

hindrance. The work of Christ on the cross has accomplished everything that was necessary so that the assembly might be the beneficiary of the treasures of God's grace. Christ has acquired His bride by giving His life on the cross. We cannot measure the greatness of the infinite price paid.

The Spirit often uses the woman in order to illustrate these marvellous facts. Let us quote, among others, the account of Rebecca going to join Isaac her bridegroom (Gen. 24:26 etc.). Let us also remember the beloved bridegroom of the Song of Solomon. Although it deals with the Jewish bride, we can find the same motivation for affection and adoration that there is for the heavenly bride. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:2: **“For I have espoused you unto one man, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ.”** In Ephesians the relationship between husband and wife is directly related to Christ and the assembly.

From all this there flows a particular responsibility on the part of the sisters concerning their testimony. They are to display what becomes the assembly through their attitude, by their deportment and by their clothing. This testimony is for the world; but, and this enhances its value, it is also for the angels. The angels learn the deep mysteries of Christ through the church (Eph. 3:10; 1 Cor. 11:10). He was the object of their attention when He came to earth. They followed Him from the manger to His resurrection and on to His ascension into glory. Now they are taught through the assembly, which is the bride on earth of the glorified Man, Christ, who is sitting on the right hand of God in the heavens.

Let us consider four commandments relating to the sisters' deportment and find their bearing in the Word of God. We will see that her position is glorious and always in relation to Christ's perfections. Notice in passing that the brethren are responsible for the sisters' deportment. The fathers or the husbands are the heads of their households and have to maintain divine authority as subject to God themselves.

When the Queen of Sheba **“saw all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, and the food of his table, and the deportment of his servants, and the order of service of his attendants, and their apparel... there was no more spirit in her”** (1 Kings 10:4f). The sitting and the apparel of Solomon's servants revealed the glory of this king: type of the Great King, the Son of David, who will reign soon. In this they provided instruction for the Queen of Sheba.

The four aspects with which we will occupy ourselves are:
a) Head-covering; b) Cut hair; c) Modest clothing and; d) Wearing men's garments

a) Head-covering.

The necessity of covering the head is clearly taught in the 11th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, verses 4 to 10: **“Every man praying or prophesying, having anything**

on his head, puts his head to shame. But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered puts her own head to shame; for it is one and the same as a shaved woman. For if a woman be not covered, let her hair also be cut off. But if it be shameful to a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, let her be covered. For man indeed ought not to have his head covered, being God's image and glory; but woman is man's glory. For man is not of woman, but woman of man. For also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman for the sake of the man. Therefore ought the woman to have authority on her head, on account of the angels.”

Covering the head expresses firstly the submission of the church under its Lord. The Son of God has the pre-eminence over all the creation, over everything, but how much more over His church. What a privilege to be allowed to manifest publicly this submission to the Lordship of Christ.

In the Word we find a special circumstance where the Israelitish woman was shown with uncovered head. It is in Numbers 5, verse 18: **“And the priest shall set the woman before Jehovah, and uncover the woman's head, and put the memorial oblation in her hands, which is the jealousy offering; and in the hand of the priest shall be the bitter water that bringeth the curse.”** Thus the priest uncovered the woman's head while she was suspected of infidelity towards her husband. How much we should think about such a solemn thing: the uncovered head would signify that the church is unfaithful or even adulterous. Are not those reproaches often addressed by God to his elect people, Israel? And the professing and apostate church shows this character of infidelity. She does not accept the Lordship of Christ and has allied herself with the world. God is obliged to notice this situation when He speaks about Babylon in the 18th chapter of the Revelation. For us, our testimony is that of the 11th verse of Psalm 45: **“And the king will desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him.”**

b) Cut hair

The passage in 1 Corinthians 11:14-16 is very explicit: **“Does not even nature itself teach you, that man, if he have long hair, it is a dishonour to him? But woman, if she have long hair, it is glory to her, for the long hair is given to her in lieu of a veil. But if any one think to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor the assemblies of God.”** We can also find a very instructive direction in the 21st chapter of Deuteronomy, verses 10 to 13: **“When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and Jehovah thy God delivereth them into thy hands, and thou hast taken captives of them, and thou seest among the captives a woman of beautiful form, and hast a desire unto her, and takest her as thy wife; then thou shalt bring her home to thy house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; and she shall put**

the clothes of her captivity from off her, and shall abide in thy house, and bewail her father and mother a full month, and afterwards thou mayest go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife.”

For the Israelites the fact of being shaved expressed that the wife did not as yet have complete joy of her husband. The author of an article in “L'Écho du Témoignage” from 1865 (Vol. V, page 141), which deals with the same subject, writes: *“The church has not to appear as if it has been suspected by Christ, or if it felt still like a miserable captive; it would be its shame.”*

God wants us to have full joy (John 15:11; 16:24; 1 John 1:4). In the 15th chapter of John's Gospel this is entered into by keeping His commandments; in the 16th chapter by being in dependence upon and in the full confidence of the Father's love; and in the first epistle of John by being in full communion with the Father and the Son. Thus the long feminine hair is a reflection of the glory that Christ gives to His bride and the testimony of her full pleasure in what she finds in her Lord.

It is remarkable to notice that the teaching concerning head covering and long hair is in the 11th chapter of the 1st epistle to the Corinthians, part of the Scripture which speaks to us about the Lord's table in the 10th chapter and the Supper in the 11th chapter. This shows us something of major importance; we can only approach the Table and celebrate the Supper by recognising all the rights of the Lord and in full enjoyment of having been purchased by Him.

c) The wearing of decent and modest clothes

In 1 Timothy 2, verses 8 and 9, the apostle, after having said: **“I will therefore that the men...”** continues with: **“In like manner also that the women in decent deportment and dress adorn themselves with modesty and discretion...”** There is a particular insistence from the apostle's side. It is not a simple exhortation but an injunction which emphasises its importance.

In Exodus 20, after the announcement of the Ten commandments, verse 26 says: **“Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto Mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”** With what care God protected the holiness of His altar upon which the sacrifices were offered, which were types of the sacrifice of His beloved Son. One could only approach this altar by being free from every stain and by ensuring that one's nakedness was covered. The nakedness here signifies that the “me” is manifested. The moral significance of such teaching is great. A decent and modest deportment recognises that the “me” has been crucified with Christ.

It was in humility and complete self-effacement that the Lord Jesus was in the world. **“He hath no form nor lordliness, and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.”** (Isa. 53:2). He did His Father’s will in order to save His creature. This will led Him unto death. With the help of a modest deportment a Christian woman can in measure reflect this perfect obedience. Her beauty is not **“that outward one of tressing of hair, and wearing gold, or putting on apparel; but the hidden man of the hear, in the incorruptible ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which in the sight of God is of great price. For thus also the holy women who have hoped in God heretofore adorned themselves, being subject to their own husbands; as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose children ye have become, doing good, and not fearing with any kind of consternation”**

What a beautiful attitude! Proclaiming to the world that it has no attraction for the church, but that Christ is the hidden treasure of her heart.

d) The wearing of a man’s garment

Deuteronomy 22 verse 5 teaches us that **“There shall not be a man’s apparel on a woman, neither shall a man put on a woman’s clothing; for whoever doeth so is an abomination to Jehovah thy God.”** This is one of the most contested passages but nevertheless its moral significance is of great importance. The wearing of a man’s garment by a woman is an abomination to the Lord. The term “abomination” in the Word of God is constantly related to idolatry. At the end of his life, Solomon went after “Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites” (1 King 11:5).

The woman who wears a man’s garment illustrates the idolatry of the professing church. “Children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). “Wherefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). Thus the apostle Paul, having spoken about the people of Israel in the desert, exhorts us in the seventh verse of this same chapter: “Neither be ye idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.” Are we so accustomed to this evil that it no longer exercises our consciences? Jeremiah had to notice it twice: “Are they ashamed that they have committed abomination? Nay, they are not at all ashamed, neither know they what it is to blush” (Jer. 6:15) and “Are they ashamed that they have committed abomination? Nay, they are not at all ashamed, and they know not how to blush” (Jer. 8:12). When God sets His creature in a particular position it is a very grave evil if they depart from it. Consider the angels who, before the flood, did not keep their own original state but abandoned it. God had put them in a heavenly position but they left it and mingled themselves with men (Gen. 6:1). This sin is so grave that God keeps them “in eternal chains under gloomy darkness, to the judgement of the

great day” (Jude 6). What a solemn thought! Would our wives and daughters like to have this character? Surely they will endeavour to be Christ’s witnesses by rejecting such confusion.

God has assigned a certain position to the man and another to the woman. Scripture is very clear about this and there are a number of passages which show it (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22f.). Some want to change this divine order and put the woman in the same position as the man. This terrible confusion increases more and more. The wearing of a man’s garment by the woman and vice versa is flagrant testimony of this great evil. The woman wants to leave the position in which the Lord has placed her. In principle it is the same sin as that of the fallen angels of Genesis 6. It is only by respecting the divine order and commandments that we will be able to respond fully. **“To Him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father: to Him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen.”** (Rev. 1:5f)

Conclusion

This is what the Word of God teaches us about the deportment and clothing of a woman. This is their testimony in contrast to that of the man and of angels. If these precepts are not observed the angels themselves are wrongly taught. What a responsibility before the Lord! Thus, beloved brethren, by the women’s deportment in our meetings as well as outside, we will express: —

The reality of our submission, of our faithfulness towards Christ:

The sisters having their head covered.

Our attachment, our full confidence, our perfect pleasure in Him:

The sisters not having their hair cut.

The holiness of the Lord’s table and the necessity to keep our “me” as dead:

The sisters wearing decent and modest clothes.

That the Lord is everything for us, that our heart is not divided and that we are not an object of abomination in God’s eyes:

The sisters not wearing a man’s garment.

With what simplicity such a testimony can be given for the glory and the grace of the Lord!

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*Scripture quotations are taken from
the New Translation by J. N. Darby*

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The Importance & Deep Significance of the Sisters’ Department

Foreword

When meditating upon the instructions in the Word of God concerning our deportment and clothing we can rejoice in the beauty of their moral significance. On the other hand how often we have neglected these instructions. Are we guilty of ignorance or do we fear reproach and prefer conformity to the world? May the Word of God have more effect upon our hearts and consciences so that by our deportment we may be **“manifested to be Christ’s epistle...”** (2 Cor. 3:3)

We live in a time when a lot is said about service and when young people are pressed to do something for the Lord. We are in danger of forgetting that **“obedience is better than sacrifice”** (1 Sam. 15:22) and that only the Lord can **“send forth workmen unto His harvest”** (Matt. 9:38). It is God who has before prepared good works that we should walk in them (see Eph. 2:10) and the sisters’ department is certainly a part of these good works. Furthermore, **“this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”** (1 John 5:3).

Our position as children of God is a special privilege, the value of which we do not always appreciate. **“See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God”** (1 John 3:1). **“And our fellowship is indeed with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ”** (1 John 1:3). Also the Lord has said to us: **“Ye are My friends if ye practise whatever I command you I call you no longer bondmen, for the bondman does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things which I have heard of My Father I have made known to you”** (John 15:14f). God permits us to enter into the intimacy of His thoughts regarding His Son and the bride acquired through His sacrifice on the cross. He does this because all His delights are in the glorious person of His Son and to direct our view to our adorable Lord and Saviour. All the (New Testament) commandments given to us by God are related to the various glories of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are not orders given to slaves which are to be carried out without intelligence, but directions given to friends who through the Holy Spirit have to discern their deep significance. In the Scripture the woman is often a type of the church, Christ’s bride. The church embodies the last of God’s ways in regard to man and this mystery was hidden in the old economy. It is in our dispensation that the river of divine goodness can flow forth without