

NT

A pattern for life in God's House

Mediator of a better covenant
Praying for our children
Abortion

Upside down values: peacemakers

Issue 3 2012

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From the Editors' desk

According to your word



In the longest psalm in the Bible (119) – a series of 22 eight verse alphabetical acrostics memorised by Hebrew children – frequent reference is made to the Word of God. The first question, with its appropriate answer in verse 9 is as relevant in 2012, as when first penned by the writer 3000 years ago. *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it **according to your word**.* That Word, like God Himself, is eternal, unchanging, unerring and true.

As we look through the articles in this issue of NT magazine we need to remind ourselves of these facts, and contrast the changing thoughts and actions of humanity. The contrasts between God the Rock (of ages) and the shifting sands of men's changing thoughts, underline His words that *as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*¹

In the main series articles we are reminded that the upholder of all things does so **by His word**, and the mediator **by His blood**. What a glorious person the Son of God is, and we can rejoice in these aspects of His work! How much do we love Him and would be prepared to suffer for Him? The interview, 'Taking a Stand', tells of one man's response as a Conscientious Objector. He believes in peace and, in the Beatitudes series, we look at the peacemakers. Again, the supreme example in this is the Prince of Peace Himself, the One who spoke those blessings in His sermon on the mount.

Corinth had its problems in the first century, but the issues which Paul had to write about are not so different in our day. Moral issues and associated health problems have been written about in this magazine before. The answer is still the same: *keep yourself pure*.

The Lord Jesus prayed for His own, and what did He say? *You gave them to me and they have kept your word.*² Can He say that of me – do I live **according to [His] word?**

Robert



References: (1) Is. 55:9 (2) John 17:6 ESV

Twitching!

Gilbert Grierson, Knocknacloy, N.Ireland

My brother, a bird-watcher (or 'twitcher'), was excited. We had brought him out on a two-day trip to Donegal on the west coast of Ireland. Having found a hostel to stay in, we set off to explore the area with its wild rocky fells, high cliffs, deserted beaches and Atlantic breakers. With nothing between us and America except water, we set off to walk along the beach.

While his binoculars were trained on two large black birds feeding on the cliff-side grass which he identified as being a rare species and which caused him great excitement (he was twitching all over!), my attention was drawn to a flock of sheep which were also grazing on the grassy slopes that tumbled down to the beach. They were on the move. I spotted the shepherd before I saw his dogs. There were two of them, black and white collies, working hard, perfectly coordinated, running this way, pausing, lying down, running back the other way, skilfully coercing the sheep in the required direction and collecting up any strays. The shepherd's shouts and whistles gave the dogs their orders, and these, obviously well-trained, responded to their master's voice. This was a beauty to behold in their perfect obedience.

Their master's voice! There was a time when THE Master's voice was heard in this world, sometimes loud and authoritative, saying, "*Peace, be still!*"¹ quietening the raging sea; sometimes gently and lovingly saying, "*Come to Me*".² What a privilege to listen to Jesus' voice and converse with Him face to face! The incarnate Word was revealing the heart and mind of the invisible God. There were times for questions – there's nothing wrong with questions as they can reveal a healthy, inquisitive mind. But there were other times when, the Bible says, *from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.*³ Yes, there is

A time to keep silence,

*And a time to speak.*⁴

Healthy asking must turn to quietly trusting. There are some things that our Master speaks to us about that we will never understand fully down here – things which we

One day the Master's voice will be heard again on earth and at His name every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ... Now that really is something to start 'twitching' about!

*see in a mirror, dimly.*⁵ Then it is a time for resting on faith. After all, we don't see the whole picture down here and some knowledge is too deep for us; such as how and where the Good Shepherd is leading His sheep, going on ahead, calling, not driving with dogs. At times all we hear Him say is, "*Follow Me.*"⁶ He will not take us where He will not go Himself. "*I am with you always.*"⁷ So we ...

'Trust and obey, for there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.'⁸

I felt led that day on the beach in Donegal to bend down and write something in the sand with a stick before we left the sea-shore and climbed the 167 steps to the cliff top and went on our way. What did I write? **JESUS IS LORD.** And He is. Lord of the sand, sea, cliffs, rare birds, sheep, men and women, boys and girls; Lord of all. The Atlantic breakers came in later that day and washed away that truth written in the sand, but one day the Master's voice will be heard again on earth and at His name every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁹ That truth will never be erased for the whole of eternity.

Now that really is something to start 'twitching' about!

References: (1) Mark 4:39 (2) Mat. 11:28 (3) Mat. 22:46 NIV (4) Eccles. 3:7 (5) 1 Cor. 13:12 (6) e.g. Mat. 4:19 (7) Mat. 28:20 (8) John H.Sammis (9) Phil. 2:10-11

Bible quotations from NKJV unless otherwise stated



The superiority of the New Covenant

David Viles, Hayes, England

“Could do better ...”

Perhaps this phrase evokes uncomfortable memories from our school days, recalling room for improvement in matters sporting or academic. In the matter of divine covenants, however – the arrangements established by God to regulate His relationship with the human race – there could never be any need for improvement: *his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.*¹ Nevertheless, we are assured more than once in the letter to the Hebrews that God – who Himself established the ‘old’ Covenant mediated by Moses with Israel – came to judge the law of that covenant to be very less than perfect, in fact weak and unprofitable.²

The problem was not with God, whose foreknowledge envisioned the defects of the Old Covenant and provided for their rectification, but with the people of Israel and their failure to live up to their side of the arrangement, despite their initial enthusiasm – “*All that the LORD has said we will do.*”³ God could, and would, do better – through the New Covenant.

The context

The question must therefore be asked, why did God take such infinite pains to uphold His Old Covenant with such a *rebellious and stiff-necked* people⁴? While we cannot presume to question the dictates of God’s sovereign will, we are told that the Old Covenant was a temporary arrangement with a national focus. Its implications brought both glory and ultimate disaster (through disobedience) to the Israelite nation, but in God’s ongoing purpose it was merely a stage – a *tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*⁵ In God’s eternal plan, this narrow national focus was to be replaced with New Covenant blessings lavishly bestowed on all those (Jew and Gentile) so justified, under a covenant mediated by none other than Christ Himself.

Such an extension of God’s purposes was challenging for Christians of Jewish descent, steeped in the nationalistic context of a glorious covenant which God declared nevertheless to be obsolete and ageing.⁶ The temptation, particularly under the prevailing persecution,⁷ to reintroduce a ‘Jewish’ gloss to their new lives in Christ, or even to revert to the security of Old Covenant practices, was strong and pervasive. It earned consistent opposition and a stinging rebuke from the Apostle Paul who had himself made the same spiritual journey to Christ – *how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles ... to be enslaved by them all over again?*⁸



By divine inspiration, the writer of the Hebrews epistle takes a less confrontational approach. We are privileged to be led by him into a presentation, in exalted and explicit detail, of the flawless facets of the New Covenant;⁹ like a precious jewel, he scrutinises it closely in comparison and contrast with the limitations of the Old. Glorious and exalted the Old Covenant undoubtedly was both in its inception and application, but, as Paul insisted, its glory is far eclipsed by that of the New Covenant because through it God did *better* – the characteristic word of the Hebrews letter.

Better ... best

In fact, we are confronted, not just with the comparative, but with the superlative. It is not only that the New Covenant is ‘better’ than the Old – it is ‘perfect’ (fulfilled, complete) because it is focused on a perfect High Priest, the Son of God.¹⁰ As he makes clear at the beginning of his argument, the writer has much to say about the priesthood of Christ.¹¹ In a passage which must have left its original Jewish readers stunned by its Spirit-driven audacity, the writer emphasises that the claims of the Lord Jesus to high priestly status, so specially identified with, and reserved to, the descendants of Aaron in the Jewish mind, predated and surpassed the appointment even of Aaron himself.¹²

A companion article in the previous issue of NT examined the superiority of the high priesthood of Christ in the royal order of Melchizedek. Suffice it to note here

that Hebrews lays particular stress on the centrality of the divinely ordained priesthood to the nature of the covenant – *when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law*;¹³ the imperative is clear – a new priesthood means a new covenant. Centuries before, Korah and others had dared to aspire to the priesthood, rebelling against the authority of Moses and Aaron. Their punishment from God was as sudden as it was exemplary and it entered into the annals of Israel – *that no outsider, who is not a descendent of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the Lord*.¹⁴ So there was neither a change in the priesthood nor (therefore) a change in the covenant at that time. The Hebrews epistle confirms that it is for no-one (not even the Son of God) to assume the position of priest for himself. God alone must ordain who is to be accorded this signal honour as He had done with Aaron and his sons,¹⁵ and God chose His Son to fulfil this New Covenant role – as a priest in the ancient Melchizedek order, not descended from mortal Aaron, but possessing indissoluble life.¹⁶

Emphasising the importance of this change of priesthood and differentiating it sharply from what went before at Sinai, our writer is inspired to refer to two verses from the Psalms – short, but full of significance for the authority of our great High Priest. The first emphasises the Lord Jesus’ fitness for this exalted office, as the eternally begotten Son of the Father.¹⁷ The second, repeated later in the epistle, stresses that His appointment was made on the basis of an irrevocable oath spoken by God Himself.¹⁸ It is most unusual for Scripture to refer to God in a way which links the finality and permanence attached (humanly speaking) to an oath¹⁹ with the awesome nature of a divinely sworn statement, but such is the import of these verses. We are solemnised by what is being stated – God is binding Himself finally and permanently to the appointment of His Son as High Priest and, therefore, to the terms of the New Covenant of which He is the focus. As a result of this oath, His High Priest offers us ‘gilt-edged collateral’ – a full guarantee (surety) of the benefits of the New Covenant, because Christ is Himself that surety.²⁰

The privileges of the New Covenant

With such a High Priest, such a Mediator, such a Surety, how can the New Covenant fail to be far ‘better’ for its beneficiaries than what went before? Human failure undermined the benefits of the Old, but the Lord Himself assures us that the New Covenant is founded upon His blood *shed for many for the remission of sins*.²¹ Nothing, not even human failure, can detract from the merits of that blood – it

‘speaks for us before [God’s] throne,
proclaims redemption’s work is done.’²²

*For this reason*²³ – the authority of His own shed blood – Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant.

This better sacrifice engenders ‘better promises’ for the believer than were available under the Old Covenant. Hebrews redefines a striking prophecy of Jeremiah’s –

which will be applicable also to redeemed Israel in a future day – applying it to the foundational promises of the New Covenant: God’s will inculcated in human hearts by the indwelling Spirit rather than imposed by external commandment, with the crowning assurance of God not only forgiving but forgetting our sins²⁴ and the guarantee (from the Mediator of the covenant Himself) of *the promised eternal inheritance*.²⁵

The intimacy with God implied by these better promises anticipates the most precious of the ‘better things’ identified in the epistle – *a better hope, through which we draw near to God*.²⁶ Under the Old Covenant, that high privilege of access into God’s most holy presence was available only once a year and only then through the representative high priest. In contrast, our hearts thrill to the divine invitation to draw near, with confidence, in worship – *in full assurance of faith* through the merits of that shed blood.²⁷ Do we value this enormous opportunity as we should? To be welcomed into God’s own sanctuary – a place of joy where we meet God and the Mediator Himself; the writer can only use terms which were precious to his hearers – Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem²⁸ – to attempt to describe this place, the glory of which transcends our understanding. In telling contrast is the fearful and terrible meeting place of Sinai, where a holy God initiated the Old Covenant relationship, glorious as it was!²⁹ Through the Mediator of the New Covenant, our access is very far *better* – in fact, *perfect*.

References: (1) Deut. 32:4 NIV (2) Heb. 7:18 (3) Ex. 24:7 (4) Deut. 31:27 NIV (5) Gal. 3:24 (6) Heb. 8:13 (7) Heb. 12:3-7 (8) Gal. 4:9 NIV (9) 2 Cor. 3:7-11 (10) Heb. 7:11 (11) Heb. 5:11 (12) Heb. 7:1-16 (13) Heb. 7:12 NIV (14) Num. 16:40 (15) Ex. 28:1; Heb. 5:4-5 (16) Heb. 7:16 (17) Ps. 2:7; Heb. 5:5 (18) Ps. 110:4; Heb. 5:6; 7:20-21,28 (19) Cf. Heb. 6:16-17 (20) Heb. 7:22 (21) Mat. 26:28 (22) J.B. Belton – O Lord Thy courts we humbly tread, PHSS 99 (23) Heb. 9:15 (24) Heb. 8:8-12 (25) Heb. 9:15 NIV (26) Heb. 7:19 (27) Heb. 10:19-23 (28) Heb. 12:22-24 (29) Heb. 12:18-21

All Bible references from NKJV unless stated otherwise

With such a High Priest, such a Mediator, such a Surety, how can the New Covenant fail to be far ‘better’ for its beneficiaries than what went before?

Christ

The upholder of all things

Stephen Hickling, Birmingham, England

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God ...¹

This takes us right back to the beginning, to Genesis 1. It was by the mouth of God that the universe was created and we know that the creation was effected through the Son.

Whilst Hebrews 11:3 has the command of God in **creative** power in view, however, Hebrews 1:3 focuses on the Son's word of **sustaining** power:

The Son ... sustaining all things by his powerful word.²

'Sustaining' conveys the dual thought of support and movement. By His every word, God the Son not only upholds the universe, but regulates it and carries it forward. His powerful imperative is the reason the universe both exists as it does and continues to exist.

For by [or in] Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.³

In Colossians 1, the Lord's priority and authority, vis-à-vis His creation, are clear: all things were created by Him and for Him. More than that, though, all things were created **in** Him. That seems to express something of the dependence which the creation has on the Lord. It is solely on account of all things being the result of His creative design, will and continued supply of energy that our universe hangs together as it does. Don't the laws of nature bear out so clearly the harmony and solidarity of the Godhead and testify also to the Son's tireless work of upholding?

And yet, what a marked contrast we see in the 'upholder of all things', as He was led away to be crucified. We read of Him:

Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.⁴

The same word, which is used of His upholding power in Hebrews 1:3, is here used of the men who 'brought' Him to Golgotha. Of course, they had no knowledge of the sustaining power of the One they bore. They saw a man exhausted from trial and false testimony, battered by the scourging of Roman soldiers, and agonising at what He alone knew lay before Him; and so they carried Him to the Place of the Skull. We rejoice at the grace of God in allowing the 'upholder of all things' to be brought by sinful men to Calvary!



Yet, physically weakened though the Saviour was (struggling even to 'uphold' His own cross – see Luke 23:26), how thankful we are that *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.⁵* He carried a weight far greater at Calvary than the cross of wood he carried to Calvary. In God's mercy, we will never know how heavy that cup of God's wrath against sin was; He bore it on the cross, where He drained it completely, even to the very dregs.

By His powerful word

The Lord Jesus is the Word (Gk. 'logos') that was with God, that was God and that became flesh.⁶ 'Logos' means the expression of thought and, as the Word, Christ is the full expression of the heart and mind of God. In His person, character and actions, He fully communicates to us all that we are able to comprehend about God.

In Hebrews 1:3, though, the focus is on the detail of His every utterance (Gk. 'Rhema'). The words He speaks are full of power to sustain; they uphold the universe!

The power of divine utterance was evident in creation. God spoke and it was so and He saw that it was good. Just so, the words of the Lord Jesus carry dynamic force. After all, He told His disciples that He did not speak on

His own, but spoke only what He was commanded to speak by His Father. Even the words He used were the ones His Father gave Him to speak and time after time in the gospel narratives we see their wonderful power.

The Jews often expressed the power of God in their writings by phrases such as 'He carries all His creatures' or 'He bears His world'. The writer to the Hebrews was giving clear testimony to the deity of the Lord Jesus, then, in stating that by His powerful words, the Lord sustains all things. What a striking contrast there is between the power of man and the power of God: man demonstrates his power by acts of great exertion, by force and by violence; yet it is characteristic of God alone that He need only speak to work wonders.

*For nothing will be impossible with God.*⁷

Literally, this verse tells us that no word (Gk. *rhema*) of God shall be without power. The Lord never wastes a word. Everything He says is vitally important and never fails to accomplish the purposes for which it is spoken. As disciples of the Lord Jesus, we would do well to hang on His every word, for not one of them will return to Him void.

Of course, the whole Bible is the inspired Word of God, but many of us will have Bibles which emphasise the spoken words of the Lord Jesus in some way (perhaps highlighting them with the use of red text). Time spent in the gospels, studying the records of the Lord Jesus' sayings will be time well-spent.

Ephesians 6 contains the passage of Scripture which talks about the Christian's armour: those things with which we should clothe ourselves daily if we are to withstand the attacks of the evil one.

*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*⁸

The Son ... sustaining all things by his powerful word. Hebrews 1:3

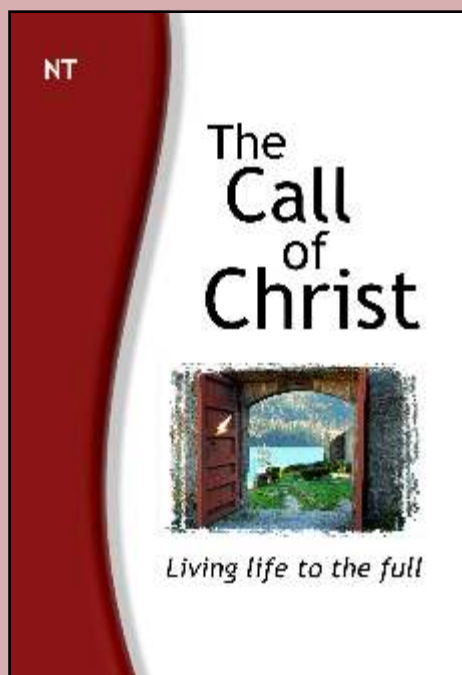
'Word' here is '*rhema*' – we need a firm grip on the individual words or sayings of God if we're to succeed in our spiritual warfare.

For those of us in the west, the Word of God is freely available. Many of us will carry the whole Bible in our pockets on our PDAs and smartphones; the words of the Lord are at our fingertips. There is, however, still great benefit to be had in memorising these words. How much better-equipped for battle will we be with small phrases and verses committed to memory! We need only recall the Lord's temptation in the wilderness to answer that question. God desires that we learn His words and He will enable us, by His Spirit, to do so if we patiently dedicate time to this exercise.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the sustainer of all things: all things live, breathe and have their being in Him. How much more inclined is He to bear up those He calls His own! Shouldn't the security of the everlasting arms evoke a desire in us to pay close attention to His words? His are the words of abundant life; if they abide in us, those words will empower us to live in the freedom for which we were saved, rather than as slaves again to things from which He died to set us free.

References: (1) Heb. 11:3 (2) Heb. 1:3 NIV (3) Col. 1:16-17 (4) Mark 15:22 (5) 1 Pet. 2:24 NIV (6) John 1:1,14 (7) Luke 1:37 (8) Eph. 6:17

Bible quotations from NASU unless otherwise stated



This full-colour book is an attractive compilation of contributions by Karl Smith, Greg Neely, Dave Webster, David Viles, Brian Johnston, Geoff Hydon, David Woods, Ed Neely, Craig Jones, James Needham, Leonard Ross and Keith Dorricott.

Originally published in NT throughout 2009, these articles together show how the call of Christ touches every aspect of our life and service for God. The illustrations and challenges complement the Biblical exposition to present a very readable and appealing book. Additional study questions at the end of each chapter give the reader opportunity to explore the topics further. This can also be used as a basis for individual or group study times.

As well as giving us all a great deal of food for thought, this book is an ideal primer for sharing with friends, who are already believers on the Lord Jesus, a balanced introduction to collective aspects of discipleship.

Available from Hayes Press, or a Kindle version can be downloaded from Amazon.

Is it marriage or not?

Peter Hickling, Cromer, England

How do you find out what a word means? Look in a dictionary, of course! But the trouble with this is that a dictionary will say what a word means to most people now, not what it has meant, or what its derivation implies. For example, take the word 'gay'; the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary of 1964 gives its primary meaning as 'Full of or disposed to joy or mirth; light-hearted...', a meaning current since the 14th century. Yet the current O.E.D. on iPod gives the primary meaning as '(of a person, especially a man) homosexual', and describes the long-standing meaning as 'dated'. The word has been hijacked and given a substituted meaning such that it is not now possible to use it in its traditional sense without provoking sniggers.

The meaning of the word 'marriage' is now under threat, when some want to redefine it to accommodate their ideas about acceptable behaviour. The iPod O.E.D. does give the accepted understanding of this: 'The formal union of a man and woman, typically as recognised by law, in which they become husband and wife'. This, too, has been the normal usage of the last 800 years. Now some would like to apply the term 'marriage' to arrangements between people of the same sex. The simplest objection to this is that it is not what the word means. For example, you may have a red car, and you know what this means; someone else can't come up with a blue car and say 'Mine is red too, because I say so'.

It is legal in some jurisdictions for people of the same sex to register civil partnerships, which give them the same fiscal and legal status as married people, but they cannot truly be called married, because that is not what the word means. Why should we bother about this? Because it is another attempt to take a generally understood word, and wrest it from its normal meaning. The homosexual lobby keeps trying to do this, hoping that deviant behaviour will come to be seen as simply a lifestyle choice, which can be

described using the same terms that we have always used for normal behaviour. This is not true; a man and woman together can naturally procreate children, which a homosexual pair cannot.

But this is a Christian magazine, and there are far more important reasons for the endorsement of marriage than traditional or practical ones. We stand by the Biblical teaching about marriage, expressed right through the Old and New Testaments. At the very beginning God said, *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*¹, and the Lord Jesus Himself quoted this. It is true that some of the patriarchs and Israelites had multiple wives. This was permitted, although not encouraged. New Testament times show a return to the divine ideal. Jesus attended and made wine for the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee², and everywhere the New Testament assumes the one-man-one-woman relationship as the norm. Scripture goes further, and parallels the relationship between husband and wife with that between Christ and the Church³.

Someone may say, 'Yes, that's all right for you. You are a Christian, and accept the Bible's rules; but I am not. You go your way, and I'll go mine'. We say 'Do what you will, though we don't think you should, but whatever arrangement you make, you can't call it marriage, because that isn't what the word means.' Whether secular opponents like it or not the English language has been built up on the foundation of Christian beliefs, and if people want to adopt different practices they must find different words for them. We are thinking of an English word, of course, but the same would apply to the corresponding word in other languages. What we are really standing up for is the recognition of marriage as an institution, in its customary and biblical sense.

References: (1) Gen. 2:24 ESV (2) John 2:1-11 (3) Eph. 5:22-33



Upside down values

The peacemakers

Andy Seddon, Swindon, England

Is it true that much TV entertainment takes advantage of people not getting on with each other? It could be a reality show or a talent contest. Some of it might be healthy competition, but often it is the arguments and fights which have the public talking afterwards. I suppose these shows would be a little boring if all the characters got on well and were nice to each other!

In total contrast to this, Jesus declares: *“Blessed are the peacemakers”*.¹ These are people who actively promote harmony and reconciliation. The New Testament word, ‘reconciliation’ simply means ‘to change’. This would be evident, for example, when enemies change into friends or when anger changes into forgiveness.

Jesus goes on to say that peacemakers shall be called *“sons of God.”* Why? It is because children take after their parents, and our heavenly Father is the ultimate peacemaker. There are three things that the Bible shows us to be true about God the peacemaker, and therefore should be true also of those claiming to be His children:

God loves reconciliation

Making peace with sinful, rebellious human beings has been at the centre of God’s plan ever since Adam and Eve first became His enemies. A wise woman once said to King David: *“God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.”*² Reconciliation and restoration are themes at the centre of God’s heart.

If we have personal faith in Jesus Christ, then we have already experienced for ourselves the peace that God brings. In the words of Paul: *you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*³

If we enjoy this divine peace, then we too should be active in promoting peace with others, especially with our spiritual family who share our salvation. To tolerate bickering and conflict without taking action is not an option. We are to *seek peace and pursue it.*⁴ We are to be *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit.*⁵ We are to *strive for peace with everyone.*⁶ These words imply earnest, positive action: ‘seek’, ‘pursue’, ‘maintain’, ‘strive’.

God acted first

Reconciliation was God’s plan, not ours. This is amazing when we remember that God was the innocent and injured party! The Bible states: *all this is from God.*⁷ It was *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*⁸

If you are like me, then you may be prone to stubbornness! If, in the middle of a conflict with somebody, I think – and I stress the word ‘think!’ – I’m in the right, then I am less likely to take peace-making steps,



because this would inflict a painful blow to my pride! After all, why can’t the other person come to me? Well, if I am a true child of God, would I not take the initiative, just as God took the initiative for me?

Disunity harms our spiritual service for God. Jesus commands: *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you ... First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”*.⁹ Notice here how I must take the step when I am aware my brother has a problem with me!

God made a phenomenal sacrifice

When we’ve been hurt, taking steps to be reconciled might feel costly. It may cost time or energy, it may require a change in our attitude and behaviour, and it may even feel humiliating! Consider carefully however the price that God has paid: *while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.*¹⁰

God’s love knows no limits. He gave what was most precious to Him so that we could know divine peace. As we think about this, let us pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to bear *with one another ... forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you ...*¹¹

Only when we practise these ‘upside down’ teachings of the Lord will we know the happiness of being free children of God.

Bible quotations from ESV

References: (1) Mat. 5:9 (2) 2 Sam. 14:14 (3) Eph. 2:13 (4) 1 Pet. 3:11 (5) Eph. 4:3 (6) Heb. 12:14 (7) 2 Cor. 5:18 (8) Rom. 5:8 (9) Mat. 5:23-24 (10) Rom. 5:10 (11) Col. 3:13

*“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called
sons of God.”* Mat. 5:9

Ethical dilemmas

Abortion

Trevor Shaw, Brantford, Canada

A short time ago, I planted a seed. Eventually a green shoot appeared, which grew daily with buds forming along the way, followed by leaves and petals until eventually the flower was in full bloom. When did the life of that flower begin? Only at full bloom; when the buds became apparent; as the shoot emerged or when the first roots emerged from the seed?

Emotions run high on both sides of the abortion debate and many passionately defend their perspectives. What does the Bible say about the issue of abortion (the deliberate artificial termination of an embryonic human or human foetus as it develops from conception to birth)? If we are looking for specific direction in the Bible that says whether or not it is right to have an abortion then we won't find it. However, there are some guiding scriptural principles that can be applied as we explore this subject.

*"You shall not murder."*¹ Many would assert that to perform an abortion is to take a human life,² so the question of when the Bible indicates human life begins is a key component of understanding whether or not abortion is an option for the Christian.

Some reason that life as a human being begins when a newborn baby takes its first breath. They refer to God breathing *the breath of life* into Adam³ to support their perspective, reasoning human life begins outside the womb and therefore conclude abortion is not the same as killing a human being. One problem with this line of reasoning though is Adam was not 'born'. He never grew in a mother's womb and there was no human life before God placed him on the earth as a fully developed human being, so God did something unique to give life to Adam.

Most Christians point to scriptures like Psalm 139:13-16, which describes the intricate development of a baby in the womb, to reason that a life begins before a newborn baby takes a first breath. Technology shows the detailed typical week-by-week development of an unborn child: when the brain starts to form; the heart beats; when arms, legs, fingers and toes form; when the baby recognizes sounds and starts to practise breathing. Most mothers sense this growth, especially as an arm or leg stretches or the baby moves position or even hiccups within its mother's womb and many mothers know their baby's personality even before birth! John the Baptist leapt upon hearing the voice of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus;⁴ Jacob and Esau fought within Rebekah's womb.⁵ In these specific instances both actions indicated the personalities and adult lives those in the wombs would lead. It is also interesting to note the unborn John the Baptist that leapt inside Elisabeth's womb was referred to as a babe ('brephos' in Greek); the born Lord Jesus in the manger in Bethlehem was also referred to as a babe (*brephos*)⁶ as



were the young children who were brought to the Lord to bless.⁷ Luke describes unborn, newly born and child using the same word, without clarifying whether he is referring to just their physical stage of development or other aspects too. Can we conclude therefore that since all three stages use a consistent word, they are in fact all living people? For many Christians the answer is yes, and based on all these facts they find it impossible to come to any other conclusion than life begins at conception and that to abort a pregnancy is in fact to kill a life.

Perhaps two reasons for the strong opinions on both sides of the debate are the sheer magnitude of the issue and the reasons for abortion. Statistics indicate in the UK and North America, over 20% of all pregnancies are aborted.⁸ With availability of technology where the foetus gender can be established, even having an abortion because the unborn child is the 'wrong' gender is becoming more common. However not every abortion performed is the result of self-centred circumstances. Facts suggest 7% of abortions are undertaken on medical recommendation due to extreme pregnancy health complications in either baby or mother or because the pregnancy was the result of a rape.⁹ All these cases must involve extreme anguish for those involved – anguish few of us can ever enter into or understand. As such, and in the absence of explicit scriptural direction, these decisions must be brought before the Lord in all prayerful sincerity, seeking His will and then acting upon it according to one's conscience.

References: (1) Ex. 20:13 (2) Ex. 21:23 where 'life for life' applies to miscarried foetus (3) Gen. 2:7 (4) Luke 1:41 (5) Gen. 25:22-23 (6) Luke 2:12 (7) Luke 18:15-16 (8) www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/index.html#CA (9) www.abortionno.org/Resources/fastfacts.html (cited for statistical reference only, opinions expressed on this website are not necessarily shared by NT)

Conflict at Corinth

Moral issues

Geoff Hydon, Mount Forest, Canada

Growing up in the Midlands of the UK (in the 1950s) it was not uncommon to hear from one's parents: "They may do that there anywhere else, but you'll not do that there here!" What was reportedly permitted in a friend's house did not make the same behaviour acceptable at home. You can almost hear this sentiment from Paul's lips as he guided the young church of God in Corinth. What might be accepted in their culture was nevertheless very inappropriate for them now as God's church.

As a major port, the population of Corinth would include many immigrants, business people and travellers, away from home and family influence. It had previously in its history become a place notorious for its lax morals, and 'corinthianize' had become a term referring to sexual impurity. To see how challenging the cultural setting was in Corinth, first read Paul's letter to the Romans.

Remember, he wrote it from Corinth.¹ Surely things that were so upsetting to Paul in the Roman colony of Corinth would underlie some of his comments to saints in Rome itself. So read Romans again (especially the first few chapters), remember how history repeats itself, reflect on Paul's surroundings in Corinth. Then think of your own cities and towns today.

Today, the culture around us may reflect popular assumptions that: marriage should *follow* sexual experimentation;² monogamy is unnecessary;³ divorce is inevitable;⁴ same-sex unions are acceptable choices;⁵ drinking for fun (or use of hallucinogenic drugs in minor amounts) is normal;⁶ abortion and euthanasia are just personal choices;⁷ in the 'me' generation self-interest trumps altruism;⁸ petty theft is inconsequential;⁹ cheating on taxes or other similar lies is OK;¹⁰ gambling is a positive contributor to society.¹¹ To the sanctified mind most of these fall under Paul's statement, that such things should *not even be named among you*.¹² But you and I are pressured every day by a surrounding culture like Corinth's that argues such things are really acceptable,

and even wise. Check the footnotes to find the Spirit's counter instruction through Paul.

A convenient medium to express the local culture in Corinth was what we might term graffiti. Slogans of competing philosophers were written boldly in public places for all to see. They were like the 'tweets' used today to spread personal views. Similarly we can see the use of popular philosophy in the slogans the Corinthians used: 'Everything is permissible';¹³ 'Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods',¹⁴ which in their cultural setting were sayings employed to justify satisfying their sexual and physical appetites. Such things typified the feasts arranged by Roman citizens, and it seems some thought this 'freedom' extended to excusing misbehaviour in the church.¹⁵ Similar warped logic led some to focus on a so-called 'spirituality' that allowed them to ignore sinful use of their bodies, thinking their souls would be unaffected!¹⁶ Paul evidently had an uphill battle to correct errors spawned by the encroaching culture. Does it sound familiar?

Paul's Spirit-led instruction to Corinthian saints was to show them a much higher and contrasting standard.¹⁷ He used popular quotes himself to reinforce practical warnings.¹⁸ He refuted earthly wisdom expressed by philosophers and contrasted it with the wisdom of God.¹⁹ God's wisdom is expressed in sacrificial and selfless giving. Therefore, any thought that all things were permissible must be strongly qualified.²⁰ Actions must be God-glorifying,²¹ and focused on what is helpful to others not just gratifying to oneself, even if that requires strict self-control.²² The ultimate response to their self-serving arguments was to consider the reality of bodily resurrection, and the far-reaching consequences of that unavoidable fact for all people.²³ Is it therefore surprising that in today's debates about Christianity and its true values, it is the essential belief in the resurrection that drives hearers to draw definite conclusions, just as it did for Greeks centuries ago in Corinth, and Athens too?²⁴

References: (1) Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 1:14. The following references are likewise all to 1 Cor. unless otherwise stated. (2) 6:13-20; 10:8 (3) 7:2 (4) 7:10 (5) 6:9 (6) 5:11; 2 Cor. 7:1 and see 1 Thes. 5:8 (7) 6:19 and see Ps. 139:13-16 regarding the sanctity of the human body (8) 10:24,33 & 8:13 (9) 6:10 (10) 5:8; 13:6 and see 2 Tim. 3:13 (11) 5:11; 6:10 gambling often reflects covetousness (12) Eph. 5:3 (13) 6:12; 10:23 Gk: πάντα ἔξεστιν 'All things are lawful' (NKJV) (14) 6:13 (15) 11:20-22; 2 Cor. 12:21 (16) 3:1; 6:13-15; 14:37 (17) 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 (18) 15:32,33 (19) 1:20-31 (20) 6:12 (21) 10:31 (22) 10:23-24 & 9:27 (23) 15:32-34; 50-58 (24) Acts 17:31-32



Taking a stand

An interview with Jack McIlvenna, Middlesbrough, England

Why did you take a stand as a Conscientious Objector?

Although the Second World War had ceased about seven years earlier, the U.K. still had conscription legislation in force. This meant that unless you were in employment that was considered to be of national importance, or still in full-time education, you were required to engage in military service. However, there was also in force legislation that permitted you to register as a Conscientious Objector. As a teenager I was well aware of the issues involved in this and was absolutely convinced that as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ it would be wrong for me to serve in a military capacity.

Which scriptures guided your thoughts?

The main scriptures I used during the proceedings were *pursue peace with all people*;¹ *be diligent to be found by Him in peace*;² and *love your enemies ... and pray for those who ... persecute you*.³

Were you apprehensive: did you doubt at any point that this was the right course of action?

Yes, I was apprehensive, but I believed strongly that I would be failing the Lord if I did anything other than take a stand on this matter. In this connection I was strongly influenced by the Lord's words, "*he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me*."⁴

What actually happened at the tribunal: what was the process?

In order for the process to begin you had to register at your local Employment Exchange as a conscientious objector. Two months after I registered I appeared before my first tribunal hearing in Glasgow. I think this consisted of a panel of five, one of whom chaired the proceedings. I was required to state

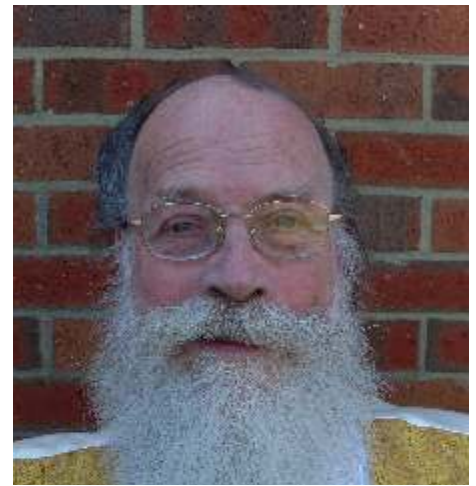
my reasons for requesting registration as a Conscientious Objector, following which a Christian brother witnessed to my beliefs. Then followed detailed questioning designed to examine my resolution and make me justify my reasons. The panel then conferred for a few minutes after which they stated that I would be required to engage in military service in a non-combatant capacity. I appealed against this decision and, six weeks later, I appeared before the Appeal Tribunal in Edinburgh. The same process was followed, but on this occasion the decision was that my name be removed from the Register of Conscientious Objectors resulting in me being required to undertake Military Service of a combatant nature.

What arguments and pressures were brought to bear during the proceedings?

The members of the tribunal argued that the Bible was a book full of war; Jesus Himself said, "*I did not come to bring peace but a sword*"⁵ and, "*he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one*"⁶; the Bible teaches that, *the authorities that exist are appointed by God*⁷ and *submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*.⁸ "Would you, a strong young man, stand and watch your mother being killed and do nothing about it?"

What was the procedure following this?

I was required to attend for a medical to assess my suitability for Military Service, the health questioner including a section in which I was required to enter the regiment I would like to join. I wrote, "As a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ I cannot take part in Military Service." This was strongly disputed by the Army Medical Officer who was responsible for coordinating the medical results, however I was adamant that I was not



prepared to change my statement. Following this I received my 'call-up' papers to report for Military Service. I then wrote to the Commanding Officer to inform him of my strongly held beliefs. He replied that it would be dealt with when I reported to the Army barracks.

How did others treat you?

There was a strong anti-war feeling amongst the general population at this time, so neighbours and colleagues had a grudging admiration for my 'stand'. However this was certainly not the case at the Army barracks, where shouting, threats and persuasion were used to try to force me to sign documents and to wear an army uniform. In an effort to discharge me without involving military discipline, I was hospitalised in the sick bay in order for me to be examined by a psychiatrist. A week later the psychiatric examination findings were that there was no reason for me being declared unfit for Military Service. Although I had argued strongly against being hospitalised, the Lord had a purpose in it, for I was granted permission with the complete agreement of the patients to preach at a Gospel service which all the soldiers attended.

What was the most difficult moment?

I was subsequently charged and placed under close arrest. This lasted for a week and was the worst part of the whole experience for I was kept in a small cell, deprived of all my mail and visited by an Army Chaplain every day. He spent hours with me trying to persuade me to become a

soldier and threatening me that otherwise I would remain in that cell indefinitely. By the end of the week I was in despair, but thankfully I had been permitted to keep my Bible, and as I read it the following words ‘jumped off the page’: *At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me ... But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me ... Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.*⁹ Despair became joy, as I fell on my knees before the Lord and thanked Him for speaking to me so clearly. The next day everything changed, I was placed under open arrest and, with certain restrictions, was allowed to engage in normal daily activities within the Army camp, to write and receive correspondence and to even have visitors.

How did you sense the Lord’s hand with you, helping you?

The Lord provided an Army captain who understood the reasons for my stand, so I requested that he become my Defending Officer. He ensured that I would be given a sentence of 96 days, as this was the legal requirement in order to be able to appeal to another tribunal. He also requested that I serve my sentence in the Detention Centre of the Army barracks to avoid having a criminal record.

He later agreed to attend the final tribunal in London to support my plea. The outcome of this tribunal was that they recommended to the War Office that I be discharged from the Army and serve 2 years and 3

months on ‘work of National importance’.

On my return home I obtained employment on a local estate as a forester, later leaving there to become a nursing assistant in a hospital for elderly people.

In the Bible that went with me throughout that year I underlined *rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*¹⁰ as I, too, felt that I had been privileged in that way.

References: (1) Heb. 12:14 (2) 2 Pet. 3:14 (3) Mat. 5:44 (4) Mat. 10:38 (5) Mat. 10:34 (6) Luke 22:36 (7) Rom. 13:1 (8) 1 Pet. 2:13 (9) 2 Tim. 4:16-17 (10) Acts 5:41

Bible quotations from NKJV

Light in the darkness

Geralde Mag-usara, Davao, Philippines

In a recent mission trip, about eight hundred people in total heard the gospel and God’s plan for our discipleship (in the 7 steps of Acts 2:41,42) throughout six barangays (villages): Pantukan, Kaligutan, Sonlon, Liguyon, Nabunturan and Salvador. Local brothers in each place have committed to following them up.

Due to stormy weather, we were detained for two days preaching from house to house and conducting Bible studies where we were. In this, God overruled because a 25 year-old, five months pregnant, was suddenly gripped by the truth of God’s Word. She texted her boyfriend and declared they must cease living together for Christ’s sake (Luke 9:23). It will be far from easy, but we pray that she may overcome her difficult situation with God’s help. “I would like to be in God’s house,” she said.

Fifteen persons recently observed the breaking of the bread – may the Lord add them to God’s house! They came from the area surrounding our hall in Davao, some walking for almost an hour to observe how to remember the Lord in the biblical Breaking of the Bread as practised in the Churches of God.

God has used our preaching with the (data) projector as a tool to show the light of salvation to about 40 people in one physically and spiritually dark area. Now we are very busy in follow-up work there among the 300 people of that village.



At another nearby location, we also preached with it. The people there, like me, are poor on earth, but rich in heaven because more than ten people there repented and accepted Christ as personal Saviour. Most of the people there live without electric light. I feel they are more receptive than the richer ones in the immediate vicinity of our hall.

In two further nights of evangelizing using the laptop and data projector, at another spot close to the Davao church hall, seventeen people received Christ as their personal Saviour. I hope the Lord will add them to His house. I wish God would send more workers to help in the follow-up.

Why a woman should cover her head in church

Brian Johnston, Leigh, England

The issue

The purpose of this article is to defend the teaching and practice of head-covering by women in the churches of God.

It is claimed¹ that in the Roman Empire, around the time of the New Testament, a dress code developed: it became a case of 'you are what you wear.' At a time when women were gaining financial power and control over their lives, some chose to go about bare-headed, flaunting elaborate hairdos² and challenging convention. High-class married women, tempted to conform to this image of the 'new woman', might then have been among those leading the challenge against the wearing of head coverings at Corinth.

As for any factors which may have influenced male behaviour, sculptures exist which show those taking an active part in pagan rituals did so with their head covered. Generally, male pagan priests at Corinth were drawn from the social elite. This raises the possibility that active brothers in the Corinthian church were likewise divisively stressing their nobility³ by covering their heads. While these points are of interest in getting a feel for what may have raised the question



at Corinth, we will see that **the all-encompassing nature of the apostle Paul's answer shows local and cultural matters – then and now – to be beside the point.**

A major interpretive key:

A man ought not to have his head covered because he is *the image and glory of God*.⁴ This description of man is something seen in the creation account⁵ and is traceable throughout the Bible.⁶ **It is a major interpretive key for 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, the significance of which is all too readily overlooked.** For if a man ought not to have his head covered because he is the image and glory of God, then clearly these instructions go way beyond any local or cultural boundary, and must have relevance for all brothers and sisters in the churches of God⁷ at any time and place where they exist.

It is worth emphasizing that the key point of man being the image and glory of God is applied to the actual symbol of head-covering.

The insertion of verses 8 and 9 into the flow of the argument in 1 Corinthians 11 serves at first sight to make the parallel (see inset box below) of verse 7 with verse 10 less obvious. The wording of that latter verse is admittedly difficult, but in any event, it has to mean that a woman should wear a head covering, for nothing else is a satisfactory

punch-line to the argument which Paul has been advancing.

In each case, God alone gets the glory!

We may conclude that these instructions about head-coverings mean

(1) a man wears no covering for he is God's glory: this means God's glory is uncovered, even as God is subject to no-one.

(2) A woman wears a covering for she is man's glory: this means man's glory is covered, even as man is subject to Christ – and so the glory again goes to God instead.

And (3) a woman wears a covering: which also means that her personal glory (her hair) is covered. So, women cover their heads (and men uncover theirs) in order that God gets the glory in each case in accordance with the hierarchical authority structure of verse 3.

It has been suggested that the word 'head' in this passage carries the meaning of source. The case for this is weak, but even if it were so, surely the thought would have to be that of an authority source or structure related to the content of the verses which follow.

A major rule in biblical interpretation

To handle God's Word accurately we first need to study what the text meant

³But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. ... ⁵But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. ... ⁶let her cover her head. ⁷For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ... ¹⁰the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head.

1 Corinthians 11:3-10 NASB



in Esther 6:12 when Haman covered his head in shame, surely using part of his clothing to do so.

What does our human nature teach us (1 Cor. 11:14)?

As in Romans 1:26, this teaching warns against any blurring of the distinct roles appointed by God for male and female genders. God created humanity as *male and female*, and any move (such as women adopting what are perceived as male characteristics in their hairstyle) which lessens the impact of this God-given differentiation is not from God. Having established the authority structure as it applies between the sexes – which God wishes to be kept visibly distinct – the teaching of 1 Corinthians 11 on head coverings should be viewed as symbolizing this authority structure.

Where does this teaching on head coverings apply?

The teaching of 1 Corinthians 11:4-13 applies to those occasions when the church comes *together as a church* (lit. ‘in church’) since:

(a) Paul speaks of prophesying throughout this section of Corinthians (see 11:4,5) as delivering edification for the whole church;¹²

(b) In verse 11 the expression ‘in the Lord’ indicates the functioning of churches of God as in First Thessalonians 5:12 – the context of instruction which is ‘in the Lord’ in these instances (also 1 Cor. 14:26) seems to most naturally relate to the instruction of a church of God when it is gathered in-church;

(c) 1 Corinthians 11:16 describes it as a church practice (a ‘practice’ is unmistakably a ‘church’ practice when it is viewed in the context of church gatherings);

(d) ‘this instruction’ (v.17a) probably refers back to the preceding one about the head-dress of women, with transition to what follows and so its application would then be to be those times when the church comes together (v.17b) as a church (v.18). This view has its notable advocates,¹³ perhaps because in 1 Corinthians 7:6, Paul uses the same Greek expression

to clearly refer back to what precedes it;

(e) and finally, the succeeding verses (11:17-34) are devoted to the breaking of bread ordinance which is clearly designed for the whole church (v.22) when it is ‘in church’.

The last word on head coverings

The force of verse 16 also is often underplayed. The final word in settling any residual contention was twofold: the apostles (‘we’) had *no other practice*; and notably neither did *the churches of God*. So, rather than this head covering practice being limited to Corinth at that time, as some allege; the reality was that this was everywhere practised throughout the churches of God in New Testament times – possibly everywhere except at Corinth!

References: (1) Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows*, Eerdmans, 2003 (2) see 1 Tim. 2:9 (3) 1 Cor. 1:26 (4) 1 Cor. 11:7 (5) Gen. 1:26-27 (6) e.g. in Rom. 3:23 & 2 Cor. 3:18 (7) 1 Cor. 11:16 (8) 1 Cor. 11:4-5 (9) Tertullian, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4: The Veiling of Virgins*, pp. 27-29,33 (10) Some, in proposing this, appeal to the fact that in the Greek version of the Old Testament the same word describes the leper’s ‘unloosed’ hair in Lev. 13:45; cp. Num. 5:18 (11) e.g. Gen. 38:15; Is. 6:2 (12) cp. 1 Cor. 14:4,12,19,31 (13) F. F. Bruce (First and Second Corinthians, NCB, London, Oliphants, 1971, p.108) sees ‘touto’ (this) in v. 17 as referring to what has preceded, as does J. Héring (The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, ETr. by A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock, London, Epworth, 1962, p.111-12) and C. K. Barrett (A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, HNTC, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p.260). The view expressed in the article is also that found in Robertson’s Word Pictures on 1 Cor. 11:17.

[Editors would be glad to enter into further correspondence with any readers looking for more historical and theological depth on this subject.]

to the original hearers. So, what did Paul mean when he wrote, *Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head?*⁸ How was this understood in earliest Christian times?

The English Standard Version Bible (ESV) seems to imply that, in New Testament times, women’s head covering in 1 Corinthians 11 may have symbolized marital status. Is there any substance to this suggestion?

In fact, the early Christian practice of head-covering **by single as well as married women** is reflected in non-biblical writings.⁹ It is also supported by second and third century pictures from the catacombs showing Christian women praying with a cloth veil on their heads.

Paul’s Greek word means ‘thoroughly covered’. Some propose that it is a particular (‘piled up in a bun’) hairstyle that is in question,¹⁰ however, the word used generally refers to a covering of some kind.¹¹ The corresponding male prohibition in 1 Corinthians 11:4, against having (literally) ‘something down from the head,’ occurs in this exact form in the Greek version of the Old Testament

Praying for our children

David Webster, Liverpool, England

We tend to pray most about the things that matter most to us. Our children matter to us in a big way, so we will almost certainly pray for them. From the moment a woman realises that she is carrying new life within her that child becomes very precious and so it is a true spiritual response to commit the child, its future and its care and upbringing to the Lord for His blessing. An unborn child is known by the Lord¹ and we can reverently commit the future into the hand of the God who sees.² Consider the following individual scenarios:

The little boy is sleeping soundly in his bed. Encouraged by the story of Hannah,³ his mother watches and silently prays that the Lord will reveal Himself to the child and that he will become a disciple of the Lord Jesus. She sees the need for men who love their God and prays that her little boy might fill that role.

The teenage girl is going through a rough time at school. She is finding it hard to fit in and make friends and her frustration is making her a difficult person to live with. Her parents pray for her, that the Lord will provide a good friend for her and that her Christian faith will become strong; that she will make good choices and be kept from the evil that is all around her. They pray for themselves, too, that they will have all the wisdom and patience to help her get through this.

Their son is going through a period of unemployment which has affected his confidence. Unable to assist directly, his parents pray that he will find work and that he will maintain his trust in the Lord, and continue to serve the Lord meanwhile.

Their family, no longer children, have left home and the older son has children of his own. Their daughter no longer maintains a Christian lifestyle. Still the parents regularly pray for them. The concerns are different, of course, but they pray that this new family will be strong and that their grandchildren will learn to love the God who sustained them through all their lives. They pray for their daughter that she will return to her faith and that she will be given help meanwhile in pursuing her career.

We should never underestimate the significance of a Christian home and regularly bringing our families to the almighty God of heaven. The allusion to Timothy's Christian mother and grandmother⁴ brings a Bible perspective to it. The Lord Jesus encouraged little children to come to Him when He was here⁵ and is still interested when we bring our little ones (and big ones!) before *the throne of grace*.⁶

What, then, ought we to pray about? If *a wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his*



mother,⁷ then we should certainly pray for them to get wisdom. We want them to put their faith in the Lord Jesus, don't we? And become disciples, too; we will pray for those. We want them to be kept from being corrupted by the evil world they are living in. We will talk to God about that. We want them to be kept safe. God will hear our requests for safe-keeping. They need a good education. We'll ask God to provide one. In fact, bringing up a family is a real cause for anxiety, isn't it? God's Word tells us, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*.⁸

We want to 'guard' our children and our prayers for them 'guard' our hearts. Praying for our children, we take our natural anxieties and concerns and leave them with our heavenly Father.

Bible quotations are from the NIV

References: (1) See Gen. 16:11-12 (2) Gen. 16:13 (3) 1 Sam. 1:11 (4) 2 Tim. 1:5 (5) Mark 10:14 (6) Heb. 4:16 (7) Prov. 10:1 (8) Phil. 4:6-7