

Headcoverings: The Foundation

1 Corinthians Series

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 11:2-3

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If you have your Bibles please turn with me today to 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

This morning we come to one of the more difficult, disputed and controversial texts in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 11 verses two through 16 that deal with the subject of head coverings.

And before we actually get into the message I would like to read this passage to you. 1 Corinthians 11 beginning at verse two.

Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.¹

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

As we can see, the passage specifically instructs the Corinthians that when a man prays or prophesies his head must not be covered. While a woman who prays or prophesies must have her head covered. This Paul instructed the Corinthians. And all interpreters of this passage would agree to this. But from that point on—I am sorry to say—great disagreement arises over the interpretation and application of the passage.

Now this is not due only to difficulties in the passage itself, difficulties for us to understand and interpret, but let me say also to the subject matter. That is, it treats of the place of the woman in the Church and her role in relation to the man.

With the rise of Feminism both within and without the Church, we have at this passage becoming central to the debate with Feminists and those influenced by them seeking to interpret the passage in a way that is consistent with their views and those who hold to the traditional Christian understanding of the role distinction between men and women using the passage, interpreting the passage accordingly.

So let me say, as we begin, that that the primary issue at stake in our study of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is not head coverings. That is not the primary issue. The primary issue is the relationship of men and women in God's created order. That is the primary issue. The matter of head coverings arose because of a misunderstanding or a dispute over this more fundamental matter. And we see that a problem that took place in the Church at Corinth over head coverings becomes the occasion for the Spirit of God to instruct the Church on the role and place of men and women in God's order.

Now this is not to suggest that the matter of head coverings is unimportant. It really is very important, but it is important because the covering or the uncovering of the head is to uphold and signify the divinely established order. That is why it is important. It is symbolizing something and that is what makes it important. It is not the symbol, but what it symbolizes. And this is what our concern must be in this passage. This is what must be kept in mind throughout.

And once the reason for Paul's instructions concerning head coverings is understood, the issue of the actual practice of head covering is put in its proper perspective and then can be carried out with knowledge and with peace.

Now as we look at this passage we will see this is exactly how Paul deals with the issue of head covering. He begins in verse three by stating the fundamental theological truth that underlies all of his instruction concerning head coverings. In verses four through six he states the practice itself, that is the practice that he wants in the Corinthian Church. And then he goes on in verses seven through 15 to further discuss the basis of the practice of head covering. And he does this from the creation account of Scripture and also from nature. We will be considering those things in the times ahead. We won't get that far today.

But I thought it might be helpful as we begin to just pause for a moment and to catalogue for you some of the various views within the Church concerning 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

And this may be helpful because we may not all be on the same page here. We might have different views. And it will also be helpful to you for you to see what my concern is in this passage is to and why I am going to take the kind of time I am going to take on the passage.

Six different views I am going to summarize here and there are variations of each view. But we are going to take six, as I have seen it and this is my own studies and research and reaching, the six views on the covering among Christians. And we will just list them here.

Number one, Paul's teaching that a woman is to wear a head covering in worship is culturally conditioned, but the underlying principle on the relationship between men and women is universally binding. In other words, the practice itself of head coverings was something that was culturally conditioned. However, the underlying principles upon which the practice was based are universal and binding on all men in all ages.

This view would hold that women are to be in subjection to men in the Church, upholding male headship within the sphere of the Church and that the head covering was a cultural means of expressing that subjection. In other words, in the Corinthian context women wore head coverings to express their submission to their husbands. And that should be upheld by the Church though it is a cultural convention. But since it does point to a truth that is found in Scripture, the cultural practice should not be set aside.

They would also say that an expression of submission varies from culture to culture. And a culture where head coverings have nothing with expressing that submission, head coverings would not be required for women. Primarily this view would hold that Paul is teaching that women are not to appear in the dress of a man or vice versa.

Now this view is held by many conservative commentators such as Charles Hodge, R C H Lenski, Leon Morris, [?] and interestingly today in the recovering biblical manhood and womanhood book that was written by the council, evangelical council on the role between men and women, the chapter dealing with 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 by Thomas Schreiner upholds this view, that is the traditional understanding of the roles of men and women, but however the head covering itself is merely a cultural manifestation and not binding on the Church today. That is the first view.

The second view is that Paul's teaching that a woman is to wear a head covering in worship is not based on any cultural factors, but is a practice binding on the Church in all ages and in all cultures. That is, both the theological principle of male headship and the practice of symbolizing that male headship through the woman having her head covered, this is universal and binding.

This view is, we might call, an older view that has been held in the Church by many different churches and denominations in the past. It was held, for example, by the Reformers, primarily. The Puritans held to this, Presbyterians and so forth. Someone whom you are very familiar with, most of you, as far as a commentator, Matthew Henry advocated this view as did John Calvin in his commentary and another one that is fairly

popular even today is the older commentary by Jamieson, Faucett and Brown advocating this view.

The third view. Paul is teaching that a woman is to wear a head covering in worship refers to the necessity of the woman to wear her hair in a distinctively feminine way. This view would also uphold the traditional conservative understanding of the relationship between men and women as God ordained it. However, they do not believe that the covering is something beyond what that what nature supplies. In other words, the covering is women's hair worn in a distinctively feminine way, primarily long hair that is worn in a fashion that would indicate her status as a woman.

This view is fairly recent. In fact, the idea that a woman's covering is her hair was not advocated, as far as I am aware, before the 60s, the 1960s. It is advocated today by some excellent scholars, James Hurley and George Knight, two examples of that. That is the third view. In other words, the teaching is that the head covering is her hair.

Number four. Paul's teaching that a woman is to wear a head covering applies at all times. In other words, it would also uphold the traditional view, but it would not limit the head covering to times only of praying and prophesying, but the woman is to be covered at all times, not just in times of public worship, not just in times when Christians would gather together to pray and study the Scriptures, but at all times a woman is to have her head covered.

Now that should be quite familiar. To most of you around here that is what we would... I would term a traditional Anabaptist position on that, though there are others who hold that who are not Anabaptist. But the woman is to be covered at all times and the covering is not her hair, but it is an actual covering of another source, some kind of head gear.

Number five. Paul's teaching that a woman is to wear a head covering applies only to meetings outside the church. And we will talk about that in a minute. Since women are forbidden to pray and prophesy in the church this view argues Paul must be speaking of meetings outside the church. And so the ideas of head coverings does not apply to church meetings, but only to times outside the church wherein and at such a time is permitted to pray and prophesy.

A version of this view is that the woman is only to wear a head covering when she prays or prophesies, specifically when she prays or prophesies. And some who teach this say a prophecy as we see in the New Testament is a gift that has passed away and therefore the idea of a woman being able to prophesy and needing to have her head covered when she prophesies doesn't apply today because the gift of prophecy has ceased. And also they take the praying in this passage as referring to praying in tongues and they argue this from 1 Corinthians 14. And therefore effectively it doesn't have anything to say to us today because this is only during the transition time between the Old and New Testament when these miraculous gifts were given. Women in the church... were allowed in the church services to pray in tongues and to prophesy, but if they did that in the church they needed to be covered, but since those gifts no longer are given, it really doesn't have

much to say to us today in terms of the actual practice though the teaching that underlies it would.

And number six. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11:21-16 affirms that women may take leadership roles in the Church, but in doing so they ought to observe proper decorum. This would be the views of your evangelical Feminists who would say, really, 1 Corinthians 11, properly understood is part of Paul's teaching that emancipates women and they are given in this passage full liberty to participate in the services.

However, in doing so they ought to observe the cultural customs. This view would not teach that there is any need for women today to wear head coverings. There is no need for women to express any type of submission to men because there is no submission to men. They are on an equal footing with men in Christ and therefore this passage is really designed not to teach women to wear head coverings, but to see their liberty in Christ and their full equality with men in terms of leadership positions in the Church.

This view would also say that the head covering issue is completely cultural as was the concept of womanly submission. That was also cultural. And, therefore, the passage has really nothing to say to us in terms of head coverings.

As I mentioned before, among these six major views on the passage we have variations among each one of them.

Ok, having said that, having set the stage, as it were, to the passage, let us turn to the actual study of the text beginning with the context. As you see with a study in this type of a passage demands must from you as hearers. If you just want to plan to sit back and kick back and put it into neutral, you won't get much out of this. You are required to think and hold your Bible open. Examine what is said. Consider these things whether they be so as I seek to interpret the passage as I believe it should be interpreted.

Now, beginning with any interpretation we have to look at the context in which the passage appears. And in 1 Corinthians chapter seven through 14, as we have noted previously, the apostle Paul is responding to a series of questions that the Corinthians had asked him in a letter that they had sent to him. The Church sought Paul's counsel on a number of issues where there were problems or disagreements in the congregation.

There were three primary areas that they sought Paul's counsel on and within those areas, you know, sub points.

First of all, they asked his counsel about marriage and we have already studied that in chapter 7:1-40. Secondly, they asked Paul about the issue of Christians eating meat offered to idols or the more broader issue of Christian liberty. We studied that in chapters 8:1 through chapter 11 and verse one. We come now to the third area and that deals with—for want of a better term—matters relating to public worship in church, public worship, the church's order as it comes together in worship. And by saying that we are not specifically talking about only the Lord's Day morning service, but whenever the

Church as the Church with elders presiding for the desire to edify the body gather together to worship.

And, you know, the early church was meeting daily at one point. We are required by God's law to meet once a week, one day in seven. The Church has liberty to meet at other times. And so when I talk about public worship I am not necessarily limiting it to the, what we traditionally think of as the Lord's Day service.

Of course, it's primary application and usage would be in that context.

So Paul is going to be asking... or they are asking Paul, I should say, questions relating to their worship. When they gather together as a church to pursue those things that God has commanded them in terms of corporate fellowship and worship.

There are three things they ask Paul about, three areas of trouble and problems in the Corinthian's church. Number one is the one we are looking at now, women's coverings, the question of whether or not women should be covered in the service. Secondly, the Lord's supper. That is also here in chapter 11. There were abuses and problems concerning the Lord's Supper. And thirdly, and the longest section, is that dealing with spiritual gifts and the usage of tongues and prophesy within the assembly of God's people.

Now, getting back to our text today, apparently some questions and problems had arisen in the congregation at Corinth over the practice of women being covered in worship. Paul had taught the practice of women being covered. And I will show you that in a minute from verse two. He had already taught that, that women should be covered in service or in the church worship. And this was being observed faithfully in Corinth, which verse two also says.

Furthermore we see in verse 16—as I read earlier—that this practice was a standard for all the churches that Paul ministered to.

But some women in Corinth appeared to have been questioning this if not actually appearing in worship uncovered. They may have been claiming that—as they do today—that all distinctions between men and women have been removed in Christ.

A classic passage on our standing before Christ in Galatians 3:28 says there is no longer any bond or free, Greek or Roman, male or female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus. And that doctrine which is certainly true was being taken by some apparently and saying, there is no subordination. There is no distinctions within the sphere of the Church anymore. We are all one in Christ. Therefore why should I be wearing a head covering?

So Paul's teaching on the subject must be understood in this kind of a context, the context of the relationship between men and women in the Church and their proper roles.

We know from Scripture that there are three primary spheres of God's government

beyond self government which deals with the individual. The other three primary spheres would be the family, the Church and the state.

Now the Scripture speaks to the issue and the relationship between men and women concerning these spheres. And the passage we are about to look at deals specifically with the sphere of the Church.

In Ephesians chapter 5:22-33 we see specific teaching concerning the sphere of the family in the relation between men and women as we do also in Colossians three, Titus two and 1 Peter chapter three. But we are going to be looking here in this context. Paul is dealing with the Church, the sphere of the Church and the relationship between men and women in that sphere.

Now let me give you an outline of the passage before we begin. In verse three Paul sets—after he gives the introduction in verse two—in verse three Paul gives the theological foundation for the matter of head coverings and that is the doctrine of headship. And then in verses four through six Paul gives instructions regarding the head covering. Here we will consider what the head covering is, when the teaching or instructions apply and how they apply to men and how they apply to women.

And then in verses seven through 16 Paul gives support for his instructions regarding head coverings. He begins in verses seven through 12. He gives support from the biblical account of creation. Verses 13 through 15 he gives support for his instructions from nature. And then in verse 16 he gives support for his instructions from the practice of all the churches.

Having taken that time to introduce, now we actually get to the text. Verse two, Paul's introduction.

He says, "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."²

Now this introduction goes to more than just verses three through 16. It actually is an introduction to this whole section where Paul is going to deal with the ordinances relating to public worship in the Church. And he says, "I praise you brethren."³

Notice down in verse 17 he says, "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not."⁴

He is going to talk now about the Lord's supper. But he is going to praise them about the matter of head coverings. And what is he going to praise them on? He is going to praise them that in regard to this they remember him in all things. That is, they are mindful of Paul and his authority as an apostle of Christ. Hence, their very letter sent to him asking

² 1 Corinthians 11:2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:17.

him for his counsel in the matter shows they remember Paul. Paul is the man to go to in this situation. He will have God's wisdom. He will have the answer that we need.

He says, "You remember me in all things and I praise you for this. Thank you for writing to me concerning this issue in question. I also praise you, brethren, that you keep that ordinances."

That is, the Corinthians are, in general, carrying out the ordinances which Paul delivered them concerning worship. Now, there were problems, true. But in the main they were keeping the ordinances, particularly they were keeping the ordinance concerning head covering.

Now this word "ordinance" is important to understand as we begin this passage. It refers to that which is handed down or over to another individual. It is used in reference to instruction that is passed on to others either orally or in writing. It is rendered sometimes in the New Testament, our translation, by the word "traditions."

In the New Testament the word "ordinance" refers to the teaching and instructions that were held as authoritative in a religious community. That is what is meant by the ordinance. That is the teaching and instructions that were held to be authoritative in a religious community.

And I use the term "a religious community" because it is used negatively of the Jewish community where Paul... not Paul, Jesus continually rebukes them for keeping the traditions of men.

But the thing to notice, those traditions were authoritative. They bound the people and the people in the Jewish community considered the teachings of the scribes and elders to be authoritative instruction. These were ordinances that they were to keep.

So it was used negatively, this word in the New Testament concerning Jewish tradition. But it is also used positively of apostolic teaching or the apostolic traditions. That is, the teachings and instructions that were passed on by the inspired apostles of Christ to the churches and those instructions were considered authoritative in the New Testament setting because these men were the mouthpieces of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look, for example, to 2 Thessalonians chapter two. There are a number of passages we could go to, but this is, perhaps, one of the clearest in trying to condense.

Paul says in verse 15 of 2 Thessalonians two, "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions..."⁵ same word that is translated ordinances in 1 Corinthians.

Hold the ordinances, the traditions, those things that we passed to you, "the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle."⁶

⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

⁶ Ibid.

In other words, “What we have given to you in our word and we have handed down to you, this is the authoritative Word of God and it is to be kept within the churches.”

Paul, we also have this same word used in Jude three where we are to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”⁷ And the word “delivered” there is the word.

Handed down to the saints. And that is referring, again, to the apostolic traditions that have been handed to the church through those inspired men of God. And we must earnestly contend for these things. These are not mere opinions. These are not mere conventions. These are not mere cultural matters. These are the ordinances that we are to keep in the churches of Christ. As they were to be kept in the early days of the Church, so they are to be kept today and they are recorded for us in the words of God in the New Testament. These are the ordinances of the apostles that we must keep.

Now Paul, in speaking of keeping the ordinances here in 1 Corinthians 11:2 is talking about the practice of head coverings. Now this was an ordinance that was handed down by Paul and the apostles to the churches of Christ.

What we are talking about, then, in this passage are not mere cultural matters, mere matters of convention. But we are talking about, as Christians, studying to understand the ordinance of God in regard to head coverings.

This is authoritative for you and I who believe in the authority of the New Testament and Christ’s apostles. It is not a matter to be set aside lightly.

Paul uses this same word, but in its verb form, that is about delivering teaching to them, this is its noun form when he calls it something that I have delivered to you, an ordinance. He uses it in its verbal form also in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 23.

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.”⁸

He is giving the apostolic ordinances concerning the Lord’s supper.

Furthermore, look at 1 Corinthians 15 and verse three, talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ. He says, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.”⁹

This is also what Paul delivered, the traditions, the ordinances of the gospel he delivered unto them.

⁷ Jude 3.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:23.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:3.

Therefore, Paul's instructions to the Corinthians on the matter of head coverings must be taken as very important and very serious. In terms of apostolic tradition, it is on the same level as Paul delivering the instructions concerning the Lord's supper and concerning the content of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul had taught the Corinthians regarding head coverings and his teaching was being obeyed, though there were some problems arising.

This suggests to us that the matter of head coverings is more than an opinion on how to deal with the matter of liberty or an issue of cultural conventions. It points to the fact that Paul's instruction on head coverings applies to all churches in all places in all times.

Having said that and having praised them for that, Paul moves on, then, in verse three to give the theological foundation for understanding his ordinance concerning head coverings.

And verse two sets the stage. We are dealing with an ordinance here handed down authoritatively by the apostle Paul to the churches of Jesus Christ. And they are to be kept and they are to be obeyed. We are not talking about matters of Christian liberty. Paul is changing the subject. If head covering was an area of Christian liberty it would still be considered under the liberty section. He is moving on to ordinances, commands.

No liberty here.

Remember, Christian liberty is where God has not commanded or forbidden. But there is no liberty in the matter of a head covering. It is a command, an ordinance delivered to us. Let us keep that in mind now as we try to understand exactly what that ordinance is.

Paul begins with a theological foundation for understanding the ordinance of head coverings in verse three.

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman [is] the man; and the head of Christ [is] God.”¹⁰

Here we have the theological foundation of head coverings and it is the doctrine of headship. This is where Paul begins and this is where we must begin. This declaration by Paul makes evident the fact, the practice of head coverings is for the purpose of reflecting this doctrine in a visible way.

Understanding the New Testament teaching on the role relationship of men and women in the family and the church begins with an understanding and acceptance of the biblical doctrine of headship. This is where it starts. The fact that Paul begins his instructions on head coverings with an unchanging biblical doctrine indicates to me that he is not simply giving instructions on how the Church in Corinth should respond to a local custom.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:3.

In chapter 10 verses 20 to 21 Paul taught us how he dealt with local customs. To the Jew he became as a Jew, to the Gentiles as a Gentile and so forth and so on. But Paul is not dealing with local custom. He is dealing with an abiding theological truth, the doctrine of headship.

He says, “But I would have you know...”¹¹

That is, if you are to understand my instructions to you concerning head coverings, you must know the following the doctrine of headship. And the word “know” that is used in this passage, the Greeks had two words for knowledge. One, knowledge gained through experience, the other knowledge gained by revelation. Someone teaches it to us. We learn things both ways.

The word that is used here is knowledge by means of revelation. It is not necessarily something that experience would teach us. But this is something that God has sovereignly revealed to men. And Paul is going to make known to us and be the agent of that revelation in the clearly stated proposition concerning headship given to us in verse three.

“I would have you to know,” he says, “that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”¹²

We must pause and consider the meaning of the word “head.” It can be used in a literal sense, obviously. But it is used quite often in a non literal sense. It can refer to chronological priority, including source, that is something is the head because it came before in terms of time or in terms of physical space, such as the head of a river might be called the source of the river where it begins. It also refers to positional priority, not just chronological priority, but it is also used in reference to positional priority denoting superior rank.

Now the Hebrew word for head—and we ought to consider the Hebrew word because Paul being a Hebrew and being filled with the knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures would use the word head, I believe in a way that is consonant with the Hebrew understanding of the word head. How did the Jews use the word head? What does the Old Testament say about the word head?

The Hebrew word head was used in reference to a chief or a leader, beyond its literal usage, of course. And it meant to be in authority over someone. It was used in the Old Testament, for example, of the King of Israel. He was the head of the tribes of Israel. It is used of the high priest who was the head over the nation in terms of its worship. It was used also of a man as being the head of his family.

Therefore the word, the Hebrew word, the primary sense in which it was used was that of being an authority over, that of positional priority.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

And we see that this use of the root to designate a divinely appointed office in the Old Testament is carried over into the New Testament. Paul is using the word head here to set forth the hierarchical structure in God's economy, or, as Charles Hodge says, "Order and subordination pervade the whole universe and is essential to its being." And that is what Paul is setting forth here.

There is a divinely appointed order of authority in the universe. And we are told what it is here beginning with God through Christ to man and to the woman. This is a divinely appointed order of authority.

As we think about this order we will have to note that there is not a point for point correspondence in the order.

First of all, I want you to know that when we look at the order of authority here and we talk of God in Christ we have the sphere of the divine, God in Christ, the sphere of the divine. And then we have a great gulf to the next step when we come to the human sphere where you have man and woman. There are two spheres in this appointed order. We have God and then we have Christ and the divine and then we have man and then we have woman in the human sphere.

Christ is the one who bridges the gap, because Christ is the God man. He was both God and man, the eternal Son made flesh in the person of Jesus.

Paul refers to the headship of man here and refers to Christ's headship in terms of the name Christ, not Jesus because when we speak of Christ we are talking about the divine Mediator in both of his offices, both of his natures as man and as God and he is the divine Mediator.

Paul says, "The head of every man is Christ."¹³

What he means by this is that Christ has authority over every man. This reference to Christ is significant and because it means that we are talking about the mediatorial kingdom of Jesus Christ. That is, in his redemptive work, when both his natures were active, Jesus Christ has been invested now as the victorious Lord with authority over all things in heaven and earth as Ephesians 1:21-23 teaches. He was made head over all things for the Church, not just head over the Church, but over all things for the sake of serving the Church. Christ has headship over all.

There is no higher authority on earth. Christ is the head of all things. He has authority over man, meaning that man is under the headship of Christ.

The word man that is used here is not the general term for mankind, but the gender specific term for a male, as is the word woman here. It is not a general term, but it is the gender specific referring to the woman. And so he is talking about men here. And he is

¹³ Ibid.

saying that men are under the authority of Christ. They are subordinate to Christ. That man must see his place in God's order of authority.

This is important because as we talk about the doctrine of headship we must realize that the emphasis is usually placed on the fact that woman is subordinate to the man and the man usually places his emphasis there and the woman does, too, in the sense that she doesn't like it and the man that he likes it.

But that is taking this whole idea of subordination out of its context, because the man himself is subordinate. He is under authority. He is under the authority of Christ. He is not autonomous. He is not free to do as he pleased. Just as a woman must submit to a higher authority, so must a man. He must submit to the authority of who? The Lord Jesus Christ who is placed in authority over him by the father in view of his redemptive work and his glorious victory, his resurrection to the Father's right hand.

Now we must see that for man he has no higher authority on earth. There is no other over him but there is one in heaven who is over him and it is Christ the Lord. He is under the authority of Christ, the divine Mediator. And man must submit to him.

Now it says then, "The head of the woman is the man,"¹⁴ stating that man has authority over the woman. The woman is under the headship of the man and under his authority and subordinate to him.

So the woman does have a higher authority on earth while the man does not. Now in saying that, by the way, I am not denying the teaching that men will have to submit to other men as elders and other men as civil magistrates. But they have no other being. Men as a class, as a generic group have no other authority over them. Men don't submit to women. Women are not placed in authority over men. And so men may have to submit to other men in those relationships in the Church and in the state, but the woman must submit to another human being in terms of their being. That is the male rather than the female and she must submit unto him.

When we think of the idea of womanly submission we have to see that it doesn't only apply in a marriage sphere, but also in all spheres. This statement of headship is not narrowed and, in fact, it is supported by other biblical teaching that it applies in all spheres. Christ is the head over all things. Man is his... is under his authority to take dominion in the earth in all spheres—family, church and state—and so the woman is to submit to the man who is under Christ in all spheres, the family, the Church and the state.

The context here is specifically, though, the Church. This is important because some have argued that in Christ distinctions cease between men and women. This is the evangelical Feminist argument. Because we are now one in Christ in the redemptive sphere of the Church there are no longer any distinctions. But that turns this passage around. Because it is the very context of the redemptive kingdom of Christ the doctrine of headship is set

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:3.

forth. Christ's headship does not remove the distinctions in the Church. It establishes them. It is in the realm of his mediatorial kingdom that this order exists.

Then we are told, finally, by Paul that¹⁵ “The head of Christ is God.”¹⁵

Within the godhead there is order as well. When we think of the trinity we need to think of it in two senses, the economical trinity and the ontological trinity.

You say, “Boy.”

Ontological simply comes from a Greek word meaning being. In terms of the being of the members of the godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—they are completely one in essence and equal in power and glory. There is no difference in the essence of the Father and the Son and the Spirit. The economical trinity speaks of the duties within the godhead in carrying out the redemptive purposes of God. And in that setting there is subordination.

The Father is over the Son, and though it is not stated here in the passage, the Son sends the Spirit indicating that the Spirit is subservient to Christ. The Spirit comes to bear witness not to himself, but to Christ. The Spirit comes not to give his own words, but the words of Christ.

And so the economical trinity is not dealing with the essence and being of God, but with the function of the godhead in carrying forth his work in the world. And within that sphere there is subordination. And in that sphere Christ is subordinate to God which, in this passage, would stand for the Father.

Now this is important to understand in reference to submission and headship. We know by orthodoxy and the teachings of the Scripture that there is no difference in essence and worth between Christ and the Father. They are of equal value, as it were. They are of equal essence and glory.

So it is when we talk about the headship of the man over the woman there is no indication whatsoever that the woman is an inferior person. She is fully equal to the man. She also was created in the image of God in terms of her essence, in terms of her humanity she is completely the equal of man. But in terms of God's economy, in terms of the carrying forth of his work in the world among men, God, just like he did in his own godhead has established headship, authority and order.

And so when we talk about this, it is a false accusation against this biblical doctrine to say that we are teaching that women are inferior to men. Not at all. We are teaching that within God's divinely appointed order, there is headship and there is submission and God, who is the Creator—and if we have a problem with this doctrine that is who we have to take it up with—has established a particular order in earth and he has established men with the headship in that order, always remember, too, that men are also within an

¹⁵ Ibid.

order. They have a place to take within it, too, and they are under the authority of Christ which leads us to another consideration that is really not on this passage, but a woman herself, Christ is head over her, too. He is head over all things and, as her head, has appointed the man to be an authority over her.

However, if the man walks in rebellion to his head, the woman is required not to obey him, but her greater head the Lord Jesus Christ. And so submission to human authority is always conditioned on this statement of the apostles, “We ought to obey God rather than men.”¹⁶

When men depart from their submission to God’s law and his authority, then those under them are required to not obey them, but to obey their king and their Creator and their Lord.

So here was the divinely revealed authority in the universe. Both men and women have their place in it. It applies to all spheres of life—the family, the Church and state. In the family we have husbands and fathers with the headship. In the Church we have elders. And within the civil sphere we have magistrates and women are not to be civil magistrates. They have not been called to have headship in any sphere.

This is a foundational doctrine for understanding practice of the headship.

Now, having said that, we move on to the instructions regarding the head coverings. Here we want to consider three things. What is the nature of the covering? When does the covering... when does the teaching concerning the head covering apply to men and women?

Hopefully we are going to get through the first two questions here yet this morning. What is the head covering?

In verse six and in verse five the words are used in this fashion.

“Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered...”¹⁷

There is the word.

Verse five.

“But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head.”¹⁸

Verse six.

¹⁶ Acts 5:29.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:4.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:5.

“For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn.”¹⁹

And then later on he speaks down in verse 13:

“Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?”²⁰

The word “cover” here means to cover up or to veil. The word “uncover” is the opposite of that. It means to uncover or unveil the head. The usage of these words points to some sort of covering, that is, a veil, a scarf, a hat, et cetera, or what we might simply call head gear, something that is put on the head.

Interestingly in verse four it speaks of the man here, it says, “not having his head covered.” Literally it could be translated, “having down upon his head,” simply indicating that the man has something resting upon his head which makes it pretty difficult to make the covering hair out of that kind of a statement by Paul.

The man is not to have anything resting on his head it says, when he prophesies or prays while the woman is to have something on her head. She is to be covered or veiled during that time of praying.

This indicates that the head covering is some sort of head covering and not hair. The exact nature of this head gear is not specified in the passage.

As I mentioned earlier in the sermon that some claim that the covering is the woman’s hair, that is, specifically long hair worn in womanly fashion. They support it in a couple of ways.

Number one, they say, “Greek and Roman women did not wear coverings in the first century, but actually they had long hair that was worn in a distinctive drawn up fashion.”

By the way, when you get into studying what the veiling practices were in the ancient world, you can become very confused. One writer and teacher claiming evidence for this and evidence for that.

Some say that the evidence was that the Greek and Roman women did cover their heads with a veil and Hurley’s research, which is quite extensive, says they didn’t. They did not cover their hair. The way that a woman showed her rank and her position as being married to a man and so forth was by the way she wore her hair. It would be long. It would be worn up in some sort of a distinctive fashion. Often she would put jewels and that type of things in to express her rank so that what she symbolized that she was a woman. She was married to a man and this was her rank in society by how she wore her hair, not by anything that was on her head.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:6.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:13.

And so those who proclaim the covering is hair begin by saying that the covering in the Greek and Roman context of 1 Corinthians would have been long hair worn in distinctive fashion.

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 says what? That her hair is given her for a covering. Now what could be plainer than that? We have been talking about a covering throughout the passage and here Paul finally gets to the end and says, "Listen, her hair is the covering."

Well, there are some problems with that view. As I said the word used in verses four through six indicate head gear, not unloosed hair. In other words, to pray without their hair covered, according to this other view, would be that they had taken their hair down. They had let it down. It was no longer worn up in distinctive fashion. They let their hair down and that was the way in which they were rebelling against the symbol of their position as a woman.

But the words for covered and uncovered in verses four through six do not indicate unloosed hair, but rather head gear.

Secondly, if the covering is long hair, I find it strange that Paul didn't simply say so from the beginning and waits till the very end of the passage. Why wait to verse 14 to introduce the word and the concept if that is what he is trying to teach the Corinthians?

Furthermore, the covering, as you will note, is only specified for the time of praying and prophesying. This implies that we are talking about something that can be taken off and put on. And 1 Corinthians 11:14-15 functions to support the need for a covering in chapter 11 verses four through six.

A different word for covering is used in verse 15 than was used earlier. And when he says it is given to her for an covering, it means over against or corresponding to. In other words, the natural covering of the woman given by God is support for the fact that she needs additional covering. And we will look at that in detail when we get to that part.

A different type of covering, hair, is used to support the need for headgear. You don't usually support something by appealing to itself. But you appeal to something else to support the position you are seeking to make.

Therefore, the head covering is some sort of head gear, I believe, not long hair. Since a specific type of covering is not specified, I think the Holy Spirit is giving us liberty to decide what type of covering we will use. This could vary from culture to culture, from church to church. The issue in this passage is not the type of covering, but the fact of a covering. And the important thing to remember continually is that the symbolism of the covered or uncovered head is understood as being a symbol of God's appointed order. God's appointed order, one's place in it.

So the head covering is not one's hair distinctively worn. It is not long hair. But it is actually some sort of veil, hat, handkerchief, whatever, in the passage.

Now finally for today what or when do these instructions concerning the head covering apply? At all times is the woman to be covered? Or at a specific time, during a specific activity?

Paul states that his instructions apply to the time when a man or a woman is praying or prophesying. Now I must confess it is difficult to determine the exact meaning of Paul here. I believe the meanings of the word, however, in the context point to something done in public or before others, we should say, not one's own private devotions. The praying that is being spoken of here is not when the woman goes in Jesus' instruction, closes her door and prays to God. We are talking in the context here of public worship, not private devotions and how our public worship should be carried out.

Furthermore, the word "prophecy" is one of the Spirit's gifts for the edification of the body. And spiritual gifts are never given for individual benefit. They are always given for the benefit of others.

This is one of the arguments we will see later on in 1 Corinthians against so-called devotional tongues. Tongues were not given to benefit you in your worship before God. They were given for a purpose to edify and benefit others. Spiritual gifts are given so the body can be built up, not you personally, though you may, of course, receive benefit from the exercise of your gift. But that is not the purpose of it. And if you do receive benefit it is simply because you are part of the body.

The gifts are always exercised in context of others. So prophecy.

And therefore when he speaks here of prophecy we are talking about the gift of edification. Look at chapter 14 and verse three.

"But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort."²¹

And so the prayer and prophesy that is being spoken of here point to that in which others are involved, public or group worship.

Therefore, Paul is speaking of the exercise of prayer and prophesy before or with others and must include, if it is not limited to, the meetings of the church congregation.

Now this suggests to some that women are then therefore must be permitted to pray, lead in prayer and prophesy in church meetings along with men. This is the position that I said taken earlier... or I said earlier taken by evangelical Feminists and others influenced by them who would not be of that particular camp and that it proves that women have the full right of participation in the services and to lead the congregation in public meetings.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 14:3.

But also many more conservatives and evangelicals hold that a woman is not permitted to hold the office of elder or be appointed a teacher in the Church, yet she can't do those, she can't be an elder, yet the actions here specified do not violate that prohibition and that a woman would be allowed in public to pray since prayer, for example, is not directed to men, but God. And prophesy, they would argue, is a charismatic gift where the speaker is somewhat passive in the exercise thereof.

Now the gift of prophecy is not preaching and teaching. Different words are used for the preaching and teaching of the Bible and the regular ministry of the elders as teachers. Prophecy was a special gift that was given to the Church in its infancy before the New Testament was written to provide direct, divine revelation to the Church concerning matters they could not know the answer on apart from God revealing it because they didn't have their New Testaments yet.

Think where we would be as Christians in our church life and all those things without the New Testament. There would times come when we would need some direct revelation because this revelation hadn't been put into written form yet. God supplied that need through prophets in the Church. And the gift of prophecy was occasional and when the occasion arose when there was a need for a type of revelation, God would give to those he had gifted for that gift the message to deliver to the Church.

And, therefore, prophesy is not teaching per se, as is the idea of taking the written Scriptures, opening them up or taking the apostolic tradition and explaining them and applying them to the Church.

And, therefore, they can... the argument is since it was somewhat of a passive gift, it was perfectly acceptable in their view to think that women could have exercised that gift within the congregation.

But there is a problem, I think, with this view. In the context of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:34, look there please, the long discussion on prophecy and tongues in the Church and specifically then it is talking about prophecy and after talking about prophecy and the speaking of prophets.

“Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.”²² And so forth.

Verse 34.

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.”²³

And another aspect.

²² 1 Corinthians 14:29.

²³ 1 Corinthians 14:34.

If they will learn, if they have questions, “Let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”²⁴

So how can we have this prophecy be exercised in the church when Paul later in 1 Corinthians 14 says within that context women are not to speak. Furthermore, look at 1 Timothy two.

This context is that of public prayer. Paul in 1 Timothy two is instructing the Church on the roles of men and women within the body of Christ and the congregation. And he says in verse eight, within that context, “I will therefore that men [males] pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.”²⁵

And then he goes to talk about he women. What are they to do? He talks about their dress and he says in verse 11:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.²⁶

So the context of public prayer is when Paul speaks that he assigns the duty to men and later on, though it is specifically, you know, teaching, I understand, he does though, again, reinforce the idea of the woman being silent.

Therefore some have suggested that Paul is speaking at least in regard to women, that is when he talks about praying and prophesying, family worship or private meetings in the home of Christians or meetings of the Church other than the Lord’s Day worship service.

Now this is plausible to some degree because women were given the gift of prophecy. Acts chapter two, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”²⁷

Acts 21 verse nine we learn the four daughters of Philip did prophecy and they had to exercise it somewhere, right? So they can’t do it in the assembly and they have the gift of prophecy it has to be exercised somewhere.

Also we look at Acts chapter 12 and verse two and we see believers of the house of Mary praying for Peter. And we get the view then is this, that this praying and prophesying is not referring to the church services where the women are to be silent, but it is referring to private meetings in homes.

But I have a problem limiting Paul’s instructions to family or private meetings. Again, the context favors or points to meetings of the congregation and the possibilities of disorder within that sphere, that setting.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:35.

²⁵ 1 Timothy 2:8.

²⁶ 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

²⁷ Acts 2:17.

Now listen carefully. To limit Paul to requiring head coverings only for these two actions means that all... at all other times and actions they are not required. And that would cut both ways, not on the men should not be covered at that point and women should.

This would mean that during the Lord's supper, preaching, teaching, singing, evaluating the prophets, interacting with the teacher, reading the Scriptures, the instructions do not apply. The head covering issue is not an issue. Only when they pray or prophesy.

But why does the doctrine of headship only have to be symbolized during these two actions and not the others? Think about it.

Now remember both men and women are given the instructions on covering the head or uncovering. This would mean that men could be covered at any other time in the worship service. They could have their hats on or whatever they wanted to wear on their head when they preached, when they observe the Lord's supper, when they sang, when they recited the creeds or whatever they do. It cuts both ways. Men have no requirement.

And, remember. What is the covering and the uncovering symbolizing? The doctrine of headship. And a man's uncovered head symbolizes Christ as his head which we will explain next week.

So then we would have men cover their heads at the very time they most exercise their headship and when is that? When they teach the Scriptures and when they observe the Lord's supper. Men are given authority to bind and to loose through the sacraments and through the aspect of church discipline. They are given the Word of God to expound its doctrines in the world and to do it under Christ's headship and authority. However, in doing those actions they can have their heads covered and they don't need to symbolize their submission to Christ.

Do you get my point? I hope so.

Therefore, all things considered, I believe that it is best to understand praying and prophesying as a synecdoche. You got that? A synecdoche.

Does anybody know what that is, what that beast is? It is a figure of speech wherein a part is used of the whole or a class.

The best example comes to my mind is the Lord's prayer.

"Give us this day our daily bread."²⁸

What is bread? It is a synecdoche. It is referring to all foods. It is one aspect of food that stands for the whole class. So when we pray for our daily bread we are praying for all of our needs in terms of food to be met. So when Jesus... I mean, when Paul speaks of

²⁸ Matthew 6:11.

praying or prophesying he is using a synecdoche and he is using a part to they refer to the whole. Therefore praying and prophesying which were two primary elements of early Church worship stands for the whole class of worship.

When the Church gathers for whatever reason to worship, praying and prophesying being synecdoches speaking of worship, they are to be observing the rule of head coverings, men uncovered and women covered.

Thus, I believe the instructions regarding head coverings apply to all times when a group of Christians gather to worship, when they pray, when they read the Scriptures together, when there is teaching exercised. The primary application would be to the Lord's Day worship service and all other established gatherings of the Church such as mid week Bible studies, prayer meetings and so forth. Whenever the Church gathers, not just the Lord's Day, but any time.

It would also, though, apply to any other time a group of Christians specifically meet to worship. For a couple of Christian families decide to get together to encourage one another and to pray and read the Bible, not a church meeting, not sanctioned by the elders, something they do on their own. Head covering teaching should be observed.

I also therefore believe it applies to family worship and a Christian family, when a Christian family gathers to worship where the doctrine of headship certainly applies in terms of the husband and wife, the head coverings are to be observed in family worship.

Furthermore, this text does not teach that women can lead in prayer or prophesy in a congregation. It cannot be used for that matter. However, it does show that they may engage in congregational worship. They may not lead in prayer, nor teach and speak. They may, as the congregation comes before God as one body sing with their voices, recite prayers with the body such as the Lord's Prayer, speak together with the body as priests, because then they are not speaking as man and woman. They are speaking as a body of believers. But even in that context they should be covered and men should be uncovered.

Finally I believe this then shows that the passage is not requiring women to be covered at all times or men to be uncovered at all times, because remember whatever you require of the women, you must require of the men on the other side. If women must be covered at all times so men must be uncovered at all times and have nothing on their heads. That is what the passage says, have nothing on their head at all which doesn't hold up.

But it does require, though, whenever the body of Christ, the Church, gathers to worship that they need to have their heads covered. The women and the men uncovered.

The doctrine of headship is foundational to understanding the subject of head coverings. It is to symbolize that doctrine.

The head covering, in reviewing today's message is not hair, but some sort of head gear. And the instructions on head covering apply to all meetings of Christians for worship.

Let us pray.

Father, guide us to an understanding of this passage that we might walk as individuals and as a church in obedience to the ordinance that is found in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and that we might humbly submit ourselves to that ordinance for the glory of Christ to the upholding of the divinely established order in the world, an order that is so viciously under attack today that we might be used in this simple yet profound way to help turn back the assaults of the enemy on your most precious, divinely established order. Help us, Lord, to understand this difficult passage. Guide us in our discussion now in Jesus' name.

One of the difficulties of 1 Corinthians 11 is you have to keep in balance many passages and many considerations. I found myself in my own studies as I would go down one avenue of understanding I would get blocked off by a text of Scripture or another principle and I would have to back up and start over again and head down another one. Oh, no. This can't be that because of this. Oh, no, it can't be that.

And that is why I said, all things considered, I see prayer and prophesy as a figure of speech which is a common one, a synecdoche where the part stands for the whole and the only way that I can personally balance all of the different factors is to see it in that fashion.

That is really how we have to interpret the Scripture, by balancing all the relevant texts and coming up with a logical, reasonable, biblically founded position. That is what I have tried to do. Whether or not I accomplished it is yours to judge.