

## Reflections and Conclusions

I hope that the work of this book has shown that Paul was basically arguing for the need for women to veil their heads when praying/prophesying in the public meetings of the church.

It has been argued that Paul is essentially putting forward two arguments for this course of action—the first (more complicated argument!) was based on the need for the woman not to be seen to be “promoting” the man in the presence of God and before the congregation, and the second argument was related to womanly modesty in light of the exalted privilege of praying to God in this way.

These arguments were backed up with analogous arguments from “everyday life” regarding “extreme” hair lengths for women—lack of hair in the first argument and an abundance of hair in the second argument. In the second argument, this glorious abundance of hair, and consequent need for covering was part and parcel of the modest behaviour expected of respectable woman in everyday life - both amongst Christian women and in the best practice of the surrounding culture.

But what about veiling in “everyday life” in relation to the first argument. In this argument, in the (hypothetical) case of a woman who had cut off all or almost all her hair, it was of course accepted that she would then need to wear a veil over her head to avoid, or at least mitigate, the consequent shame. However, the argument about veiling when praying or prophesying in church was that shame would result if the woman was unveiled, and it was argued in the present book that Paul’s reason for this was that the woman, the glory of the man, was in some sense representing her “head” - the man—in a public way, and that this was shameful because of “inappropriate glory” to the man in the presence of God and before the congregation— at a time when it was paramount for God alone to be glorified.

It was further argued in the present book that Paul’s solution, veiling, covers up the head of the woman, and so symbolically or metaphorically covers up the man, the head of the woman in a spiritual, theological sense, and so eclipses his glory. However, this raises the question, does the action of veiling only “acquire potency” to act in this way in particular religious situations? Do we quietly ignore this symbolism at other times? In favour of this point of view is the observation that the man should be uncovered when praying or prophesying. This was not taken to mean that

he should be uncovered at all other times, (or indeed that he could not pray privately at other times— after all, a Christian soldier should not, I suggest, feel obligated to remove his helmet in the heat of battle to offer up an urgent silent prayer for protection.)

By analogy then, should we be allowed the possibility that the symbolism of a woman's veiling or other headcovering works differently in "everyday life"/outside of church from how it operates in church when the woman is praying/prophesying? Put that way, it sounds reasonable!

However, I suggest the situation is more complicated than this!

In the case of the man, he is the glory of God, and his head symbolically represents Christ. This at least allows for the possibility that the *context* in which the symbolism is "active" is primarily situations where God's glory and God's honour are to be demonstrated in an active way—as in the case of public prayer and prophecy in church. It would appear that in other situations, such as wearing a helmet in battle or even to cover one's head when it is raining, God is not actively involved in this sort of outwardly demonstrable way, and it seems reasonable that the symbolism of the man's head is not "in operation" at these more "mundane" times.

Can we say the same thing about the woman's headcovering on more mundane occasions such as when the woman is in public in "everyday life"?

Just as the man is the glory of God, so the woman is the glory of the man. But this suggests, at least to me, that the woman is sort of "representing" the man, and acting to glorify him on all public occasions when she is unveiled, and failing to represent him in this way if she is veiled. But surely, this is wrong?! Surely it is the woman's role to bring honour and glory to the man by representing him and acting in his best interests when she is in public—after all, the man's glory is not "competing" with God's glory in these situations - and she would indicate this by being unveiled, not symbolically covering him up by veiling?!

Well, I think this argument is mainly wrong! First of all, the part I agree with is that when the woman is unveiled and in public, she is representing the man's glory (by being unveiled), and also that the man's glory on such occasions as these is not actively competing with God's glory. So far so good!

But . . .

Should a woman appear “in the lists” on behalf of the man in this public way? Should she be batting for the team at all?! I suggest that the answer is no—and the wearing of the veil is an outward sign that she has no intention of behaving in this unbecoming way. If for example, we were to narrow our focus and think of a married woman “scrapping in public” for her husband’s honour and glory, I think we can see that this is indeed unbecoming and actually shameful: she is, or should be, not just *hors de combat* but actually *totalement non-combattante*! But there is more to be said about this!!

To continue the battle imagery, the wearing of a red cross is a sign that someone is a non-combatant, and that they are to be protected whilst they are performing good and merciful actions. I would suggest that a woman’s veil or other headcovering shows, not just that she is modest, as already discussed, but that she is entitled to protection when in public, and that one aspect, amongst a number of other aspects, of this protection is that she is indicating that she is not actively promoting her husband (father, brothers etc.) in the public sphere. Here we are looking at the “division of labour” that is proper in societies where men’s and women’s roles are appropriate and line up with God’s good creation order, as well as Christological typology, and thus to what is “fitting” in a society that reflects biblical, Christian values.

Thus, the outside world is the “risky” outside world where men act and interact and provide for their families etc. but women are more associated with, but not restricted to, homemaking and making things beautiful. These values were universally understood and valued until a very short time ago, historically speaking, in the West. In such cultures, confusion is created when a woman steps in, (or wades in!), on her husband’s behalf—for example, in a dispute. It is shaming for the husband, but, perhaps more importantly, the other party is put in an impossible position. For a man to speak roughly or even to physically attack another man’s wife is unthinkable—a woman is protected in such instances by virtue of being a woman, but she is taking unfair advantage of her position as a woman to attack the man opposing her husband. This is one example of why, I suggest, public life should be the province of men.

James Jordan mentions this consideration when discussing why women should not be teachers in church. If someone teaches something erroneous “from the pulpit” (i.e. in the public meeting of the church rather than in private), it is the duty of other men in the church tactfully to confront him. If he accepts his error, he can put it right by subsequently acknowledging his error to the church, and no harm is done—quite the reverse! If he persists, then, as I see it, since the church is the pillar and ground of

the truth, it is the duty of other men in the church to make a public issue of it—so that the church is not misled. Now, how would this work out if it were a woman making the teaching error and that she refuses to acknowledge it in private discussion! Are the men to shame the woman by publicly drawing attention to her error in front of the assembled church (and risk a fight with her husband!)? Or should they let her go on in error to avoid acting in this un-gentlemanly way towards the woman? Women must be protected from being exposed in this way, but the woman is taking unfair advantage of her “protected” status.

The woman is indeed the glory of the man as Scripture says, and I suggest that there are “quiet” ways in which the woman can work for the man’s best interest without acting for him in certain areas of the public sphere, and that this quiet and protected way of operating can be well symbolised by the wearing of a headcovering. Thus I suggest that the headcovering is not (or should not be) a symbol that the woman belongs to a man and is under his authority, but rather she is showing that she is not intervening on his behalf in the public square (?the *politeia*), and that she is, in consequence, claiming society’s protection when she is in public. (Paradoxically, however, the wearing of the headcovering shows that there is a someone on whose behalf she is not intervening—there is a “head” under that headcovering! - and it is to that someone that anyone disrespecting the woman will be answerable!!) Both this more private role for woman and the symbolic wearing of a headcovering (a little house?) have traditionally been features of all cultures in all eras until recently in the West.

I don’t think that this view however requires women to remain “indoors”! (This was an understanding of the woman’s role in the Greece of the Classical and Hellenistic eras—see for example, pp. 6, 37 of Bruce Winter’s interesting and helpful book, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows—the Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*.) Rather, I am suggesting that the woman’s “protected status” should go hand in hand with the recognition of what is basically the Christian “Complementarian” view of the roles of men and women. The woman’s headcovering serves as both Christian modesty and the symbolic declaration that her public actions are not to be understood or interpreted as encroaching on those areas which, according to creation and typology, are appropriate for men.

Finally, it has been repeatedly proposed and argued in this book that Paul’s arguments to the Corinthian church for veiling when a woman is praying or prophesying are theological rather than cultural and also that Paul points out that this veiling is the practice of all the churches of God.

I suggest then that these arguments have a “normative force” even though Paul uses “hair” illustrations which, it could be argued, have a culturally circumscribed aspect. (It might be going slightly beyond what is strictly analogous here to suggest that the application of our passage applies today, even though the illustrations Paul uses are “cultural” in the same way that the Gospel is still preached, even though farmers use agricultural machinery these days rather than sowing seed like the Good Sower, or that spiritual battles continue to be fought, even though our soldiers use modern armaments rather than the more basic equipment of the Roman soldier described in Ephesians Ch. 6!)

