

## **Reasons why sisters should be encouraged to make up their own minds about hats**

- Christianity is basically about attitude, not ritual.

The Apostle Paul said:

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”  
(Colossians 2:16-17)

Christianity is not about observing things like this, but about one’s heart and one’s behaviour.

- As Christadelphians there are only two rituals which we follow, and these because we read direct instructions in the reported words of Jesus: Baptism and Breaking of Bread.

Even with these, it is the spirit in which they are done which makes them valid.

- Other practices are commanded elsewhere: anointing with oil, raising hands in prayer, greeting one another with a kiss, foot washing, fasting, laying on of hands.

Why do we not put these into practice? None would be difficult to do. Our usual answer is that these were part of the practices of the era of the first century AD. We practise the spirit of them, but not the literal detail.

Therefore we pray for those who are ill but we don’t anoint them with oil; we pray reverently, but don’t raise our hands in prayer; we greet one another either with a handshake or a kiss; and we appoint people by ecclesial elections or by accepting volunteers.

- In the case of Baptism and Breaking of Bread, we seek to return to the first century practice because we believe the essential meaning is closely involved with the first-century manner of doing these.

We decline to accept later developments, so we practise believer’s baptism by immersion, and we don’t regard the bread and the wine as transubstantiated into Jesus’ body and blood. Nor do we have clergy who preside at the Breaking of Bread.

- Why then do we adopt a different approach on hats?
- Hats are not a New Testament practice.
- Veils to show modesty probably were. But veils are not worn today, and hats no longer show modesty.
- In fact, hats are intended as part of dressing up – they are chosen to enhance the wearer’s appearance, the opposite to veils in New Testament times.
- The meaning of veils varied in the ancient world.
- Sometimes they indicated virginity (as with Isaac’s future wife), hiding her from her fiancé’s sight. Sometimes they indicated marriage, obscuring a wife’s beauty from all but her husband.
- Hats do not have either meaning today. The wearing of hats in meetings today is part of a church tradition from the 1800s and early 1900s, but not Bible teaching.
- If we insist on a custom which in the world is seen as part of dressing up (as for a wedding or a high-class social occasion), we risk bringing disrespect on our assemblies by apparently putting great stress on worldly externals!

## But what about ... ?

- 1 Corinthians 11:5 "... any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonours her head ."

This is not talking about hats but about veils (RSV) or about hair styles (NIV margin). It refers to the women who spoke in public, praying or prophesying. According to the understanding of the 1st century, by not dressing in what was deemed respectable clothing, they appeared to be dishonouring their husbands.

- The wearing of specific clothes is a cultural matter.  
"That the question should be raised as a question of propriety in the East in Paul's day is not to be wondered at considering the extreme seclusion of the female sex in the social custom of those countries."  
Robert Roberts (*The Christadelphian*, April 1895, page 140)
- As with other practices, the way to apply it is to observe the spirit, which is that sisters should behave respectably when addressing the meeting or when offering prayer.

A modern equivalent (apart from wearing modest clothing) is for a woman to wear her wedding ring. The true spirit of 1 Corinthians 11, however, lies not in external clothing but in keeping one's marriage together.

- The wearing of hats is not Bible teaching. Sisters should be able to wear or not wear hats according to conscience.  
"Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."  
(James 4:17)

Those who see it is a biblical instruction should follow their consciences and wear a hat; those who feel it is not biblical, should likewise be able to do what they feel is right. Both should understand and respect the differing understanding of the other.

"The question of women being covered or uncovered in the exercises of worship is not of very great importance...." " ...it does not matter much one way or the other."

Robert Roberts (*The Christadelphian*, as above)

This leaflet gives a quick outline of the reasons why tolerance should exist on the wearing or not wearing of hats. For a detailed exposition of the relevant Bible passages, with explanation of the Jewish and pagan backgrounds, please see *1 Corinthians 11:2-16 – Headcovering in Bible Times and the Application Today* available for free download from [mchaffie1@talktalk.net](mailto:mchaffie1@talktalk.net)

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# Veils, Hats and Wedding Rings!

