

Editor's note: On this web site are PowerPoint slides by Pat Donahue of Huntsville, Alabama. A few of those slides deal with some things spoken during the Freed-Hardeman Forum of 1990. I asked Bro. Donahue to write an article explaining those slides and the issues in them. This excellent article is the result.

The Covering Issue and the 1990 Freed-Hardeman Forum

Patrick Donahue

My guess is the majority of Christians believe God's instructions regarding the covering in I Corinthians 11:2-16 are culturally limited and therefore not binding today. Notice the following quotations from the transcript of the 1990 Preachers' and Church Workers' Forum at Freed-Hardeman University ...

Paul's concerns reflect ... **concerns of culture** (page 13)

... the prohibition ... was **due to circumstances in Corinth** and Ephesus and other public churches but **would not apply elsewhere**. ... wherever it would be a shame The corollary is, of course, **wherever it would not be shameful, the prohibition is meaningless** (page 43)

... we begin to understand in the context of that culture and in the context of that particular church what was going on there. (page 79)

Paul is dealing with specific situations in two specific communities, and that is why he puts those restrictions on the women in those places. (page 81)

Paul has a righteous concern, but this **does not mean that women are** (so bound, ptd) ... **when the circumstances faced in Corinth are not present**. (page 108)

What we have suggested about Corinth and Ephesus is that we have situation-specific concerns where Paul is concerned about the health of the church in those places. (page 163)

Based upon the title of this article, you may think the above points were made at Freed-Hardeman in an effort to bolster the "custom view" of the covering. But that was not the point. *Our brethren Robert Randolph and Lynn Mitchell made these statements to support their view that the prohibition against women preachers in I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-12 are no longer binding, because it was only a cultural matter to begin with.* Don't you agree their statements sound strikingly similar to the statements more conservative brethren make in defense of their view that the covering requirement was only a cultural matter? Personally I don't see any difference at all.

My own assessment is that Ralph Gilmore made an excellent response to Randolph and Mitchell's above argument. The following quotes detail that response ...

These scriptures are not tied to culture. They are tied to creation ... I do not know how they can say ... this is a cultural matter when at least these two instances, and probably three instances [i.e., I Corinthians 11, I Timothy 2, and I Corinthians 14], it's **tied to creation, it's tied to creation, it's tied to creation**. (page 57)

I Timothy 2:12-15 is not cultural because it says the woman came from the man, and woman was deceived in the transgression. (page 72)

Our brother Gilmore hits the nail on the head about why the prohibition against women preachers is still binding – because the reason given for the prohibition goes back to the "order of creation" (Adam created first, then Eve) and is not based upon the culture of the time. This should cause the non-covering

advocates to seriously rethink their position, because that is also the very reason given for the covering in I Corinthians 11:8-9. It is the same “order of creation” in both places, used against women preachers in I Timothy 2:13 and for the covering practice in I Corinthians 11.

This fact certainly did not go unnoticed by the women preacher advocates at the Freed-Hardeman forum. Doesn't Lynn Mitchell have a valid point when he made the following reply to Gilmore's response? ...

In I Corinthians 11, Paul bases his discussion on whether women should wear veils on the doctrine of creation and the order that exists between God and woman. (page 133)

Mitchell is observing the inconsistency of those who teach against women preachers today, but who don't believe the covering is still binding today, because Paul makes the exact same “order of creation” argument for both instructions. How can our conservative brethren who take the “custom view” on the covering question miss this point?

Mitchell closes the loop on his argument by tying the two issues together explicitly ...

... some gospel limitations are related to cultural and traditional limitations themselves, such as at Corinth. Other limitations may be originally proper but, when they cease to be cultural norms, may become oppressive and even sinful. For instance, requiring veils on our women here in Henderson ... (page 33)

What it meant cannot always be the same as what it means to us (Else, for example, the Christian women in this auditorium would be wearing something on their heads.) (page 34)

David Lipscomb ... argues in his Gospel Advocate Commentary that the Bible clearly teaches women are not to speak publicly in church ... On the other hand, Lipscomb also argued just as strongly that God through Paul requires all women to wear an artificial covering when they approach God in prayer whether in public or private (page 41)

The question in I Corinthians 11 that Paul was answering was not how man is related to woman. The question he was answering ... was whether women should wear veils And his answer was yes. (page 133)

Randolph enhances Mitchell's argument by saying ...

In chapter 11 Paul plainly tells us that women were to pray and to prophesy with heads covered. The issue in chapter 11 is what their attire is when they participate in worship. He is as clear here as he is about silence in chapter 14, yet we hear 14 but we do not hear 11. Maybe it is that we have given up the veils as cultural and are afraid that if we admit it, we will have to face the fact that the admonition to silence has contextual meaning that mitigates against its being prescriptive. That is to say, silence in Corinth served a specific need for those women that is not replicated in our churches today. (page 107)

At one point Gilmore said in support of the Bible's restriction against women preachers ...

There is a big difference between those who say the Bible means what it means and those who say it does not. It means what it means in I Timothy 2. It means what it means in I Corinthians 14. ... because these passages are God's word and these passages do not mean the opposite of what they say (page 128)

But again, I think you will admit Mitchell's comeback was effective ...

When I was young and foolish, I had just started preaching, I attempted to get the women in my congregation to wear something on their head because I believe Paul says what he means and means what he says. Didn't work. (page134)

And so it took me about five years, once I got on the kick of trying to get my sisters to wear something on their heads, to get over the fact that they weren't going to do it ... But it didn't take that long for me to understand some of the implications of that fact, and that is, that **if my sisters were not going to give in to a symbol from the first century on that issue, they probably were not going to give in to another symbol from the first century.** (page 155)

My observation is that our brothers Randolph and Mitchell did a very good job of showing that the women preachers and covering issue stand or fall together. Their only problem is in teaching that both positions fall, instead of teaching that both still stand. That it is an undeniable fact that Paul bases his argument for both teachings on the “order of creation” (I Timothy 2:13, I Corinthians 11:8-9) should cause many to rethink their “custom only” view of the covering question.

I think all of my conservative brethren agree with this “order of creation” reasoning about why women should still be discouraged from preaching in the pulpit today. Why aren't we willing to use the exact same logic (scriptural argument) on the covering question? What we should learn from the 1990 Freed-Hardeman Forum (and from the Bible), is that if the prohibition against women preaches is still binding today (and it is), then the requirement for a woman to cover her head when she prays is still binding today for the same reason.

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