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A Bushel of Goodness

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Johnny was just one of those people in life that you never forget. He was getting up in years when I first met him. Well, my first encounter with this son of Italy wasn't really an introduction. I heard him pray at the Lord's Supper!

When he finished his prayer, I confess I looked up to see who this man was who entered the presence of God with such simplicity, such intimacy, and with tears.

There was nothing of note in his appearance. Not tall, but stocky, a nondescript gray suit draped over what had once been the powerful figure of a working man. He was obviously more at home in his mother tongue than the American English of his adopted land. His accent was still highly seasoned with the characteristics of the traditional Italian immigrant, but that in no way hindered his approach into the Sanctuary.

Oh! those prayers! When he rose to pray before the Gospel meeting to lay hold on God on behalf of lost sinners, his earnest appeals carried us with him into the throne room of the universe. He was a man who appreciated being saved and longed for others to "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

Yes! God had been good to Johnny and to his dear wife of many years. He had never lost the joy of his salvation and wanted my preaching colleague and I to come for dinner so that he could tell us his story of the goodness of God.

We were invited for a noon-hour meal. We realized—as the meal progressed—how much we had to be thankful for, that this was not the evening meal just before we preached! After all, who can translate hospitality into those wonderful aromas, delectable dishes, and spicy marvels like an Italian mama?

The real purpose, however, was not just to set a delicious feast before us for our bodies, but to tell us his story. It took the whole hour of the meal as he spread out before us a more wonderful feast than that crossing our palate. Even after these many years I still relish it.

It is a long time ago now, and no doubt some of the details may be lost to my memory, but I have never forgotten the salient facts.

He, his wife, and children were very poor in Italy. Some of his relatives had made it over to the United States and enjoyed the benefits of their new land. So to help out, they sent Johnny the fare to bring his little family over to the New World with all its promise and prospects. So they came.

But the promise and prospects had died in the crash of the late 20's, and the depression filled the streets with the unemployed. Johnny walked those streets every day looking for any kind of a job that would put food on the table.

One day, someone told him that an Italian preacher, Caesar Patrizio, was preaching the Gospel at a nearby meeting place, and invited him to attend. Johnny wasn't too interested, feeling that he had his own religion. But time lagged in those days and there were few distractions, so one evening found Johnny slipping into the back seat to hear the Italian preacher.

The message was simple, the text was the Golden Gospel Text, John 3:16 , “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Johnny didn’t get much out of the message. His mind was already thinking about tomorrow and the daily hunt for a job. But there it was, “For God so loved the world . . . ” Well, thought Johnny, if God loved the world, just maybe that included him, and maybe this God could get him the job he needed. So he sent into heaven his desperate prayer, not for his soul, for his salvation, or for heaven, but just for a job. “O God, if You love me, please get me a job, so I can feed my wife and kids.”

The very next day, at the market, a man offered Johnny a job, loading vegetables on the trucks, for 75 cents a day! “Wasn’t God a-good to me?” he would say. Then he went on, “The next day, he hire’ me again—an’ I got a promote; he pay me a dollar a day! Say, wasn’t God a-good to me?”

At the end of that long, hot day, the boss said, “Hey, Johnny, you look hot. Here, drink this Coke,” and handed him a bottle of pop.

“Thank you, boss,” replied Johnny, “But you keep the Coke and give me the nickel instead, an’ I buy a loaf a’ bread for my kids.” “Oh, Johnny,” laughed the boss, “Drink the Coke, and here’s the money for a loaf of bread for your kids, too.”

By this time Johnny is beaming as he tells us again, “Say, wasn’t God a-good to me?” But his story isn’t over yet. The next day, after a hard day’s loading of trucks, the boss called him over, “Johnny, d’ya like a cabbage?”

“Sure boss.”

He tossed a large fresh cabbage into a bushel basket. “Like potatoes, Johnny?”

“Sure thing.”

“What about squash and cauliflower?”

“Yes, yes, we like them all,” Johnny gasped as he saw the boss fill up the bushel basket to the top with delectable vegetables and fruits.

“There, Johnny, take that home to the wife and kids.”

We could hear it coming. And the tears in his eyes primed ours too, “Say, wasn’t God a-good to me?”

He hoisted the bushel of vegetables and fruit on to his shoulder and set out to walk across the city, seven miles to his little home. “An’ my heart was-a sing,” he laughed.

Johnny always had difficulty with his prepositions. “Under this roof” was “A-bottom this roof.” “In front of the house” was “A-top-a the house.” So he arrived home at last, perhaps a little later than usual because of the load of blessing in the bushel basket, and his wife was “a-waitin’” for him “a-top-a the house.”

Once inside, he put down the bushel basket from his shoulder and explained their good fortune. Then after some silent moments, Johnny spoke again, “Wife, if God goin’-a love me like-a this, I goin’-a love Him back.”

No doubt Heaven was moved at the sight of that little family, bowed in the presence of the God of John 3:16, drawn in loving response and obedience by the evidence of the goodness of God in a bushel of vegetables. For as Johnny would learn, “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom. 2:4).

How good God has been to us in these western lands. Not just with a bushel of vegetables; “He daily loadeth us with benefits.” The food we eat, the ability to eat it and the appetite to enjoy it. A measure of health and strength and soundness of mind. A bed to sleep on and shelter from the elements. Meaningful employment and a paycheck God enables us to earn. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights . . .”(Jas.1:17). Friends and loved ones around us, and God handing us a breath at a time without fail, “The God in whose hand thy breath is” (Dan. 5:23). Yet the greatest evidence of His goodness and wondrous love is still emblazoned in John 3:16 , the gift of His only begotten Son.

If indeed God has so loved you as Johnny found out, do you love Him back? Have you obeyed His gospel call? Has there ever been a time when you got down before Him and thanked Him for all the riches of His goodness and received His greatest Gift, His own beloved Son as your Saviour? If not . . . why not? God is not good to us because we are good, but because He is good!

Well, Johnny, his dear wife, and the Italian preacher laugh and sing and serve together in a Land where the fruit doesn’t come in bushel baskets, and the trees never lose their leaves. They are at home with the Lord, to bask forever in the sunshine of the riches of the goodness of God. And there, in the House of the Lord, Johnny will “love Him back” forever and forever.

Isn’t God good?

Two O’Clock at Entebbe

At about 6,000 feet we were crossing into Ugandan airspace heading for Entebbe. The azure sky was punctuated with cottony puffs of cumulus. The earth below was deep, rich green. The rains had started. But everything was not as peaceful as the scenery. President Idi Amin had ordered the expulsion of all Asians, limiting them to one suitcase of personal belongings. Only three days before we had heard on the radio that any foreign aircraft flying into Ugandan airspace would be shot down.

We couldn’t raise a signal from Entebbe. The radio silence was ominous and we scanned the horizon continuously for any speck that might suggest an approaching aircraft.

At last, from only forty miles away, we got a response on the radio. It was a curt, “Permission to land.” With a sigh of relief, we concentrated on the landing.

It was a small aircraft, carrying only the pilot, a lady missionary with a sick baby, and me. The missionary was going to be met by friends from Kampala. The pilot was to pick up some missionaries’ children returning to Zaire from school. I was to connect with a South African Airlines flight that night for London.

We carried our baggage into the immigration office and fished out our papers. The warmth of our welcome was soon evident on the official’s face. “Don’t you know,” he said angrily, “that President Amin has forbidden any white persons to enter Uganda?” We didn’t know that only the day before this new edict had been passed. “Get

out of the country!" he shouted. It was more than anger. There was fear there.

"That is exactly what I want to do—on the first flight to London tonight," I replied.

"Get out . . . now . . . the way you came in," and with that the official turned to his desk. As I tried to explain how that was impossible because the plane was now loading with children, he added one more complication, "Get out of the country by two o'clock, or you'll be arrested." I could easily believe him as I looked at the armed police and soldiers moving around.

From a child I had been taught to pray. To pray for little things and for big things. This was a big thing and for sure it was time to pray. As we stood there—the pilot, the missionary with her baby and I—we looked hopelessly at one another. I felt we should pray all right. A verse from the Bible had come to my mind. No doubt it was from God. It is 1 Peter 3:22—"Jesus Christ: who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him." So, standing there, we claimed the truth of that Scripture as I asked the Lord to deal with these authorities.

The pilot made plans to return to Zaire with his load. The missionary was met by her friends and was taken off under their protection. I sat waiting, occasionally going to the gate to look for something that might be the answer to my dilemma.

Just after 1:00 p.m. a jet landed. As it taxied in, I could read a British airline insignia on its side. Going to the counter, I inquired where that flight was going. "Non-stop to London," the agent replied.

“Wonderful! Put me on it, please.” My relief was momentary.

“Sorry, sir, but that is an unscheduled flight stopping for fuel only because of strong headwinds between here and London.” Then to blow out any candle of hope, he added, “In any case, sir, I have the passenger list from Nairobi. Every seat is full.”

“Well,” I compromised, “would you put my luggage on?”

“Yes,” the agent nodded, “we can do that.” It was a relief to get rid of the stuff. I felt at least more mobile for whatever might happen.

Some of the passengers alighted for a few minutes, going into the terminal through another door. I decided that perhaps this was God’s provision for me, so I took up a position near the gate. When I heard the call to board and, as the passengers stepped out onto the tarmac, I moved in behind them. I could feel eyes boring into the back of my neck and I waited for a shout. But none came! Climbing up the steps, I expected a flight attendant to be there to check for a pass and I had none, nor did I even possess a ticket for that flight. No one was there. Walking slowly up the aisle, I looked for that one important seat, the empty one! Every seat was full, and many children were being carried on the knees of adults. All were Asians fleeing for their lives.

The First Class section was separated by a curtain. I went through. Just then a crew member came from the flight deck and, seeing my uncertainty, asked, “Where is your seat, sir?”

“Oh,” I faltered, “I don’t have a seat. I just boarded here.”

“I’m sorry, but you’ll have to leave the aircraft. We are not permitted to pick up passengers here. This is an unscheduled stop for fuel only.” By now I had taken a quick look around. There were one or two empty seats, but all with “Occupied” tickets. Except one.

“How about that one?” I asked, and explained the dilemma of my impending arrest.

“I’ll check,” said the officer and walked down the aisle. Time dragged on. Then I heard what seemed to be the thump of the door closing. The officer reappeared. “I don’t understand it, sir. We are supposed to be full, but we have to go. That seat is yours!”

What a sweet sound to an old pilot to feel the surge of the engines on takeoff and the “clunk” of the undercarriage that signals we had broken with gravity. But they were never more sweet as I leaned back in my First Class lounging chair to thank God who hears and answers prayer, and who still controls the winds for His timely help. I looked at my watch. It was two o’clock.

Preparation for just such a day, however, had been made many years before. As a teenager, I had discovered my deep need of the Lord Jesus Christ to be my personal Saviour. In an upstairs bedroom in the outskirts of Glasgow, Scotland, I bowed over my bed and cried on Him to save me from my sins and the judgment to come. He heard my cry then and by His grace He saved me.

How wonderful to know this Saviour. Do you know Him? If not, receive Him now. Turn from your sin, your idols and transgressions to the loving, living God. He will keep His Word: “Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). It does not mean you will never have a problem nor a sorrow, but in every circumstance

He will always keep His promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5), and in His hand lies all authority and power.

Perhaps it was the release of the tension, but I could not help but laugh on the inside at the sequel to this incident. About an hour after takeoff, dinner was served. I had not eaten since Zaire in the early morning so I was ready. My mouth watered in anticipation as I watched the flight attendant pass out a delicious-looking steak dinner. Then it was my turn.

“Excuse me, sir,” the flight attendant apologized, “I’m sorry, but we seem to be short one steak dinner. Would you mind taking an economy lunch?” Ah well, I thought, we can’t have everything. After all, I am on board and safe. Just then a turbaned gentleman across the aisle caught the attendant by the arm.

“Please, I don’t eat meat,” he said, and handed the dinner back. With a smile, the attendant turned to me.

“Do you mind helping us out, sir, and eating up this steak dinner?”

“Not at all,” I replied. I thought I could oblige without too much effort!

I struck up conversation with my fellow traveler in the next seat, who informed me he was an airline executive, traveling back to London. He had been responsible in Nairobi for organizing this airlift of Ugandans who had made it into Kenya. This was the last of these flights and he was returning to home base. He discovered I was en route to Canada, with a stopover in Scotland for a brief visit with loved ones there. I had been booked through Heathrow to Glasgow, but of course my schedule was a

bit upset now. Pulling out his timetable, he told me that his company had a flight out of Gatwick for Glasgow about thirty minutes after our arrival there. Of course my tickets would all have to be rewritten, baggage transferred, etc.

“Why not stay in London overnight and get a good night’s sleep; then catch our seven o’clock flight in the morning?” he suggested. I hadn’t planned on that added expense in London, but by now there were a few things I hadn’t planned. “Look, just leave it to me. Follow me to the counter when we arrive,” he said. That sounded just fine to me and soon the hypnotic vibrations of flight wafted us both into a comfortable sleep.

The tires squealed as we touched down in London. It was about 11:00 p.m. and soon I was following my Good Samaritan friend upstairs, along hallways and at last out into the terminal and over to the ticket counter.

“Please give this gentleman a voucher for the hotel tonight, breakfast in the morning and a taxi both ways,” he requested of the agent. The young lady looked at the various tickets and schedules.

“I’m sorry, sir, I can’t do that since your friend can still catch a flight tonight to Glasgow.” Passing his identification to the young lady, he persisted gently.

“Just take care of it, Miss.” Soon I held in my hand my tickets, duly rewritten, and my voucher for transport, food, and a bed in the beautiful Gatwick-Shelby Hotel.

Does the Lord at times smile down upon us, I wonder? Well, that evening, after a luxurious shower and contemplating the comforts of a good night’s sleep in a king-size bed, I could not help but smile as I bowed to

give thanks to the One who ”. . . is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him.”

So Rich a Crown

He came, out from God, a gift from the Father's heart. Descending from the throne high and lifted up, He laid aside the garments of His majesty. The train of that robe of light filled the heavenly sanctuary with its radiance. Stepping down from the infinities of uncreated light, He passed through the creature realms of wondering angels, taking nothing of them. Still downward He came to one of the billions of His galaxies which He Himself had made. There His destination hung, a speck of sunlit stardust, so insignificant among gigantic suns and island universes that only He could find it, for in the eternal purposes of love and grace He had placed it there as a paradise for His creature man.

He arrived on the dark side of the planet, for it was night where He appeared. Yet that darkness must give way and bow to the Effulgence of God. The night sky blazed with glory. A multitude of angels heralded God's praise in the heavens and man's privilege and prospects on earth. Blessed creatures indeed all they of the human race! The Son of God had come to earth to bring heaven into their hearts and them into heaven at last. Though full well He knew the price His love would pay to make it so.

What a story of the glory of God on earth, walking, working, weeping, among His creatures. Oh, how they would welcome this visitor of love and sweetness to this sordid world of tears and pain that man had made out of the paradise of God! Ah, sad and shameful is the record. He came, but there was no room for Him. They wanted His bread in their mouths but not His beneficent rule in

their hearts. They wanted His healing powers but not His holy claims. They were filled with wonder at His grace but filled with wrath at His truth.

At last, their hatred exceeded. They must find Him and destroy Him. His radiance had exposed their sins. Their insect consciences scurried for cover. They mocked at His meekness and scorned His compassion for sinners. They had made their decision. The darkness they loved and therefore the light they must extinguish.

Gethsemane! So they found Him at the garden of the oil press . . . on the dark side of the planet. In the night He had prayed in agony till His sweat like great blooddrops fell to the ground. He had seen what none else but God could see. He had surveyed "the place afar off" where none else but He would go, and He bowed to the Father's will. He stood before their rabble mob, Holiness personified.

Love was His banner and compassion the beating of His heart, even for those who hated Him without a cause. His body bathed in the sweat of His anguish and the traitor's kiss still wet upon His cheek, they led Him away to the judgment of men.

Gabbatha! The soldiers gathered round in raucous glee. "A King?" they mocked, "Then anoint Him" and they spat in His lovely face. "A King? Then give Him a robe," and they threw around His bleeding back a soldier's cloak. "A King? Then give Him a staff of authority" and they put a brittle reed into His hand. "A King? Then give Him a crown" and they pressed a crown of thorns upon His blessed brow. "A King? Then He must have a throne," and they took Him to Golgotha. There they nailed Him

through His hands and feet to the only throne men ever gave Him.

Yet out of this race of sinners they have come by the millions. From habitations of cruelty and homes of respectability, from hell-holes of ignorance and halls of learning. Still they come! His cross, His suffering love, has won their hearts. His beauty has captured their affections. He is to them the Altogether Lovely One. They are His and He is theirs by eternal decree. Is it any wonder that, by faith, they gather around Him week by week and show forth His death, remembering with sweetest sadness the giving of His body and the shedding of His precious blood and looking forward "till He come"? –

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.
Forbid it Lord that I should boast,
Save in the Cross of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.
See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown.
Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my heart, my life, my all!

Lessons in John 13

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from the Lips of the Master

The Lord Jesus has been revealed as the elect and beloved Servant. "Behold my servant, whom I chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased." (Matt. 12:18, cf. Isa. 42:1) In John 13, the feet-washing is a living parable on the self-humbling of Christ as outlined in Philippians chapter 2. It teaches us something of what it meant for Him to take that form of a servant. Thus He gave an example for all acceptable service, John 13:15.

It Involved a Decision

"He riseth," v.4. Here is a picture of that great decision in eternity, to serve on behalf of fallen man at infinite cost. By this the Lord teaches His disciples that, in all spiritual service, there must be a determination to do it, a sincerity in doing it and the actual doing of it. "As the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." (Eph. 6:6) James speaks of the "doers of the word and the ‘not-doers’." The "doers" are characterized by their uncompromising walk, continuing in the perfect law of liberty, and are blessed in their doing. The "not-doers" are characterized by their unbridled talk, contemptuous of the perfect law of liberty, and are self-deceived in their heart. (Jam. 1:22–26)

It Involved a Renunciation

"He laid aside His garments," v.4. This answers to Philippians 2:7, "[He] made Himself of no reputation."

The Lord did not empty Himself of anything. It was Himself that was emptied out, into the vessel of perfect sinless humanity, yet never ceasing to be God. He did not lay aside His divine nature, but took to himself a human nature, so that He might die. He did not become another person, but partook of "the seed of Abraham." Thus having two natures in one glorious Person, He was "God…manifest in the flesh."

It Involved Humiliation

"He took a [servant's] towel," v.4. This answers to Philippians 2:7, "[He] took upon Him the form of a servant." The lord thus taught the disciples that true, acceptable, spiritual service will involve taking the place of submission. As sinful beings, we cannot imagine what it must have meant for the Lord to become a man. Human existence is all that we have ever known, but not He, the eternal Son of God. We began in humanity. He became a man.

It Involved a Voluntary Restriction

"He girded Himself." The Lord was never restricted in Himself. He is God. He did however, restrict the expressions of His greatness on occasions. Relative to time, He came from the infinite extensions of eternal days to the realm of sunrise and sunset. Yet ever He possessed His attribute of eternity. Relative to space, the One of whom the poet wrote, "Who art Thyself Thine own vast dwelling place," came to dwell on the insignificant speck of stellar dust. Yet He ever possessed the attribute of immensity. Relative to power, He came from the infinite expressions of absolute authority and might, to learn obedience by the things which He

suffered and to be touched with the feelings of our weaknesses. Yet He ever possessed the attribute of omnipotence.

The disciples could learn by His example, that if their service was to be after the character of their Lord’s, it will be very costly relative to their own persons., their own time, their own movements and their own energies. They will "not go out free." As to our time, it is irretrievable and "cannot be gathered up again." As to our movements, we are accountable, and we shall meet them again at the Bema. As to our energy, it is expendable and soon, so soon, our strength diminishes and the good that we would, we cannot.

It Involved a Special Provision

"He poureth water into a basin." The water was there, but it had to be taken up, and it had to be poured out. We read of "the water of the word." At great cost to God and to many of His servants, even martyrs, we have the Word in our mother tongue. It is there, readily available, in Western lands at least. But it is not enough that it has been provided. It must be appropriated. By daily discipline, it must be personally taken up.

The Lord did not pour the water into the cup, that would have been useless. He did not pour the water on their heads, that would have been thoughtless, it was their feet that needed the water. He did not pour it on the floor, that would have been waste. The water was applied where it was needed. The disciples could learn by this, that the application of the Word must be relevant to the need, thoughtful, and profitable to the blessing of those ministered to.

It involved Completion

Having washed the disciple’s feet, He took a towel and wiped their feet dry. Their cleanliness and comfort were restored. He did it completely, for behind the task was His own character. He did it tenderly, for behind the towel was His own blessed hand. He did it perfectly, for behind the act was His own purpose, divine instruction. Paul followed His Lord in this, he "finished the course." Spiritual service must be done in the right way, for the right reasons and at the right time and we are not to leave our allotted task undone for someone else to fulfill.

> *The Lord has given the example that "Ye should do as I have done*
> *to you," v.15. May we all be followers of the Perfect Servant.*

From Precious Seed Magazine, March–April 1989

The Head Covering: A Biblical Perspective (The True Women's Lib)

The women's "Liberation" movement in society today is sadly behind the times. It has been one of the distinctive characteristics of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that, wherever it has been preached, it has elevated womanhood from the degredation of heathenism to a place of nobility beside the man. Heathenism almost always has debased the woman; the gospel liberates her and entrusts to her a God-given ministry, uniquely fitted to her design and characteristics.

Of course, every flourishing fashion or movement in the world tends to overspill into the Church. The evidence of this may be seen in the styles and patterns of behavior that are becoming more common among believers. One of the most general of these is the increasing number of women who appear at assembly meetings without a head covering.

Some believers were discussing this one day and an "elder" happened to join them. When he heard their conversation had to do with the head covering, he dismissed the matter with the remark, "It's inconsequential." One can hardly blame many of these women who go with uncovered heads into an assembly of believers when they have not been taught by their spiritual leaders what is scripturally correct.

The question arises, "Is it tradition or truth?" Putting aside personal preferences for a few moments, let us try to find from Scripture what is taught on the subject,

specifically from 1 Corinthians 11. It will be a help to the interested reader to have the Bible open for reference.

Three Symbols

Some suggest that the first section of the chapter actually belongs with chapter 10 and is not church truth at all. Paul's discussion of matters that affect assembly gathering, they assert, does not begin until verse 17, "when ye come together." But this is missing the design of the chapter. The first section (vv. 1-16) begins with "Now I praise you." The second begins with "I praise you not" (v. 17).

There are three symbols in this chapter: the head, the bread, and the wine. The first portrays our relationship in the mystical Body, the last two teach us concerning the sacrifice of His physical body. Can we take the liberty of saying that one of these is inconsequential? If so, which one? Can we omit the bread or wine next week at the Lord's Supper? Such a flagrant departure would not be tolerated. Then by what principle of interpretation can the other symbol be relegated to the growing list of "inconsequentials" we hear about these days?

A reading of 1 Corinthians 11 readily shows that there are two distinct lessons in the first section of this chapter which deal with the head. First, there is a lesson in headship; second, a lesson in glory.

Headship

Verse 3 sets the foundation for the lesson in headship. It teaches the divine order of authority. It is significant that even here the Spirit of God does not put the woman first, although that would be the logical order in the

ascending scale of authority in the spiritual realm. “The head of every man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”

Obviously there is no thought here of inferiority-superiority. The statement “the head of Christ is God” stands directly beside “the head of the woman is the man.” We know that Christ is not inferior to God—He is God. The issue is order, just as we have alphabetical order. Names beginning with the letter “A” in the telephone directory are not more important than names beginning with any other letter. So in His universe God has established order—world order, home order, and assembly order. “Let all things be done decently and in (according to the) order” (1 Cor. 14:40).

In Ephesians, the headship of Christ is related corporally to the whole body of the Church. In 1 Corinthians, His headship in the assembly is related individually to the believer. In verse 4, the covered head of the praying or prophesying man is seen to be dishonoring to his head (“and the head of every man is Christ”). Here the simple words “to cover” are used. Thus Christ must not be dishonored by His symbolic concealment, the covered head of the man.

The woman is warned in verse 5. The uncovered head dishonors her figurative head (“and the head of the woman is the man”). The reason the man is not to be held in dishonor will be developed in the lesson in glory: “Forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God” (v. 7). The word “dishonor” is a superlative, “to thoroughly put to shame.” In the context, when a man appears with his head covered, or a woman with her head uncovered, it is

an implicit denial of the divine teaching regarding headship, whether intentional or otherwise.

Glory

Now the Spirit leads Paul to press the issue and to show its solemn overtones by giving a lesson in glory, and strong reasons for compliance with this word of instruction. Glory might be said to be a visible manifestation of inward nature. The glory of a rose bush is the rose. That is not all of the rose bush, but the bloom is the manifestation of its nature. By the rose we learn the nature of the bush. The reason for the uncovered head of the man is given: “Forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God.” Image is not likeness; these are distinctly different ideas. Likeness is similitude, being like; image is representation, whether like or not. The Lord Jesus is never spoken of as “being in the likeness of God.” He cannot be “like” God since He is God.

Man must not, then, cover his head in the assembly because he represents God as His image. Further, he is the glory of God. If image is representation, then glory is manifestation. God’s authority must not be hidden. This is the twofold reason for the uncovered head of the man.

The woman is not spoken of as the image of man, but as his glory. Here it is not representation, but manifestation. The glory of man must not be manifest in spiritual exercises, therefore that glory must be covered. No glory but God’s is to be seen in the spiritual realm. Thus when the man sees the women’s heads covered, he is reminded that his glory is covered there too. His public ministry is to be done so God alone receives the glory.

The School of Angels

The reason for the woman's covering is also twofold. First, it is a natural one. Verse 8 shows that the man had precedence in the natural realm andis therefore an image of God, "for Adam was first formed" (1 Tim. 2:13). The woman, as steward of the coverings, aids the man in his responsibility.

Second, a spiritual reason is given in verse 10. "For this cause ought a woman to have power (a sign of submission to authority) on her head because of the angels." Why is this? Ephesians 3:10 gives a clue as to the importance of angelic observation. God uses the Church to teach them somthing of His manifold wisdom. How can these spirit beings learn the significance of the Lordship of Christ, the place of the Church and of the individual believer? Such things are an utter mystery to them. God shows them by object lessons or symbols.

Just as Aaron is a type of Christ in certain ways, though completely unaware of it himself, and just as the Lord used a little child to teach the disciples a lesson on entrance into the kingdom, although the child was oblivious to his role, so now, though we may be unaware of it, we are under the scrutiny of spirit beings. We are being used by God as object lessons to make known the glorious truths of authority and submission which otherwise would be unintelligible to them. How solemn! Yet Abraham grasped a higher truth when he said, "The Lord before whom I walk."

When a woman comes into a church gathering with her head covered, she performs a ministry to the hosts of heaven. She becomes to angels an object lesson of submission to divine headship. What a rebuke she is to

the wicked angels! Their sin is that of rebelling against divine authority. What a delight to the obedient angels, as they see also the man's head uncovered portraying the unshielded glory of God and His accepted authority!

However, there is an assurance in verse 11 that positionally there is no thought of superiority because of gender. Paul states in verse 12 that even though the first woman came out of the man, ever since every man has come into the world by a woman. We are together, "in the Lord."

The Double Cover-Up

Some excuse their uncovered heads by citing verse 15, "Her hair is given her for a covering." Since she has hair, these assert, that is enough. Surely a careful reading of the text would show such an interpretation to be a weak avoidance of the truth as it is set out. Notice that for the woman there are two glories involved. She is a glory: "The woman is the glory of the man" (v. 7). But she also has a glory of her own. Her hair is a glory to her (verse 15). For the glory that she is (the glory of the man), God has given her a natural covering, her long hair. For the glory that she has (her hair), she must submit her will to cover that with another covering which she places over her own glory.

For all who can receive the ministry of the Word, there is a responsibility to obey. Elders and ministers of God's Word are also accountable to give needed instruction and not to shun to declare the whole counsel of God. If we fail to address ourselves to these matters, we should not be surprised when aberrations appear regularly, even brazenly, among us.

Long-Haired Men

Long-haired men are not left out of these solemn verses (1 Cor. 11:1-16). In this day when even some believers follow this fashion, a word might be timely. Verse 14 teaches that it is contrary to the natural order for a man to have long hair. Why is this? Verse 15 shows us. Long hair is a glory for the woman. Therefore, for a man to be wearing this glory is a paradox in the sight of God and of the angels. The glory of the woman must not be seen in the Church, whether displayed by women or men.

To raise this subject usually calls forth some argument. Some say that the Lord Himself had long hair. Did He? How would we know from Scripture? Of this we have no certain knowledge. In any case, if those who so argue really desire conformity to Christ, it is clearly taught in Scripture that for the present it is moral likeness to His Son that God desires, not physical. The Spirit is working in our lives to transform us in heart and conduct to the Lord. Speculation is no excuse to contravene the clear instruction of the Word of God.

From where does this fashion of long haired men come? Not the Beatles, as many think. In Revelation 9, the hordes of hell erupt from the pit. They are seen as having the “faces of men and . . . the hair of women.” Just as the Lord is transforming His saints into a moral likeness to Christ, so the arch-enemy seeks to conform a multitude into a likeness which portrays a confusion of God’s natural order. Confusion of the sexes has always been a mark of depravity through the ages. It frequently has called forth the judgment of God.

Whatever long hair on men may have meant to our grandfathers or early brethren, we cannot say, but in our day it is the badge of rebellion. We must remember, too,

that when men wore their hair longer a century ago, the hair of women was much longer, thus maintaining the distinction between male and female.

This is not to say tha tevery man who wears his hair long is rebelling against God. Many are not consciously doing so, but in the light of Scriptures under consideration, they may be, all unwittingly, making themselves object lessons for the adversary against Scripture's standards.

How Long is Long?

Some questions naturally arise out of the examination of this subject. Man's penchant for rules would have him prefer that the Lord lay down in inches "how long is long." The Lord wisely has not done so in this case, nor in many areas that affect our lives. The great principle of the Christian life is "faith." If a sincere desire is present, together with a submissive will, it will not be long before the exercised soul will know if the Holy Spirit is being grieved or not.

For Today?

Is this for today? The relevance of these verses (the bread and wine symbols do not suffer from this argument) is sometimes brought into question. It is implied that this was a Corinthian problem and applied only to that church. However, all the teaching of this epistle is clearly directed in its introduction. It was written to the Corinthian saints "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul is not afraid to address cultural problems in Corinth. But in this chapter there is no mention of culture. Instead, he takes us back to creation to show us the basis for the order being discussed.

Chapters 11-14, which form a unit, close with the warning, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

Other Questions

Sometimes the size of the head covering for women is the question. The word used to describe this covering is a superlative, and means to “amply cover.” Tiny bows and almost invisible nets cannot be said to “amply cover.” They may enhance her glory, not cover it.

Another query is sometimes raised regarding wigs. Do they cover? Yes, they cover the woman’s natural glory, but they obviously defeat the spiritual purpose by providing an imitation glory. The onlooker sees a fascimilie of her glory uncovered, and not a badge of submission.

At what age should a girl be expected to wear a covering over her hair? Should teenagers? Perhaps this could be easily resolved by asking how young should a boy be before he does not wear a covering? Perhaps it has been argued that these youngsters do not pray or prophesy and are therefore exempt. However, none can gainsay the exhortation to fathers to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Submission to the Lord is to be taught our children by example, by precept, and when necessary, by chastening. All parents would agree that it is easier and happier for all if this be learned at the earliest age.

But When?

On what occasions this scripture applies presents a more difficult problem. Obviously it includes church

gaterhings where the elders would be held accountable before the Lord. A meeting of the local church is not determined by geography, however. It is possible to have church order in a house (as the early church met), or to have home order in a church building (as with a wedding). Church order could be in effect in a field or forest, as with many during times of oppression. What determines the order is who God would hold responsible if anything went wrong. In world order, God holds government to be responsible. In home order, it is the husband or parent. In church order, the elders are held to account.

There are, however, other occasions when a woman may exercise an oral ministry by prayer or testimony from the Scriptures. The principles laid down here would apply to such. Further instructions are found elsewhere in Scripture; for instance, in 1 Corinthians 14, governing the woman's silence in the assembly. Chapter 11 must be read in the light of these subsequent controls. But remember that devotion to Christ, not mere duty, is our guide.

When there is uncertainty as to the wearing or not wearing of the covering, it would seem, in the light of 1 Corinthians 11:10, that the exercised sister will not wish to risk grieving her Lord. Private home situations are clearly distinct, since in the home and family context the order of rule is not directly through the elders, but through the husband and father in the home.

Ire and Fire

It is a strange thing that there are few Scriptures that stir up the fire in some saints like this one. This may be the reason why the earlier part of 1 Corinthians 11 is

taught less than the remainder of the chapter. Likely the apostle also felt the ire of some when he refers in verse 16 to the possibility of contention. It was the custom of the Jewish men of that day (and today) to cover their heads in the synagogue. It was also the custom of the Greek women to enter the temple with their heads uncovered. But, says Paul, “We have no such custom.” The New Testament Church was distinct from the heathen temple; consequently, it stood in contrast to social and religious customs of the day. Christians were to behave differently in these matters.

Suffering Loss

The rebellious spirit can always find an argument and present picayune excuses which seek to discount both the relevance and personal application of this section of the Scripture. When we know that godly Moses suffered a soul-grieving loss as a result of spoiling a type of the glorified Lord, it should make us all tremble lest we too should be guilty of presenting to the eyes of believers, unbelievers, and the watching spirit world a distorted picture of our beloved Lord, His authority and glory.

Hair or Heart?

In conclusion, let it be clearly understood that while outward form should convey inward condition, it is not always necessarily so. A woman, with the most adequate head covering and modest apparel, may be as cold as an iceberg in her devotion to the Lord, and all the while proud of her conformity to a set standard. Likewise, a short-haired man may be greatly grieving the Lord in other significantareas of his life. The long-haired youth, or the girl with uncovered hair may, in their hearts, be devoted to the Lord to the measure of the biblical light

they have. They may be deeply committed to His cause and living blameless lives in the wicked society around them, but through spiritual infancy, or the failure of the elders and the teachers, have never learned the solemn implications of 1 Corinthians 11.

While the outward sign does not necessarily convey spirituality, nor the absence of it bespeak carnality, it is axiomatic that the submissive heart, willing to learn and to please the Lord who bought it, will be brought into the light of the Word of God suddenly or little by little, and will never risk a compromise.

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