

## What does Paul mean by his illustration of women and head coverings?

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about the difference between a man and a woman “praying or prophesying, having his head covered”. Due to this passage, it is very common to see Roman Catholic women wearing a scarf or other head covering.

1. What is the immediate context of Paul's illustration?  
1 Corinthians **11:1-16**

Paul begins this section by reminding the brethren to keep and obey the traditions or teachings that Paul delivered to them. This opens to the description of a chain of “headships” and guidance for saying prayers or prophesying/preaching. The man is to be uncovered and not covered while the woman is to be covered not uncovered. The list of hierarchies seems to indicate positions of authority and responsibility. After dealing with the issue of covered and uncovered, Paul reminds the Corinthians about the created order of the man and the woman and the purpose behind her creation (as a help meet).

2. What is meant by being the head of another?  
Ephesians **1:20-23**; 4:12-16; **5:22-24**      Genesis 24:64-65  
2 Samuel **15:30**      Numbers **30:3-7**  
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Being the head of another is an indication that the “head” is responsible for the one he is “head” over. Whatever the “covered” person does is viewed as a reflection of his “head” and in a sense the “covered” individual is viewed as acting on behalf of his “head” and as a result is responsible to the “head” for his words and actions. In this passage, the man is responsible to Christ for what he does while the woman is responsible to the man for what she does. Paul links this headship concept to the divinely chosen created order of things.

3. What does the symbolism of “cover” mean?  
Exodus **26:13-15**; 28:42; **33:22-23**; 40:3      Numbers 4:7-12  
Ezekiel **12:3-6**

Things that are covered are those things that you wish to protect and preserve. It is also used of the Holy things of God that are not to be looked upon.

4. What is the relationship between men and women that Paul is trying to encourage?  
1 Timothy **2:9-12**      Genesis **3:16** cmp Genesis **4:6-7**  
1 Peter **3:1-7**      Genesis **2:18-23**

Paul is trying to maintain the relationship that God originally created. The man is expected to take the leadership role of the house and of the church. The woman was created to be a divinely appointed helper to the man. This means that Paul is attempting to communicate the need for the woman to willingly submit to the position of authority that the man has been placed in and for the man to step out and lead as God called him to lead.

5. Does this mean that men are superior to women?

Galatians **3:28**

Matthew 22:30

1 Corinthians **11:8-12**

It is not an issue of superiority but one of responsibility. The man is expected to bear more responsibility for what goes on within a family.