

Spiritual Covering: Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are!

In the New Testament, there are two words used for *cover* or *covering*: *kaluptō* and *peribolaion*. *Kaluptō* is used for the generic sense to cover something. It is *never used* to describe any relationship between believers. *Peribolaion* is used in one of the most notoriously difficult passages of Scripture (1 Corinthians 11:15) where it is sometimes translated as *veil* and sometimes as *head covering*. In Hebrews 1:12, the King James Version translates it (for better or worse) as *vesture*. The word is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. That is it! Neither word for *cover* or *covering* is used to describe any relationship between any believer and leader. It is simply not there. In his characteristically straightforward fashion, Gordon Fee suggests the following:

Almost certainly, therefore, by this idiom Paul is referring to an external cloth covering. Beyond that, everything is more speculative.³⁰

We simply have to admit we do not know³¹ [what the covering practice was all about].

We simply do not know what the practice was they were abusing.³²

But finally we must beg ignorance. Paul seems to be affirming the “freedom” of women over their own heads; but what that means in this context remains a mystery.³³

Refreshingly honest.

For our purposes, the key passage is 1 Corinthians 11:16: “If anyone is *philoneikos* (contentious, quarrelsome, wrangler, quarrel lover, disputatious), we have no such custom, neither do the churches of God.”

Clearly, the matter was a local issue of custom at Corinth, not a universal principle from which (allowing even the widest berth of inference) a universal spiritual-covering doctrine can be legitimately squeezed out.

Authority, Accountability, and the Apostolic Movement

Since there is simply no exegetical base in the New Testament for the doctrine of spiritual covering, where do its practitioners get it? Primarily from three sources:

1. Inferentially from the head and headship passages we have already discussed
2. Old Testament typology
3. Unfortunate and careless hymns and choruses concerning the blood of Jesus

Old Covenant Coverings

Coverings everywhere characterize the Old Covenant in stark contrast to the New. A quick reading or word search will make it plain. This is a significant difference between the two covenants. Adam and Eve covered their nakedness, God himself, providing the skin for the task. Coverings and their details take up large portions of text concerning the tabernacle of Moses. The cherubim over the ark of the covenant are the “covering angels.” They cover their faces. Moses covered his face after the Sinai encounter, and on and on. The theme is everywhere.

In Genesis 9, the Scriptures record the commendation of Noah’s two sons for covering their father’s nakedness when he got drunk after the flood. It is completely biblical to speak of covering one another’s offenses, weaknesses, sins, etc. It is a manifestation of love to do so: love covers. However, this covering is not a governmental order limited to a few apostolic office holders. It is a body-relational dynamic. We are all supposed to cover one another in this sense, not just leaders over subordinates. It is completely *unbiblical* to speak of covering one’s *person* in a *governmental* or *positional* way.

The glory and message of the New Covenant is the absence of coverings! The message of the New Covenant, without exception, is about the removal of veils, coverings, limitations, fears, and mediators.³⁴ The covering veil of the temple was rent at Calvary! The New Covenant is characterized, not by a covered relationship but an open (*anakalupto*)-

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face relationship.³⁵ In 2 Corinthians 3:14, Paul explicitly contrasts the difference between the two covenants in terms of covering: the Old is covered, the New is not. Our glory in Christ as stated in Hebrews 4:16 is that we might come boldly (*Gr. parrhesia*: outspokenness, frankness, bluntly, publicly, fully assured) to the throne of grace, not hesitantly. The coverings of the Old Covenant were temporary until the coming of Him who would in His person render them unnecessary.

Those who want to teach the doctrine of spiritual or apostolic covering from Old Covenant stories and verses simply do not understand the change in the cosmic order that took place at Calvary/Pentecost. The reestablishment of a governmental order based on covering is not new apostolic revelation, it is regression into the covenant of bondage, and the fruit of the doctrine will be bondage, not safety, blessing, and divine order.³⁶

Nice Tune, Bad Theology

The first-century heretic, Arius, got his doctrines established by putting them to catchy melodies and getting the common man to whistle and sing his tunes. His doctrine was absorbed in the mind through the wings of an airy melody. Unfortunately, the same thing happens frequently in the church, especially since the explosion of worship choruses in the last thirty years, which while helpful in terms of singability and beautiful in arrangement, are often not exactly pillars of deep theological thought but rather quite inaccurate.³⁷

Nowhere is this truer than our understanding of the blood of Jesus and its relationship to sin. Much of the impetus for the doctrine of spiritual or apostolic covering is absorbed through unfortunate hymns and choruses that emphasize the believer being covered by the blood of Jesus. The connection is made along this line: if the blood of Jesus needs to cover us to protect us from danger and harm, it is not too big a step to believe we need other coverings to protect us from danger and harm, obligingly provided by apostles or other ministers.

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Shocking as it may be to some, *there is not a single New Testament verse that says the blood of Jesus covers us*. Blood covering is a *thoroughly Old Covenant concept*; one that is temporary, not permanent. One of the most significant changes from the Old to New Covenant is what was only covered in the Old is washed, purged, cleansed, and utterly removed in the New. Sin that is covered is sin that is still present. Jeopardy exists if the covering is removed. Sin that is washed has been removed. There is no jeopardy, no danger. The pitiable psychological and practical reality is that most Christians live like their sin is covered, not gone. They live their lives in the constant dread of being discovered as not being up to date on their sin, as if some of it was going to leak through the blood covering like ice cream on a dip-top cone on a summer day. They live in perpetual fear of sin leakage and the risk of the punishment it entails.³⁸

Even in the Old Covenant era, the psalmist speaks of sins being removed as far as the east is from the west,³⁹ cast into the sea of divine forgetfulness; not covered, lingering under the surface just waiting for the first error to cause them to be manifest. The psalmist got a peek into the future glories of the New Covenant era. The glory of the New Covenant is that our sins have been removed, not covered.

There is no greater jeopardy than to be confronted with ones sins before a holy God. If Christ has taken care of this dread, not by covering but by washing, from what do believers need protection, and who on earth is going to provide it more than Christ has already done? Apostles? Hardly.

On Account of Being Accountable

Perhaps a reader might be thinking, *Crosby, all we are trying to do is assure responsible and accountable behavior, what is wrong with that?* First, like covering, accountability is an unbiblical term, and in application it can, and often does, exceed biblical grounds. Do a word search (King James Version) sometime on *accountable* or *accountability*. It is not