

Head Coverings and Bible Study

¹Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. ²Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. ³But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. ⁵But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. ⁶For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. ⁷For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. ¹⁰Therefore the woman ought to have a *symbol of authority* on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered? ¹⁴Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:1-16 NASB95)

In this passage from the book of 1 Corinthians written by the apostle Paul above, a subject is introduced that some people think is a command for women to wear a cloth on their heads, but others do not. Sometimes there is a lot of passion connected with this subject. Why is there such disagreement? Both viewpoints are defended by seemingly concerned, godly men and women. Both appeal to the Scriptures as the final authority. Both claim that their view is what is being taught here. Yet the two sides cannot both be right. Either the Bible teaches us that women should wear something on their heads, or it doesn't.

So how can we tell which view to accept? For those who take the whole Bible seriously, and desire to please God by doing all that God asks of His children, each instruction that He may give is important. If God really wants His daughters to wear a cloth on the head, they should do so. If not, then leaving it off should not cause one to be ostracized or to feel guilty. But laboring to find out what the Scriptures say is equally important, because either they can be trusted or they can't. That's why this is as much a discussion of Bible study methods as it is a fact-finding mission for head coverings. Like the Bereans (Acts 17:11) we should 'search the Scriptures' ourselves to find out which one of these viewpoints is true to the Word.

From the Scriptural evidence, and from reading the explanations of people who hold one or the other viewpoints (including those listed below), I have concluded that there is no Scriptural warrant for a woman to wear a cloth on the head. The passage above does not instruct either for or against it, and those who say that Paul does command in the affirmative have not made a convincing case for it. I put these statements here so you will know where I'm headed, and if you already have your mind made up and do not want to be confused with facts then you can

stop reading here. But if you don't know, and you want to find out what I think the Scriptures say, then stay tuned.

In this essay I refer to several articles by other authors, and these are listed below instead of leaving them to a bibliography at the end of the essay. Some of the material presented here I also borrowed from another article I wrote on clothing, which is the fifth article listed here. Four of them can be found online (addresses included) and one can be requested by mail.

1. 'Should I Remove My Kippah? A Jewish Perspective of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.' Tim Hegg. <http://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/1Co%2011%20&%20Kippas.pdf>
2. 'Headcovering Customs of the Ancient World, An Illustrated Survey' by Michael Marlowe. <http://www.bible-researcher.com/headcoverings3.html>.
3. The above survey by Mr. Marlowe is a companion article to 'The Woman's Headcovering.' <http://www.bible-researcher.com/headcoverings.html>.
4. 'The Validity and Value of the Woman's Head Covering' a booklet by Daniel Botkin. Obtain by writing to Gates of Eden P.O. Box 2257 East Peoria IL 60611-0257. I suggest including a few dollars to help defray the costs of postage. The web site can be found at <http://www.gatesofeden.org>.
5. 'People Husbandry through the Word' by Bruce Scott Bertram <http://www.wholebible.com/PdfLibrary/PeopleHusbandryWord.pdf>

I also used some material gleaned from exchanges in the forum on www.wholebible.com.

There are another couple of good articles on the web by a lady named Nancy A. Carter from the United Methodist Church. "Paul and Corinthian Women's Head Coverings" (<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/corinthians/veils.stm>) and "Paul and Corinthian Women's Hairstyles" (<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/corinthians/hairstyles.stm>).

Other articles where a cloth covering is promoted include 'Let Her Be Veiled: An In-Depth Study of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16' edited by Tom Shank and available online (use a search engine) and 'The Biblical Headcovering: Scarf of Hidden Power' by Renée Ellison also available online. Caution is advised when attempting to study these types of articles. Frequently they are heavy in opinion or commentary resulting from very poor hermeneutics which causes a great deal of confusion when comparing the author's conclusions to the Word.

Bible Study and Presuppositions

As we interpret the Scriptures, the conclusions we make depend on what we are thinking going into the study. These thoughts are called *presuppositions*. A presupposition is an understanding or an idea that you or I accept as truth. It may actually be the truth, or it may just be something we assume is truth. Everyone has presuppositions and we really can't get away from them. An example of a presupposition would be that, well, everyone has presuppositions! We don't always realize that we have them, but they are always present, filtering all information we

receive. They affect how we see the world, how we behave, and how we interpret information coming from any source, whether it's a TV program, our friends, or the Bible.

Presuppositions are not necessarily bad. We just have to recognize that we have them, work hard at making sure we have evidence for them, and be ready to adjust them if they don't match up to new facts. Since everybody has presuppositions, you need to know mine, because they will bear heavily on everything I tell you. I won't give you the evidence for them here because I have limited space and I want to get to the main subject. The first one I already gave you – everyone has presuppositions. Below is a summary in list form of some of the rest of them, for ease of reference.

1. The whole Bible is for everybody.
2. The Torah, or Law, is a valid lifestyle and discipleship method for every believer.
3. The Bible is written to reveal God's will, not to conceal.
4. The Bible is God's Word, given through men, but without error in what it teaches.
5. Scripture interprets Scripture. Both the immediate context (verses around the text in question) and the extended context (the chapter or section all the way up to the whole Bible) are perhaps the most important tools for determining meaning in a passage.
6. All Scripture needs to be considered together and applied in a balanced fashion.
7. Anyone can find most of the meaning of Scripture by using English translations.
8. Defining words is not enough. We must also understand how they go together.
9. 'Meaning' is what the author intends to convey. There is only one meaning.
10. 'Application' is how we use the author's meaning. There are many applications.
11. We need to be careful not to 'read into' the text something that isn't there (the technical term for this is eisegeses, eye-sah-gee-ses).
12. If a text appears confusing or contradictory, it is my understanding that is at fault, not the Word of God.
13. We should not make big doctrines out of little verses.

Bible Study in Context

Did you ever try to read a letter someone wrote to you from the middle? Do you normally read only parts of your letters? No, we read letters in context, from front to back; otherwise they don't make much sense. So when we read a letter from Paul (or any book, Bible or otherwise for that matter), it makes more sense to look at the whole thing. In a similar manner it helps to look at such things as who wrote the book, why it was written (often stated by the author himself), who it was written to, what subjects are discussed, and so on. Sometimes, too, there are other verses directly related to the ones we are studying, as well as those indirectly related. There are also times when other sections of the Bible are directly quoted, which serves to help shed light on a subject.

The immediate context in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 is about hair, because there are six words directly connected with hair, and only one that applies to a garment (in verse 15). Verse 15 also gives us some help with an outright definition of the 'covering' that Paul is talking about (her long hair is given to her 'for' or 'instead' of a covering). Coupled with some of the specifics mentioned below in the section on Start With What You Know, I think these are strong indications that Paul is not speaking of an artificial covering but a natural one, that of a woman's hairstyle.

The extended context of the chapter doesn't help us very much in this instance, except for a few places that might bear on whether or not there is a command in this section (discussed below), and there are no other places in the Scriptures that speak of a command for a head covering. When I say command, I mean a specific 'thou shalt' or 'thou shalt not' statement or something very similar. In some ways this can be seen as limiting too much, but anything less is simply not concrete one way or the other. However, there are a number of other places in the Word where veils or other garments are mentioned, which help us with some background information on how important a cloth covering was and how it was used. There are also a few places that speak of hair and practices that were common at the time a particular Scripture was written. We will discuss most of these shortly, as well as other context-sensitive ideas such as what the Greek words for covering mean.

Start With What You Know

When a confusing passage of Scripture confronts me, the first thing I try to find is anything I could call definite. In the passage we are looking at, a few things seem to be definite. First, Paul leads off in verse two by saying that the Corinthians hold fast to the 'traditions' which Paul had delivered to them. He also wraps up this section (seemingly) by saying, "we have no other practice" in verse 16. The absence of command language (such as 'thou shalt' or 'women must wear such and so) is indicating that he is talking about some sort of preference or application of the Word rather than a command from God. Otherwise he would have referenced some other part of the Word, as he did when he chastised them for "a man has his father's wife" in chapter five of this same book. We know also that sometimes Paul wrote his opinion as an instruction, and sometimes gave clarification 'from the Lord' as in another section of 1 Corinthians.

⁶But this I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. ⁸But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. ⁹But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*. ¹⁰But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband ¹¹(but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹²But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. (1 Corinthians 7:6-12 NASB95, underlines mine)

In chapter 11, it looks like he might just be giving his opinion, reinforcing a tradition, or correcting the improper application of a tradition. But it sure doesn't look like there is a command in view. Command language is not present at all. The only exception to this might be in verse 16 where Paul says, "we have no other practice," but even in using the word 'practice' he avoids the word 'command.' So I must conclude that he is not issuing a command. There is also nothing mentioned in the Law of this practice. Paul would not be making up a new command, because he would know there are specific prohibitions against doing so (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:5,6; Ecclesiastes 3:14). He might, however, be mentioning tradition and practice because of something in the 'oral law' (interpretations and

rulings of and from the written Torah transmitted orally) but oral law is not on the same footing as the written law. And, like Jesus, Paul never overrides what is written in the Torah.

Another item that is definite is that this is the only place in Scripture where this subject is actively discussed (there are passive instances showing that a woman was wearing something, but no active instruction). If Paul was creating a new command you would think we should see some specifics. In other words, if he is giving us something that is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, such as women having to wear a cloth on the head when prophesying or praying, there needs to be some additional information. For instance, there is no indication of the marital status or age of the woman, although it is most probable that Paul is referring to married women here because of verse three. There is also no hint of material type, color, size, or position on the head. 'Head,' after all, means all the way down to the base of the neck, so even if a garment was the covering here, it would at least be like a veil or a sack 'covering' the head. There are no women I've seen who advocate a head covering using this part of Scripture that choose either the veil or the 'sack' style of covering. Usually it's just a small triangle of cloth right on top of the head. If a separate cloth covering were in view here, "it could be anything from a bandana to a sombrero" (a good quote from Jesse on the Whole Bible forum). God doesn't leave us hanging in limbo when He commands a certain behavior. He is very specific when He has to be, and when He isn't, we should be very careful to avoid helping Him out by adding details we think should be there.

Some will argue that there are many things we do which have no parallel or specifics in Scripture, such as wearing clothing in general. This is true. There is no law commanding the wearing of clothes. We just do it naturally. Other than a couple of laws about things like mixing different threads or wearing clothing that belongs to the opposite gender, there is no legislation for the actual wearing. Of course, there is also no command to breathe, or eliminate, or what have you either. On the other hand, I am not tasked by God with the job of making sure people breathe or wear clothes, but I am tasked with avoiding adding to or subtracting from His Word, which is really the issue here. The problem is, we might observe that Adam and Eve were given garments of skins, for instance, but does this mean all of our clothing should only be leather? Of course not. That would be reading into the text. But there is a large difference between the Biblical mention of wearing clothes and coming up with a new law for something to wear on the head (or any law where God is not clear about it in what we have written down for us).

One more item here that I think is definite is in verse 15 where Paul says that "a woman's hair is given to her for a covering" (the Greek is literally *anti peribolayon* which is similar to 'anti-Christ,' meaning 'instead of-Christ'). This seems to be Paul's own definition of a covering. In fact, as I mentioned before, 'hair' is mentioned five times, including verse 15, and if we include the word 'shaved' which also refers to hair, that makes six. No other type of cloth covering is mentioned, unless one assumes that the Greek word for 'cover' in verses 6 and 7 (*katalupto*) means a cloth covering, which it doesn't. I'll tell you why when we get to the section below called 'The Word 'Cover.'"

God's Word Revealing

But first, let's talk a little about translations and concordance definitions, because I don't want to tell you what to think, I want to help you learn how to think. In my opinion any believer can find

the meaning of a section of the Word if they just use a few simple tools. For instance, since God's Word is written to reveal, and not conceal (one of my presuppositions I told you about), the assumption is that He delivered His Words in a way anyone can understand, in common languages. This is the purpose of English translations.

A lot of scholars and language experts work on the translations (and more than a few have died to bring us those translations), so those of us who can't read Hebrew and Greek can be assured that we are getting the best text available. This does not mean scholars can't make mistakes (or even deliberately translate according to their presuppositions), but we can minimize the mistakes by investigating what presuppositions were used by the translators, and by comparing different translations. The average person can use several English translations, a concordance (sort of like a dictionary if you don't know) and a few other simple tools, and with a little work arrive at a good understanding of what God is trying to say. We do not all have to be language scholars to get meaning out of the Bible. After all, God's Word was delivered on stone tablets hand-written by Him in a language understandable by a representative sampling of His creation, and they didn't listen. The problem with God's Word is never the language; the problem is always in the heart.

Some teachers will try to dazzle you by dragging out the ol' concordance and defining Greek or Hebrew words. Then they try to build a federal case out of some obscure word ending or complicated point of grammar. An example is listed below in the paragraph discussing the article by an author named Bo Williams. But very few of these people are actually expert linguists. Don't get me wrong; definitions of words and understanding the Hebrew or Greek are good building blocks for interpretations. We need to apply ourselves as best we can to the text and the meaning, and perhaps even learn the languages if we can. In a few cases, it *is* important which Hebrew or Greek word is used. But most times it isn't. There are lots of Scriptures, which give us many examples of how words are used, even in English. Scripture interprets Scripture, which makes it relatively easy to find the meaning of almost every word, again with a little effort.

What is more important to understand, other than basic word definitions, is that the same word can be used different ways, depending on the other words in the sentence, and depending on what the author wants to say. For instance, 'he has egg on his face' does not mean that 'the reproductive product of a bird has been forcefully deposited on a man's countenance.' It really means that he embarrassed himself in some way. So we need to discover how the author intended to use the words and phrases he selected, which means a heavy dependence on context and other similar writings by the same author if we have them. Dictionary definitions of words are a start, but that doesn't mean that the dictionary (or a concordance) has the final say on what a text means. Finding the definition of a word or words is just a start.

The Word 'Cover'

We must also look at something called the *semantic range* of a word. This just means that a word can have a whole bunch of meanings depending on how it's used. In the text we are looking at now, the word 'cover' or 'covering' is one such word. The English word 'cover' can mean any kind of a covering, from clouds to a coat, and it can also mean the 'act of covering.' The *manhole cover*, for instance, is a noun, but *cover a manhole* is an action (a verb). The

semantic range of the word ‘covering’ covers a lot of ground, as you can see. To be fair to Paul, we have to pick up what he is talking about from the surrounding verses, if possible, or other parts of the Bible.

Since there are people who want to use their concordance to impress (and many times confuse), it is helpful to find out if the Greek language here is really any different than the English. There are two words in this section of verses which are translated by the same English word ‘cover’ (or ‘covering’ or ‘uncovered’). So is there something important in these two words? Do they perhaps mean two different things? Well, actually they do, but perhaps not what you think.

One Greek word in 1 Corinthians 11 is translated into the English word ‘cover’ (transliterated as *katakalupto*) and used three times in verses six and seven; one for ‘uncover’ (*akatakalupto*) used once in verse seven; and one for ‘covering’ in verse 15 (*peribolahyon*).

In a concordance, you will find that *katakalupto* (Strong’s number 2619) is a verb. This word points more to an ‘action of covering’ than a covering itself (*akatakalupto* (177) is just the negative of *katakalupto* and is listed as an adjective). The other word, transliterated *peribolahyon* (Strong’s 4018) is a noun. You can see how it might get a little tricky when trying to understand what is being said here. The English word ‘cover’ can be used as both an action word (to cover) and a noun (the cover).

But in Greek the distinction is a little more obvious because two different words convey two different concepts. Many people insist that the word ‘cover’ or ‘covering’ necessarily implies that there has to be a cloth involved, in order for the action to make sense. They see that *katakalupto* means ‘covering with a cloth’ because they can’t separate the verb (action) from the noun (thing). But let’s look further into the Word to see if we can get a better handle on other possible meanings of *katakalupto*.

Tim Hegg helps us define the semantic range of the Greek words in his article ‘Should I Remove My Kippah?’ On pages eight through twelve he relates the Scriptures he’s found comparing *akatakaluptos* from verse 5 (rendered ‘uncovered’ in English) to the same word in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Tanakh or OT) which is used in Leviticus 13:45. The Hebrew word for ‘loosened hair,’ a sign that a leper was unclean, is translated as *akatakaluptos*.

45“As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ (Leviticus 13:45 NASB95, underline added)

Since the word *akatakaluptos* in this verse means ‘hair down,’ then in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 it probably means the same thing. Its opposite, *katakalupto*, most probably means ‘hair up’ or ‘bound hair.’ To help confirm this, in Numbers 5:18 there is a related word (of the *kalupto* variety - *apokalupēi*) in reference to a woman having to ‘loosen her hair’ (let it down) before drinking of the water of bitterness. This indicates a cultural norm of having it up. Tim also points out that there is a specific word for ‘bareheaded’ in Greek (perhaps he’s thinking of a word like *gumnokapalos*), and that in his opinion it is likely that Paul would have used this word if he was talking about the difference between a cloth covering and hair. There are also

other specific words for cloth coverings such as *skepasma* (4629) meaning 'raiment' and translated in 1 Timothy 6:8 as 'covering,' and *epikaluma* (1942) meaning 'a covering or veil' used in 1 Peter 2:16. If Paul had wanted to be specific about a cloth for a covering, a number of good words were available.

Below is a quote sent to me by my friend Nate Long after he received a draft copy of this article. While the author is trying to limit *peribolahyon* to a prayer shawl, which is not supported by the Word, it does show that the word is a noun and refers to a separate 'wrapper.'

"Another reference to the prayer shawl is in 1 Corinthians 11:15. This Greek word, *peribolaiou*, means wrapper or covering in reference to a garment. The NIV translates it as covering. Deut 22:12 says, "You shall make twisted cords upon the four corners of your covering, wherewith you cover yourself." The twisted cords are the tzitzit of the prayer shawl. The word translated covering is *k'sootkha*, and simply means "your covering." There are no alternative meanings for *k'soo(t)* (the *kha* suffix is the pronoun "your"). In the Septuagint *peribalou* is the word used to translate *k'soo(t)* in Deut 22:12. Paul was clearly saying that women were given long hair instead of a prayer shawl. The word *k'soot'ho*, meaning "his covering" is used in Exodus 22:26. There it shows the use of this large garment as a blanket." (*Power New Testament*, Glossary, pg 390, by William J. Morford.)

Another view is presented by Mr. Botkin on page three of his booklet, where he sees in the two Greek words two different types of covers (an opinion also held by Mr. Shank and Ms. Ellison). *Katakalupto* he takes to mean a cloth (a scarf or shawl), *peribolahyon* he thinks means 'long hair' as in 'wrapped around.' So he sees that women should have 'long hair wrapped around' them as well as a 'covering' on top of that. He acknowledges that in verse 15 the word '*anti*,' meaning 'instead of,' is used in front of *peribolahyon* which is why most translations read 'for a covering.' He also sees that *peribolahyon* is used in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 22:12 to refer to a 'cover' which is a garment (in his view a man's prayer shawl or talit, as Mr. Morford states above). So his conclusion is that the hair is given 'instead of a prayer shawl' as a covering.

There are at least three problems with this understanding. The first is that *katakalupto* is not a noun (a thing) but a verb (an action). Primarily, the word is referring to the action of covering (or uncovering) rather than the covering itself. The second is that his own logic gets in the way of his interpretation; because if a woman's hair is given to her 'for' or 'instead' of a prayer shawl (as he would like us to translate it in verse 15) the clear meaning is still that her hair **is** the cover. The third problem is that he wants us to limit *peribolahyon* to a particular type of garment (like a prayer shawl), when the word actually means 'something thrown around' or 'wrapper' or 'veil.' If we limit the word to anything, it would most likely be limited to 'veil' (Morford's quote above notwithstanding) in which case the verse would read 'given to her instead of a wrapper' or 'veil' which teaches exactly the opposite of what Mr. Botkin wants us to see.

The use of the concordance is not guaranteed to give a person the real meaning of a word or verse. At times it only complicates the understanding, depending on how it's used. One short article I read, by a person named Bo Williams titled 'Definitions-Peribolaion,' is based on the assumption that the meaning of *peribolahyon* is uncertain, due to only being used once in 1

Corinthians 11 and once in Hebrews 1:12. Because of this unsupported assumption, the author translates the word back into the Hebrew *leboosh* (Strong's number 3830) because Hebrews 1:12 is part of a quote from Psalm 102:25-27 (which is where *leboosh* is translated in the Septuagint by *peripolahyon*). Then, the author translates from the Hebrew *leboosh* back into Greek and comes up with a different word meaning 'vesture' or 'undergarment' (*himatismos*) based on John 19:23. This supposedly clears up the confusion!

I don't know about you, but it certainly doesn't clear it up for me. Most translators will tell you that trying to translate back and forth in a limited fashion like this only complicates the translating, and does not generally help. If Williams had only looked for related or root words some confusion might have been avoided. For instance, *peribolahyon* is Strong's number 4018, while Strong's number 4016 (two places before 4018 in the concordance) is *periballo* meaning 'clothed' or 'arrayed' (used 24 times) and is probably the root word for *peribolahyon*. People like Williams should also see that the Greek of verse 15 has "her hair is given to her *anti peribolahyon*." 'Anti' is the same as the word used for 'anti-Christ' meaning 'instead-of Christ.' So a woman's hair is clearly given "instead of a wrap or veil."

If one just reads the plain text, the meaning is clear. It is only when reading a cloth into the text that all the complications and confusion starts. The above author here demonstrates a common principle in teaching – if the word you are looking at doesn't mean what you want it to mean, use grammatical gymnastics to find another one. But even though specialized translating is a common technique, that doesn't mean it is a correct one.

Many authors just seem to be thoroughly confused and get lost in chasing their own logical fallacies. For instance, Renée Ellison writes on page four of her article (mentioned above) that "It is equally clear that the Apostle Paul is describing an actual veil for the woman's covering, rather than her hair. The two Greek words used for hair and covering are not interchangeable, for *katakalypto* means to cover wholly, indicating some cloth hanging down that covers. *Peribolaion* comes from *peri* – perimeter – indicating the natural hair around the head." (This includes a footnote referring to the article by Mr. Shank mentioned above.) As we can see, Ms. Ellison reads into *katakalypto* a cloth, which in no way constitutes a part of the description in Strong's Concordance, nor can her supposed definition be supported from any other portion of the Word. As for her take on *peribolaion*, what is really clear is that she desperately wants to see a cloth, because even if *peri* means 'perimeter,' what is more probably referred to is a cloth (there's that pesky noun again) thrown 'around the perimeter' of a person. Nowhere in Scripture is *peribolaion* taken to mean hair.

It seems that the best understanding, according to the Scriptural evidence and according to the context of Chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, of *katakalypto*, is that it refers to hair bound up on the head. So *akatakalypto* means 'hair down.' If this is correct, then verses four through seven are better understood if we use the word the way it seems to be intended. Below is an alternate rendering of the verses using this understanding.

Every man praying or prophesying with his hair hanging down from his head shames his head. But woman praying or prophesying with hair unbound shames her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not put her

hair up on her head, let her also have her hair cut off (literally cut herself); but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her put her hair up on her head. For a man ought not to have long hair, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

Scripture Interprets Scripture

A good question to ask yourself when trying to figure out a section of Scripture is “Are there any other places in Scripture that speak of something similar?” If there are, then we might be able to use those verses to help establish meaning in the text we are studying now. The best meanings are found when we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.

You might need to get a little creative in your search here, because another verse might not actually use the term ‘head covering.’ It might use related words like ‘hat,’ ‘veil’ or ‘scarf,’ and there may also be various word endings too, as well as various Hebrew or Greek words to deal with. A simple way to find related Scriptures would be to use a concordance or a word search program on your computer. I like the word search best because it is very fast, although the program hasn’t been invented yet that can help you read fast!

For our current text, I found six other references for ‘veil’ in the Bible. Three are listed below.

She said to the servant, “Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?” And the servant said, “He is my master.” Then she took her veil and covered herself. (Genesis 24:65 NASB95)

So she removed her widow’s garments and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gateway of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown up, and she had not been given to him as a wife. When Judah saw her, he thought she was a harlot, for she had covered her face. (Genesis 38:14-15 NASB95)

When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him. (Exodus 34:33-35 NASB95)

The three other references are neutral and apply to a bride (Song of Solomon 4:1, 4:3, 6:7). Two of the three quoted above are negative. Of the negatives, one applies to a male (Moses hiding the glory of God), one to a prostitute. Judah knew that Tamar was a prostitute because she had a ‘head covering.’ Rebecca had her veil off while around the servant, but put it on for meeting Isaac. Four of the six apply to brides, and in my experience a bride does away with the veil after the wedding.

Other references make an analogy to death as a veil or covering over the nations (Isaiah 25:7); virgin daughters of Babylon are said to wear skirts, veils, and covered legs (Isaiah 47:1-2, where taking these off is analogous to idolatry); and in one place (Hebrews 10:20) the veil of the temple is an analogy for the flesh of the Christ. Paul speaks of the veil of Moses in a negative way (2 Corinthians 3:13-16) as covering the glory of the Messiah in the Law. Speaking of the veil in the temple, a number of authors try to draw a parallel between the veil in the temple and the

supposed veiling of a woman. They point to the ‘double covering’ of the tabernacle as if somehow there is a direct link between that and a woman’s cloth headgear (with her hair). This stretch of reasoning, however, makes Mr. Fantastic (of the Fantastic 4 comic book heroes) look like he is made of stone. Just because there are similarities between different items in Scripture does not mean that they are the same. Nor does the similarity automatically translate into a command. I couldn’t find anything one way or the other in Scripture that commands women to wear a piece of cloth on their heads. This doesn’t mean that women didn’t wear head coverings, just that there is no Scripture for it.

Cultural Arguments

Some teachers bring up cultural arguments to support the idea of women wearing cloth head coverings, as Mr. Marlowe does extensively in his article (mentioned above) and Mr. Botkin also does in his pamphlet. The thought is that if we can find some evidence of what people were wearing at the time, we can perhaps narrow down what Paul means here. Mr. Marlowe in particular goes to great lengths to supply us with pictures of ancient statues and pottery showing various ladies wearing numerous and various cloth head coverings. His illustrations are quite excellent, and they are a good way to get a glimpse into what the styles of the day were.

But one big drawback to the pictures given by Mr. Marlowe is that they do not show *why* the head coverings are being worn. They could just as easily be showing ‘hair (or head) protectors’ rather than religious ‘coverings.’ Think about it. Not very long ago, most of the world was living an agricultural way of life, where being outdoors most of the time was normal. There was lots of stuff blowing around, the sun was hot or the wind was cold, and women could just as easily have worn something on their heads to protect themselves instead of showing submission to a man. Another reason the pictures don’t help is that it seems *every woman* wore head coverings in that day, regardless of religious overtones. Cultural arguments can be a bit of a help for determining practices at the time of the writing of Scripture, but they are not Scripture.

In a 42-plus page article titled ‘The Biblical Headcovering, Scarf of Hidden Power’ by Renée Ellison (www.CrossOver.Ellison.net), cultural arguments and personal experience play a big part in her desire to show the legitimacy of a cloth covering for women. Unfortunately, these make up the bulk of her evidence in support of the wearing, instead of Scripture. Her Scripture references are sparse and introduced mainly as support for her assumptions. The personal stories are wonderful, and I’m sure are loaded with plenty of meaning for her. However, they do very little to shed light on the meaning of this (or any other) Scripture. Many of her arguments start as conjecture and meander around to pick up a verse or two to back up the conjecture, rather than allowing the Bible to speak for itself and using what is present in the text to shape her beliefs. In other words she starts with an idea, then pokes around in the Word until she can either find a verse that seems to support her idea, or mistranslates words to get what she wants. She has lots of pretty analogies and personal experiences, but tragically little in the way of Biblical light.

Cultural arguments are weak for interpreting because we don’t always know what the customs were at the time, and they are also weak because there might’ve been customs at the time that are not mentioned in the Word. For instance, it was a Greek and Roman cultural preference that men have short hair, and if a man had long hair it seems to mean he was a homosexual. A woman having long hair on top of the head was a Jewish cultural preference (and a Greco-

Roman preference) that spoke of modest femininity. If she had it down in public (while she was married) it was considered improper. Another example of a custom not directly mentioned in Scripture is that common prostitutes would shave their heads to advertise their profession. This could've been what Paul meant when he said that if a woman prayed 'uncovered' (with her hair down) it was as shameful as if she had shaved her hair off (as Tim mentions in his article).

In his booklet (mentioned above) Mr. Botkin illustrates another reason why the cultural argument is weak. In one section, he spends a lot of time telling us that it was cultural and normal for women to wear a cloth on the head (which apparently is true). But, in another part of the book he also spends time trying to dispel the modern notion that 'nobody else does it' (it's not cultural now). See what happens? On the one hand he tries to make a cultural argument for wearing a cloth on the head (everybody did it), and on the other hand he says that just because nobody else does it in our day, that is no reason not to wear something. If it is 'culturally' correct to wear a cloth on the head when 'everyone does it' (way back when) why is it not correct to avoid them when 'nobody else does it?' This is what is called 'circular reasoning,' and is a trap into which many people fall when trying to justify a practice that is not in the Word.

Looking at the culture of the people at the time the Word was written is a good way to help us understand the Word. We just have to be careful to be consistent and balanced, looking at as many cultural preferences as can be applied. We also need to remember that culture never overrides the Word, nor should it ever dictate new commands.

Anecdotes

An anecdote is a personal story or testimony. Anecdotes are sometimes wonderful testimonies about how someone used something they learned from Scripture in an everyday situation. Mr. Botkin relates a stirring anecdote in his booklet where his wife was suffering from an illness which doctors couldn't cure. They had her tested for different diseases, moved to another dwelling thinking she might be allergic to the one she was living in, and prayed a lot. Nothing worked to heal her, not even the prayer. One day he asked her to wear a cloth on her head while they prayed, and miraculously within a few days she was healed. He suspects the cloth may have been the reason for the cure, although he states that "of course, there is no way to prove whether or not wearing a piece of cloth was what made the disease depart" (page 15).

The big drawback to using anecdotes for Scripture interpreting is that they may or may not have the right emphasis, and other connections might have been missed. For instance, it could just as easily be seen from Mr. Botkin's anecdote that his wife did what he asked her to do, and he suggested to her what he thought was the right thing to do, and so God honored their intentions. Not because of a piece of cloth, but because they were trying to be obedient in the best way they knew how. Anecdotes or testimonies help us relate to other people, and give us some insight into how to apply the Word to our lives. But they also never, ever, override Scripture.

The Difference Between Meaning and Application

The use of cultural arguments and anecdotes to interpret Scripture brings up a good point about the difference between *meaning* and *application*. Meaning is what the author is trying to tell us. When he selects words and phrases, brings in illustrations or uses analogies, shows us a mystery, and puts together the things that God has shown him in his own style and language, he is trying

to get a specific point across to his reader. It has to be this way because language is intended to convey meaning, and the writers of Scripture in particular are trying to give us the meaning as simply as possible. In general, they are writing to the average person, and writing in a way to be understood. Reading what they wrote at least 2,000 years after the fact can be difficult, not because the writer is trying to make it hard, but because we may not understand the way he used the language, or his cultural background, or other helpful tidbits like that.

Application, on the other hand, is how we use or apply what the author is saying. There are lots and lots of applications we can draw from the Word of God. Some of them can apply to everybody; some of them are personal and meant only for the reader. A *devotional* method of Bible study is one where the reader tries to figure out *what the Scripture means to me*. This is a good method of Bible study, because it gets a person into the Word (or the Word into the person) and into making it a part of daily living.

But one thing we have to be cautious about is trying to make a personal application authoritative for everyone else. This is the downside of a devotional Bible study method, or of changing an application into Scripture. If we are not careful we could get into “adding to or taking away from” Scripture. To add to God’s Word means to create a command, for instance, where no command exists. This, in essence, destroys the actual meaning of the Word for other people and transfers authority from God to the person with the application. Taking away from God’s Word doesn’t mean to get a wonderful teaching or application out of it, it means to remove meaning so that other people don’t get the full effect of what He intended (again, destruction and authority transfer). When we attempt to turn an application into Scripture we cause it to lose some effectiveness and risk sending people in a direction away from God and towards another end.

There is clearly no command specified or implied in this section of Scripture. So we should be very careful to avoid adding one by taking an application that might mean something to us personally and forcing it back into the text. If a woman wants to wear a cloth on the head, fine. If a husband wants her to wear one, fine. Those are different issues than finding the meaning of this text.

Angels and Authority

Most people who argue that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 is teaching a cloth head covering for women center their views on speculation concerning the issues of authority, submission and helping angels figure out who is in charge. A cloth on the head is supposed to be the ‘symbol of authority’ (verse 10) showing how the husband is the ‘head of the woman’ (verse 3) and apparently helping angels figure out who the authority figure is (verse 10).

Daniel Botkin spends a great deal of time in his booklet speculating about the connection between angels and cloth head pieces. And I do mean speculating, because he doesn’t have any Scriptural evidence to go on for his conclusions here. He spends about equal time between angels of the ‘fallen’ variety and the ‘un-fallen’ variety. However, the English words ‘angel’ or ‘angels’ are used 288 times in the NASB, and in all but one verse, they refer to angels that are not fallen, or ‘God’s messengers.’ The one exception is in 2 Corinthians 11:14 where Paul says that Satan disguises himself as an ‘angel of light.’ One other mention (2 Peter 2:4) says that God threw ‘angels who sinned’ into the lake of fire, but ‘angels’ describes them before their fall.

So the overwhelming meaning of the word ‘angel’ is of the ‘not fallen’ sort. The ‘fallen’ sort are generally called ‘demons.’ It seems plain that angels and demons are two different groups, so Paul’s comment concerning angels would, at the most, refer only to the un-fallen variety. This is still very little information to go on as to why a head covering (hair or cloth) is important to angels. But if we are going to speculate, as so many do, then on the basis of the Scriptural evidence it makes better sense to think that the angels Paul refers to in verse 10 are the regular, holy angels of God. And a female’s long hair on top of her head is more in tune with the natural way that God created women (hence the argument from nature in verse 14), and would therefore be more meaningful for an angel if anything was. A cloth covering is not natural by any stretch of the imagination, so it doesn’t fit with the natural argument in verse 14.

We can take our cues on the subjects of authority and submission from the Word. The Scriptures have a number of things to say about these subjects, especially between a husband and wife. Husbands are to “love (our) wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for it” (Ephesians 5:25,26) and “love (our) wives as our own bodies” (Ephesians 5:28). Each member of Christ’s body is also to “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21) and love another as we love ourselves. Paul mentions the head structure (1 Corinthians 11:3) again in Ephesians 5:23, in keeping with the idea that a man wouldn’t harm his own body. According to these verses and other like them (such as Colossians 3 and 1 Peter 3) submission to God and Jesus, and each other, is a fact of body life in the Messiah.

The arguments for the supposed connections between a cloth on the head and authority are, at best, unsupported speculation. There is nothing else in the Word to support the wearing of a cloth to communicate with angels, or to signify authority or submission. Surely such important concepts would be taught elsewhere in the Word, particularly in the first five books. In those books God takes great care to explain in detail such things as what we should eat and what we shouldn’t wear when He thinks it is needed; a person would think that the subjects of authority and angels would be that much more important. Curiously, there is nothing. The only place in Scripture that seems to teach such things is in this short section written by Paul.

But if it is true that a cloth on the head helps angels figure out who is in charge, which is rather humorous on the face of it, then why tell women that the only time they have to wear a cloth is when they pray or prophesy (verse 5)? Wouldn’t the cloth arrangement need to be on all the time, in order to provide a continuous symbol of authority? When she takes off the cloth, does she suddenly become vulnerable to angelic problems? Is she only protected as long as she has a cloth on her head? What about women, who couldn’t care less about God or His angels, wearing a scarf or a veil? Does this mean that just because she has a cloth on the head she is entitled to whatever a godly woman is entitled to? This doesn’t seem reasonable in view of other Scripture.

It makes much more sense according to the Scriptural evidence to think that, because it was modest and normal for a woman’s long hair to be bound up on top of her head in public, she would automatically have a covering when praying or prophesying. Therefore she could pray or prophesy anywhere. She wouldn’t be prohibited from those actions because she couldn’t find a cloth. Here the cultural argument falls down again, because it was normal for most women to wear a cloth on the head anyway. She wouldn’t have taken it off for praying or prophesying; she

would've kept it on all the time while away from home. Converted and unconverted, married or unmarried, old and young, all or nearly all women wore a cloth on the head as a matter of course on a regular basis.

Summary

Hopefully, I have explained enough about some of the main points of Bible study in regards to this subject that you will be able to take the principles and come to your own conclusions. This happens to be a very difficult section of Scripture, but we can start with the facts we have and work our way through the context to figure out the other parts.

We know the following things for sure. There are two Greek words for 'covering' used, a verb (*katakalupto*) and a noun (*peribolahun*). In verse 15, the word 'covering' is a noun (*peribolahun*) and this verse in particular means that a woman's hair is given to her instead of a cloth covering or garment. The context of the verb *katakalupto* in Leviticus 13:45 indicates 'hair that is loosened,' so in context with the mentioning of hair in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 it would best be defined also as loosened hair. Six times hair is mentioned, including the word 'shaved.' Hair seems to be a big subject in this section of the Word. But there are no specifics (here or anywhere) telling us size, material, style, age or marital status of the wearer, and so on, which we would expect to see if a cloth covering is being discussed, especially since no other place in the Word has any specifics.

We also know there are a number of other words for cloth coverings or garments, none of which are used here. In addition, the language Paul uses is not command language, but is language indicating 'practice' or even 'tradition.' Angels are mentioned, but there is nothing to indicate what is important about angels. We know that a 'symbol of authority' could be just about anything, but in keeping with how much hair is mentioned it is more likely something to do with hair. Finally, wearing a cloth on the head was common culturally at this time, and so was long hair on top of the head.

If we take these facts and use them as a framework to help us figure out what we don't know, we can, I believe, judge the truth. Sort of like using the weight of evidence to determine truth in a courtroom. These judgments will not be enough, perhaps, for some people, because they would just as soon see a cloth covering in this section than something to do with hair. Still others may need a flat statement more in keeping with their understanding of English, such as "I am not talking about cloths on the head" or something similar. The bottom line is, at worst there is no clear statement in this or any other section of the Word that women are commanded to wear a cloth on the head. At best, the most likely explanation for this passage, given the facts we have, is that Paul is talking about hair styles. Even if we can't say for certain, the weight of evidence points to something concerning hair rather than something concerning a cloth.

After much reading of other's opinions and my own study, it is apparent to me that this entire section is in fact speaking of hair styles rather than a cloth on the head. If we were to paraphrase this passage, given what we've learned, it would read something like this.

¹Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. ²Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. ³But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a

woman, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴Every man who *has (long) hair hanging down from his head* while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. ⁵But every woman who has her *hair loosened* while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. ⁶For if a woman does not keep her *hair bound*, let her also have her hair cut off; but *since* it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her *keep her hair up on her head*. ⁷For a man ought not to have *long hair*, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; ⁹for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. ¹⁰Therefore the woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels. ¹¹However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. ¹²For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man through the woman; and all things originate from God. ¹³Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with *her hair down*? ¹⁴Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her *instead of a veil*. ¹⁶But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the congregations of God. (1 Corinthians 11:1-16, paraphrased by the author, italics added for clarity; some italics removed.)

It takes significant speculation and imagination to even begin making connections between what Paul is stating here and a piece of cloth. And all the speculation and anecdotes in the world, however beneficial or well intended, do nothing to add to our understanding of this passage. When we put all of the things we do know together, the picture emerges that Paul is speaking of hair styles. It could be that he does this because there were female converts who were former prostitutes and came in to the assembly with shaved heads, as Tim Hegg suggests, or perhaps there were converts who didn't know any better about cultural norms.

So with all this evidence pointing to hairstyles, why would people teach that the subject is a cloth covering? Why create a command where none exists? Isn't it hard enough to follow the specific commands we have from God in His Word without creating new ones? Several answers to these questions occur to me from what I have observed. My interpretation of this behavior is that there are some who don't know any better, or who haven't studied thoroughly. There are others, though, through the emphasis on the authority of men, who seem to want to reinforce their status as authority figures over women, and so invent a command for a cloth head covering. Their concern is more for status than for discerning and following God's Word. In addition, they want to transfer the authority of God's Word to themselves, through faulty interpretations.

Asceticism also plays a part. An ascetic is one who sees that most physical things cause sin, and so live life by giving up most of the physical pleasures, like a monk in a monastery. Paul tells us that this type of thing is of no value.

²⁰If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ²¹“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” ²²(which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and

severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:20-23 NASB95)

The ascetic person is trying to come up with more things than just what God says in order to help them feel more holy (or less sinful). The ascetic's commands are the 'commands of men,' and therefore are of no use to enhance or promote godliness. I personally know of three women who insist on wearing a head cloth who not only are not submissive to their husbands (because their husbands don't want them to wear the cloths, among other things) they are having difficulty submitting to God's Word in general.

Asceticism and authority transfer are not new; because almost from the first moment that God began speaking people have wanted to transfer the authority of His Word to themselves and 'feel holier than thou' in the process. Most who do this are like petty tyrants, always seeking to add to men's (or women's) burdens and not lifting a finger to help. These 'Torah tyrants' want to do things to be "seen by men" even if it means twisting English or Greek into pretzel shapes and lifting Scripture out of context to do it. The worst damage, though, is to God's Word; for in imposing their own vision over the plain meaning of the text they cause people to doubt what God says. A person can't just read the Word and understand, they must go to the Torah tyrant in order to get the translation. If the promoters of cloth head gear for women just left it at 'this is my opinion' or 'I really like to wear a cloth on my head,' then it would be fine. They wouldn't have very much *weight* behind their preference though, so it would be similar to wanting everyone to wear a beanie with a propeller. Cute, or funny maybe, but not very weighty. This is why the promoters of head coverings must find justification in God's Word, so they have some extra 'oomph' to back up their preference.

I know I am stating this very strongly, and it will offend people. I wish I didn't have to state it this way, but I have witnessed a large amount of strife and confusion created by this idea of reading head coverings into the Word. When I hear a youngster at a baptism testify to how wonderful she has learned Torah to be (which is a good thing), but how 'parts of Torah, like the head covering' have become an important part of her life, I get alarmed. Someone taught her that head coverings were a part of Torah, and I can't stress enough how wrong this is and how confused this child will be as she continues attempting to learn and grow in God's Word. I have also witnessed women, thinking they were doing something God commanded, start wearing a napkin on their heads in direct contradiction to their husband's wish. The justification is 'I have to do what God commands' even if her husband is so spiritually stupid that he can't see it. What arrogance, what pride, what unmitigated chutzpah to make God's Word of no account for nothing more than a preference or an ascetic's whim.

I know I'm not going to make friends in the camp of the Torah tyrants. They should know better, but if they won't listen to the Word then they sure aren't going to listen to me. We don't need more religious leaders who insist on teaching the precepts of men as God's Word. But I write articles like this to help the people who are still learning, still growing, and still wanting to know what God is really saying. I write to children, who may be confused by all the grammatical gymnastics and begin to think they must be doing something wrong even though they can't find it in the Word. I want to reassure you that you can pick up most of the meaning by a plain reading of God's Word. It will take some work, and a lot of reading of all of His

wonderful Word, but you can do it. If you don't see things like a head covering, *then don't wear one*. It's okay; you can't go wrong just reading His Word and doing what you see. I don't mean that extended study is not a good thing, just realize that God is writing to His kids in language they can understand, and that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

If there was really a command somewhere in the Word for women to wear a cloth on the head, the devoted and loving disciple would want to do it. Many of God's commands are of such a nature that they really do help to discipline the flesh for the sake of greater holiness and intimacy with Him. This is the nature of all of His Laws. But the Laws work because they have the authority of God behind them. If He says they will work, then they work. If He commanded a cloth on the head for women for any purpose, then it would work according to that purpose for any disciple who loves with all his or her 'mind, soul, and strength.' But the presence of a cloth on the head certainly does not qualify as a command from God in any section of Scripture that I have studied, and so does not signify any greater adherence to God's Word or any greater holiness than a woman who doesn't wear a cloth.

There are a number of places in the Scriptures where God tells us not to add to His Word or take away from it. It is my opinion that seeing a command here telling women to wear some sort of cloth on their heads is adding to the Word. If someone wants to, there is nothing to prevent it that I can see, but there is still no command. If it was really that important for women to wear such a cloth there would be some mention of it in the first five books of the Bible, because that is where God lays down most of the basics of holy living for His people. Paul knows better than to try to add to the Word, and does not do so in this section of his writings. He refers to nature, and to tradition, but never to Torah. His language stops well short of commanding, and we should follow his example and stop short of making a command also.

Bruce Scott Bertram