

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 76 issued January 2009

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- Through the Bible With the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
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- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham

A Woman and Her Headcovering

The Pastor's Letter – August 1971

There is a controversy as to whether or not women should cover their heads while engaged in the public worship of the Church. No less a conservative publication than the Irish Baptist Magazine (in 1971) carried an article strongly biased in favour of a more liberal approach to the question and giving licence to the women-folk to discard their traditional head-coverings claiming that the “hair” of the head is a sufficient “veil” and all that is necessary for the fulfilling of the scriptural injunctions of 1st Corinthians chapter 11.

We strongly challenge this view, and purposely refer to it as “a more liberal approach,” because we see it as a symptom of the worldliness of the church of the present day. For too long the church has been caught up with an idea of “worldliness” that has been superficial in the extreme and has completely missed the point that worldliness is also the contamination of the mind of the believer by the thoughts and standards of the age in which he finds himself. These are the days when the world's women are clamouring for what they call “female liberation”; the equality of the sexes is the great battle-cry of many in our day, and women must be counted on a par with men in every aspect of life. While speaking in glowing terms, however, of the men and the women being “one in the Lord,” the relevant scriptures, nevertheless, make havoc of the current notions of equality and deserve the thorough study of every Christian woman who may have, even unconsciously, imbibed the spirit of the age and forgotten that as “the head of every man is Christ,” so “the head of the woman is the man.” (See 1st Corinthians chapter 11 verse 3)

Now, it's on this verse that the whole of Paul's argument concerning the covering of the head in 1st Corinthians rests. He is dealing with the proper approach to the matter of prayer and prophecy when the church gathers together, and whether or not the head should be covered or uncovered, both in the case of the man and of the woman. And, being the apostle Paul, he never begins an argument half-way through, but invariably goes right back to first principles. Hence his opening statements in verses 2 and 3 of the chapter. “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. But I

would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”

He has a word of praise for the Corinthians, as you can see in that verse 2, in that they have kept “the ordinances” as he had delivered them to them. But he is now going to deal with a few matters (including their awful abuse of the Lord’s Table) that they have neglected. Hence his **“BUT,”** at the beginning of verse 3: “But I would ye should know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” And it’s in the light of that great principle, that the Corinthians had obviously overlooked, that Paul then draws his conclusions regarding the covering or the uncovering of the head in the next two verses. “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head ...”

The meaning is surely abundantly clear. If a man covers his head while he is praying or prophesying, he dishonours his head. That is, he dishonours Christ; for Paul has just stated that “the head of every man is Christ.” By the same token, then, the woman who prays or prophesies with the head uncovered “dishonours her head;” that is, the man, for, “the head of the woman is the man.”

What follows then, is a description of those women who fail to honour the man in this way, and an appeal to consistency on the part of the apostle. If the woman prays or prophesies having her head uncovered, says Paul at the end of verse 5, “that is even all one as if she were shaven.” The shaving, or shearing of the head was apparently the mark of the woman of loose morals who counted herself under no man, nor honoured no man. In the Old Testament, a woman even suspected of dishonouring her husband by unfaithfulness was brought before the priest, “And the priest,” it says, “shall set the woman before the Lord, **and uncover the woman’s head ...**” Paul, then, in verse 6 in an apparent effort to show the gravity of women dishonouring the men in praying or prophesying with uncovered heads, draws out the consistent course of their behaviour: “For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn ...” If she really wants to appear “free” from the headship of the man, let her be consistent, and go ahead and show that liberty in the most brazen fashion of all. **“But,”** comes Paul again, “If it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven

(and every Christian woman at Corinth, and elsewhere, would know that it was a shame to look like one of these women that Paul brings before them) let her be covered.” Let her evidently show forth her glad subjection to the man, in the Lord.

In verses 7 to 9 the apostle returns to the theme of the priority of the man in the purposes of the Lord. “For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.” And, it’s on account of this, says Paul in verse 10, that the woman ought to have “power on her head, because of the angels.”

That this is a difficult verse is beyond question; but in the total context of the verses we must hold fast to the most obvious interpretation. The word translated “power” is the same word that is also translated “authority” in other places. So, the woman is to have “authority” on her head. And as Paul has been speaking about the man being “the head of the woman” we must infer that the covering of the head on the part of the woman bespeaks the man’s “authority” over the woman in the church. On account of the fact of the “woman being for the man,” and being “created for the man,” **“For this cause** ought the woman to have (the sign of the man’s) authority on her head, because of the angels.”

“Angels” translates the Greek word “angeloi” which means “messengers.” In this case, either the messengers of the church – the officials of the church – or simply, as it stands, the angels of God who are with the church when she meets in her Redeemer’s name. The emphasis is on the comeliness of public worship, and it is, therefore, unseemly, both in the sight of men and of angels for a woman to discard that covering which shows her subjection to the man in the Lord, and in the Lord’s church.

The next two verses serve as one of Paul’s great counter-balances to any thought of tyranny on the part of the man: “Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.” And then comes his appeal, both to the woman’s good sense, and to the very ways of nature itself: “Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature

itself teach you, that, if a man hath long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.” And it is that verse 15 that appears to have become the rallying point for those who would eliminate the practice of the covering of the head by the woman at the means of grace. “Her **hair** is given her for a covering,” they say, quoting this verse, “therefore, no other covering is necessary.” But, we answer, that her hair is given her for a **natural** covering: “Doth not even **nature** itself teach you ...?” But the Christian woman is one step above nature in that she is **spiritual**, and Paul makes his appeal to her spiritual senses by directing her attention to the very course of nature itself. If nature has provided her with a glorious covering that distinguishes her womanhood, how much more should her spiritual womanhood be distinguished by her glorious subjection to the man under the Lord?

If the hair of the head is the only covering referred to in this passage, then, we are forced to ask – with our tongue firmly planted in our cheek – “What about the bald women with no hair?” For, says Paul, “every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered (that is, **with no hair**, according to this modern view) dishonours her head.” And, planting our tongue even more firmly in our cheek, we are forced to ask, “What man has a right to pray who hasn’t first visited the barber and had his head made to resemble a billiard ball?” For, says Paul again, “Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered (that is, with hair on his head, according to this modern view) dishonours his head.”

We fear, brethren, this is too much to stomach. We resolutely refuse to reduce the mighty apostle to the Gentiles to a dithering old man who would spend 15 precious verses of Holy Scripture to an exhortation that amounted to nothing more than that only bald men may pray and prophesy in the church, and bald women may not! Why should Paul say that the woman “**ought** to have power (or authority) on her head because of the angels” if she already has such power or authority by nature? Better to have written, “For this cause **she already has** power on her head because of the angels.” Quite obviously, Paul is pointing to something quite apart from the natural covering of the hair, to a covering that bespeaks a great spiritual truth which the woman is exhorted to display, as ready acknowledgement of her divinely appointed station in the Lord.

Please note that I have not mentioned “hats” as such, but coverings. Some hats, we fear, are more of an adornment than a covering, and a head-scarf would probably meet the purpose far better. But, be that as it may, we believe that the injunction is clear and that it calls for the covering of the head in the public worship of the church – and in our day, covered adequately and modestly. We believe that the injunction applies **to our day** and was not simply addressed to the first century church at Corinth. We note that Paul draws his confirmation, not from Corinthian national dress or usage, but from “nature” – “Doth not even nature itself teach you?” And we note also, and have noted, that Paul goes back to first principles: “But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man.”

We would desire that the church today would likewise return to first principles in so many things, including this matter in hand.

Paul’s closing word in verse 16 is decisive, although sometimes misunderstood in our reading of our Authorised Version: “But if any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” The Amplified New Testament, together with the Revised Standard Version etc. more readily draws out Paul’s closing emphasis and shows that he viewed his position to be beyond dispute and in harmony with the whole church of God: “Now if any one is disposed to be argumentative and contentious about this, we hold to and recognise no other custom (in worship) than this, nor do the churches of God generally.”

We have taken more space than is normal for the “Pastor’s Letter” in this edition but feel that the present climate in the churches up and down the land with regard to this question have necessitated the foregoing thoughts. We commend them to you for examination in the light of the scriptures mentioned.

Yours sincerely,
W.J. Seaton
(August 1971)



Hugh Latimer's New Year Gift

Stout High Latimer was Bishop to Henry V111 while Protestantism was in favour with the throne of England, and on New Year's Day, according to the prevailing custom, he took his New Year's gift to present to the King. It was unusual for the King's Bishop to present something costly and so, brave old Hugh, in keeping with his fervour and zeal, presented the King of England with what he believed to be the most costly gift of all and also, what that particular

King of England stood most in need of – a copy of God's Word. In keeping with his zeal, too, however, he determined that the Word of God was all the better for being "applied", and as he handed his gift over to Henry, he turned down one page to mark the text which says, "But whoremongers and adulterers will God judge."

Henry could have reacted violently and Hugh Latimer could have paid dearly for his vigour, but instead the King expressed his thankfulness for his bishop's faithfulness.

When the time for the Bishop's sermon before the King had come, Hugh Latimer again spoke very plainly. This time, however, Henry was of no mind to accept his bishop's rebukes and he ordered the Godly old preacher to appear again before him on the following Sabbath and make amends for his utterances. When that day arrived, Latimer stood in his pulpit before the King and began by reminding himself that it was, indeed, the King that he appeared before who could banish him from his office, or the realm, or from this earth as he might see fit. "Hugh Latimer," he began his sermon, "dost thou know before whom thou art this day to speak? To the high and mighty monarch, the king's most excellent majesty, who can take away thy life if thou offendest; therefore take heed that thou speakest not a word that may displease! But then consider well, Hugh, dost thou not know from whence thou comest; upon whose message thou art sent? Even by the great and mighty God! Who is all present! And who beholdeth all thy ways! And who is able to cast thy soul into hell! Therefore, take care that thou deliverest thy message faithfully." He then proceeded with the same message that he had preached the previous Sabbath, but with more emphasis and with more energy.

Henry's reaction could well serve as a lesson to any who imagine that we should aim to please men: "Blessed be God," he said, "that I have so honest a servant."



Gleanings In the Psalms (Psalm 37)

The great riddle of the prosperity of the wicked and the affliction of the righteous which has perplexed so many, is here dealt with in the light of the future; and fretfulness and repining are most impressively forbidden.

C.H. Spurgeon

This Psalm may well be called the good man's cordial in bad times; or, a sovereign medicine for the plague of discontent; or, a choice antidote against the poison of impatience.

Nathaniel Hardy 1649

Verses 1 and 2. "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." He who allows himself time to consider how soon the fairest spring must give way to a burning summer, a blighting autumn, and a killing winter, will no longer envy, but pity, the fading verdure of the grass, and the still more transient glories of the flowers of the field.

B. P. Ffenne

Verse 6. "And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." If thou should be accused as a man of evil designs, let not that trouble thee neither: for though thy name may be obscured for a time by slanders and accusations – as the sun is by mists

and clouds – yet, as the light scatters them all at last so shall thine integrity appear, and shine as bright as the sun at noonday.

Symon Patrick

The Lord will clear the name of the slandered! If we look to His honour, He will see to ours. Even in the worst cases, where a good name is for a time darkened, Providence will send a clearing like the dawning light.

C. H. Spurgeon

This is full of encouragement to those whose names are clouded with unjust reproaches. Joseph was accused of incontinence, David of treason, Daniel of disobedience, Elijah of troubling Israel, Jeremiah of revolting, Amos of preaching against the king, the Apostles of sedition, rebellion, and altering laws; Christ Himself of gluttony, sorcery, blasphemy and sedition.

John Flavel

Verse 7. “Rest in the Lord ...” Or, as it may read, Hold thee still; and this is the hardest precept that is given to man.

Jerome

Verse 7. “Rest in the Lord ...” (1) Rest in the **Will of God**, for whatever He wills is for your greatest good. (2) Rest in the **Love of God**, and think much on those words of Jesus: “Thou hast loved them as thou has loved me.” (3) Rest in the **Mercy of God**. (4) Rest in the **Word of God**. (5) Rest in the **Relationship** that God has established between you and Himself, so that, you are His child and He thy father. “Rest,” I say, “In the Lord.”

Hints to the Village Preacher

Verse 11. “The meek shall inherit the earth ...” ... the meek, who are thrust up and down from corner to corner, and hardly suffered to remain anywhere in the earth; this earth, which they seem most deprived of, they only shall have and enjoy. Be sure, once the Lord hath made it worth the having, then none but they shall have it.

John Pennington

Verses 14 and 15. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. “Their sword shall enter into their won heart, and their bow shall be broken.” When the wicked are most near to do mischief to the Lord’s people, then is mischief most near to them.

David Dickson

Verse 16. “A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.” A little blessed is better than a great deal cursed. A pound blessed is better than a thousand cursed. A black crust blessed is better than a feast cursed. The gleanings blessed are better than the whole harvest cursed. A thin table with a blessing is better than a full table with a snare. A threadbare coat with a blessing is better than a purple robe with a curse. A hole, a cave, a den, a barn, a chimney-corner with a blessing is better than a stately palace with a curse.

Thomas Brooks

Verse 18. “The Lord knoweth the days of the upright ...” in verse 13 we are told that the Lord knows all about the “day” of the sinner: “The Lord shall laugh at him,” we are told, “for he seeth that his day is coming.” But, the believer may rejoice in the fact that God’s great foreknowledge extends to every moment of “the days of the upright.” As Spurgeon puts it: “No arrow can pierce us by accident, no dagger smite us by stealth; neither in time, nor in eternity can any unforeseen ill occur to us.”

(Psalm 37 will be concluded in the next edition)



Men of the Awakening

John Berridge

When George Whitefield and the Wesleys were thrust out of the pulpits of the Established Church of England and began preaching in the open air, they were fanning the first flickerings of a fire that was to burst into the great Evangelical Awakening of the 18th Century. Morally and religiously,

the whole of this island appeared to lie in the lap of the evil one. Organised religion had sold its self to the gods of the hour, and if we today may grasp at any glimmer of hope for our own spiritual condition, then, perhaps, we might find it in recalling that it was in the midst of such awful blackness before that the Lord sent forth His light and revived his praise once again.

The names of Whitefield and the Wesleys are, of course, the names that are most readily associated with that great time of glorious light. But when God revealed His mighty arm at that time, He revealed it, not only in these worthy brethren, but in a band of powerful preaching evangelists, as well, who traversed the countryside on the backs of their horses proclaiming the gospel of God's free unmerited grace to sinners.

Over the next few editions, I want us to think of some of these Men of the Awakening, and pray that the Lord might again be pleased to rustle the branches with the winds of reviving grace and raise us up to be generation of evangelists such as they were. For, wherever the opportunity presented itself, they preached. And this is what marked them out; they preached! "On horse-blocks, market crosses, churchyard walls, tombstones, doorsteps, or window-sills," we are told, "anything that occasion or ingenuity could provide." These were their pulpits, and from those they preached! Men like John Berridge, Howell Harris, Rowland Hill, William Grimshaw, William Romaine, Daniel Rowlands, Henry Venn. These were but some of the men of that awakening time. And when we consider that the first of our brief sketches involves a man – John Berridge – who was the means of awakening almost 4000 souls in one particular year, then we may be well-persuaded that these men deserve a place in our thoughts as well as those of greater fame and more notable exploits.

John Berridge was born in the year 1716, and although he appears to have had some early "religious impressions," there were soon lost when he went up to Cambridge to begin his ministerial studies. Neither he, nor any of his fellow-divines, nor, indeed, their tutors appear to have had any knowledge of evangelical saving faith and, like many in our own day, John Berridge entered, passed through and out of his theological training and into the pastoral oversight of a church without either knowing or embracing the gospel of justification through faith alone. It was in the year 1755 that he moved to Bedfordshire and to what was then the little

village of Everton. Here he was to remain until his death in 1793, but the thing that links his name immortally to that place as far as the church of Christ is concerned is what took place there two years after his arrival. As the pastor of Everton John Berridge was a diligent man, even though it was a zeal that was not according to knowledge. However, in the year 1757 the Lord in His grace laid claim to that zeal and directed it to His own praise and glory. “Cease from thine own works,” came the voice of God to the Everton minister’s soul, “only believe.” And with that belief there came a life of service devoted to Christ and to His gospel. “I fear my weekly circuits would not suit a London or a Bath divine,” he once wrote to a friend, “Long rides and miry roads in sharp weather. Cold houses to sit in, with very moderate fuel, and three or four children roaring or rocking you about. Lumpy beds to lie on, and stiff blankets like boards for a covering. Rise at five in the morning to preach; at seven breakfast on tea that smells very sickly; at eight mount a horse with boots never cleaned, and then ride home, praising God for all His mercies.”

Such was the life of a man of those times, for his life was preaching. On one occasion, our old friend was called before the Bishop and was accused of preaching in other men’s “parishes” and preaching at all times of the day and night. “My lord,” he said modestly, “I preach at only two seasons.” “Which are these, Mr. Berridge?” “In season and out of season, my Lord.” So it was! He travelled wherever he was asked to preach and could find ready ears, but it was especially around his own shires that he loved to labour most for his Lord. Here he preached the word, established farm meetings, and provided out of his own pocket for the upkeep of some young evangelist who would care for the souls that had come to new-found faith under his sermons. In this respect he was “the cheerful giver.” At a time when it was more the custom for the clergy to “devour widows’ houses” old John Berridge left himself penniless for the work of the Saviour. To support his young evangelists he sold the silver plate from his home, and where a cottage had been used for the preaching of the Word it was his custom, instead of looking for a “preaching fee”, to slip the poor woman of the house a half-crown to defray the cost of heating the humble abode.

Great in heart, and great in mind, too, was John Berridge, possessing one of the mightiest intellects of his time at Cambridge where he became a Fellow at Clare College. And yet, like his Master before him, when he

spoke “the poor people heard him gladly.” In fact, it is for his “quaintness” that many seem to remember him best and for which his enemies condemned him most. That this was part of his natural frame he readily admitted. “Odd things break from me as abruptly as croaking from a raven,” he said. But, how those odd things were owned and used of the Lord as hearers thronged to attend his meetings, occupying even the crossbeams of the churches, it is said, and hardly leaving enough space for him to turn round in the pulpit.

His style of preaching was “unique” it would be supposed, for the spoke of coming to preach with “a sack well filled with well-baked wheaten bread,” but, he went on, “the bottom came out of the sack, and I have nothing left for you but five barley loaves and a few small fishes. But you will have those loaves hot from the oven,” he went on, and, indeed, those loaves proved to be “food convenient” to many souls, for behind all the quaintness, so called, there lay a body of Divinity that was at the very heart and soul of the Evangelical awakening. Hear him as he speaks about that old illusion, the free will of man. “Nature,” he says, “lost her legs in Paradise, and has not found them since; nor has she any will to come to Jesus.” Listen to what he calls justification by faith alone; “The jewel of the gospel covenant, the groundwork of the Reformation, the glory of the British church.” Regarding pride, he says that he can love it and hate it; quarrel with it and embrace it; “It pleads a right through the fall,” he says, “to be a tenant for life, and has such a wonderful appetite, that it feeds kindly both on grace and garbage.”

No wonder, then he advises his fellow-preacher to begin their sermons by “laying open the innumerable corruptions of the hearts of your audience ...” and no wonder that he preached and laboured for thirty years under the title of “The old devil,” for while such preaching suits the needy sinner it also wakes the ire of the self-righteous. However we might say of him what he said of another, “He has lost his character right honestly by preaching the gospel without mincing it.”

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

You remember in the last edition we spoke of that brave missionary Mary Slessor and how, even before she went to Africa she bravely told the people in her home town of Jesus' love for sinners.

In this edition we find Mary in Africa, in a place called Duke Town. A messenger comes to her hut and calls out, "Run Ma, run." (Ma, is what the Africans called Mary.) Mary ran to a hut where twin babies had just been born. She took them in her arms and said to the woman, "What are you going to do?" "Break their backs and put them in that calabash," was the reply. For to have twin children was regarded as a curse, a bad omen.

Mary held the two little babies close to her and asked, "Why are you going to kill such tiny little babies?" "Because the father of one of them is an evil spirit, and one of the twins will grow into a cruel monster and destroy us. "Give us the twins and we will throw them into the jungle to be eaten by a lion."

Wasn't that terrible, boys and girls? But, you see, these poor people didn't know any better. They had no Bible and did not know about God and the Lord Jesus. They believed everything that the Witch Doctor told them and this was his doing. Mary knew this and bravely she carried the twins back to her hut. When the chief was told that she had allowed the twin children to enter her house and had put them in her own bed, he would no longer come near. Mary was deserted by everyone, but she knew she had done right, and that the Lord would give her strength to carry on her work in that place. And, sure enough, the people gradually came to accept what she had done.

One twin girl lived all her life with Mary like her own daughter, and Mary called her Janie, after her sister in Scotland. When she returned to Scotland, Janie, who had now become a true Christian like Mary herself, thrilled the boys and girls in Mary's old Sunday School by reading the Bible to them with her own African accent. How thankful Mary was that she had been able to save her life that day in Duke Town.

Love,

Mrs Seaton

Internet Edition 76 of The Wicket Gate Magazine - A Continuing Witness

Issued on the Internet January 2009

Web Address of the Magazine - www.wicketgate.co.uk

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