

# Glad Tidings

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

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## The Woman's Head Covering Custom

(Jerry Fite)

Paul directed the praying and prophesying women in Corinth to have their heads covered or veiled. *“But every woman praying and 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 women exercising miraculous spiritual gifts; men were to have their heads *uncovered*. Paul writes, *“Every man praying and 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 gifts. He also ties the covering and uncovering of the head to the principle of headship, which distinguishes to 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 among the Jews and

Gentiles is helpful in 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 believed the churches founded by the apostles did insist that both “virgins” and “married women” were included in the custom of women being veiled. He writes, “Throughout Greece, and certain of its barbaric provinces, the majority of the churches keep their virgins covered. There are places too, beneath this African sky, where this practice obtains; lest any ascribe the custom to Greek or barbarian Gentilehood. Moreover, I will put forth as models those churches that were founded by either apostles or apostolic men...The Corinthians themselves understood him (the apostle Paul) to speak in this manner (all praying and prophesying women – including virgins) For to this very day the Corinthians veil their virgins. What the apostles taught, their disciples approve” (*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 the church from the generations that preceded him. His Apostolic Tradition contains the following statement: *“And let all the women have their heads covered with an opaque cloth, not with a veil of fine linen, for this is not a true covering.”*

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

Clement of Alexandria, an elder writing from Egypt around the year A.D. 190, counseled: *“Let the woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happens to be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled” (Clement, The Instructor 3.12).*

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