

The Long and Short of A Hairy Subject

Here's the long and short of a hairy subject. There seems to be a recurring confusion regarding biblical teachings on the subject of head coverings and hair – be it facial hair, men's and women's hair lengths or the religious ceremonial use of top hats and veils. The English translation of the Apostle Paul's teachings in 1 Cor 11 has also been a subject of confusion for new converts as well as for Yeshua's more mature disciples. Variations of the following questions seem to come up again and again.

- Should women wear a veil during worship?
- What is the appropriate length for a woman's hair?
- What is the appropriate length for a man's hair?
- Can men fashion their beards? Specifically, does Torah forbid men from shaving a style into their beards, such as wearing trimmed sideburns or a goatee?

These questions are as abundant today as they ever have been, and confusion reigns. One thinks he knows and judges those whom he thinks don't know or who have a different understanding. Another also thinks he knows and but has a totally different understanding. Opinions can be interesting, but they are not suitable for doctrine. What does God's word plainly teach? What does Torah say? What did Sha'ul (Paul) say?

Since we know God's word teaches us that a woman is to have long hair – how long is long? Since we know God's word teaches us a man is not to have long hair – how long is long? How long is short? Is it six inches, four inches, eight inches? Is hair to be measured by inches, fractions of inches, millimeters? Is "long" hair determined to be long enough for a woman and short enough for a man according to its relation to the collar and ears – i.e., if it covers the collar and ears it's considered long? Or is hair considered long if it hits the neck...or is it the shoulders? What's the standard? Who gets to determine what "long" is? How long is long? For someone imprinted with the standards that J. Edgar Hoover enforced on the FBI, men should have very short, almost shown, hair, like a military style. Even setting aside the style and lengths associated with the '60s "hippie movement," someone who grew up in the '60s or '70s would be accustomed to men's hair styles that were much fuller than they are today. Even longer were the styles of this nation's founding fathers. There have always been some men who wear their hair long enough to be flowing down over their shoulders. This too has been acceptable and even popular in certain circles, while it has been rejected in others. In some societies women wear a veil everywhere outside the home – some even in the home – regardless of how long their hair is. From George Washington to Abraham Lincoln, many of our country's

most respected leaders would be considered like outcast rebels by many today, simply because of their hair length. Are the ever-changing societal standards to be our guide? Is whatever comes natural to us, to be our guide? The great teachers of the Bible era were before our modern scissor cuts, hair stylists, razors and barbers of modern times. So how long was Moses' hair – actually? How long did Rabbi Yeshua and His disciples actually wear their hair? It may have been fuller than we might realize. Is that ok with us? What does long mean and when is a veil necessary? Do the commands forbid men from trimming their beards or having sideburns?

Sha'ul did not command men to have short hair. He taught that men having long hair dishonored their head. Paul did not teach women that they could not have short hair. He taught that women should have their head covered when praying and to keep a symbol of humility on their heads. What's the difference and why does it matter?

Some years ago at my grandson's *Brit Milah* (covenant of circumcision), I had the great honor of being the *Sandek*. Symbolically, my lap was like the alter of sacrifice. The blessings and prayers were so beautiful and meaningful. Before the ceremony began, the Mohel (circumcising rabbi) handed out kippah's (skull caps) for all the men that did not already have one on. Family was there. Many from the local synagogues were there. Many from our local assembly were there. After the ceremony, I received the standard round of questions regarding men praying with their heads covered. How could I do this? How could I pray to God with a yarmulke (Yiddish) or kippah on my head, if Paul said that it was a shame to do so? How is it that Messianic Jews wear kippah's or hats during prayer, but other Christians typically don't. Are Gentile Christians right and the Jewish ones wrong? Did Paul reform the Jewish practice of wearing the kippah? Is it as one man rebuked; *Messianic Jews are so steeped in Judaic tradition that they cannot see or accept what Paul was teaching?*

I remember well a conversation among a group of men who wanted to pray. They were outside on a very cold winter day. The temperature was in the low teens and breezy. Some wanted to remove their baseball style hats, others did not. One man asked, "Would God want us to freeze? Does that honor God?" Such confusion is totally unnecessary.

Let's begin our study by examining what Paul actually taught. Let's look at the meaning of the words Paul actually used. By that I don't mean the English words the translators selected as substitutes for the Greek. Let's see what Paul actually taught and practiced, because the confusion is mostly in the translation. That's partially why there is a difference of understandings between Yeshua's Jewish and Gentile disciples.

The Church at Corinth was a very worldly church. The context of this chapter shows Paul was dealing with symptoms of forwardness and insubordination among the Corinthian women and with feminized men bent on worldly fashion. Let's see what Paul said:

Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head.
But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved (1 Cor 11:4-5).

The Greek words translated “head covered” and “head covering” that Paul used are *kata-kephale*. Their literal meaning is *down from and around*. The words imply a motion down from and around, like a twisting or wrapping flowing motion like a veil and like various braided hair styles. The words imply enough length to be able to perform the functions of a veil covering and wrapping around the head and face and to hang down from the head. The words also imply a feminine twisting or woven style that hangs down from the head. Scholars will tell you the primary meaning of *kata-kephale* is regarding the flowing twisting style, with length being the secondary meaning. There are some men's styles that may not be too long, strictly speaking, but which can still violate Biblical teachings if they are worn in a feminine twisted style. The reverse of a woman with a masculine style can be true for women as well. The truth about Biblical teachings regarding hair is, they are concerned with style at least as much as they are with length.

Later in 1 Corinthians Paul further built his case with the following statement:

Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her for a covering (1 Cor 11:14-15).

Here Paul makes a very direct point stating that a woman's long hair is given to her for a veil-like covering, in place of a veil. Here Paul uses a different word, but one that is also translated “covering.” Here Paul used *peribolaion*, meaning veil, wrap or cape. Clearly, Paul was not teaching that women had to wear a veil when praying, since he states that women's long hair is given to them in place of the use of a veil. But he does state that if a woman's hair is too short to be flowing down and around, then they should use a veil so that their head remains covered and adorned. This is to honor God and to show a sign of submission.

These same passages teach us that men's hair ought to be masculine in nature, and not sufficiently long to hang down from the head and twist around it like a veil. That is certainly shorter than the images of a long-haired skinny, weak looking man with a crown of thorns on his head, like those that adorn many homes and churches. But it is also long

enough to allow for stylistic changes that naturally occur over time and for individualism – but only within a godly band of latitude.

Notice the words of respected scholar and Bible translator, David H. Stern, who gave us the Jewish New Testament, The Complete Jewish Bible, Commentaries and many other works:

Wearing something down over his head. This is the literal translation, and it is used here to show that Sha’ul is talking about wearing a veil, not a hat. The usual translation, “with his head covered,” obscures this fact, and as a result an issue has arisen in Messianic Judaism that should never have come up at all, namely, whether it is proper for a Messianic Jewish man to wear a kippah (“skullcap or, in Yiddish, yarmulke) in public worship. Of course it is proper, since objection to it is based only on a mis-translation of this verse. For more see my Messianic Jewish Manifesto, pp 170 – 171.

God commanded the priests to wear a head covering on their heads in His service and as they officiated in prayer. The kings of Israel wore crowns. God promised Israel that He was going to make them a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:6). Today Jews wear kippah’s as a symbol of being the priest for their families and as a symbol that each man is king over his own castle. Paul was not changing this old custom. He wasn’t even addressing it. This is only a question of poor translation.

As respected Rabbi Jonathon Burnis of ‘Jewish Voice’ has explained, Paul was referring to hair that hangs *down and around*. Paul’s words do not forbid men from wearing a skull cap, baseball cap or having their hair cover their ears.

This was the teaching and understanding of all the apostles, not just Paul. Notice Peter’s words when encouraging women concerning their hair:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging (braiding RSV) the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel (1 Peter 3:3).

The word translated *arranging* the hair is *emplékæ* meaning, *to interweave, to braid in, intertwining and plaiting*.

A woman’s hair was often braided, twisted and woven in a feminine style. This was the Biblical norm for women. Peter was saying that having inwardly beautiful, feminine and submissive character was of much more value than excessive braiding and style. Paul used almost the same verbiage in 1 Timothy.

In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but that which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works (1 Tim 2:9-10).

Once again we see the twisting and braiding of women's hair. It takes a certain length to be able to do that. That is the length Paul said was long enough for women not to need a veil and it was a common feminine style of the era. That same length and style on a man are what Paul said would dishonor his head.

God's word is replete with teachings that men ought to dress and fashion themselves in a masculine way while women are to fashion themselves in feminine styles.

A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so *are* an abomination to the LORD your God (Deut 22:5)

At one point the apostle Paul even told the men in the Church at Corinth, "...*quit ye like men...*", meaning *stand up like a man* – or – *act like men* (see 1 Cor 16:13). This is the principle of God's will for men and women and is what all the apostles taught.

Now let's briefly consider one more 'hairy' subject – men's beards. God's statutes say:

Don't round your hair at the temples or mar the edges of your beard.
Don't cut gashes in your flesh when someone dies or tattoo yourselves; I am *Adonai* (Lev 19:27-28) (CJB).

There are two Hebrew words used to refer to the cutting of hair in the Holy Scriptures – *gazaz*, meaning to cut or shear hair, and *galah* meaning to shave.

God told Jeremiah; "Cut off (*gazaz*) your hair and cast it away...(Jer 7:29)."

God instructed Ezekiel regarding the priests saying; "They shall neither shave (*galah*) their heads, nor let their hair grow long, but they shall keep their hair well trimmed (Ezek 44:20)."

God did not want His Priests to shave their head bald or their hair too short; neither did He want them to let it grow too long – balance. The Hebrew word for long here is *salah*, meaning *unrestrained*.

God's word also teaches us that a man should not shave the hair of his temples bald, as this was a heathen practice done for the dead (Lev 21:5, Deut 14:1). However, the word

instructing men not to “mar” the edges of their beards or lower sideburns in Lev 19:27 is *sahat*, which means: to destroy, to ruin, to pervert, to wipe out. This is referring to destroying the skin so that hair cannot grow there anymore. It means to so mar and scar the skin that the hair is permanently perverted or destroyed, i.e., wiped out. Hence the reference in the context of cutting gashes into the flesh or perverting the flesh with tattoos. God’s statutes do not condone tattoos, but they certainly do allow a man to trim his side burns and to trim and shape his beard.

Sometimes it helps to consider the spirit or principle of God’s word and if you are not fluent in Hebrew and Greek, to analyze the scriptures from several different translations. It is especially helpful for the student of God’s word to study with a mind truly opened to God’s Word! Preconceived ideas are the deceitful enemy of truth. God be with us all as we go and learn.