

Dear Linda,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You said that as a new Christian you were taught that it was a sin for a female to cut her hair “because of the angels.” You said you always questioned this thought as well as other teachings that the particular Christian group that you are involved with endorses. However, you said you do agree that one evidence of receiving the holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. You told us that you are having a tough time even going to church because you are confused as to what teaching you “should sit under” and asked for some guidance, since you do not like being “this far from God.”

Question #1: You said that you were taught that it is a sin for a woman to cut her hair “because of the angels.” You are referring to what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian brethren regarding propriety in worship (1 Corinthians 11:3-16). At the time of Paul’s writing the Corinthian community was actively discouraging women from wearing veils on the grounds that “woman is the head (source) of every man” contrary to the biblical creation narrative. In verses 4-7 Paul not only says twice that it is disgraceful for a woman to pray or prophesy with an uncovered head, he also says twice that it is disgraceful for a man to cover his head when praying or prophesying. We can infer from these verses that the Corinthian custom was not only for women to go bare-headed (as a religious rite of all Greek girls upon reaching puberty), but also for men to wear head coverings. This custom would have been a unique local arrangement, perhaps adopted in an attempt to regularize (with theological rationale) the varying pagan Roman and Greek practices to which the worshippers would have been previously acquainted. However, although the Corinthians discouraged women from wearing veils in worship services, they did not want them to shave their heads either. Paul’s rhetoric teasingly invites the Corinthians to explain their logic, that is, should not shaving a woman’s head bring her even closer to God if their creation story were correct?

Paul explains in verses 8-9 that the Corinthians have the creation story wrong, so that if they want to continue with their logic, they must do exactly the opposite of what they have been doing. After explaining their error to their satisfaction, Paul goes on to say in verse 10, “For this cause ought the woman to have a *sign of authority* on her head, because of the angels.” The expression “sign of authority” or “power” is the Greek word *exousia* (Strong’s #1849) and means “privilege, freedom, mastery, delegated influence, authority, liberty, power or strength.” A better translation would be, “Therefore, a woman ought to have freedom over her head,” meaning that a woman ought to be free to wear a veil or not as she wishes. That Paul cared nothing for worship attire as an expression of creation order is evident from his immediate comments in verses 11-12. “In any case, in the Lord, woman is not without man, nor is man without woman; for just as the woman was from the man, so also man is through woman, and all things are from God.”

In verses 13-16 Paul returns to his rhetorical stance, once again assuming the Corinthian position in order to discredit it. Specifically, he asks them to tell him whether the pride and comfort women naturally take in having long hair indicates that women are not meant to have their heads covered. (At this point the Corinthians are taking the stance that women should wear veils and Paul is trying to show them how awkward this is.) “For long hair is given to her as a covering.” (Verse 15) Lastly, commenting on their unique local custom, Paul informs the Corinthians, “If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.” (Verse 16) The Corinthians seem to have been particularly sensitive to the possibility that they might stand out as different from the other churches and they apparently wanted to conform.

All of the above having been said, there are many wonderful Christian groups who feel that women should cover their heads during a religious service. Their reasoning is that the men in the congregation are representative of Jesus (the head) and the women in the congregation represent the body of Christ. Therefore, women should wear a head covering and men should not. This design is an earthly representation of a much bigger heavenly picture where Jesus is the actual Head and his Church (both males and females when on earth) makes up his Body. This is very lovely picture and has nothing to do with the order of creation as the Corinthians had supposed. Should you wear a head covering? That is a question that you need to reflect on and pray about. It is your decision. We believe that either choice has validity. Whatever conclusion you come to, we are sure that the Lord will bless you.

Question #2: You told us that you agree with the teaching that speaking in other tongues evidences the gift of the holy Spirit.

We believe that the miraculous gift of speaking in tongues was from God and was much needed at the time since the gospels were not yet written. The Apostles and disciples were commissioned to spread the “good news” by word of mouth to Jews and other people from diverse cultures that spoke a variety of languages. Speaking in tongues does not mean speaking in some angelic language. It means speaking in a language that is understood by the people being addressed, even though the speaker is not familiar with the language himself. There are three instances where speaking in tongues is recorded in the New Testament. They are Acts 2:1-11, 10:38-48 and 19:1-8. In each instance those who spoke were Apostles who had been given the gift of the holy Spirit. Their audience was Jewish or Jewish/Christian and they were speaking in a language that their hearers could understand. Speaking in tongues was not a common practice. It was done for very specific purposes with very specific audiences under very specific oversight.

The misuse of speaking in tongues was part of the carnality issue in the early Corinthian church.

In 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that speaking in a foreign language helps no one if that language is not understood (1 Corinthians 14:2). "So with yourselves; if in a tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air." (1 Corinthians 14:9) The whole purpose of speaking in tongues was to inform people of the good news about Jesus and his sacrifice, not to mystify them with a language they did not understand. The Apostle continues to reason with the Corinthians to use their gift of prophecy to build up the brotherhood. He tells them to use their sanctified minds, a far more valuable gift than the temporary gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:18-19).

Is the gift of the holy Spirit evidenced by the speaking in tongues? We believe that it is

not. Rather, the gift of the holy Spirit is evidenced by a sanctified mind, one that is set apart for service to God. Speaking in tongues was necessary to get the early Church started but is no longer needed today since the Bible has been printed in practically every language and has been distributed throughout the world. Then is this so-called "gift" that many Christian groups claim to have coming from Satan? We do not know. Perhaps speaking in tongues is just an emotional reaction. Perhaps Satan is the deceiver. We are told that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Whatever the source, we believe that the scriptures are clear that speaking in tongues is not a "miracle" that is from God today.

Lastly, you told us that you were confused as to what teaching you should "sit under" and asked for guidance. We noticed that you live in Franklin, IN. There is a very good Bible class in Columbus, IN. We would be happy to direct you to it, if you would like. If you would prefer to investigate the scriptures on your own first we would suggest that you go to our web site at www.christianquestions.net and click on "Related Links" on the left. At that location you will see several web sites. We suggest that you click on www.bible411.com or www.biblestudents.com where you will find a free on-line Bible study as well as much information on many biblical questions and concerns.

We hope we have answered your inquiries. Write us again with any other questions and we will do our best to answer you. Be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind at www.christianquestions.net. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio