
The **HAIR LENGTH**
of **CHRISTADELPHIAN**
BRETHREN

a Biblical Analysis

"We recognize no other practice . . .
For a man to wear long hair is
degrading to him."

(1 Cor. 11:16,14, R.S.V.)

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Foreword

This analysis is not a thinly disguised attempt to keep the barbers in business, nor is it the product of a bald-headed Victorian. If it were, it might well be discarded as just another personal viewpoint. Rather, this analysis attempts to set out *God's verdict* on the issues in question.

It has become apparent that in many Christadelphian centres the long hair of the young people is regarded as innocuous — an unimportant part of changing fashion that is inevitable. It is regarded with outright sanction on the grounds of personal liberty. Justification for this position is sought on the basis of such examples as the hair length of Samson and Absalom, and even photos of John Thomas. The plea is made that “the inward state of the heart is all that God is concerned with.” On the other hand, the long-haired innovation is rigorously resisted by others as being an outright defiance of clear Scriptural teaching. To some young people the divided position of knowledgeable brethren on the issues is regarded as further licence to do as one pleases, since even the “experts” are not agreed.

Today, it is not uncommon to see Bible School photos in which it appears impossible to distinguish the males from the females on the basis of hair length, and to find brethren who are prominent in ecclesial and preaching work, with sons whose hair length is a source of embarrassment to fellow-labourers. It is, therefore, long overdue that the principles regarding hair length be set out clearly. It is the purpose of this analysis to do just this.

Ron Abel

LONG HAIRD BRETHREN . . .

A SHAME AND DISGRACE

There is a passage in Scripture which clearly shows that God regards long hair on a male as something shameful and disgraceful. The passage is 1 Cor. 11:14, 15. Note the R.S.V. translation:

“Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her pride? For her hair is given to her for a covering.”¹

The issue in Corinth appears to have been whether or not *Spirit-gifted*² sisters should continue to wear the token of their subordination to their husbands³ — their head-coverings. This had become a particularly contentious issue (1 Cor. 11:16), and Paul refused to allow any innovation at Corinth. Sisters, Spirit-gifted or otherwise, were to come with heads covered to the assembly of the saints. In his analysis Paul points out that the differences between male and female were divinely intended from creation (and hence must be recognized irrespective of Spirit-gift possession). Note the contrasts:

- i. the head of the man is Christ
the head of the woman is her husband (v. 3)
- ii. the man was made in the image and glory of God
woman is the glory of the man (v. 7)
- iii. man was not created for the woman
woman was created for the man (v. 9)
- iv. man to have short hair (inference from v. 14)
woman to have long hair (inference from v. 15)

¹ The Greek word “peribolaion,” translated “covering” comes from the words “peri,” “around,” and “bollo,” “to throw” (like a mantle). See W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966 ed.), p. 252. It is a different Greek word from “katakalypto” which means “to fully cover,” (Yg), and refers to the head-coverings elsewhere in this chapter.

² This is the inference of “prays” — i.e. praying in a tongue (1 Cor. 11:5, 13; cf. 1 Cor. 14:4); prophesying (1 Cor. 12:10, 28; 14:1, 5) Note also that it is the sisters who are commanded to keep silent (1 Cor. 14:33-39) in the very context of the misuse of Spirit-gifts.

³ The Greek word “aner” in 1 Cor. 11:3 can mean either “husband” (as the R.S.V. translates it) or “man” as in the A.V.

The contrasts between the hair lengths of males and females is part of the divinely intended distinction God has placed between the sexes. Note the following summary of 1 Cor. 11:14, 15:

SEX	HAIR LENGTH	GOD'S VIEW
male	long	degrading (R.S.V.); shameful (A.V.), (11:14)
	short	intended length (by implication)
female	long	intended hair length — a God-given mantle (11:15)
	short	degrading, shameful (11:6)

Males wearing long hair, in effect, are appearing womanish, or effeminate. They are eroding a divinely intended distinction between male and female. This conclusion ought not to be dismissed lightly. Persons guilty of womanish conduct — effeminacy — were regarded as an abomination in Israel (Deut. 22:5). In the New Testament it is regarded as a sin so serious as to be placed alongside fornication and homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9).

A man seeking to please God in all his ways will cleanse himself from “every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1, R.S.V.). He will do this even if it means standing out amidst unenlightened Gentiles with whom he works or attends school. He will not be counted among those found flouting God’s standards in order to please his friends, or appear a “regular guy.”

It is the plain teaching of this passage that long hair on males is regarded by God as degrading and shameful. For Christadelphians such a clear and unequivocal judgment of the inspired Apostle Paul ought to resolve the issue.

THE APPEAL TO “NATURE”

PROBLEM: Since Paul’s argument in 1 Cor. 11 is only an appeal to what “nature itself teaches,” how can this be regarded as an authoritative prohibition against brethren having long hair?

SOLUTION:

1. Paul’s argument from “nature” is an appeal to the seemliness of the Corinthian judgment. It might be paraphrased — “Does not *even* common sense teach you?” If a similar appeal were made today among some Christadelphians, a consensus might conclude that if a man has long hair it is not degrading to him. Such a finding would only indicate that contemporary “common sense” is wrong — less enlightened on this question than the Corinthian believers of Paul’s day.
2. A careful reading of Paul’s argument shows that he is not, however, merely appealing to common sense. He says “does not *even* nature itself teach you.” In other words, his conclusion is intuitively obvious from a divine stand-point, not requiring an Old Testament citation or the evidence of direct revelation. That there is additional evidence is implied in Paul’s use of “even” — evidence which could be deduced from common sense. Paul occasionally (e.g. see 1 Cor. 9) reasoned this way for the benefit of Gentile converts, as he did on the question of his apostolic credentials and apostolic rights.⁴

⁴ To the Jews he argued his right to material support on the basis of Old Testament teaching (1 Cor. 9:9-10). To the Gentiles he argued his case on a “common sense” basis (1 Cor. 9:7-13). Paul’s appeal to “common sense” did not mean that his position was devoid of divine support. It was, in fact, additional to it. Notice also Paul’s indictment of sinful conduct in Rom. 1 on the grounds that it was “contrary to nature” (Rom. 1:26) and “unseemly” (Rom. 1:27). When morality is so devoid of principle so as to be contrary to nature, it is totally depraved.

HOW LONG IS LONG ?

PROBLEM: Paul states that "long hair" is degrading. But who is to decide what is long? How long is long?

SOLUTION:

1. PARENTAL INSTRUCTION

There are several answers to this problem. If the question is raised by a young person living under parental authority, then the problem is resolved by what his father says, even if the decision is arbitrary. Obedience to parents is the first commandment with promise (Exod. 20:12; Eph 6:2). Respect for their decision has always been a basic instruction of God's revelation to men in *all* dispensations.⁵ For example, consider these two passages:

- a) "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right" (Eph. 6:1).
- b) "A fool despiseth his father's instruction" (Prov. 15:5, 20). See also Prov. 17:6; 6:20-22.

There are many arbitrary decisions — what time to go to bed, how late one is allowed out at night, etc., which must be set, despite the appearance of arbitrariness. For young people in this age category, the problem is one to be decided by the parents and accepted in the right spirit by the youth.

2. ECCLESIAL CONSCIENCE

No man is an island in ecclesial life. Even when one is away from direct parental supervision and responsibility, there is an ecclesial conscience to be respected. There are ample passages to this effect: "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." (Rom. 15:1-3).⁶ "Look not every man on his own things ['interests,' R.S.V.], but every man also on the things of others." (Phil. 2:4, cf. v. 20, 21).

⁵ A stubborn and rebellious son who would not obey the voice of his parents was commanded to be stoned by the men of his city in Israel "So shalt thou put evil away from among you, and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deut 21:18-21) This is the divine attitude to rebellious sons — something worth thinking about

⁶ It is sometimes thought that one ought never to pass judgments on such matters as appearance and dress on the basis of Rom 14:10. However, a survey of the context indicates that the issue in this passages relates to the eating of meat and the keeping of days — unimportant items, which, in themselves, will not affect one's standing at the Judgment. Matters relating to morality do require our concern. (Note Rom 15:2, 3, see the e.g. of 1 Cor 5:11-13)

Whether one is bald or grows hair will not in itself commend him to God. The godly person will follow Paul's example when it comes to personal liberties. Even if a young person is satisfied that his hair length is neither "long" nor effeminate, *when judged by Biblical precept*, he nevertheless will be prepared to let his personal liberty be judged by another man's conscience. The principle is set out by Paul: "Therefore, if food [dress, appearance] is a cause of by brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall." (1 Cor. 8:13, R.S.V.). To do this is to act out of "agape" — a genuine regard, and to demonstrate maturity in divine things.

3. Paul told the Corinthian detractors "but when they [the Judaizers] measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding." (2 Cor. 10:12, R.S.V.). It might well be added: "For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends." (2 Cor. 10:18, R.S.V.). Comparison with the hair length of school peers or fellow employees is in itself an unsatisfactory way of determining how long one should wear his hair. A Christadelphian does not determine the nature of man or his morals by a comparison with what most people think, why should he do so when it comes to hair length?
4. In the face of the clear evidence of 1 Cor. 11, it would be bold indeed to push Christadelphian standards toward conformity with the social custom of the world on the grounds that "long" cannot definitely be defined. God has given us principles to guide our conduct. If these are understood and appreciated there will be no need for a measuring tape.

SAMSON — THE NAZARITE VOW

PROBLEM: Since some Old Testament Israelites, like Samson and Absalom, wore long hair, how can long hair be forbidden today?

SOLUTION:

1. Samson was *commanded* by God to leave his hair uncut (Judges 13:5). His long hair, therefore, had nothing to do with social custom. Samson was a Nazarite from birth (Judges 13:1-7). The Nazarite vow allowed Israelites not of the priestly tribe of Levi to assume, in effect, a priestly status in Israel.⁷
2. Separation and dedication are repeated descriptions of the Nazarite vow. God instructed that the visible token of his separation was that he “shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow” (Num. 6:5). When his hair was cut it indicated that his vow had either been violated or terminated (cf. Num. 6:18). It is tragically ironical that the token of the Nazarite’s separation — his long hair — should be cited to justify *conformity* to this evil world, when the very intention of the vow was to teach separation from the world of man and dedication to the things of God.
3. Only those unaware of the import of the special circumstances of the Nazarite vow would seek support in the example of Samson for the wearing of long hair today.
4. It is noteworthy that even the priests of the Kingdom will be forbidden to wear long hair: “Neither shall they shave their heads, nor suffer their locks to grow long; they shall only poll (trim, R.S.V.) the hair of their heads.” (Ezek. 44:20).
5. Long hair in Scripture is *always* associated with the female. Note the following:
 - a) “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her, for her hair is given her for a covering” (1 Cor. 11:15).
 - b) “And they had hair as the hair of women . . .” (Rev. 9:8). The intended contrasts here must relate to the appearance of the hair, i.e., its *length*.

⁷ The High Priest wore a turban upon which was a gold plate inscribed: “Holiness to the LORD” (Exod. 39:30, cf. Exod. 28:36-7; 29:6; Zech. 3:5). Instead of this, the Nazarite wore a crown of hair, symbolic of his consecrated separateness.

The case of Absalom might be regarded as an exception to this: “And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it . . .), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king’s weight” (2 Sam. 14:26, R.S.V.). The weight of his hair was about five pounds.⁸ It was because his hair weighed so much that he cut it once a year. This exceptional growth of hair was, in fact, the very vehicle of his death. How else could a man remain suspended *alive* — *caught* by the head in the thick branches of an oak? (2 Sam. 18:9, 10). Irregularities in worship and conduct were frequent among David’s sons. Absalom is never set out in Scripture as a man to follow. Rather, he was the epitome of vanity — a character who was base, immoral, (2 Sam. 16:21-22), wicked, deceitful, and treacherous. He is not an example to be emulated, and only those hard-pressed for evidence could seek support in the hair length of Absalom to establish a rule of conduct.

PROBLEM: God is interested neither in the clothes one wears nor the length of hair. Rather, it is the inward state of the heart that matters.

SOLUTION:

1. It is true, of course, that God dwells with those of a “poor” and “contrite spirit” (Isa. 66:2), but the passage continues: “and trembleth at my word.” A believer with a right “heart” will not wilfully disregard God’s instruction that long hair on a male is disgraceful and effeminate (1 Cor. 11:14, 15), nor will he insist on his “rights” and “liberties” while disregarding the concern and disapproval of fellow-brethren (cf. 1 Cor. 8:9).
2. There are many Biblical passages which show a relationship between one’s appearance and “heart.” Note the following:
 - a) “. . . women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire, but by good deeds as befits women who profess religion [‘godliness,’ A.V.]” (1 Tim. 2:9, 10, R.S.V.). The assumption here is that there is a characteristic dress — “modest,” which befits a heart of godliness. Conversely, exposed necklines and scanty swimsuits give reason to suspect the genuineness of the profession of godliness.

⁸ 2½ shekels are slightly heavier than 1 oz. See *Westminster Dict. of the Bible* (London: Collins, 1944) p. 522.

- b) Pharisees enlarged the borders of their garments, but Jesus, "who knew what was in man," said that the motive was merely "to be seen of men" (Matt. 23:5). The appearance was directly related to the "heart."
- c) An Israelite who rounded off the hair of his temples (Lev. 19:27) profaned his separateness from heathen practice. A profession on his part that his heart was acceptable irrespective of his appearance would not dismiss the fact that he sinned in his appearance.
- d) A priest who let the hair of his head hang loose profaned the sanctuary of his God (Lev. 21:10-12, R.S.V.). It would be idle for the priest to seek to justify his appearance on the grounds that his heart was right before God.

A believer whose heart is godly will "perfect holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). In so doing, hair length and dress will not be excluded from scriptural guidelines and commandments. He will not assume an artificial distinction between the "inner" and "outer" man.

- 3. In Canada the long hair innovation was apparently introduced by a pop group, "The Beatles." Since then it has been the hallmark of many groups in rebellion. It has predominated as a hair-style in Viet Nam Moratoriums, among beatniks and peaceniks. Long hair still carries a social stigma among some employers who regard it as damaging to their public relations. In many areas of this country it is viewed as incompatible with Biblical faith. In the face of such associations (whether absolutely right or wrong is not the point here)⁹ why would a Christadelphian who is instructed to walk circumspectly before those outside the Faith (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:7), and whose avowed enemy is the world, i.e., the society (1 Jn. 2:15-17), follow a Gentile custom which identifies him with the world?
- 4. The Christadelphian is regarded as a soldier on active duty (2 Tim. 2:4), and called upon to wage a good warfare (cf. 1 Tim. 1:18). Half-hearted allies who seek a kind of parley with the enemy by bending Christadelphian standards must be regarded as having an un-

desirable influence upon other soldiers in the Christadelphian ranks.¹⁰ Such were sent home from the army of Israel (Deut. 20:8).

- 5. Long-haired males appearing as candidates for baptism must either be ignorant of the Biblical principles regarding the hair length of brethren, or guilty of deliberately disregarding the instruction. If the former, then further instruction should produce the desired result — short hair. If the latter, how can such be a fitting candidate for an event which symbolizes death to self and servitude to Christ? Of such candidates it is fit and proper to expect fruits meet for repentance (cf. Matt. 3:5-8). Defiance of Scriptural instruction, and disregard for the ecclesial conscience is not the frame of mind in which to approach such a solemn occasion as this, when one appropriates the sacrificial work of God in Christ Jesus.

CONCLUSION

As the sleeping sickness of Sardis and the lukewarmness of Laodicea dull spiritual sensibilities, it can only be expected that the thin, and often porous, membrane which divides the ecclesia of today from the world, will witness a largely one way diffusion of influence from the world into the ecclesia.

Long-haired brethren *visibly* show that they stand with the world on this issue. To such we can only make the appeal of Scripture and remind them that they will surely be responsible not only for their personal decision, but for those, often babes in Christ, who use their example as licence to follow.

Wise men will see the issues — the need to "guard the deposit" entrusted to them and to assiduously resist the innovation of long hair as something effeminate and disgraceful in the assembly of the saints.

May the grace of God teach us "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope . . ." (Titus 2:12, 13).

⁹ The believer is commanded to abstain from every appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22).

¹⁰ It is for this reason that some American ecclesias have refused long-haired brethren the use of the speaking platform