

“We have no such custom”

Editor’s note: A highly-advertised book on the head coverings takes the position that 1 Corinthians 11:16, “*But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.*” means that Paul’s instructions for women to cover their heads in prayer and men to uncover their heads was meant for Corinth alone because of some local custom in Corinth, and that no other churches in the world held the custom (practice) of requiring their women to cover heads in prayer. This is considered by Bro. Andrew Bieler in the long paper found on this web site. But since the paper is very long, I am putting an extract from page 12 of his paper here to highlight what is clearly good reasoning concerning this verse. Verse 16 clearly shows that every church had the same practice, and Bro. Bieler shows that the practice had to be what Paul required in 1 Corinthians 11. PKW)

The “Every Church” Problem

Once again, we find the Scriptures have provided a simple yet powerful way to eliminate his false doctrine in one little verse. After asking if it is a proper activity for women to pray uncovered, he states: “and if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.” (1 Corinthians 11:16). Although some will argue this verse means that headcovering wasn’t the custom, and others say it shows it was once a universal custom, those arguments are immaterial to this flaw, so the meaning of that verse will be dealt with in another section. Of more importance to us is what this verse implies. It is a declaration that everyone Paul associates with and every faithful church all agree on one thing; either they all kept the custom of covering, or none of them did. There is no middle ground, and that is the significant point.

Why is this significant? If every single faithful Christian and church DID NOT have a custom of covering their women, then no faithful Christian in the world was keeping the custom of headcovering at all. This would by necessity include churches among nations we know for a fact required women to always be covered, nations such as Tarsus, Jerusalem, Armenia, Persia, etc. So if we believe that no church anywhere covered their women (even ones located in societies that definitely covered women), it was therefore fine for those Christian women to ignore their cultures. But here was Paul, telling the women in Corinth not to rebel against culture and instead be covered. That is a glaring contradiction!

Either Paul wants Christian women in Corinth to keep the Corinthian culture and be the only church that breaks the Christian custom, or Paul wants them to be like every other church and flaunt the supposed headcovering culture of Corinth. There is only one church, or there are culturedefined denominations. Which is it?

That’s ruinous to the “Culture of Corinth” excuse, but what if the opposite is true? If every single faithful Christian and church DID have a custom of covering their women, then Paul was telling the contentious that regardless of whatever culture Christians may be found in, a true Christian church is always expected to keep women covered in prayer and prophesy. This also destroys the idea that Paul was limiting his remarks to Corinth alone, since it is a custom that all faithful churches in every sort of culture (including the vain, uncovered Roman, Greek, and Egyptian cultures) were keeping, as taught by Paul’s statement. Either way, whatever the culture of Corinth may have been, it clearly meant nothing compared to the universal custom of the church of Christ.

--Andrew Bieler