THE QUESTION

What did the early church teach about women covering their heads?

Asked by a THF member on August 15, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 9 numbered quotations · the 16 early Christian passages and 20 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-church-teach-about-women-covering-their-heads

The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

The early writers here taught that Christian women should cover their heads. Tertullian argued that Paul's rule covers every woman, including unmarried virgins. John Chrysostom read Paul as wanting women covered at all times, not only at prayer. Clement of Alexandria tied the veil to modesty and to not becoming a snare for men.

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HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 7

Paul's rule covers every woman, virgins too

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In Tertullian's day some churches let unmarried virgins go bare-headed, arguing that Paul named only women. Tertullian answers that the word every leaves no one out: every age and every condition. Just as every man includes boys, every woman includes virgins.

1 “But we must deal with this point, which is commonly observed throughout the churches: whether virgins should be veiled or not.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On Prayer* 21 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

2 “Briefly and fully, with a well-ordered definition, he says, "Every woman." And what is "every," except every class, every order, every condition, every dignity, every age?”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 8 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 5, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 7

Chrysostom says women stay covered, not only praying

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

John Chrysostom notices a difference in how Paul speaks. A man is told to be uncovered only while he prays. But Paul compares an uncovered woman to a shaved one, and shaving is always a disgrace, so Chrysostom concludes the woman should be covered continually.

3 “Well then, he does not force the man to be uncovered at all times, but only when he prays.”

later in the same passage

“He means that she ought to be covered not only at the time of prayer, but continually also.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on First Corinthians* 26 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 13, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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POINT 3 OF 7

Long hair teaches the lesson of the veil

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Chrysostom reads Paul as saying the woman's hair and her covering go together. Nature gave her a covering of hair so that she might learn from it to veil herself as well. A woman who throws off the veil, he says, is by her own choice like one who is shaved.

4

“He did not say, "Let her have long hair," but, "Let her be covered." By this, he teaches that these two things go together.”

later in the same passage

“For this reason, He left it to nature to provide her with a covering, so that even from this she might learn this lesson and veil herself.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on First Corinthians* 26 (c. 386–407 AD) **Source 15, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 7

Two readings of "because of the angels"

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Alexandria reads Paul's phrase as meaning good men, whom an unveiled woman might tempt, while heavenly angels see her anyway. Tertullian takes the angels as heavenly and adds that if a woman should not be uncovered before them, a showy crown on her head offends them even more.

5

“So let her be veiled, so that she may not cause them to stumble into fornication. For the actual angels in heaven see her even when she is veiled.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Fragments* 1 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

6

“If she ought not to appear with her head uncovered on account of the angels, much more with a crown on it will she offend those elders who perhaps are then wearing crowns above.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *De Corona* 14 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›

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POINT 5 OF 7

Clement links the veil with modesty

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In his teaching on clothing, Clement of Alexandria says a woman's beauty is for her husband, not for public view. He gives the command to veil the head as part of that modesty, and he warns against even a purple veil that draws attention to her.

7

“This is true not only because it is forbidden to expose the ankle, but also because it has been commanded that the head be veiled and the face covered. For it is an evil thing when beauty becomes a trap for men.”

later in the same passage

“Nor is it proper for a woman to want to draw attention to herself by wearing a purple veil.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Instructor* 2.11 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 1, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 7

Tertullian wanted a real covering, not a token

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Tertullian also speaks to married women. He criticizes those who bind their hair with bands or wear tiny caps that leave the head mostly bare. The veil, he says, should cover the whole area the hair covers when it hangs loose, down to the neck.

8

“For some, with their turbans and woolen bands, do not veil their head, but bind it up. They are protected in front, indeed, but bare where the head properly lies.”

later in the same passage

“Let them know that the whole head constitutes the woman. Its limits and boundaries reach as far as the place where the robe begins.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Tertullian,** *On the Veiling of Virgins* 17 (c. 196–220 AD) **Source 4, page 6** Read it in the library ›

THF's updated English

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POINT 7 OF 7

Covering the head showed reverence in church

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Chrysostom describes the custom in his own church. Before the Scriptures were read, people washed their hands, a woman who was uncovered put on her veil, and a man who was covered uncovered his head. He treats these outward acts as signs of reverence within.

9 “And if a woman is uncovered, she immediately puts on her veil, showing inward reverence.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **John Chrysostom,** *Homilies on John* 53 (c. 386–407 AD)
THF's updated English

Source 14, page 6 **Read it in the library ›**

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- These passages show that the veiling of virgins was debated in Tertullian's day, so not every church practiced it the same way.
- The writers do not all say whether the covering was worn at all times or mainly in worship; Chrysostom says at all times.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 16 early Christian passages and 20 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–16, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 17–20, in Bible order), then 16 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

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EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *16 passages from 4 writers*

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 1–2*

1 *Instructor* 2.11 **Quote 7, page 4** “your face is lovely." "Yes, but only for the man who has married me." But I do not want chaste women to give any occasion for such praise to those… [continues online] **read ›**

2 *Fragments* 1 **Quote 5, page 3** of the angels." By "angels," he means righteous and virtuous men. So let her be veiled, so that she may not cause them to stumble into fornication. For the actual… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · sources 3–10*

3 *On Prayer* 22 (on point 1) “divine Scripture, and that book of Genesis as well, was drawn up, used that same word in writing women, which, by the example of Eve unmarried, applies also to a… [continues online] **read ›**

4 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 17 **Quote 8, page 4** do not quite reach to the ears. If they are so weak in hearing that they cannot hear through a covering, I pity them. Let them know that the whole… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 8 **Quote 2, page 2** all these opposite points, the result is that a man is not to cover his head. That is because nature has not given him excess of hair, because it is… [continues online] **read ›**

6 *De Corona* 14 **Quote 6, page 3** less may the Christian put the service of idolatry on his own head. No, I might have said, upon Christ, since Christ is the Head of the Christian man. For… [continues online] **read ›**

7 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 12 (1885 English; on point 1) “a veil externally upon her who has (already) a covering internally… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *De Corona* 4 (1885 English) “Susanna also, who was subjected to unveiling on her trial, furnishes an argument for the veiling of women, I can say here also, the veil was a voluntary thing… [continues online] **read ›**

9 *On Prayer* 21 (1885 English) **Quote 1, page 2** “they who allow to virgins immunity from head-covering, appear to rest on this… [continues online] **read ›**

10 *On the Veiling of Virgins* 14 (1885 English; on point 1) “is this.) If an uncovered head is a recognised mark of virginity, (then) if any virgin falls from the grace of virginity, she remains permanently with head uncovered for fear… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 11–12*

11 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 5) “downward when you walk abroad, veiling yourself as becomes women… [continues online] **read ›**

12 *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 7) “the women approach with their heads covered, as is… [continues online] **read ›**

John Chrysostom, *c. 386–407 AD · sources 13–16*

13 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 26 **Quote 3, page 2** “at all times, but only when he prays. For he says, "Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head." But he commands the woman to be… [continues online] **read ›**

14 *Homilies on John* 53 (1885 English) **Quote 9, page 5** “a woman if she be unveiled straightway puts on her veil, giving proof of internal reverence, and a man if he be covered bares his head… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 26 **Quote 4, page 3** and the hair are one, and also that a woman who is shaved is again the same as a woman whose head is uncovered. For, he says, "it is one… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Homilies on First Corinthians* 26 (on point 2) “man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *4 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

17 **1 Corinthians 11:4** Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. **read ›**

18 **1 Corinthians 11:5** But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head. For it is one and the same thing as if she were shaved. **read ›**

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19 **1 Corinthians 11:6** For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off. But if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or be shaved, let her be covered. **read ›**

20 **1 Corinthians 11:10** For this reason the woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels. **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *16 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 2:23 · 6:1

Matthew 6:5 · 10:26 · 12:36

Acts 20:28

1 Corinthians 4:7 · 7:34 · 11:3 · 11:14 · 11:16

2 Corinthians 10:13

Philippians 3:19

1 Peter 1:19 · 2:9

Revelation 14:4

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

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THE END OF THIS STUDY