

How Long Is Long?

by Wayne Goff

In 1 Corinthians 11, while discussing head coverings, Paul said concerning men: *“Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?”* This was a popular, often-used Scripture in the sixties when hippies became popular in America. Most young men then had hair that was “too long” according to the popular census of the day, and to the horror of the “establishment.”

While combatting that problem, young men responded by asking “How long is long?” Of course there is not a definitive answer, but I remember as a teenager that my father set the standard in his house!

But most often “How long is long?” is asked of sermons. A wise sage once said: “A sermon ought not to be any longer than it is deep. With that as a measuring device, some sermons I have heard were long at ten minutes!”

Weaker brethren generally enjoy **shorter sermons**. A fifteen-minute sermon fits their tastes pretty well, and I call them weak because the Bible is so much richer, deeper and fuller than that! If you are of that number, do not lose heart! You can cure your *short attention span* by a **daily** dose of Bible reading and meditation. *“Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day”* (Ps. 119:97). It’s amazing *how short* a forty-five minute sermon is when we have been meditating on God’s Word all week!

On the other side of the coin, **a long sermon** is not necessarily a virtue. A sermon can be long, ill-conceived, ill-prepared, and ill-presented and be **worthless!** No preacher who does that should pat himself on the back for the seeming virtue of being “long-winded”! He needs to follow Paul’s advice to Timothy: *“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”* (1 Tim. 4:15-16). Good, spiritual progress leads to better sermons. Listeners will thank you!

So, how long is long? In answer to how long a man’s legs should be, Abraham Lincoln replied: “Long enough to reach the ground!” A good sermon will be *long enough* to deal with the subject appropriately. A good listener will pay attention to the end.

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