering of **vs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13** as a garment placed on the head, and see a second covering (the hair) noted in **vs. 15**. Moreover, we have others in the congregation (one of which is me) who are equally genuine and equally sincere in their belief that there is but one covering (the hair) in view throughout the entire context. I am so happy to say that neither group has shut their minds to further investigation. I am also happy to say that a spirit of brotherly kindness has prevailed as we continue to examine ourselves (**2 Cor. 13:5**). This is how it should be in a quest for truth.

One thing I must tell you relative to **1 Cor. 11:2-16** is that many are the people who place the covering into the category of Corinthian custom. That is to say they believe and teach that the covering of **vs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13** was indeed a garment placed on the head, but it was only a non-sinful Corinthian custom that Paul was binding on the local church in Corinth. One preacher in South Carolina has stated it this way, “*The veil was the customary expression in Corinth of God’s law of the headship of man over woman. The veil was not worn because it was law, but because of what it signified to headship at Corinth.*” One preacher I used to know in Colorado said to me: “*Anytime anyone asks me about this section of the Bible I just simply show them verse 16. It plainly states that the veil was a custom – something done only in Corinth.*” I affirm that both preachers are just as wrong as they can be. Below are just three reasons why the covering was not a Corinthian Custom, but something that was/is bound upon all women for all time.

- First of all, if the covering is just simply a matter of custom in Corinth then I would like someone to explain to me how **1 Cor. 1:1-2** fits. That text reads this way: “*Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.*” The Living Bible captures well the idea I’ve underscored. It reads: “*To the Christians in Corinth, invited by God to be his people and made acceptable to him by Christ Jesus. And to all Christians everywhere – whoever calls upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and theirs.*” You see, the information included in this letter was applicable to Christians in any location. Understanding this, how can the covering be only a Corinthian custom? Hmm.
- Secondly, there is a very interesting section of Paul’s letter to the saints in Corinth that argues strongly against the claim that the covering was merely a Corinthian custom. The verses read this way: “*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church*” (**1 Cor. 4:15-17**). Follow the logic. Paul taught the same thing in every church. Paul instructed female saints in Corinth to have their heads covered while praying or prophesying. Thus, Paul must have taught all Christian women in every congregation to have their heads covered while praying or prophesying. If not, why not?
- Thirdly, a careful look reveals that **vs. 16** is not teaching the covering was a custom – something optional. If this was the case, why did Paul argue so urgently verse after verse? Please tell me. **Vs. 16** is actually teaching that if any person is contentious (wants to dispute the matter), then that person is to understand that neither Paul, nor any apostle, nor any other local church did things differently – there was no other way of doing things. The covering was bound upon all. It was habitually practiced in all local churches.

As stated earlier, we do not yet all speak the same thing concerning one covering or two, and we need to continue (and are continuing) to work toward this end (**1 Cor. 1:10**). However, let’s make sure that every single person at Palmer Road understands that the issue Paul dealt with in **1 Cor. 11:2-16** was not merely a Corinthian custom.