

# Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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## The Custom Of The Head Covering

(Jerry Fite)

Paul directed the praying and prophesying women in Corinth to have their heads covered or veiled. *“But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoreth her head; for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven. For if a woman is not veiled, let her also be shorn: but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be veiled”* (I Corinthians 11:5-6).

The covering of the head was not only an item of interest to the woman exercising her miraculous spiritual gifts; men were to have their heads “uncovered”. *“Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered, dishonoreth his head”* (I Corinthians 11:4).

Paul narrows his focus of the head covering to men and women exercising their miraculous spiritual gifts. He also ties the covering and uncovering of the head to the principle of headship, which distinguishes the man from the woman (I Corinthians 11: 3).

The headship distinction is definitely tied with the difference in covering the head among praying and prophesying men and women. Knowledge of the customs of the first century people in Corinth among the Jews and Gentiles is helpful in our understanding the difference.

Tertullian, who lived in the latter second century and early third century, wrote a tract regarding the head covering among virgins. He writes, “...the churches that were founded by the apostles did insist that both their married women and their virgins be veiled: Throughout Greece, and certain of its barbaric provinces, the majority of churches keep their virgins covered. In fact, this practice is followed in certain places beneath this African sky. So let no one ascribe this custom merely to the Gentile customs of the Greeks and barbarians.

Moreover, I will put forth as models those churches that were founded by either apostles or ap-

ostolic men. . . . The Corinthians themselves understood him to speak in this manner. For to this very day the Corinthians veil their virgins. What the apostles taught, the disciples of the apostles confirmed.”

*[Tertullian, The Veiling of Virgins The Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 4 pp. 27-29, 33]*

Hippolytus, a leader in the church at Rome around the year A.D. 200, compiled a record of the various customs and practices in that church from the generations that preceded him. His Apostolic Tradition contains this statement: *“And let all the women have their heads covered with an opaque cloth, not with a veil of thin linen, for this is not a true covering.”*

In the Jewish society: *“In biblical times, women covered their heads with veils and scarfs, as a sign of chastity and modesty”* (The Encyclopedia Judaica).

The custom of women wearing the veil manifested modesty and apparent honor of man’s headship. It should not be ignored by Corinthian women exercising spiritual gifts. Taking the veil off was the problem, not learning to put it on.

