

1. The Origins of our Traditions

First, we wish to thank everyone who reads this and responds for having the emotional fortitude to discuss this matter in a rationally objective fashion. The usual range of reaction is from insult (that we consider their favourite doctrine to be a lie) to fear (that maybe we're right). So it is with prayer and a measure of frustration that we have pursued this topic which we feel is very important. Some of you may have already read a precursor to this paper, in which case you will notice that, through serious study and application, we have retracted and/or altered some of our views, always with the goal of learning the truth in mind. We believe that the ritualized head covering is clearly a case of lost meaning.

The Mormons have a really twisted doctrine about baptism for the dead which they base on a single passage in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (I Corinthians 15:29) which appears to teach it.

No matter how the case is presented that the idea is completely misguided because of how it contradicts the rest of Scripture, this belief is tenaciously held on to because of how much tradition they have built up around it. And, of course, there is that one passage in Paul's letter.

We will not be dealing with this Mormon belief here, except to show that that is what it can be like to talk to Christadelphians about the issues of hair and head coverings. Whenever the question arises, I Corinthians. 11:3-15 is immediately turned to (the only passage there is) and it is presented as though it were a flat instruction to wear hats and regulate hair styles. Notice that this one passage happens to be in the same letter from Paul as the one the Mormons get their baptism for dead people from.

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Of course, that's the safe, easy way out. It's already an established tradition, almost nobody disagrees with it, and anyone who asks about it is typically so poorly read of the scriptures or so unwilling to rock the boat that pointing out that one passage is normally enough to terminate the discussion. Besides which, if that doesn't work, the "giving offense" line is quite often tossed out as a means of shutting off discussion. So nobody challenges the traditional, face-value interpretation of the passage because, after all, the majority of people go along with it. And many of the other churches do it, don't they?

And that's partly why the Christadelphians adopted it in Victorian times when most women still wore some form of hat in public, usually for show. They did it because the Campbellites did it. The Campbellites did it because the Church of England did it. The Church of England did it because the Roman Catholics did it. It certainly did not come from anything proven using the Bible.

At www.kensmen.com/catholic/theveil.html you can find a document which presents the Catholic understanding of I Corinthians 11. With the exception of some references to Canon Law and "Our Lady", it is - **verbatim** - the Christadelphian teaching on the subject.

The two articles published in the Christadelphian, in Volume 32 in 1895 and two years later in Volume 34, approach the matter in essentially the same way: they begin by stating the traditional understanding, then - without any serious investigation into the interpretation of the symbology or the use of the Greek words - they proceed to debate the merits of applying the practice today.

The issues discussed revolve around whether or not Paul's authority extends to modern times and whether or not the practice should be applied beyond the scope of first century society, and no serious attempt is made to relate the symbols to the Old Testament or to define the meanings in Greek of the words Paul used.

What we will see is that the traditional symbology is in contradiction to the balance of scripture, which is something that the pioneer brethren would certainly have discovered had they been minded to investigate it properly. So rather than hammering the matter out through exhaustive Bible study, they indeed swallowed it whole. And it's easy to understand why. In the face of such enormous errors as infant baptism, supernatural demons, a "Triune Deity", immortal souls, Mary - Queen of Heaven, and other such things, the head coverings issue would have seemed petty indeed - and this perception of it is reflected in Robert Roberts' article on the subject in 1895.

2. Head Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11

So what about that passage in Paul's letter? Doesn't it just say "Do it!"? Well, not quite. It has a few things in common with that one from the Mormons, thus:

1. It appears to directly state the false doctrine;
2. People who favour the false doctrine have convoluted reasoning for it beyond the scope of what is actually written in the Bible;
3. No other passage in the Bible directly discusses the issue;
4. The rest of the Bible teaches something quite different; and
5. By examining the context in which it was written, the meanings of the words in the language it was written in, who it was written to, and the customs with which they lived, we can understand what Paul really was trying to tell them and us.

First, let's take a look at the validity of the need to understand customs to be able to understand the context of a passage. We have been told by many well-meaning brethren that there is no validity to the application of custom. If it is true that the customs, and therefore the context, of the society of the time is irrelevant to an understanding of the Bible, why is it that Jesus "cast out devils" instead of "curing neurological dysfunction"? Jesus certainly would have known that he was healing a medical condition rather than evicting an evil deity, so why doesn't he correct the misunderstanding? The answer, of course, is that the cultural background of that society precluded it. Yet if we totally ignore the context of the society he lived in, we end up believing in the existence - and power - of supernatural demons! Again, if custom has no bearing on context and understanding, what of Joseph's coat of many colours? What of the significance of Esau selling his birthright? The Bible is full of happenings that require an understanding of custom in order to appreciate the full meaning of the passage involved.

Before we get into understanding this passage in its context, let's take a look at a few basic facts from the Bible which show that the traditional viewpoint is totally illogical and unscriptural and even creates a few absurdities.

1 Corinthians 11 does not state that the head covering represents subjection. Rather, this inference is drawn from Paul's choice of wording in v. 10, where we read "For this cause ought the woman to have authority on her head. . . ." and of the mention of the creation order - which was not to indicate subjection, but something else which we will discuss further on. (Eve was not in subjection at creation, but afterwards, therefore woman was not created in subjection to man.) It does not state that subjection to God or anyone else is the reason for the head coverings. Rather, the meaning of the covered head becomes clear with a comparison with other places where the symbol is found:

2 Samuel 15:30

David wept, as did all those men who had their heads covered.

Esther 6:12

Haman's covered head is a sign of his grief over having been sent to give great honour to his arch foe, Mordecai.

Jeremiah 14:2-4

Here, the plowmen and nobles cover their heads in mourning by reason of the drought.

Job 1:20

Job shaved his head in mourning the loss of his children and possessions.

Jeremiah 16:6

In telling Jeremiah about the devastation to come, God says that men shall not show signs of mourning - including making their heads bald.

Jeremiah 48:35-38

The lamentation of Moab is graphically portrayed here by, amongst other things, baldness of heads.

Ezekiel 27:29-32

The lamentation for Tyre is also graphically portrayed by the baldness of heads.

Isaiah 22:12-13

Baldness is equated with weeping, mourning, and the wearing of sackcloth.

Amos 8:10

Baldness is again equated with lamentation, mourning, and the wearing of sackcloth.

The symbol of the head being covered or shaved is one and the same, and represents mourning, grief, etc. , whereas the symbol which represents subjection is entirely different, as evidenced in the scriptures:

Genesis 18:2-3

Abraham bowed himself to the ground before those he called My Lord”, and then refers to himself as “thy servant”.

Genesis 19:1-2

Lot does likewise.

Genesis 27:27-29

Being lord over his (Jacob's) brethren is here equated with having them bow down to him.

Genesis 41:40-43

When Joseph was made ruler over Egypt, the Egyptian people were instructed to kneel before him.

Genesis 49:8-10

The blessing on Judah was that from this tribe would come the ruler and lawgiver - before whom all the Israelites would bow down.

Isaiah 45:23

This entire chapter is dedicated to declaring God's dominion over men. And what does the record state in v. 23? unto me every knee shall bow”

Psalm 95:6-9

Here we see the rebellious behaviour of the Israelites in the wilderness, where they refused to be in subjection to their creator, contrasted with a more appropriate behaviour: let us kneel before the LORD”

Clearly, the Scriptural symbol of subjection is to kneel, bow down, or prostrate oneself in the presence of the other - and not to cover the head, which symbolizes grief, sorrow, or mourning. Paul, being well versed in the Old Testament, would have known this and used the same symbology, not needing to “invent” something new in contradiction to it. Furthermore, if symbols and their interpretations are allowed to change this radically, scripture can no longer be used to interpret scripture. What the head covering means in the Old Testament must be the same as what it means in Paul's letter, regardless of how we might wish to think otherwise. This brings us to the conclusion that the traditional teaching of head coverings for sisters representing subjection of woman to man - and hence symbolically, the ecclesia to Christ - is supported by only one passage in scripture, and that by using a symbology foreign to the Bible.

II Peter 3:15-16

The apostle Peter warns us that Paul's letters contain some things which are difficult to understand, and are easily taken the wrong way if not thought through clearly and completely. The fact that there is only this one passage about head coverings should raise eyebrows. Even more so, because it's from a writer who we've been warned writes in ways hard to understand. And yet no one seems willing to dig a little deeper into what Paul was dealing with to discover what he was talking about!

Exodus 28:3-4

The High Priest's garments included a head covering which (vv. 37-38) he was not to remove in the course of his ministrations in the Tabernacle. Verse 40 states that his sons had to wear them, too. And verse 43 clearly states that this statute of the priestly garments was binding on Aaron and his sons forever. In Levitical Law every priest wore a head covering for glory and for beauty (v. 40) but to the Corinthians Paul says it is a shame for a man to pray with his head covered. Were the priests to be shamed publicly for praying on behalf of the people? Was the High Priest ever a woman? Did God whimsically change his mind? Or was Paul (Acts 22:3) unfamiliar with the Levitical Law and Jewish customs? Everybody knows the answer to all of these questions is NO, but for some strange reason few people see the nonsense it makes of the traditional view of head coverings being a symbol of subjection.

But the contradiction evaporates completely when we understand the head covering as a symbol of mourning. It was on the behalf of the children of Israel that the high priest went in to the presence of God, but then he came out to the people on the behalf of God. Who he represented, therefore, was the mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. This parallel is drawn for us in Hebrews 7:22-28. With the work of redemption not yet complete, how appropriate it was that the high priest should grieve for the sins of the people! With Christ's work of redemption having taken place now, it would be very inappropriate for men to cover their heads when praying because they represent Christ to the ecclesia the same way the high priest represented Him to the children of Israel.

I Corinthians. 11:16,17

Paul here is explicitly stating that we are not to adopt this as a custom. Why are we doing it? Although some newer translations such as the NIV render “no such custom” as “no other custom”, this is not how the original Greek text reads. The word used for “such” is Strong’s #5108: “truly this, i. e. , of this sort (to denote character or individuality)”. Other passages where this word occurs are:

Matt. 19:14

But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of *such* is the kingdom of heaven.

Mark 7:8

For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other *such like* things ye do.

John 8:5

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that *such* should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

Nowhere in the KJV does this word get translated as “other”.

Also, Paul is not negating anything with this statement, but rather stating explicitly the purpose of the instruction. Read verse 17: he says it is a tragedy that the Corinthians have not abandoned their former ways, and thus their behaviour at their meetings makes things worse rather than better for the ecclesia as a whole. He is not delivering a custom or a requirement, but is giving specific advice as to a specific cure for a specific problem. Verse 16 cannot be separated from verse 17. Taken together, they may be paraphrased thus:

“If anyone complains about this, remember that neither we (you and I) nor any other ecclesia will be adopting this as a custom, and these instructions I am giving to you at this time are not to praise you, but I give them because your behaviour at meetings makes things worse, not better.”

“Contentious” does not mean academic disagreement with Paul’s teaching, or with his appraisal of the situation in Corinth, but rather an unwillingness to cooperate with the corrective action he advises to remedy the problem of the intrusion of paganism into the ecclesia.

3. Head Covering as a Symbol of Grief

Understanding the head covering in terms of its Old Testament representation - that of grief, mourning, or sorrow eliminates any doubt as to the fact that Paul is speaking of a local, temporary issue, which has since been resolved, as is evidenced in 2 Corinthians 7:8-12. The first letter to Corinth is full of such evidence - once we abandon the idea that a head covering somehow represents subjection. The whole point of this letter was that the brethren and sisters in Corinth had not put away their former ways. His point in chapter 11 is that this fact is a grief to the whole ecclesia - which they needed to be made pointedly aware of so that they could do something about it. But only the women should wear the symbol of sorrow, as it is the ecclesia and not Christ who sorrows (compare Psalms 16:9-11; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Revelation 21:2-4).

This outward symbol of grief would also have displaced the atmosphere of gaiety and feasting - sobered them up, so to speak.

It has been suggested that Paul creates a dilemma by saying his advice can be disregarded. The people who claim a dilemma then say, "What about the Memorial? What about baptism? They were commands. Should we also disregard them?" Let us address both the perceived "dilemma" with Paul's teachings, and the rituals of the Memorial and baptism.

We do, indeed, have a couple of rituals which we have been instructed to perform. But there is a pattern to them which is foreign to the Levitical Law.

Under the Law most laws, rituals, and ordinances (with the exception of a few matters dealing with behaviours motivated by our love for one another and our love for God) dealt with teaching things which would make Jesus recognizable as the Messiah when he arrived. Numerous studies over the years have dealt with how the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings, the various types of sacrifices and how they were performed, how the priests were adorned, and so forth, all symbolized various aspects of Christ and his ministry. This function of the Law is summed up in Galatians 3:24-25.

But the rituals under Christ follow a different pattern. Consider baptism, commanded to be instituted as a ritual. True, it is a symbolic act whereby death and resurrection are represented by a complete immersion in water and a rising therefrom. But it does not begin or end there. There is a process which must take place in the heart of the believer in order for his/her baptism to be considered valid:

1. Self-examination
2. Confession of sinfulness
3. Repentance
4. Walk in newness of life

Likewise with the breaking of bread, there is a command that instituted it as a ritual. True, it symbolizes the death and resurrection of our Lord, and the partaking thereof identifies us with that sacrifice. But it does not begin or end there. There is a process which must take place in the heart of the believer in order for him/her to grow spiritually:

1. Self-examination
2. Confession of sinfulness

3. Repentance

4. Walk in newness of life

This is exactly what Paul says of the breaking of bread in 1 Corinthians 11:26-32.

The only other commandment we have under Jesus is found in John 15:12-14, where He says, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." He does not institute a ritual for this command because love is the fulfilling of all laws and rituals and is the natural progression of the 4 steps listed above.

And what of head coverings? Does that ritual follow this pattern? Certainly not with the traditional understanding of it! If, however, we abandon the traditional ideas, and understand the symbol of the covered head in terms of its Old Testament meaning (that of grief, sorrow, or mourning) and also understand that these instructions were given to Corinth, only to Corinth of the first century (or those from any age and place having the same problem), and only in reference to their specific situation, then it suddenly fits this pattern, as is evident in 2 Corinthians 7:8-12, a pattern Paul would have been completely aware of.

We have received no such command to wear head coverings - only to love, to be baptised, and to participate in the Memorial.

Col 2:20-23

The point is often made that the purpose of the custom is to reinforce the teaching of a spiritual lesson by acting out a role (role-playing). Having the women don head coverings won't do that. Instead, it poses the danger of thinking, "I'm okay. I'm holy. I'm righteous. I'm safe. I wore my hat to church today." They are in danger of stopping work on their hearts and having the right covering there because the hat "shows" their humility. The trouble is, people get hung up in the doing of the thing and totally miss the intended lesson, if indeed the intended lesson is even understood. It really becomes simple role-playing with no real living of the application. It becomes legalistic instead of spiritual. That generates Pharisaical leaven (Mark 7:1-9), as these observances give a good "show" of holiness, but are worthless in the fight against our real enemy - the flesh. That's what went wrong with the Levitical Law. The apostles wrote repeatedly that the legal ordinances of the Law were not to be imposed upon Gentile believers. Why would any of them then insist on creating new rules and laws? Was head-covering in Corinth intended as a rule of role-playing after the pattern of the Levitical Law?

4. The Nazarite Principle

Acts 18:18 Paul had his hair shorn off at Cenchrea. Why? He had a vow and that is likely where he was when the royal edict from king Agrippa went out that Nazarites were to shave their heads. We have the following historical note from Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 19, Chapter 6, Section 1):

“[King Agrippa] also came to Jerusalem and offered all the sacrifices that belonged to him, and omitted nothing which the law required; on which account he ordained that many of the Nazirites should have their heads shorn. ”

The only time that taking of a vow and shearing of the hair are mentioned together is in connection with the Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:5), which was given as a law that specifically required, among other things, that any man or woman dedicated to God's service must allow his or her hair to grow. This law of the Nazarite was not given in response to any incident or any question arising from application or understanding of any other law but was appointed by God on His own initiative. Since God Himself has issued this command for men to grow their hair long, there cannot be anything, morally or spiritually, wrong with a man who chooses to do so. It would be out of character for God to appoint, *as a form of true worship*, anything which He would deem inappropriate.

Note the provision for renewal of an incomplete vow in Numbers 6:9-12. In Acts 21:17-28 Paul does this at the request of the brethren in Jerusalem, along with four other men who also have the vow. Also, notice how Paul was not recognized until the seven days were almost ended. Why not? Strong's Concordance, in its lexicon entry for #3700, contrasts Greek synonyms for the words “to see” or “to look”, thus:

991:denotes simply voluntary observation

1492:expresses merely mechanical, passive or casual vision

2334:signifies an earnest but more continued inspection

3700:to gaze with wide-open eyes, as at something remarkable

3708:to stare at something

4648:watching from a distance

The word for “saw” in Acts 21:27 is #2300: less emphatically intense than #2334, it means “to look closely at, to perceive”. That is exactly what happened to Paul - on the seventh day, the Jews from Asia *perceived* he was there *after he had shaved*. Num. 6:9 states that it is on the seventh day of the cleansing that shaving of the head is required. The vow itself was not given any specific time frame, except that the time was to be determined prior to commencing it. Paul's hair had grown so much by this time that he had become completely unrecognizable until he shaved. So if Paul willingly allowed his hair to grow to this extent, why is it that he says in 1 Corinthians 11:14 that it is a shameful thing to do? Was Paul a hypocrite? Was the Nazarite supposed to be ashamed of the visible evidence of his covenant with God?

I Thessalonians. 3:1-2

It seems here that Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica because he could not stand to wait any longer to get news of their spiritual welfare. But, if that were his only reason for doing so, he would have taken the voyage himself, instead of thinking it good to be left at Athens alone.

Furthermore, if Paul's real concern here was just the matter of whether or not the brethren at Thessalonica were doing well, it would have made far better sense for him to go there himself, rather than for him to send Timothy: Paul's status as a Roman Citizen gave him influence with the authorities which Silas and Timothy, who did not have this privileged position, would not be able to avail themselves of in his absence. So why did Paul want to send Timothy on alone to Thessalonica while he stayed in Athens? What did he have to attend to that was so important that he stayed behind in Athens even though his heart yearned to go to Thessalonica? Knowing the customs of Athenian society from being daily in their market place (Acts 17:17), he knew to send Timothy on an errand so he could give his address at the Areopagus (Acts 17:18-33) to a group of people, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who otherwise wouldn't have been inclined to pay any attention to him. Why wouldn't they have listened? Unger's Bible Dictionary sheds some light on this, where, in the entry for "hair", we have the following recorded of the Greeks:

" . . . A free Athenian citizen did not wear his hair very short, or he would have been mistaken for a slave, who would be obliged to do so. . . . "

and of the Hebrews:

" . . . the usual custom for men being to cut the hair from time to time with a razor, but without shaving it bare. . . . "

Flavius Josephus has this to say about the Nazarites in *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 4, Chapter 4, Section 4:

"Moreover, when any have made a sacred vow, I mean those that are called Nazirites, that suffer their hair to grow long, and use no wine, when they consecrate their hair, and offer it for a sacrifice, they are to allot that hair for the priests [to be thrown into the fire]." (italics ours)

Josephus, being contemporary with Paul, and having been a priest himself at the temple in Jerusalem, would have known for certain what a Nazarite looked like, and whether or not a Nazarite would grow his hair long.

Thus Paul, being a long-haired Nazarite man, would have been accepted as a peer by the Athenian "university crowd", whereas Timothy, being a short-haired Hebrew man, would have been slighted as though he were a slave. If Paul had appeared at the Areopagus with Timothy, treating him as an equal, he too would have been snubbed and thus ruined a good opportunity for preaching. We see from this that it was a shameful thing for a man to have short hair in Athens just as it was strictly a local issue in Corinth that it was a shame for a man to have long hair.

The reason for this local custom in Corinth was that Corinthian society was based almost entirely on the Roman system of things. Men had fairly short hair and women had long hair which they wore styled and ornamented for beauty. The only men that would have habitually worn long hair were the sodomites (male prostitutes) from the pagan temples. The natural way accepted by most was short hair.

Although this was the custom of Corinth, it was not a worldwide custom- see Unger's Bible Dictionary, published in 1957 by the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois. Most secular historians also agree, as do artworks and artifacts from the Renaissance, Medieval, Classical, and Pre-classical periods of history. And consider also what is written of Absalom in 2 Samuel 14:25-26: he cut his hair once every year *because it was heavy upon him*. If hair grows heavy

upon a man's head, it is reason to cut it *more* frequently, not *less*. Therefore, this indicated that cutting the hair every year was considered often for them - something they took notice of.

5. The Meaning of "Shame"

Next to be addressed is the usages of the word "shame". It surprises many people to learn that there are different Greek words, with different meanings for this word.

The word used for "shame" in v. 6 is Strong's #149 - indecorum - which means social unacceptability in a "decorated" fashion. It would be socially unacceptable for a woman to be shorn. What about the shame of men's long hair? This is an entirely different word translated "shame": it is Strong's #819 - infamy - which means base, sordid, filthy, or villainous. Paul is indicating the fashions of male prostitutes. Paul is saying, "Look around you. Is it natural for men to have long hair? Who wears their hair so?"

What of this word "nature"? This footnote appears in the Diaglott, in reference to Paul's use of that same word in Romans 2:14:

"Phusei, by nature, means also 'an infused disposition, which is become, as it were, natural. . .'" (italics his)

Thus it is reasonable to conclude that Paul is talking of learned behaviours rather than something we are born inclined to do. He therefore means the manner of the society in which the Corinthian believers found themselves. Is it not in our "nature" to see prostitution in this same light of infamy, although it is acceptable to those who participate in it? Short hair for men was the norm in Corinth, except for certain infamous individuals who were engaged in the practice of prostitution.

His point about the hair lengths in vv. 13-15 is simply that a shaved or shorn head on a man would not readily be taken as a sign of mourning, since normally, they cut their hair frequently, whereas it would be strikingly noticeable on a woman since their custom showed that a woman's hair was for beauty. The word in v. 13 for "comely" is Strong's #4241, which means "to tower up, to be conspicuous" ie, to be obviously noticeable. Therefore he is indicating that it would not be conspicuous if these women prayed with uncovered heads since they always decorated their hair. The conspicuity is from the covering on what would otherwise be uncovered and adorned.

Here we must make a retraction of a previous assumption. In studies subsequent to our original "Hats" paper, it has come to our attention that we made an error in assuming that Corinthian women would have worn bourkas. This would not have been the case because the society in Corinth was a Roman-based culture, and not Semitic-based as we had previously thought. When Paul visited the city it was less than 100 years old. After 102 years of desolation, brought about by the Roman general Mummios, it was rebuilt under Julius Caesar in 44 B. C. and Romans were brought in to colonize it. This would therefore mean their customs would have been Roman rather than Semitic. Hence men would have had short hair and women would have had uncovered, styled, long hair.

Paul is saying that in their society, which was Roman in nature, they were taught that long-haired men were infamous because men customarily wore their hair short, whereas women customarily dressed their hair up as ornamentation. Therefore, shearing a man's head to show mourning would not have been a conspicuous action for that society. Because a woman's hair was long, shearing would be a conspicuously obvious symbol of the ecclesia in mourning, but because it would be seen as socially unacceptable, it would be just as conspicuous for the

women to cover their hair in like Biblical symbology since it was normally worn in ornamented fashion.

6. The Context of Corinthians

Now, let's take a look at the context of the rest of the letter. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was devoted, in its entirety, to dealing with the one issue which was troubling Corinth: the invasion of the ways of paganism into the ecclesia and their need to be rid of it. Pertaining to which, Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 11 is that the Corinthian ecclesia was still so steeped in their former ways - that of the pagan society from which they came (see ch. 12:2) - that they have begun even to treat the Lord's supper as a pagan feast, and what a tragedy that is! Mourn and weep!

The Corinthian ecclesia had a unique situation, with some unique problems. Acts 18 records Paul's visit to Corinth. In Acts 18:5-6 Paul said he would go to the Gentiles. And so he did, with the result that a significant proportion of the Corinthian believers were Gentiles - formerly idol worshippers.

This is evident from some of the other issues Paul addresses in this letter to Corinth:

- chapter 1:10-16 - sectarian divisions within the ecclesia
- chapter 5:1-13 - sexual immorality
- chapter 6:1-8 - lawsuits against each other
- chapter 7:1-16 - marriage and divorce questions
- chapter 8:1-13 - food offered to idols
- chapter 10:19-21 - continued attendance at pagan rituals
- chapter 11:20-22 - riotous feasting at the Lord's table
- chapter 14:26-33 - abuse of the Spirit Gifts
- chapter 15:12-19 - false doctrine about the resurrection

It is clear that, although the Corinthian ecclesia had accepted the Truth regarding the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, they were having difficulty letting go of some of their old pagan habits. They needed to learn that commitment to Christ is a very different thing from worshipping idols. The pagan temples in Corinth were dedicated to goddesses - or rather, *the* goddess, as there really was only one, who was called different names in different places. In Corinth, she was Aphrodite. In Ephesus, she was Diana. In Egypt, she was Isis. In Canaan, she was Ashtoreth. In other places she had other names, such as Astarte, Aurora, Semiramis, Venus, or Ishtar. She had different names in different temples and different places, but the basic worship of the goddess was the same throughout. Women had the roles of priestesses and conducted the ceremonies, which typically revolved around the gratification of lusts, through both feasting and prostitution. Male prostitutes - called "sodomites" in the KJV - were extremely popular at the goddess's festivals, and were readily identifiable in Corinth because of their long hair, which was not condoned by decency standards of that time in that place, and hence the shame Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 11:14.

Paul's argument in 1Cor 11:2-17 is that these pagan ways must be left behind. Such practices as the Corinthians would have been familiar with were not to be brought into the ecclesia under the guise of liberty in Christ, since the ecclesia does not have liberty to disobey Him. Christ rules over the church, and the church does not rule over Christ. Instead, she must obey Him as

a wife obeying her husband. They were to mourn their behaviour and walk in the new life, not the old.

To reinforce the point of obedience to the things of God, and to openly show the necessity of changing their ways, Paul recommended that the Corinthian ecclesia put on some visual, outward show of the women mourning the behaviour of the ecclesia since, in their role of representing men - mankind, they represented the ecclesia, Christ's bride. Hence, the uncovered male head because he represents Christ and the covered female head because she represents the ecclesia. It would have been unsuitable for the men to cover their heads because they represented Christ and Christ should not be represented as mourning. He has already conquered the flesh and received the joy set before Him.

The women would not have wanted to shear their hair because, in that time and place, it was a symbol of both slavery and of punishment for prostitution and so would have brought great social disgrace to them. It would have also made it very difficult to preach the Truth to women of their same class because they would no longer have been accepted by their peers. So, instead of suggesting an unacceptable symbol of mourning, Paul opted for a more reasonable, scriptural solution - cover their heads. This was not a hat, but a bourka, veil or similar garment, completely covering the whole head. This would have supported the standards of decency current at that time and place and also reinforced the whole issue of mourning in a scripturally acceptable manner. By women showing the mourning they would have also shown their "place" in ecclesial life, that being representative of men (mankind).

7. " Because of the angels"

And so it is in verse 10 that Paul argues in favor of the head coverings " because of the angels" . What do angels have to do with this issue? There are two possibilities.

The seemingly puzzling phrases in verse 10 can be explained by looking up the word "authority". Here it is Strong's # 1849, a privilege or delegated authority. In 1 Timothy 2:12, where Paul says women should not usurp authority, it is Strong's #831, to act for oneself, to dominate. Clearly the authority on the woman's head in 1 Corinthians 11 is not a domination-subjection authority but a privileged authority to represent man (mankind). It refutes the whole business of subjection and instead shows it is a privilege for the women of this ecclesia to be seen mourning the behaviour of the ecclesia, just as it would be unfitting for the men to show open mourning because their representation as Christ would negate that privilege to them. Paul's reasoning states that since woman is from man (v. 8) and because of man (v. 9) it is fitting for woman to be the delegated representative of man because of the messengers (v. 10).

Much has been made over the years about this issue of the angels - most of it based on misunderstanding.

The Greek word here for " angels" also appears in other passages where it has been translated " messengers" . In Phil. 2:25 and James 2:25 there is no possibility that this word could refer to God's heavenly angels, but to mortal men and women. Epaphroditus was the messenger - or angel - sent to the Philippians. The Israelite spies were the messengers - or angels - sent to Rahab. The " angels" to which Paul refers here may not be the heavenly angels, but the messengers who travelled from ecclesia to ecclesia, ministering to the needs of the brethren and sisters and carrying news and letters with them, just like Epaphroditus did. These messengers, who passed from ecclesia to ecclesia, would have carried word of the happenings at each ecclesia to other ecclesias they visited so the behaviour of the believers at Corinth would have had the potential to become a stumbling block to other ecclesias if a solution wasn't found. Instead, his advice encouraged them to be a good example for others.

If it is heavenly angels that Paul is referring to, then here is the reasoning we feel explains it: In the old creation (representative of our old lives prior to baptism) the angels act as the lawgivers, the mediators between God and man, whereas in the new creation (representative of our new lives in Christ) Christ is the mediator. Paul draws attention to the creation order in v. 3, reminds us of it in verses 8 & 9, then in verse 10 indicates the need for the symbol of mourning *because of the continued presence of the angels* - the Corinthians had not left their old ways behind! They still behaved as part of the old creation (old way of life), not as of the new creation (new way of life).

Note also that in the old creation, the order was as follows (Genesis 1:26, 2:21,22):

1. God
2. Angels
3. Man
4. Woman

Whereas in the new creation, this order changes to (Hebrews 2:5-9):

1. God

2. Christ

3. Ecclesia (Bride)

4. The World

This is Paul's point when drawing attention in v. 3 to the creation order. We are not to behave as if we are part of the old creation (Ephesians 4:22-24). Notice he immediately follows his comments on the creation order with the statement in v. 4 that men disgrace their heads by covering them during prayer.

So again, why the messengers? Here are the two possibilities: 1) just as woman is from man and because of man and is therefore the fit representative of man, the messengers are from the ecclesia, because of the ecclesia and are therefore the fit representatives of the ecclesia, or 2) just as woman is from man and because of man and is therefore the fit representative of man, the angels - God's messengers - are from God, because of God and are therefore the fit representatives of God.

In our revised understanding of this passage, it could be either, thus:

	Woman	Ecclesial Messengers	Heavenly Angels
v. 8	from Man	from the ecclesia	from God
v. 9	for Man	for the ecclesia	for God
v. 10	represents Man	represent the ecclesia	represent God

In either case, we can conclude that the understanding of a head covering as a sign of mourning rather than subjection, and of it applying only to Corinth in the first century (or to any ecclesia experiencing their problem in any era) rather than to all believers throughout the ages, makes this verse far less puzzling. The problem is the focus and hence the advice on how to fix the problem.

What Paul wanted the Corinthian ecclesia to do was to become a good example to the rest of the believers worldwide by showing how they had put away their former doings to serve Christ in humility, leaving behind all forms of idol worship, as evidenced in the entire letter. Their visually obvious mourning of wrongful behaviour would have facilitated this. It would have given an air of sobriety to their meetings to replace the riotous feasting, etc. , which would in turn facilitate the repentance and dedication needed to walk in the new life. It would have prevented the spread to other ecclesias of the unscriptural behaviour of things such as women wanting to maintain the roles of priestesses that they had in the pagan worship they came out of, men being scorned as prostitutes and not worth listening to, sectarian divisions, sexual immorality, etc. They were to mourn their behaviour and leave behind their pagan ways. Then word that spread about them would be beneficial to other ecclesias, not potentially harmful.

Did Paul mean, then, that the ecclesia worldwide, including ourselves here today, was to adopt ritual observances of men with short hair, women with hats, mandatory ties and dresses and

other strict dress codes, restrictions on facial hair or the use of cosmetics and the like? Emphatically not! He even explicitly states in 1 Corinthians 11:16 that there is no such commandment. In fact, how we are to be adorned is stated clearly in 1 Tim. 2:9-10. While Paul here specifically speaks of women, it is clear from reading the next chapter that the message about appropriate behaviour also includes the men. The point is the same for both male and female: the adornment we should be concerned about is our behaviour, not our physical appearance. Furthermore, observance of such physical ordinances runs contrary to everything Paul, as well as the other apostles, had to say about the law.

Consider:

Romans 7:5-6

we are to serve in the spirit of the law, not blindly following any set of rules

Acts 15:10

it is a yoke we are unable to bear

Rom 14:1-6 & 14-15

these rituals could destroy those who Christ died to save

Rom 14:10-13

by enforcing such rituals we are judging each other and creating stumbling blocks

Col. 2:20-23

these observances give a good "show" of holiness, but are worthless in the fight against our real enemy - the flesh.

Being Christadelphians, we do not maintain any doctrines not explicitly taught in the Bible. Being Christadelphians, we study the Bible on a regular basis in the objective, analytical manner of comparing scripture with scripture, to the intent of fully understanding the truth. Being Christadelphians, we challenge every doctrine as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-12) and follow Paul's advice to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians. 5:21) to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good". Being Christadelphians, we do this with all our doctrines, right? Or did we fall asleep at the switch when we got this head coverings thing from the Campbellites who got it from the Anglicans who got it from the Catholics who got it from who knows who or where? But since it's such an accepted tradition that everybody likes, is it important that it isn't taught anywhere in the Bible? After all, breaking traditions can actually offend some people.

And that's exactly what the doctrine of head coverings is: an unscriptural human tradition instituted long ago. But is there really any danger in simple little traditions? We see what Jesus thinks of that in Mark 7:1-23. Here, He berates the Pharisees for two of their unscriptural customs which they had somehow made into laws. Pay particular attention to His initial remarks in vv. 6-9: that the Pharisees are rejecting God's teaching in favour of their own ideas and philosophies. Sure, they had logical reasons for each and every little eccentricity in their traditions, all of which they could claim was based on the Law, but their motivation was all wrong: they wanted to show God how righteous and holy they could be instead of show God's people how righteous and holy God is. This is their "leaven" which He warns us of in Matt. 16:11-12.

Consider King Saul, who thought it was appropriate to offer sacrifice when Samuel told him to wait. Saul's mistake, which he repeated in the matter of the Amalekites, was that he thought that following what he understood the prescribed forms of worship to be was more important than understanding the specifics of what he was instructed to do. This is the same mistake that the ecclesia as a whole is making today in this matter of the head coverings.

In 1 Tim 2:9-10, where Paul is advising Timothy about appropriate adornment for women, he simply says “modest apparel” not “and bourkas” or “and hats” or “and head coverings”. They are to practice silence and submission toward men and show their hearts in their works. Here is the perfect opportunity for Paul to reiterate what he advised for the Corinthians but the Ephesians obviously weren't having the same problems, therefore the solutions for them were different.

Scripture is full of places where we might also expect to find this doctrine discussed - if indeed it is true. A couple more examples are Acts 21:25 and Titus 2:1-10.

The point isn't that one solitary opportunity to reiterate the teaching has been omitted, but rather that the teaching is entirely absent from the scriptures, except by way of a misunderstanding in one isolated passage.

The covering of heads was a specific symbol to correct behaviour in a specific situation, not a law handed down by Paul as a must for women everywhere. If the morality and attitude of the heart is right before God there is no need to enforce outside customs and traditions to show someone the error of their ways. God looks on the hearts of men and women, not on what is or isn't worn on their heads. It is much more important that a woman maintain her discretion and respectful humility, acknowledging her role in the ecclesia as mankind's representative, than that she wear a hat and feel “safe” voicing opinions and committing actions that are contrary to scriptural behaviour. It is much more important for a man to live up to his role as a leader in Christ's church, as a representative of Christ himself, than to worry about what custom dictates.

What we should really be doing when we read the Bible is listening to what God is telling us, and then incorporating what we hear into our lives so that we can become better able to do what God has planned for us, become what he plans for us to be, and thereby manifest His character and give Him glory. But very few people are actually willing to do that, because it involves effort, humility, and a deep-seated desire to glorify and praise God rather than oneself. And it's quite a bit easier to get a sister to balance a kleenex on her head for about an hour or so, or to hound a brother into getting a haircut, than it is to persuade an entire organization of people that they are utterly mistaken in the proud stand which they have taken for generations. But which would give more glory to God – exacting obedience from someone? or gaining new understanding from God's Word ourselves, and then humbling ourselves to retract an erroneous statement we had made earlier and dismissing tradition for what it is?

The pride here is not inherent in the covering or uncovering of heads, but in the reluctance to properly examine a teaching before adopting it, and in the inability to abandon it once proven wrong. This is exactly what is happening here in regard to the doctrine of head coverings. Aside from which, we maintain, and always have, that it should be a matter of individual choice as to the wearing or not of head coverings. **BUT** it should be done with a true and complete understanding of what it represents - grief, not subjection.

Appendix: A Paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 11

Context: Paul is correcting the Corinthian ecclesia for the problems they have in letting go of their former ways. He instructs them to take the matter seriously, grieve for their failure, and take note of how they ought to conduct themselves.

1. This chapter begins with Paul telling the Corinthians that they should follow his example and teachings because he was a follower of Christ. Since Paul had the holy spirit and was chosen by Christ this advice should be taken very seriously. (This verse actually belongs with the end of the previous chapter.)
2. Paul starts his next topic by praising them for remembering his teachings just as he had delivered them to them and that they kept them.
3. **BUT** he wants them to know: the head of the brothers is Christ and the head of the sisters is mankind (or, in the ecclesial context, the whole ecclesia or bride of Christ) and the head of Christ is God. So the discussion centres around heads and what they represent.
4. Since the heads of the brothers represent Christ it would dishonour Christ if the brothers covered their heads. This would be in type showing that Christ is in a state of grief or mourning.
5. Since the heads of sisters represent man (the ecclesia) they dishonour the ecclesia if they do not cover their heads because they are, in type, showing the sorrow of the ecclesia for the manner in which they have been behaving, ie. the bride sorrowing the treatment of the bridegroom's body and blood - see vv. 27-29. Covering the head is the same as shaving it.
6. So if a woman doesn't want to wear a head covering let her cut off her hair. But if it is not socially acceptable for her to be shorn or shaven, let her cover her head.
7. The brothers should not cover their heads because they are the image and glory of God (who needs no repentance) but the woman is the glory of man being created from man (whose glory is manifesting at their meetings - see vv. 17-22).
8. Man was created first and woman came out of man.
9. In addition, man was not created for the woman but the woman for the man.
10. Because of the creation order, it is the woman who has the delegated authority to represent the ecclesia the way the angels represent God. (Or the second possibility: because of the creation order, it is the woman who has the delegated authority to represent the ecclesia's way of life to visitors, i. e. ecclesial messengers - mailmen)
11. However, men and women are one in the Lord.
12. Just as vv. 8-9 apply, so the oneness is proven in that they cannot exist without each other. Woman exists because of man, but man cannot exist without woman. They are both from God. (ie. by covering *her* head, she is showing *their* grief)
13. So now decide for yourselves. Would it be a conspicuous action for the women among you to pray to God without covering their heads?

14. The society in which you live shows you the disgracefulness of men with long hair,
15. but a woman's long hair is a glorious covering of beauty to her. (Paul is using their natural surroundings to emphasize the need for the symbol to be conspicuous- a man with a shaved or shorn head would not stand out much in a society where men typically had short hair, but a woman being covered or shorn would be readily noticeable in a society where women normally wore their long hair fashioned and styled for ornamentation.)
16. If anyone complains about this, remember that neither we (you and I) nor any other ecclesia will be adopting this as a custom,
17. and these instructions I am giving to you at this time are not to praise you, but I give them because your behaviour at meetings makes things worse, not better.
18. I have been told, and I think I should believe it, that when you meet together, you divide yourselves up into factions.
19. Now some dissention and division is necessary, to draw attention to and to show clearly what is approved and acceptable,
20. but you have taken it too far. You do not meet together for the Memorial Service,
21. but have turned it into a pagan free-for-all.
22. Do you not have your own homes to revel in? Or do you disregard the ecclesia and embarrass those among you who are less affluent? Do you expect me to compliment you for this dishonourable behaviour? I give you no praise for this
23. because I received from the Lord what I have taught you - that Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took a loaf,
24. gave thanks, broke it, and said: "This is my body, broken for you. Do this to remember me. "
25. Similarly, the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink it, drink it to remember me. "
26. Whenever you do this, you are announcing the Lord's death - until he returns,
27. but by partaking of these emblems in such an unworthy or inappropriate fashion, you are taking upon yourselves the guilt of putting him to death.
28. Smarten up! Examine yourselves, do something about your behaviour, and then come here and partake of the emblems in the right frame of mind
29. because if you let this continue, all you will be doing is bringing condemnation down on yourselves on account of your disregard for the body and blood of the Lord.
30. This is why so many of you are so sick spiritually, some to the point of being dead to the things of the gospel.
31. For if we would separate ourselves from our former ways, we should not be condemned.
32. But when we are condemned, we are disciplined - educated, trained, corrected - by the Lord, so that we should not be condemned with the world and all its ways in the day of judgment.

33. My brethren, when you meet together to share the emblems, encourage and learn from each other.
34. And fill your bellies at home, so that your meetings do not become a cause of condemnation. I'll deal with the rest when I get there.