

# Glad Tidings

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

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## No Such Custom

(Jerry Fite)

Paul writes, “*But if any man is contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God*” (1 Corinthians 11:16). Paul adds this caveat to his instruction regarding the head covering. Does Paul refer to being “contentious” as the custom that neither the apostles nor the churches of God practice? Is he pointing to the custom of men having their heads uncovered and women having their heads veiled? What is this custom Paul emphasizes as not being habitually practiced among the churches of God?

Some believe being “continuous” is the custom to which Paul refers. Would Paul make various arguments of why men should be uncovered and women be covered when exercising spiritual gifts to refer only to contentiousness as being that which he as an apostle does not authorize in the churches of God? Respecting the flow of Paul’s thoughts, the custom under consideration is not an isolated quarrelsome temperament, but the instruction regarding the practice regarding head covering.

When Paul says if anyone is contentious regarding his directives that he has no such custom, nor the churches of God, he seems

to point to those women who might be contentious to his present teaching, being determined to keep exercising their miraculous gifts with their heads uncovered. Paul says neither the apostles, nor the church of God have such a custom.

To say Paul is referring to the woman wearing the veil as the custom the apostles and the church of God do not have does not make much sense. Why direct the women to wear the veil, indicating the shame and dishonor they bring on themselves when they do not wear it, and then end by saying this is a custom not connected with the apostles and the church. To mean by this that men uncovered and women covered is a custom seen in society, but is not part of the revelation of God through the apostles for the church is a distinction without a difference in application. In the end, Paul demands the uncovering of the heads of men exercising their miraculous spiritual gifts, and the covering of the heads of women who are praying and prophesying.

Some believe Paul is not demanding the artificial covering for the woman. They point to Paul’s statement that the long hair of the woman is “her covering”.

If hair is Paul’s focus regarding the necessary covering of the woman, then would it not follow that having no natural covering on the head of men would be also necessary? Consistency would demand that Paul is teaching that only bald men could pray and prophesy. If the longer hair is necessary for the women exercising spiritual gifts, then the absence of the shorter hair of men was also necessary.

The difference in length of hair between men and women is an illustration. It shows the custom of wearing the veil which hung down to cover the head should be observed, just as women having longer hair which wrapped around the head distinguished her from the men.

Given Paul’s clear instructions for the men to be uncovered and the women covered, it is easy to anticipate what might occur next. If any is contentious, and therefore determined to have her head uncovered just like the men when praying and prophesying, Paul says no such custom resides with the apostles in the churches. Respecting the meaning of the veil in society, women were to be covered when exercising miraculous spiritual gifts.