

# An Effort to Bind the Covering

## A Response to Donahue's Review on the Covering

### by Jere E. Frost

"The Covering of I Corinthians 11," an article appearing in the September issue of GOSPEL TRUTHS, is reviewed in a courteous and becoming manner by Patrick T. Donahue in this month's issue. I applaud my brother's forthrightness and good spirit, and invite the reader to first read the original article, brother Donahue's review, and then this response. In this response to the review, I shall use the headings my critic used and accordingly reply to what was under said headings. I hope this helps to clarify and focus on the arguments.

#### Cover When?

My brother agrees that the covering was required anywhere that the woman prayed or prophesied: "It cannot be ... limited to the assembly .." In fact, by his logic and application, it cannot even be applied to the assembly at all, for he says, "she was not to prophesy in the assembly." We both agree that the passage has nothing to do with an assembly and therefore does not even remotely suggest that a hat be worn in church services. Cover How Much? We are again in agreement that it is to completely cover the head. We are not in agreement that you can cover the head fully and not cover the face. The covering (katakalupto), by definition, is that which covered and hung down. That you can mention the head and distinguish the face is no evidence the face is not part of the head. Let there be no equivocation: the face is part of the head. We can similarly mention the face and distinguish the hair, eyes, lips, nose or cheeks, but a distinction does not mean the hair, lips and nose are not part of the face. If one fully covers the face they fully cover the components that make up the face, and if they fully cover the head they fully cover the components that make up the head.

#### How "Nature" Teaches

There are indeed several definitions that can fit the word "nature," as is the case with many words. However, only one definition at a time can apply. A word does not carry multiple meanings in a single usage. For example, heaven may mean where the airplanes fly. It may also mean where God is. It never means both at the same time. When Peter said our hope is in heaven (I Peter 1:3-4), he was not speaking of where the airplanes fly; our hope is not in the atmosphere of earth at all. Therefore, in focusing on the word nature, I noted what Robinson's lexicon (dictionary) said it meant in the passage ñ I did not cite irrelevant meanings, or throw out a dozen definitions that would not fit the context, and then say, take your pick. I noted what it means in the passage. He quoted Thayer. Right on! What did Thayer say it meant in the passage? Yes, "native sense of propriety," and specifically applied this definition to I Corinthians 11:14, just as Robinson and Barnes did. He subsequently referenced II Samuel 15:30-31 as evidence that David prayed with a covering on his head. In so doing, he makes my point. This was no social impropriety in David's day. There was nothing against "nature" then. But it would have been against "nature" had David prayed wearing a covering in first century Corinth. Did "nature" change? He has answered himself on the point.

#### Footwashing and the Holy Kiss

My friend is right. I do put the covering in the same category as footwashing and the holy kiss. But he is remiss in saying I presented no evidence. The evidence abounds, and I cited it, that there was a custom among the Greeks to wear a covering in public; that makes it parallel as to being a custom. Not a scholar my friend cited contradicts the indisputable fact of the custom. (More on this under heading, "The Scholars Say Custom?") He shifts gears on me when he implies "no man can show from the Scriptures that covering the head during prayer and prophecy was a common practice .." So what? It doesn't matter. But look at what he implies and how he shifts gears: (1) He has already acknowledged that the passage only applies to the woman doing the praying or prophesying. Now he applies it during man's prophesying and praying. (2) He has me affirming that there was a custom while someone was praying or prophesying. No. No. Neither I nor the scholars I cited say that. The custom existed independently of anyone's praying or prophesying. The point is that the woman's praying and prophesying, which we agree is the subject person under consideration, does not exempt her from the social propriety of existing custom.

## The Scholars Say Custom?

He puts the scholars we have respectively referenced in juxtaposition conflict. But they are not in juxtaposition. The scholars I cited had to do with the general custom of Greek women in public ñ anywhere, not in worship. He himself admits the passage does not apply to the assembly, in which he declares a woman was always forbidden to pray or prophesy, but to the woman who (and when) is praying and prophesying anywhere. He did not cite a scholar who denies the Greek custom of women being covering in public. I reaffirm the point. He refuted a straw man, not the point of Greek women wearing a covering in public.

## Headship

Let me get this straight. We agree the passage does not apply to an assembly. It applies to, and only to, a woman praying or prophesying, any where and any time. Yes, that is what was said at the outset. (Reread Donahue's second paragraph!) So his argument that "you can't have one (headship) without the other (the covering) means, according to his exegesis, that the woman must put on a covering when she prays at the dinner table, in bed, or in her closet. But she does not need a covering when she sings, or listens to a man preach. In either event, we agree that the woman does not need a covering to acknowledge man's headship just because she is in a public assembly. It is agreed that the covering was a "sign" of authority, an acknowledgment of man's headship. She did not need it when she cooked, swept the floor, listened to a man preach (in or out of an assembly), sang (in or out of an assembly) or in any other circumstance. She needed it only when she herself "prayed or prophesied" (in or out of the assembly). Remember, we agree that it did not apply to attending an assembly and governed her praying and prophesying.

## Shame Like Shorn or Shaven

"Is it still a shame for a woman to be shaven?" No, to my best knowledge it is not a shame now as it was then. It was then the sign of a prostitute. I'm not up on prostitutes, but I have never heard of it being a sign of a prostitute today. Susan Powder, of TV fame for her weight control program, came on TV shaved, but it never crossed my mind that such meant she was a prostitute. Does it indeed mean that today? If so, it is by all means a shame. If it does not mean that, then no, I know of no inherent shame. Image and Glory The "image and glory" argument of Scripture simply notes why the man and woman should both accept and respect the propriety of custom. The covering symbolized authority in that culture. As my brother has already noted, David prayed wearing a covering, for in his generation it did not symbolize disrespect for God's image and glory. But it did in first century Corinth! I do not believe David would have done it in Corinth in the first century because the custom was different from what it was where and when he did it. The leaping to the expression, "forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God" as though it dismisses and negates the fact that it is in respect to custom is something my friend would not dare do on footwashing. Try it. Ignore, as my friend does, that we are dealing with a custom. Then read John 13:14: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet." Now let's get down to it here. Brother Donahue, the Scripture nowhere calls footwashing a custom. It never does! It does not give its being a custom as the reason why we should wash feet. It gives the reason: "If I have washed your feet ye also ought to was one another's feet." We should respect Christ's example now just as they did then, and just as we respect the "image and glory" of God, shouldn't we?

## Because of the Angels

No cogent argument here. "Because of the angels" simply references the need to respect authority. It does not suggest the angels did or did not wear coverings. It does not suggest women had some relationship to angels. The covering was a sign of authority then, and when the woman did something not characteristically her role (praying or prophesying) she needed a "sign" to reaffirm her respect for authority. She does not perform this role today, nor is a covering a "sign" in our culture of a woman's acknowledgment of man's headship.

## Artificial Covering Needed by Same Gender as Natural Covering

In all due respect, this argument is sheer fantasy. I am not trying to be cute, and I do not want to be ugly in any way to my brother, for he has written in a nice, courteous way, which I appreciate. But this is so off-the- wall. He says, "Paul's argument is essentially this: èLook, God has given women (not men) the long hair as a natural/permanent covering; that ought to tell you that when it comes to

the artificial/temporary covering, God wants the woman covered, not the man." Huh? First, what he says is not even close to what the Scripture says. One could just as easily say, "Paul's argument is essentially this: èLook, God has given women (not men) long fingernails as a natural/permanent covering for her fingers; that ought to tell you that when it comes to artificial/temporary covering, God wants the woman's fingers painted.'" The premise in no way warrants the conclusion. In logic, it is called non sequitur. Look around you today. Can men grow hair as long as women? You betcha. And do not forget Samson and Absalom. Does that tell us that God wanted, Samson, Absalom, and today's men who can naturally grow long hair, to wear an artificial covering? Certainly not! The argument is without merit.

### No Such Custom

There is only one custom in this entire context. My critic argues that contentiousness is the custom. But contentiousness is not a custom; it is never spoken of, anywhere, as being a custom. Contentiousness is a sin! To make contentiousness the custom is to have Paul say we do not make sinning a "custom," and/or we have no "custom" of arguing against ourselves (I should hope not). Such a spin on the passage is much too much. No, the only custom in the context is the covering, and neither "we" nor the "churches" have the custom, but Corinth does, and social propriety (nature) dictates that you respect it.

### Order of Creation

Ignoring the fact and significance of the existing custom leads my brother to make the same old assumptions over and over. The order of creation only relates to the fact that man is the head of woman. It has nothing to do with customs, either in first century Corinth or twentieth century America. It has nothing to do with what the customs were at any given time and place. I again reference Absalom and David.

### "The Freed-Hardeman Forum."

Is this supposed to add weight to the argument? Anyway, I risk differing with the forum, and a good bit more of the doctrine and rationale that issues from Freed Hardeman. Now as to I Corinthians 11 and I Timothy 2:11-12, I agree they are from the same God. I agree that the principles in both passages stand or fall together, and I agree they stand. Now what do the passages say? I Timothy says the woman is not to teach "over" the man or "usurp authority over" the man. There is no custom in the context that would symbolize this being done. But in I Corinthians 11 there is a custom, a covering, that the woman was to wear when praying and prophesying! (My brother and I agree that this is the only time the covering was needed in the passage; it does not apply to a woman simply assembling.) Now, why did she need this when she prophesied (or prayed)? As a "sign" of authority, that she was complying with the principle of I Timothy 2, even though she was doing what the man characteristically did. Or does my brother take the position that women commonly and characteristically prophesied publicly and in the assembly? Ah no, he is already on record that this does not apply to the assembly because, he contends, she never did this in the assembly. So, what's the point?

### Conclusion

My original arguments stand. They were:

1. The Custom: There was a custom in Corinth of the woman, when in public, being covered.
2. The Covering: The custom's covering was a katakalupto that completely covered the head.
3. The Prophesying: This was a spiritual gift.
4. "Nature" Teaching: "Nature" is social propriety, the ways of a society.
5. Women Prophesying: They did prophesy, but this did not exempt the prophetess from moral implications associated with the customs.
6. Today: We have neither the custom nor prophesying. And I repeat: my brother and I agree that the covering was, and is, needed only when a woman prays or prophesies, and not when she assembles.