

This reply is a bit longish, but found the historic evidence for the head-covering ordinance to be extensive.

I've read a few 4th to 16th Century histories of England, and as a consequence, have some comprehension of Early and Middle English, but perish the thought that I should tell the Venerable Bede that I know more about his language than he did. In the same way, it is blatant hubris to presume that we know more about koine` Greek than did the people who used it in their everyday speech. That's important, because a great deal was written about woman's head-covering before the 4th Century AD. It's foolish to disregard what was written about this ordinance by those who sat at the apostles feet and spoke koine` Greek every day of their lives.

Around the year 200, from Carthage -- incidentally a thoroughly helenized city -- Tertullian wrote a tract entitled *The Veiling of Virgins* in which he argued that Paul was using the word "gune" in the sense of "a female," rather than just a married woman. In the course of his argument, Tertullian described various head-covering practices throughout the Church, including that of the church in Corinth. Here is a direct quote from that tract:

"I also admonish you second group of women, who are married, not to outgrow the discipline of the veil. Not even for a moment of an hour. Because you can't avoid wearing a veil, you should not find some other way to nullify it. That is, by going about neither covered nor bare. For some women do not veil their heads, but rather bind them up with turbans and woollen bands. It's true that they are protected in front. But where the head properly lies, they are bare.

"Others cover only the area of the brain with small linen coifs that do not even quite reach the ears...They should know that the entire head constitutes the woman. Its limits and boundaries reach as far as the place where the robe begins. The region of the veil is co-extensive with the space covered by the hair when it is unbound. In this way, the neck too is encircled.

"The pagan women of Arabia will be your judges. For they cover not only the head, but the face also...But how severe a chastisement will they likewise deserve, who remain uncovered even during the recital of the Psalms and at any mention of the name of God? For even when they are about to spend time in prayer itself, they only place a fringe, tuft (of cloth), or any thread whatever on the crown of their heads. And they think that they are covered!"

Earlier in his tract, Tertullian declared that churches founded by the apostles themselves insisted that both married women and virgins wear a head-covering:

"Throughout Greece, and certain of its barbaric provinces, the majority of churches keep their virgins covered. In fact, this practice is followed in certain places beneath this African sky. So let no one ascribe this custom merely to the Gentile customs of the Greeks and barbarians.

"Moreover, I will put forth as models those churches that were founded by either the apostles or apostolic men . . . The Corinthians themselves understood him to speak in this manner. For to this very day the Corinthians veil their virgins. What the apostles taught, the disciples of the apostles confirmed."

Clement of Alexandria, writing from Egypt in about 190AD, counseled on head-covering as follows:

“Let a woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happens to be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty, and her shawl; nor will she invite another to fall into sin by uncovering her face. For this is the wish of the Word, since it is becoming for her to pray veiled.”

Hippolytus, an elder in the church in Rome around the year 200, compiled a record of the various customs and practices in that church from the writings of his predecessors. His work, the Apostolic Tradition contains the following:

“And let all the women have their heads covered with an opaque cloth, not with a veil of thin linen, for this is not a true covering.”

Chrysostom (AD344-407) urged women to worship with veiled heads, and men with bared heads.

Jerome (AD345-429) confirms that Christian women wore veils during his time, both in Egypt and Syria.

Augustine (AD 354-430) in various writings insisted that women not uncover their hair. Here is an excerpt:

“It is not becoming even in married women to uncover their hair, since the apostle commands the women to keep their heads covered. ‘For she is instructed for this very reason to cover her head, which he (a man) is forbidden to do because he is in the image of God.’”

We may not agree with every detail of the covering as voiced by these early church elders, but note this: Every one of the above quotes is arguing about HOW not IF a woman should cover her head! It was apparent to every one of these early writers (regardless of geographic location) that Scripture commanded a woman to wear a covering over her hair.

If you think there were early fathers who held an opposing view, then search, for I was unable to find a single respected early church writer who took an opposing view! Furthermore, there is ample historic record that the Christian church continually practiced head-covering for 19 Centuries, right on up until the last 60 years! Nineteen centuries of indisputable church history is a formidable course of performance, a point with which any reasonably competent attorney would have to agree.

As proof that head-covering continued to be observed in sound evangelical churches into the last century, Harry Ironside of Moody Bible Institute (an evangelical Greek scholar and theologian of no small repute) wrote the following:

“If a man should stand up in public to pray or preach (the word ‘prophesieth’ really means preach), wearing a covering on his head, he would be dishonoring his Head. If I stood in this pulpit preaching with my hat on, every one of you would rightfully say, ‘Has he no respect for the Master he professes to serve?’ I come into the presence of God and Christ and of the angels

who are learning the wisdom of God in the church, and I remove my hat. For the same reason, when a woman comes into the church, she keeps her hat on.”

Some well known evangelical theologians still teach this ordinance, not the least of whom is Charles Ryrie. If that sounds unbelievable, just read his notes on 1Co 11 in the Ryrie Study Bible.

All this argument about a simple command in Scripture reminds me of a 1st Century Jewish tradition . . . the one which held that a Jewish priest could not become a member of the Sanhedrin unless he was able to logically prove -- from Torah -- that it was permissible to offer a pig on the altar of burnt offering. Ok, so the Pharisees could “prove” it, but did their exercise in convoluted “theo-logic” lead them to the truth? Of course not, and that appears to be where a majority of churches are today. They have logically found 1Co 11:5-6 to be a New Testament pig they can sacrifice on the brazen altar of a questionable recollection of Church history and a theoretical understanding of koine` Greek.

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Sources:

1. David W. Bercot, A Glimpse At Early Christian Church Life, (Tyler, TX: Scroll Publishing Co., 1991), pp.150-151 cites Tertullian, The Veiling of Virgins pp. 125, 138.
2. Clement The Instructor 3.12.
3. Hippolytus Apostolic Tradition 18.
4. Tom Shank, ...let her be veiled, (Kalispell, MT, The Torch, 1992) pp.44-48
5. H.A. Ironside, Address on the First Epistles to the Corinthians, (New York, NY, Loizeaux Brothers, 1932) PP. 331-332.
6. Charles Ryrie Study Bible, notes on 1Cor 11:5-6