

A SIGN OF AUTHORITY

G. W. North

First published January 1976. Revised March 1978 & May 1989.
Copyright © G.W.North 1989.

A SIGN OF AUTHORITY

Headship in the Church of Jesus Christ

This is the Way - Walk Ye in It

From internal information we know that Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians in answer, if not in response to, a specific request in a letter from some person or persons in the church. Within the church had arisen great concern and disgust over the sinful behaviour and rebellious habits of many of its members; wrong attitudes to eternal truth and principles of living had arisen and were being openly practised. Fearing lest these decadent behaviour patterns should become accepted as though they were right, they wrote to the apostle for help and instruction.

Although we can only assume that the position, practices and powers of women in the church were mentioned in the letter, we may do so with a degree of certainty, for in course of answering it the man of God handles the subject with typical forthrightness. There is no doubt that to him it was a very vital issue, yet, in spite of his unmistakable ruling on the matter, to this day it still retains its controversial nature among the churches of the Western Hemisphere. Perhaps, before we attempt to approach the subject now, we ought to pause and consider a fact which should condition our whole attitude towards it.

Although Paul wrote his commandments concerning female head-covering as a corrective to unspiritual people of his day, by doing so he also left on record the unchanging mind of God about it, that we should read his precious instruction to spiritual people who wish to know and do God's will. That he found it necessary to do so should be sufficient ground for us to recognise that both the true Church and the apostle (with the Spirit of God who inspired him) knew of the gravity of the error into which the church had fallen. The fact that necessity was laid upon him to reprove and correct these women, and indeed the church majority, should itself reveal to us the magnitude of the wrongdoing in the eyes of the Lord. It should not be thought that, because these instructions concern women, only they were at fault. Paul wrote to the church, not to the ladies only. The whole church were wrong, especially the elders; in fact upon them lay the greatest blame. It is a solemn Biblical truth that where the women are at fault and may even take the initiative in sin or misdemeanour, it is the men upon whom God lays the blame. They are the head of the women as Paul so clearly states following God's example in Eden. If the ladies do it, it is because the men allow it - alas, may also encourage it. Is not this a pointed and partial fulfilment of the scripture 'a woman shall encompass a man'? Whereas the man must encompass the woman as it was before the fall.

To Obey is Better than Sacrifice

Paul opens his remarks on the subject with a clear injunction to men to uncover their heads when praying or prophesying, and follows it with just as clear instructions to the women to cover their heads. God does not always choose to explain why He has

made His decisions but there is no doubting the wisdom of all He does. We must respect His wishes and accept His choices without demur, believing obedience to be the highest form of love's trust.

It is of little use trying to make these verses mean anything other than what they plainly declare, and to say the least it is most unkind and certainly unjustifiable to murmur against Paul that he had a prejudice against women. These instructions have a simple explanation based upon eternal principles, giving rise to cogent reasonings, as we shall presently see. He who says to all that we are to 'turn the other cheek' and 'go the second mile', does not expect His gracious people to object to His wishes and demand a satisfactory reason before they will obey. Ought not we all, especially the ladies, rather, as Mary of old, say, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word'?

Contrary to such humble acceptance, the women, with the consent of at least some of the men at Corinth, were, by their unseemly behaviour, challenging the headship of God. Perhaps by deliberately leaving off their head-covering they were thinking to contest the authority or supposed ascendancy of the male; we are not told. Perhaps not everyone understood just all that was implied in such publicly displayed misbehaviour; it may also be true and charitable to think that many today are just as ignorant of the vital issues involved in the transgression. Do all realise that in challenging God's order, whether in Paul's day or in modern times, churches are rebelling against God's institution. Whenever this is done God Himself is also being called in question, and to do that is very serious indeed.

Doth Not Even Nature Itself Teach You?

Head-covering by women in the church is firstly an acknowledgement of natural order. Here we must acknowledge something so very basic that we sometimes do not recognise it, namely that when people act contrary to the simple natural order they act against spiritual order and cannot do other, for God created it. Providing it is accepted and acquiesced to with understanding and grace there's no sin in that which is of simply natural order, but it is absolute folly to go against it.

Man's headship is natural; God made him first by direct creation, forming his body from the dust and inbreathing His Spirit into him. Woman He made later, building her up from the man's bone and giving her to him. She was not the direct work of God from dust, but was an extension of God's work from an original creation. Being second she is not to be regarded as secondary, indeed she has so many things that make her more attractive than the male. He was created by God to be His glory in the flesh; she was made of his flesh to be his glory in flesh. Therefore, in this respect, when joined to him she is most glorious and so is he, but she must not presume to be his equal in realms where God has chosen otherwise. God decided this, He willed and created it this way; it is His order and is absolute. Grace does not change this basic natural order, but works harmoniously with it, improving and enhancing it.

Let us here observe a synthesis of logical ideas which is manifest in the truth of head-covering. In the natural order by creation God ordained that a woman's hair should be given her for a covering; in the spiritual order God ordains that the woman is to cover her head with something as a sign that both she and the whole church submits to God's headship. This is a most sensible as well as a natural and logical procedure, being at once a recognition of that which is both natural and spiritual. In chapter

fifteen verse sixteen Paul said, 'first that which is natural and then that which is spiritual' , and in this particular matter he makes no exception.

Outside church gatherings a woman is under no obligation from God to cover her head. Within the bounds of decency men and women may dress as they please or according to the laws of the country in which they live. This passage is not primarily written to regulate the proper relationship which should exist between husband and wife. Necessary as that is, Paul's purpose here is far greater than that; its point is to emphasise the true relationship between man and woman, and between them and God. Properly understood this passage sets out the relationship between the Church and Christ, which in turn is derived from the higher relationship between Christ and God upon which all is based.

It seems that Paul was explaining what he himself had either formerly instituted or else insisted upon in the churches in the beginning. If so it is not an isolated instance of this kind of apostolic ruling. Reading Romans six, it becomes obvious that therein he was giving instruction about a past experience which had been instituted previously and was still being practised among them. Whether or not that is so, in this Corinthian passage he sets forth an application of a divine principle which the Lord expects to find in practice in the churches at His coming.

Dwelling for the moment upon the sexual behaviour of men and women, with which he had dealt in earlier chapters, he touches upon a point in verses five and six which is introduced for its symbolic meaning. It holds a valuable and instructive position in his teaching about the order in spiritual relationships. By the commandment of God and the custom of men in those days, every woman found guilty of immoral sexual behaviour was shorn of her hair as a sign to all that she had broken moral codes and public laws. All moral codes were originally instituted of God in His holiness to protect man's innocence, people who disregard them are also breaking spiritual law. Moral law is for the safeguarding of man's original status and dignity. It is intended by God to regulate the behaviour of human souls one to the other on earth. Whilst in the body each of us is an individual manifestation of spiritual being known as a person and loved of God.

From the fact that the Corinthian church was comprised mainly of gentile believers, it may be correctly assumed that Paul's commandment to them in respect of head-covering was neither unintentional nor mistaken. It was not given merely for the purpose of superimposing a Jewish cultural custom or a religious habit upon a gentile situation. The reason for the commandment lies deeper down than Judaistic cultural or religious rites, and much further back than time could embrace. This commandment rises from the bedrock of spiritual order in the Godhead, which order cannot be broken or changed. It is connected with the truth spoken of in Romans two verses thirteen to fifteen as 'the work of the law written in the ir hearts'. It is a manifestation of that work in natural relationships, and is obligated by it.

The phrases 'do by nature' and 'doth not nature itself teach you?' used by Paul, refer to simple moral law, infused by God into the human race with the inspiration of His breath at the beginning. Both the Mosaic Law, and later the person and law of the life of Jesus Christ, are respectively codifications and personifications of that same moral law which we have referred to above as spirit/soul law affecting all human relationships.

The Head of the Woman is the Man

Whenever human beings live the highest form of moral life, a woman shorn for her sin is regarded as a pariah and is, as she deserves to be, an outcast from society. Unbridled sexual lust, which breaks all rules of chastity and defies the decency and dignity of proper marital relationships between male and female, is, before God, as the physical disease of leprosy. Paul here is not dealing with a temporary breakdown in relationships brought about by improper behaviour on the part of any man or woman. Regrettable as that is, upon true repentance there is forgiveness and cleansing for that, leading the penitent to restoration into pure spiritual life and reinstatement into proper moral behaviour. He is dealing with the permanent state of harlotry so obnoxious to God.

Only among peoples of total depravity or deliberate abandonment will it be found that harlotry is countenanced without punishment and accepted as normal behaviour. To this day women regard their hair as their glory, therefore to have it shorn from their heads is a shame, and done undeservedly this is an insult. It is a correct punishment for harlotry though, for by shearing a woman of her chiefest glory the heinousness of the sin of the inward soul is publicly revealed to her deserved shame. By shaving her, public justice was served. From that time she either continued a depraved, shameless woman before all or, repenting of her sin against God and crime against humanity, she was allowed to grow hair again as a sign of her restoration to public and moral behaviour.

It must also be borne in mind that when Paul states that 'the glory of a woman is her hair,' he is not referring to her hair as such. He is not commenting on the abundance, texture, colour or appearance of her hair; he is rather referring to the fact that she has it. Her glory does not lie in the artistry whereby she arranges her hair to suit her face or crown her beauty, for she may have none or very little of artistry or beauty.

In fact Paul is not concerned with outward beauty or appearance; he is dealing with moral and spiritual beauty. The glory of which he is speaking is glory of character: righteousness, holiness, meekness, obedience, uprightness, faithfulness. A woman's glory does not lie in that which strikes the eye, but in what appeals to the heart. In his day the fact that she had her hair meant that she was a good, true, moral woman. Therefore, whether she was daughter, sister, wife or mother, in the matter of sexual behaviour before God and man she was glorious. If it were not so with her she was to be shorn; she was a woman who had broken through the God-appointed veil of sexual restraint and decency; she was a pariah.

However it must not be thought that, because he thought and wrote in this strain, Paul was only harsh upon women of corrupt morals and not also strictly punitive against men of like behaviour. In an earlier chapter he firmly rules that for certain kinds of sexual sin a man was to be handed over to satan for the destruction of the flesh. Paul was quite impartial in all his handling of men and women; he did not favour his own sex against women but judged equally among all. Unbiased reading of his epistles shows that he considered men always had to bear the greatest responsibility; only seriously biased minds could think otherwise. Moreover, it can scarcely be thought that God would impose such treatment as this upon a woman unless He regarded the offence to be of the enormity that warranted such punishment.

Such stern measures reveal that greater things are involved than at first meet the eye. We see that to ignore or rebel against head-covering is regarded by God as a major offence. By coming to a clear understanding that the glory of a woman's morality in sexual relationships is shown in part by the fact that she retains her hair, we are prepared to be shown the greater spiritual truth that is involved in head-covering in the church.

The Head of Every Man is Christ

Paul commences this chapter with a most significant remark in which he claimed to be an imitator of Christ. Glancing up at the end of the preceding chapter we find that he classifies the human race thus: the Jews, the Gentiles, the Church. We are not to give offence to any of them, he says, but seek to please them that they might be saved. He is also specially concerned that we do nothing which causes our brother to stumble, or which in any way wounds the weakest conscience. 'Imitate me', he says, 'as I imitate Christ'. With this pointed statement he moves into his penetrating analysis and powerful instruction about head-covering in the church. 'The head of Christ is God; Christ acknowledged headship and so do I', he is saying; 'imitate me, acknowledge headship as I do'.

In the matter of human relationships the woman was originally given her hair from God to be unto her a glorious covering. Later, following the fall, this was vested with a special significance. One of the features of the outworking of sin in the race was the early breakdown of natural and moral order between the sexes. This involved the original issue of Adam's defiance of the headship of God over him. In turn this eventuated in forfeiture of his headship over all creation, including the woman.

Now however, with the coming of Christ who is the last Adam and the second man, that headship has been restored. Jesus is the unveiled Man in absolutely correct relationship with God; He is the direct image of God. He is the second man God made; He is the New Man. In the beginning Adam was made in the likeness and image of God who made both him and Eve his wife by Jesus Christ. Adam failing, it was only right, as well as the only possible thing to be done, that Jesus should come down here to restore and improve the situation, which thing He has fully accomplished.

Eve was not made directly by God from dust; she is God's handiwork and therefore of His glory, but she is not His chief glory. In the nature of things it must be acknowledged that it is a greater miracle to create from dust than to build from a rib. It therefore follows that, being made from Adam, she is made in the image and likeness of man for man and is man's chiefest glory in the realm of flesh.

It is only seemly then, and in perfect keeping with a racial principle, that when they are together in public worship of God, both she and man should gladly acknowledge and openly confess this in the way God desires. This should be especially commendable to their hearts, for God never does anything illegally or in conflict with propriety or out of harmony with eternal principle or simple acceptable ideas. If this be so in nature, how much more is it so within the Church which is Christ's body.

This may be plainly seen in both the other basic outward ordinances in the church with which Paul also deals in this epistle, namely the Lord's supper and baptism. By the former the Lord wished to exhibit His broken body and poured-out blood, so He

chose bread and wine as best suited to His purpose. By the latter the Lord wished to display the truth of Baptism in the Spirit, so He ordained water baptism. By the third ordinance here being investigated He wished to display headship, lordship and authority, so He chooses the figure of the woman's head-covering. All is of one and this ordination is established in a simplicity consistent with the whole. Nothing is strained; no foreign element or idea is introduced; everything is so very right.

Who did Hinder that Ye should not Obey?

Avoiding cynicism at all costs it is surely neither incorrect nor unkind to observe that if there be those who refuse to keep the Lord's supper and those who will not be baptised, it must not be thought strange that there are those also who will not accept head-covering, for observation confirms it to be so. Not that logic accepts the two former malpractices as the premise for the third, but reason assumes and observation proves that if two be flouted the third is imperilled. Almost certainly the same spirit abroad in the whole will not hesitate to break the third; as the apostle says earlier, 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump'. James also adds his stern wisdom to tell us that it is impossible to break one of the commandments without breaking the whole.

In reverse order of thought to this, though retaining the same principle, Jesus says, 'He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much'. Whatsoever the matter be, the spirit that is working and the principle involved are more important than the actual thing or specific area in which the spirit and principle are working. In fact, whatever, the outward results may appear to be to the observer, whether good or bad, mediocre or excellent, in the eye of God the real quality and merit of any act is only determined according to the spirit and principle by which they are produced.

What is most distressing in the Church is that dear people, who devotedly love the communion and baptism by immersion, for some mysterious reason contest the truth of head-covering and stoutly denounce it. Perhaps this is because they fail to see two things, which in the eyes of God the Father are of major importance, namely, in the church man represents Jesus Christ and woman does not; she fills another very important role which will be considered later. Being so privileged, men, when gathering in the churches, need not and indeed ought not to cover their heads. By being so forthright Paul is being very daring, but bold as he is, he is not a bit worried about this, for he is stating something of major importance and it represents a break with tradition of gargantuan proportions not immediately recognised in modern churches as it was in the beginning.

In Israel of old and among Jews of today men were, and still are, expected to cover their heads when they gather for worship in their synagogues. Their reason for the tradition is simply this: the Jews refused, and still refuse, to accept the fact that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. They think that their head has not yet come, therefore they wear a head-covering; secondly they do not pretend that their hair is their covering; they are not shaven under their hats! It should be noted also that muslims do not uncover their heads when going through their religious exercises - they too reject Christ as Saviour and Lord, and again it should be emphasised that these men do not regard their hair as their covering. Sad as these things are, it is even more sad that in certain sections of the Church men of supposed higher rank than their fellows also refuse to uncover their heads even when handling the bread (or wafers) and wine at their tables (or altars as they ignorantly call them) before God and the congregations. Thus they

deliberately reverse the commandment of God through Paul to men - by words they say their head has come, but by action and example they deny it.

Quite differently from men, the woman has a special role of equal importance to man's, a role befitting her natural state and calling as man befits his. Her part is to represent the bride of Christ. How great her privilege; it is one which all men of pure heart might envy. But there is no need; the bride of Christ is comprised of both sexes, so hers is a wonderful privilege indeed. Behold therefore the wisdom of God: when the woman covers her head she covers it for both male and female, for in respect of this relationship both await the coming of the bridegroom - He has not yet come. So here we have it: man uncovers his head because the head has come; the woman covers her head because the bride's Head and Lord and Husband has not yet come. Reasons for the order of things in the Church become clear as the mystery unfolds, and blessed indeed are the humble hearts that were willing to obey without any explanation as to why they should, even though things were still hidden from their eyes. Listen again to the further profound word of Paul as he seeks to add yet more understanding of the matter to our hearts: 'neither is the man without the woman, neither is the woman without the man'. That is perfectly understandable in the natural realm of course; there could have been no more men and women on this earth if there had never been a woman as well as a man in the beginning.

But Paul is not just appealing to common sense, he is carrying the truth observable in natural things over and up into spiritual things. When a man stands with head uncovered to worship and pray and prophesy in the midst of the church, the woman stands there as if uncovered too, and when the woman stands to worship and pray and prophesy in the church her head covered, the man stands as if covered with her also, for neither is the man without the woman neither is the woman without the man. Note, not covered by, meaning 'over', a phrase so popular in some circles, but covered with, a phrase meaning 'together with': togetherness is so dearly loved by the Lord. But there must neither be subterfuge nor substitution here; each, both man and woman, has his and her own role to fill. Ours to obey, His to order, and why should anyone wish to argue with Him?

Unfortunately, because the designs and desires God intended by the symbol of head-covering in the churches has never been fully grasped, many who would have practised it have either fully or partly, abandoned it. Such statements as, 'we do not insist on it but leave it to the individual concerned', abound everywhere, while in other churches men quite openly speak against it altogether and declare it to be bondage. Yet if this be bondage so also is water baptism a bondage, and the communion an even worse bondage, for head-covering is as much an ordinance as they are. Perhaps one of the most pitiful of all sights is a woman who sits in a meeting with her head uncovered until the time arrives for prayer and prophesying, when a head scarf or some form of covering is hastily pulled over her head. This kind of behaviour is based upon incomplete understanding of the Lord's purposes by head-covering. Why should we think that He only wishes the Church to bear witness to truth during prayer or prophecy? We should base our whole approach to this matter upon the words 'when ye come together', not on when we pray or prophesy.

Paul is not selecting praying and prophesying from among the many things we do when we come together and saying 'you only need to cover the head while these are going on'. He is appealing to our sense of propriety: do you really think it is seemly

that a woman should do these things with her head uncovered? It doesn't seem right does it? He is not saying 'it is all right for a woman to sing and say hallelujah and clap her hands without covering her head, but she ought not to pray and/or prophesy without it'. What if no woman ever prayed or prophesied in a meeting - and some never do - should that be a way out of the obligation for her? Should not this be seen for what it is - either grudging conformity by a heart that dislikes God's order and only submits to it under protest, or basic misunderstanding of truth, or just bad habit contracted by observation of the disobedience of others, or perhaps a mixture of all three?

The seriousness of the situation is this: if the woman refuses to cover her head she:

- (1) dishonours her own personal head by displaying the sad fact that she glories in herself and her own and man's flesh;
- (2) misrepresents every male present by showing that he dishonours Christ his Head, for she wears the covering for him as much as for herself;
- (3) shames and humiliates Christ Himself by displaying the fact that she and the whole church refuses to accept His Lordship. In all of these things the man is not without the woman, and the woman is not without the man; they are equally culpable and personally responsible to God in this matter.

Because of this, it is a glory to the woman to wear the sign in the church, for she wears it for the entire church. To do so is a far greater glory than having her hair upon her head, for were she to fall into grievous sin and her hair be shorn from her as a result, upon repentance and restoration she could again cover her still shaven head and gather with her brothers and sisters in Christ as before. She would then be as though she had never committed the sin, and her hair would soon grow again and she would dwell with her husband or father or her brothers in the home and in Christ - forgiven, restored and loved. The church would meanwhile be vindicated and Christ honoured as He should be.

A Bride All Pure and Holy

A woman's head-covering is to be worn as a testimony to truth and as a sign to her, and her husband or father, and to the Church and to all men, as well as to God and the angels and to the devil and his hosts also. It indicates that in much the same way as a body is unavoidably under its head when rightly related to it, she also joyfully confesses herself to be under her husband or father and Christ. It is the silent declaration ordained of God that the whole church gladly accepts God's order and will obey His orders; this is no hardship where love abounds. On the contrary, worn with understanding and with a perfect heart, it is a delight, for it shows the correctness of the relationship between male and female, and husband and wife, or, if she is unmarried, a daughter and her father and brothers. By this she declares to all men her personal chastity and faithfulness and the corporate chastity and faithfulness of the Church to Christ. More than all these, in this way that God has appointed, she shows to all and declares to Him that the mischief wrought in the human race by Eve's insubjection to Adam, and therefore to God, shall not be repeated in the Church.

A Sign of Authority

It is vital to our understanding of the mystery displayed by head-covering that we recognise that originally and ultimately all contest lies between God and satan. In the beginning of the natural order over which man was made the head the contest had

already commenced. Satan rebelled and declared war against God before He made Adam and Eve, and when she was finally made in order to help Adam, satan deliberately defied God and His order of creation by making approaches to Eve. It was a subtle tactic, for the man not the woman was the terminal point of the temptation. Having defiled the woman and achieved his first success, the devil waited for her to do the rest of his work for him, and she did: Eve defiled Adam for satan. His hidden purpose realised, satan gloated over his success, for by and beyond the conquest of Adam he was able to strike at his primary objective, God.

It was with deliberate defiance of God and in contempt for His order in creation that satan set aside all God's work and went for the woman and not for the man. What is more, it appears that he did this in Adam's presence, bypassing him and openly affronting both God and man. The woman succumbed to the advances of satan, giving him co-operation, passing on to the man the fruit of the devil's temptation. He apparently made no protest but foolishly accepted both the fruit and the affront to his primacy, weakly acquiescing to the devil's will. Through this disobedience Adam not only introduced sin into the human race but also set the pattern for the satan-introduced disorder. Rebellion and anarchy have since reigned among men, and especially so in the matter of proper relationships between the sexes.

God had to accept the fact of sin and its consequences, but He refused, and still refuses, to countenance the attempted reversal of the purpose revealed in the order of creation. That man is still the head, God makes quite plain by speaking of the old nature of man as Adam. The onus for the dread transaction in Eden was not laid upon the woman but on the man. Although the woman was the leading instrument in the fall, God still makes Man the primate, (including Eve in Adam, for she came from him and not directly from God) saying 'as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin'.

He did not blame Eve; Eve, we are told, was deceived, but Adam quite deliberately, and perhaps with some knowledge of the immediate issues at stake, chose to accept not only the fruit but also all he then understood to be involved in the act, namely both satan's and Eve's leadership to the point of domination. Their crime was twofold in effect: first it was against God; secondly it was against the as yet unborn generations of men. But in mitigation it must be stated that neither of them then knew all the long-term misery which would eventuate in the earth as a result of her insubordination and his abdication of authority. However it must also be understood that Christ, having had to suffer so terribly because of it all, is not going to allow it to be so in His own body the Church. As it was in the beginning, so it must be now.

Therefore the woman is under obligation to wear the head-covering as being under the law to Christ; it is an ordination in the New Covenant. She must do so with loving obedience and understanding, and not just as a concession to a Pauline idea. She must do so in conscious agreement with God, knowing why she does it and in no way feeling that because it is commanded her she is an inferior creature. She should rather accept it as a privilege and an honour, for it is the sign of both her own and the whole church's recognition of the original sin and of its expiation and her present right relationship with God.

On no account may man acquiesce to his woman or any womenfolk worshipping uncovered in the church, lest he be found guilty of perpetuating the devil's insult to

God. Adam stood by and allowed his woman to usurp his position, but no man is allowed of God to do such things in the church. Woman must not only show that she is under authority, but must also truly behave herself aright, even if her males are either too weak to act or too ignorant to know or too carnal to care what she does. Besides all this she has a responsibility to angelic beings in this matter, for by covering her head the woman also apparently shows the church's understanding of God's righteous concern for the angels.

Because of the Angels

In the beginning God created these heavenly creatures with a view to being first His own personal servants and secondly the servants of man. Then when the Church came into being, the angels were given special charge concerning each member of it. From scripture we learn that angels have a very keen sense of right and wrong and, among many other things, have a great desire to look into the mystery of Christ and His Church.

The Bible also reveals that, before the world was, proud Lucifer rose up against God and led a group of discontented, rebellious angels in a revolt against Him. The Lord immediately quelled it and dealt out summary judgement against the rebels. Upon some He passed terrible sentences, casting them out and dispatching them to age-abiding imprisonment under darkness, where they now await final sentence on the future day of universal judgement.

What then do the unfallen angels who retain their first estate think about openly-advertised world-wide rebellion on the part of the Church? When being sent forth by God to minister to the Church they observe uncovered women supposedly worshipping their Lord, yet flagrantly disobeying Him in the act, how do they feel about it? For disobedience many of their race were inflicted with great and sore punishments, why then should people in the Church, (who, while being members of a lower order, profess to be made higher than they) openly disobey God and not be judged for it? Was it for this that their Lord and creator instituted the age of grace. Is grace license for sin? Are men and women allowed to do as they please? By disregarding this commandment of God, the churches sin in a threefold manner:

- (1) they perpetuate the disobedience to God which was begun in Eden;
- (2) they compound the original sin by allowing personal disobedience in this matter;
- (3) they shame Christ and His Church, for they act as though it does not matter; indeed in some quarters even preach against the truth. If only for the sake of the testimony to those angels who witnessed stern judgements and punishments of their fellows, all women should wear the sign. What is more, Man must insist that Woman is covered, because in the church Christ is his Head and his glory and not the woman.

The Joyous Submission of Love

Paul takes up this very point and uses it as a further reason for the injunction, stating clearly in the text that the woman is the glory of the man. When making woman God not only took of man's bone, He also took of his glory and made her of both. Making man He took of His own glory, infusing it into dust with the impartation of His Spirit; but not so with the woman; glory was given her by God, but indirectly, that is, as from Him via the man. She was the image of God imaged in the man, her beauty and glory was his beauty and glory enhanced; she must therefore be covered when gathering

with men in the church. Covering her head she (and they by common consent) hides both her own as well as man's glory. The Church is for the display of God's glory; no other glory but His alone may be sought or seen; all wrong glorying is sin. Christ is the glory of the Church. In no way and to no degree may woman or man seek to display themselves; it is wrong to do so. If man wishes to see Woman displayed in the Church it is for wrong reasons; equally, if women want to see men displayed in the church it is also for wrong reasons. When the Church gathers together, it does so for Christ, and all must agree together that as much as is humanly possible man's glory should not be on view at all.

In this matter of head-covering the Church must move in line with that which is natural, covering over what cannot be obliterated, doing so in wholehearted manner with willing obedience. Intelligent co-operation with God in this, so that the natural becomes spiritual, is the hallmark of submissive love. If this be not so, that which is thought to be natural (as the uncovered state) will always become sinful, that is carnal. In what Man does the Woman is included, yet each member of each sex must do his or her own part and one must not seek to usurp the position and glory of the other. There is nothing a man or a woman can possibly do which is more honouring to Christ than obeying Him. If we disobey Him in this least thing, how can we think that we can be obeying Him in the greater things?

The man is left uncovered to show that Christ the Head is uncovered; the woman is purposely covered to show that the Church, the Body of Christ, has its Head upon it and is covered by Christ. The covering is therefore seen to be the symbol of our oneness and union with Him and represents Christ, the power and wisdom of God. She represents the Bride, which includes both man and woman; her covering represents the Bridegroom of all. Behold therefore the wisdom and glory of God: Man and Woman joined in worship, the man representing the Bridegroom and she the Bride.

More wonderful still, by this all the spiritual anarchy of Lucifer and Adam, leading to ultimate annihilation, is exhibited as itself annihilated. Man and Woman are shown as one and equals, God being transcendent of all. It is now seen that what some women quite mistakenly regard as an outdated sign of Man's superiority over Woman is in reality the sign of something quite other and infinitely higher than that.

In the same way in which the humble, submissive Christ was equal with God, yet counted it a thing not to be grasped at, so should a woman understand that she is equal with men. She ought not to grasp at something as though she did not have it; let her humbly submit to God's loving dictates and she shall have all. By so doing she parades before all, that although she is equal in spirit with men as is Christ with God yet for God's purposes in the earth she is under the male in the same way as Christ was and still is under God His Father.

Let leaders, preachers, teachers and prophets be clear about this in their hearts and in their messages, and there will be understanding in the churches about it, then there will surely be no more open rebellion against God. Let the Woman be told, so that she will understand, that she has an honour denied Man and she will want to co-operate with God in this. Did she not co-operate with Him for the birth of Christ so that He became God's baby and hers? This being so, will she deny the honours of His body to Him now? By no means. She will gladly do His will, and praise Him that He closes

His eyes to times of ignorance, that we all obtain mercy when we do things ignorantly in unbelief.

If Any Man be in Christ

One of the greatest hindrances to the correct understanding of truth is confusion of thought arising oftentimes from misinterpretation of scripture. Sadly enough the subject under consideration here is an outstanding example of this. The scripture which is generally used to raise objections to all the foregoing is the Galatian text, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'. This is taken to mean that in the Church women are equal with men in all things, which is entirely correct. But to say that because this is so it is also true that women are the same as men in the churches is not correct.

Unfortunately this latter is an assumption made upon a wrong premise. The mistake is made because of failure to understand the difference between two important truths. Simply stated these are: 'I in Christ' and 'Christ in me'. The phrases are not actual scriptural quotations but the truths they contain have ample scriptural documentation. Textual settings of these two expressions may be seen in such passages as the following: 'if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature' and 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'. Both of these are true descriptions of everyone born of God; one cannot be true of a person's experience and yet not the other, but that does not mean that they are synonymous terms.

He is a New Creature

From the moment any person, whether male or female, is in Christ, he or she is a new spiritual creature and there is a new spiritual creation to discover. This has to be so, because the phrase 'in Christ' is identical in meaning with such phrases as 'in the Church' and 'in His Body'. It is quite impossible to be in such a position and company and not completely changed. Being in a new Spiritual experience all who are there are in an eternal spiritual body, which is to them an entirely new creation. This is nothing other than being in Christ in God: via His own death and resurrection Christ baptises us into Himself.

Now this is an entirely spiritual operation, and except in a marginal way it does not affect the human body, and certainly does not change the basic relationships of men and women. The Lord Jesus' death and resurrection were personal, literal and physical, having eternal spiritual effects. On the contrary, when we are baptised into His body the operation is entirely spiritual. Although this has physical effects they are limited; the body remains unredeemed. This experience places us in position in the body of Christ and therefore involves a life-changing regeneration of spirit, but it does not change the body.

Human spirits are neither male nor female. The spirit inside a female body is no different in kind from the spirit in a male body. For this reason it is better to think of individual spirits of men and women as 'it' rather than he or she. Although, while indwelling the bodies of either a male or a female, spirit cannot help being identified with the body in which it dwells, masculine and feminine genders have nothing to do with spirit. The Lord made this quite clear when He said, 'That which is born of the

flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' Masculine and feminine have to do with body only.

Upon departure from the body, the spirit, being neither male nor female, enters into a spiritual body given it by God; this is spoken of as being clothed upon with a 'house from heaven'. The new creature is then fully known and, according to Christ, neither marries nor is given in marriage. In this respect human spirits (that is the real persons) become as the angels but do not become part of the angelic creation or order. At that time all former human, bodily, natural relationships cease to be; there is no further need for them. Being of a 'kind' or 'order', bodies are unavoidably different and very partial, and in many ways represent inequality. For this reason, in that future state, they are to be disposed of, but until then they must of necessity remain and their differences must be fully accepted and acknowledged in the churches.

As well as the things already considered, head-covering is a testimony to this also. It is not at all a declaration of female spiritual inferiority; the devil has so cunningly twisted it to appear this (and he has found much fertile ground and many advocates). It is simply a clear testimony to the obvious fact that bodily we are not the same and can never be so while the earth standeth. Spiritually we are one and equal, but bodily we are not and can never be identical. Head-covering is enjoined upon us as a testimony to the fact that within the bounds of marriage there is proper bodily union and a special human relationship. More than that even, worn submissively and with spiritual intention, it can also become a declaration of a spiritual union within that marriage. Certain it is that it was never intended by God that it should become a point of debate.

Bearing these things in mind we see that when a person is spoken of as being 'in Christ', bodily states are not in view, but spiritual states only. 'I in Christ' means that I have undergone a complete change in spirit and in position, but 'Christ in me' does not mean that I have undergone a total change either in body or in bodily position. The redeemed and regenerate spirit is changed, and in men's view will develop by God's grace into a completely new soul, that is, a new person. The unredeemed body remains and, being now indwelt by a new person, will be controlled and correctly related to God and its contemporaries and environment to live among them according to God's original designs and ordinations. When Christ is in a man he remains a man; when Christ is in a woman she remains a woman; bodily, there is no change; the difference there has always been remains. She becomes a better woman though and he becomes a better man.

The Spirit Giveth Life

Carrying this one step further we note that Paul says to the Romans, 'if Christ be in you the body is dead because of sin'. All that he means to convey by this we cannot fully discuss here; the point needing reiteration is that by this the apostle is not saying that the body literally undergoes physical death. God says that death takes place but it is an entirely spiritual death. If he meant that physical death occurs it could be supposed that a change or neutralisation of gender takes place at that time. It does not; male and female we still are. When the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead also quickens our mortal bodies they are still the same as they have been from the beginning. The quickening is out from the state of spiritual death into which all mankind was plunged because of Adam's sin in Eden. We see then that, although

head-covering in the churches is an acknowledgement of essential human relationships, it is not firstly so; only secondarily does it testify to those.

The practice of head-covering in a church does not of itself mean that a church is spiritual. No ordinance having symbolic, outward practice, such as breaking of bread or baptism or anointing with oil or head-covering, is proof that an individual or a church is spiritual. Of themselves these things have no more power to bestow spirituality than they have to proclaim it. Each is only a symbol of truth, an acknowledgement of things invisible and, except each is done in loving obedience as a declaration of the truth for which the symbol is employed, they are altogether only legalistic 'dry bones'. But done in the Spirit in a spirit of humility they proclaim that those who practise them are scripturally discerning and spiritually obedient. These are not bound by jots and tittles of legalism, but desirous in purest love and spiritual delight to obey their Lord down to the finest details. And why should this not be so?

All One in Christ Jesus

However, although these things do not prove spirituality, their non-practice displays ignorance, or worse still, parades disobedience. To defend their absence reveals theological confusion, spiritual disorder, scriptural misinterpretation and common abuse of privilege; continuance in the same is schismatic. So great has been the drift from truth that a woman regularly wearing a head-covering in church these days is often regarded as a schismatic; so has error become accepted as truth and truth has been condemned as error. It is a scandal.

We must firmly believe and state that Christ in a man and a woman will abide by what He has so specifically said in all the scriptures. Paul would not have been so foolish or so careless of souls as to contradict in effect something he has said to the Corinthians by something he says to the Galatians. If he did such things, how reliable would he be? Could he possibly expect others to take him seriously? Common sense, even if it is alone, cannot accept that to introduce a topic of no moment, having momentary local meaning only, and lay it down as law in a book to be preserved for the churches throughout time, is a rash and most immature thing to do. God has preserved Paul's writings for posterity. Do we seriously consider either of them to be in need of instruction and correction from us? Are we moderns Paul's superiors? Such proud attitudes lay at the root of the schism which rent the Corinthian church, hence the letter: what he wrote found universal acceptance. There is no record that any of his contemporaries, many of them men of equal spiritual insight and standing, thought it necessary to correct Paul's statements. Has twentieth century knowledge advanced so much that we now have no need of him and his ordinances?

Let Each One Hold the Head

This great saint and first apostle to the gentiles needs no man to defend him, and both what has been written as well as the following is not advanced for this purpose. It may however shed more light on the matter, and help us to better humble ourselves to accept the commandments given by God through him to us, if we consider a telling point he made on another subject closely related to our present study. When sending instructions to Timothy concerning pastoral matters, he gave him some important directions about offices and officers in the church. In the whole of scripture these are unexcelled. The only other passages of equal substance on the subject were also

written by Paul when giving commandment to Titus. These are parallel in teaching and should be read in conjunction with the letters to Timothy.

Speaking to each of them about elders, bishops and deacons, he uses this phrase, 'the husband of one wife'. There is not the slightest hint of a suggestion that the office may be occupied by the wife of one husband. Such a possibility never crossed his mind, for Christ has not ordained women to these offices. It did however cross the Lord's mind, so He had it written down so that twentieth century churches should not transgress His wishes.

Paul next goes on to speak to Titus of aged men and aged women, carefully drawing proper distinctions between the use of the words 'elder' and 'aged'. He used the word 'elder' to describe an office in the church only; on the other hand he only uses the word 'aged' when referring to both men and women who are obviously exactly what the word describes. The word 'elder' can be used of young men, for it does not describe the age of the person who fills the office but rather the office the person fills. On the other hand the word 'aged' has no definite connections with office at all but with length of life.

If it is true that male and female are in every way equal in the churches, why this distinction? Is it not made for at least two reasons?

(1) to draw our attention to the fact that, although in Christ there is no difference, in the churches there remains a very great deal of difference, and
(2) to fix for all time the order of precedence in the churches set out by God for His people. Every person in Christ has Christ directly for his or her own head. He is over each one individually and rules over and directs each by His Spirit. Therefore every child of God must be left free to move in co-operation with and in obedience to Him, without discrimination as to sex, age or office. If the whole body is to hold the head for himself or herself that is their prime and everlasting life and duty. Their grip is not to be on a lesser person or through a group of elected men as though they were the neck which joins the body to the head. At the same time, while each is doing this, he or she is to remember and also hold to the pattern of headship that He who is the head of the entire body has laid down for local companies.

No one taught of God would think of denying that the office of eldership denotes headship in the churches. In practice this is so firmly held among us that we submit to proper spiritual eldership without demur. Similarly everyone who treasures the scriptures holds dearly to the fact that eldership belongs exclusively to the male. In effect this is an acknowledgement of man's headship among a mixed company of worshippers in the local church. Head-covering is an open confession of this before angels and men; to break with it is to confess that the heart no longer accepts Christ's authority in the Church and over the churches.

Let a Man Learn to Rule

A further point emerges which is related to this matter, namely discipline by eldership in a local church. The Lord says that an elder should be the husband of one wife. Now this does not mean that an unmarried man cannot be an elder, or Paul himself (and Barnabas also) should not have been elders or apostles. But in relation to the truth above considered, in the case of a married man, a husband and father ought to act as an elder to his own wife and their children. An elder elected to a community ought not

to find need to discipline any woman, least of all a married one, over the wearing of a head-covering.

Every man should act as an elder and discipline his own household, so that the elected elders of the church should not need to be occupied in such matters. This is one of the obvious reasons for the instruction that no man may be an elder in the church if he has not the spiritual power and moral courage to apply discipline to his own flesh and blood, but it is deplorable if he is ignorant of the grounds upon which he should stand and the principle by which he should govern. Under such conditions how can he be expected to fulfil the role of elder? If he fails to let even nature teach him, how shall he be taught of God?

Let a man first learn to successfully rule in these things over his own family; otherwise, if he allows them to appear before others in the church uncovered, not only his womenfolk but also he himself will need to be disciplined. It is altogether as though they all were naked and the church dead because disconnected from its head, and the Lord's death (to which Paul proceeds next in order in this chapter) made ineffective.

One of the most common of the erroneous beliefs connected with this passage, hindering souls and preventing them from entering into truth, is the strange idea that when Paul uses the word 'covers' or 'covered' or 'uncovered' he is referring to hair, but this cannot be. Simply to read the section inserting the word hair with its correct prefix and in its correct sense for the word 'cover' in its various usages makes Paul sound ridiculous. A couple of verses may suffice to illustrate the error: verse four 'every man praying or prophesying without his head covered with hair dishonours his Head'; verse six 'if a woman has no hair on her head let her hair be shaved off' - which is impossible. By the word cover Paul obviously means something other than and extra to hair.

It is to be doubted that the contentions to which Paul refers in chapter one verse eleven included arguments about head-covering, but it is to our shame and greatly to be regretted that contention about it has sprung up in modern churches. Much of this, though not all, is due either to misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The word 'custom' used by the apostle in verse sixteen has specially suffered from this: 'we have no such custom', he says, and thereby seems to have cast doubt upon all the foregoing - what a pity, for that was not his intention. The proper understanding of what he is saying must be governed by what he has previously said in verse fourteen, 'Doth not even nature itself teach you?' Again he gathers point for spiritual truth from 'that which is natural'. The church had fallen so far from being taught by the Spirit that their spiritual father had to resort to nature as their teacher. Nature teaches us that if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her, and then adds that it is given her for a covering. From this it should not be assumed that the woman whose hair does not grow long and luxurious has no glory. On the other hand they that do have it have glory, but it is only a natural glory - it has nothing to do with spiritual glory; this can only be obtained by the obedience of faith.

To understand the message Paul is imparting, verses thirteen, fourteen and fifteen should be regarded as being a parenthesis. Read in this light the custom referred to in verse sixteen is seen to belong to verse twelve, which is all part of the message delivered to him by God about the obligation and significance of head-covering which

he has been repeating to them. Much of what Paul says in this epistle is a fresh and very necessary repetition of the doctrines he had formerly delivered to them at their foundation as a church, and this is no exception. Everywhere he went with the gospel he spent time teaching, and what he taught had become custom in all the churches; they were traditions, but being instituted by God they were not bondages as some, seeking to throw off all restraints, would have us believe. The fact that head-covering was customary among women in Paul's day, and not only for religious reasons either, has little or no bearing on what he had been teaching. Almost certainly head-covering was a cultural thing among the Corinthians, but this in no way influenced the spiritual teaching of Paul, but if any man thinks it does, then it must be conceded that if anything it supports it.

If this latter suggestion is true, then we are facing a threefold position: firstly the natural, secondly the cultural and thirdly the spiritual, each of them testifying to the fact that women should be covered. The first was created by God; the second was developed by men from the basic creation of God into national custom; the third, taking cognisance of the former two, was instituted by the Holy Spirit in the Church through Paul (and apparently all the apostles) as an ordinance to be kept as delivered until the Lord shall come. Consideration of these things leads to the conviction that, when Paul said 'we have no such custom', he was not saying 'we no longer teach or expect or want women to cover their heads. Such an idea smacks of modern so-called liberation theology, but not of Paul.

Under Our Glorious Head

Passing on to deal with disorders at the Lord's table, the apostle speaks in verse nineteen of heresies. He says that there must be heresy among a people who misbehave in the manner of which he speaks. We therefore see that if a woman appears or attempts to pray, or to prophesy in the church with her head uncovered it is a manifestation of heresy. The act itself implies flagrant disobedience; worse still the state from which it springs reveals heresy - wrong believing, leading to wrong living with a determination to change customs and promote error as truth in the name of the Lord. This was the state into which the Corinthians had fallen. The heresies of which they approved were manifest among them and not the least of these was their belief and attitude towards head-covering.

Finally it must be said that the woman is chosen to wear the head-covering and display to all the wondrous truth that our glorious Head is covering the Church. According to the natural order, it is correct that she should do so, for she best represents the bride. In doing this she also shows that she is under authority in her home, and that the order in the church gatherings, although of a higher spiritual meaning, is the same as that which prevails in private. This is a glorious thing and worthy of praise and she who obeys the Lord in this matter today deserves our heartfelt thanks.

03-SEPT-01

First published January 1976. Revised March 1978 & May 1989.
Copyright © G.W.North 1989.