



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Text 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

1 Corinthians

“The Divine Order”

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark, and good morning. We’ve come to an interesting passage and part of 1 Corinthians. We’re going to look at 1 Corinthians 11, and if you remember from last week, we ended the text with 11:1, so we begin our text this morning with verse 2 and we’ll go through verse 16.

“Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake. Therefore the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God *with her head* uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair,

it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” A very interesting passage. May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and our time of studying it together. Let’s pray.

Father, we do thank You for this time together and this opportunity to continue our studies in 1 Corinthians. And we do come to an interesting text that raises many questions and question that we wonder what can the answer be. So, Lord, we look to you to give it. We look to you to give us wisdom and understanding as we approach a difficult abstruse kind of text, at least so it seems. Help us to gain an understanding of it and a proper application of it. Guide us in our thinking. We commit that to You. What a blessing it is and how thankful we are to know that we’re not left to our own designs. We’re not left to our own thoughts and our own efforts. We certainly must make effort in the study of Your Word to understand it and must certainly apply ourselves to it.

Answers don’t just fall out of the sky. We have to apply ourselves. But have an interpreter. We have a teacher. We so often say this but it’s something we need to remind ourselves of frequently, and that is we have the Spirit of God within us to guide us and direct us, and we pray that He would do that as we seek to understand these things. So bless the one who speaks and bless those who listen that we would have attentive ears and we would be taught first and foremost by You. Guide us in our thinking. Make personal applications to each one of us. May this be a time not of confusion but of edification. May we be built up in the faith and may we seek to glorify You in all that we do.

Bless us spiritually, but Lord, bless us materially, as well. We could go through our prayer request list. We won’t do that. You know the names listed and you know the names that aren’t listed that have need of prayer. You know who has difficulty presently and who of us will face trials and difficulties tomorrow, next week, next year. You know what’s coming. It’s all part of your perfect plan for us. And so you know the perfect answer. We pray, Lord, that you bless those who are without employment. What a discouraging thing that is and it weighs people down. When it drags on, they become very discouraged and they can even wonder if the Lord is listening, if the Lord is watching. You are. You always are. Encourage those who are discouraged with that fact and that reality, that you know their need and you know their situation and that you will bless and help them to rest in you and be active and diligent in seeking to obtain employment. Give perseverance and diligence in that.

And those who are incapacitated for one reason or another, who are recovering from surgery or some procedure, bless them with healing. Bless them with health and encourage them. Those who are discouraged because of the circumstances of life at home or within the office at work, encourage them, strengthen them. The Spirit of God is our comforter. So may He comfort them in the midst of discouraging times and help them to focus on Your Word. Help all of us, whatever our circumstance in life, to focus on the promises that you give us in Your Word and be encouraged by them and rest in that. We look to you to bless us in that way and in so many ways, Father.

We give You thanks for all that we have in Christ. You’ve blessed us abundantly. This is the week of Thanksgiving. It’s not a biblical holiday, we know. It’s not something that’s required of us, but it is a national holiday that is really, I think, wisely done. It’s a good idea. At least one week out of the year, one day out of the year, we officially are thankful. We should be thankful every day. You have blessed us abundantly. You’ve blessed this nation abundantly, materially, spiritually. And we thank You for that, and we pray that those blessings continue. And we pray for our government. We pray for our president and for the congress and for the judges. And we pray that you’d give them protection and wisdom. We pray that this land would be blessed. We are debtors to mercy alone.

You have shed your grace upon us and we give you thanks for that. And how much more we can say that about our lives personally, individually, we who have been sovereignly brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, have put our faith in him by your grace. We thank You for that. You’ve brought us into Your family regardless of what happens in this life. It is momentary. It is transitory. The permanent, the eternal is yet to come and all of this will be but a dream, just a fleeting moment. But it is a serious moment. We live in time and space and we really do live, and we have a moment in which to serve you. Help us to do that. And to that end, give us an understanding and an appreciation for what Paul wrote to those Corinthians in this text of Scripture that we’ll consider. Bless us, we pray, as we turn our thoughts to that text. And we pray in Christ’s name, Amen.

There’s a scene in that old movie, *The African Queen*, where the little steamboat is floating pleasantly down the Ulonga River when a sound is heard in the

distance. It gets louder. Suddenly, they’re in the rapids going over a waterfall.

That’s where we are in our study of 1 Corinthians. When we come to chapter 11, we’re in the white rapids. Our text has been called one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible, and that is especially true in our day, and there are more to come. Our text deals with the Trinity. It deals with submission. It deals with worship and head coverings. And I know some of you ladies after the reading of that text were wondering if after the sermon you’re going to be required to wear bonnets or burqas from now on. No. But after reading it, I think we might wonder how does this relate to the 21st century? Does this passage have any application to our age?

In fact, it does, very much so. The real issue here is not head coverings, but authority. Does male leadership govern the church or has it ended in Christ and now men and women have equal roles and equal authority? This is the very question that the modern church has been facing for a number of decades. The issues in the Corinthian church – and I’ve said this on more than one occasion. I think it’s worth bearing out again – the issues in the Corinthian church are just as relevant today as they were 2,000 years ago. There were women in the church who were participating in services, who were praying and prophesying publicly with their heads uncovered. So what? Well, the head covering was a sign of authority. That’s what Paul says in verse 10. What he means is it was worn in recognition of male authority. It was a sign, a symbol of submission. Some of the women were resisting that. They were asserting their own authority by throwing off the veil, which brings us to one of the difficulties of the text.

What was the covering? Was it a veil? Probably not. It certainly wasn’t anything like burqa. It was likely a scarf worn over the head, though even that is not at all certain. Some interpreters of the passage feel it was the woman’s hair that Paul is describing here. He says, for example, in verse 15, that a woman’s long hair was given to her for a covering. So he says the hair is a covering. Paul doesn’t actually use the Greek word for veil or covering here. The word that’s translated “covering” literally means “a thing which is wrapped around.” So some have argued not unpersuasively that Paul means her hair is a covering when it is wrapped around or put up on her head. Well, however we understand this, as a scarf or coiffure, there

was a visible sign or symbol of male authority worn by women in the early church and some there in Corinth were refusing to wear it.

Where was that happening? That is, what was the venue of this? What was the meeting where this took place? Was it in the church service, what would be the equivalent to our evening meeting, when we come together, we celebrate the Lord’s supper, gifted men use their gifts to teach or give evangelism or some word of encouragement. Was it that meeting? Or was it another meeting? That might seem like an unimportant question, but it’s really quite important and necessary question, in fact, because later on in 14:34, Paul says “women are to keep silent in the churches.” So that raises a question, an issue or a question of consistency on the part of the apostle Paul. How can he instruct them later not to speak in the church and yet here he tells them how they’re to speak?

It’s as though he’s saying a woman is to remain silent in the church, but if she’s going to speak, she should cover her head. That seems inconsistent. I think that is inconsistent. But that’s one of the problems that commentators who are serious in their study of this text have to wrestle with and various ideas have been given, various conclusions have been made. But I would suggest that we have something of a solution. I think it is a solution to that particular problem later in verse 18, because if you read down there, Paul uses the word “church” for the first time. He doesn’t use it in this text, and that would suggest that it’s not until later, it’s not until that verse or that passage after this particular passage that he begins giving his instruction on the formal meeting of the church.

What he seems to be speaking about here is a different meeting, what we might call an auxiliary meeting, like the services that we have during the week, not the evening meeting on a Sunday night, but a meeting such as a woman’s Bible study. That kind of meeting. Those kind of meetings did take place. I’m not simply reading 21st century customs into first century practices. If you were to turn to Acts 21, there’s a meeting that took place in Philip’s home there in Ceaserea, and we’re told that Philip had four daughters, each one of them was a prophetess. So women had the gifts of teaching and prophecy, and they spoke, but Paul was there, as well, and that was a meeting that was outside the Sunday meeting of the church. It’s an extra meeting. Those meetings did take place. We would think that, anyway. We would assume that Christians got together at different times during the week and

meetings that were not the official meeting of the church, but there is an example of one.

And I would suggest that that’s the situation that Paul is speaking of here. The situation was that women in a meeting outside of the church were speaking, which was proper for them, but they were doing so in audible prayer or in public prophesying in a way that challenged the male authority in the church. They were not wearing the head covering. So Paul now addresses that issue. And as I’ve said on a number of occasions, 1 Corinthians is a bit different from some of the other books that Paul wrote. The book of Romans, for example, has as its central theme justification by faith, or justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and he develops that through much of the book. There are other subjects that he deals with, but that’s basically the theme of that book. Here, there’s no particular theme. Paul is going from one problem to another. He’s solving problems. He’s answering difficulties that were occurring in this Corinthian church, and now we go onto this issue.

But he begins before tackling the problem with a word of encouragement, and he compliments the Corinthians. He commends them in verse 2 for their faithfulness to his instruction. “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.” The traditions that Paul refers to here aren’t traditions like the traditions of the rabbis or the kind of customs that we find in churches today, where there are practices that aren’t rooted in Scripture. They’re not biblically based. They’re just traditions that have grown up. That’s not what Paul is speaking of here. When he refers to traditions, he’s referring to the central truths of the Christian faith, doctrines and practices that were passed on from an evangelist or a teacher to new converts, to young churches. We have an example of that, for example, in 2 Thessalonians 2:15, where Paul writes, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us.”

So when Paul speaks of traditions here, what he’s speaking of here is inspired instruction, what would eventually be written down in the New Testament. This was before that was all codified. But he instructed them personally. He wrote letters to them. That’s the traditions. That’s the Word of God, in other words. And Paul praises the Corinthians for being faithful to what they had been taught. They were

orthodox. They guarded the truth. They taught the truth of the gospel. They proclaimed Christian theology. Things were not all bad in Corinth. In many ways, the Corinthian church was a very good church. It was a vibrant church. It was active. And that’s really where some of the problems lay in their activity, in their practices. God had established a general order that the church was to follow, a kind of chain of command it was to respect. That was breaking down in Corinth.

So Paul now corrects that. But before he does, he states the principle on which he will give his correction. There is a hierarchy in the universe that the church is to follow. Verse 3. “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.” So the order is God the Father, God the Son, man, and woman. That’s the hierarchy. And it indicates subordination, but it is a subordination of function, not essence. Now that’s the confusing part with some people. Some people don’t understand that. They think subordination is inequality and so not liking what they read here, and rightfully so if that were the, if their meaning or their understanding were correct, they try to correct that with an alternative explanation of the word “head.” Now I want to go somewhat slowly because I was told by someone afterwards that there are so many moving parts in this passage. You hear about head, you hear about angels, and all these different explanations. It got a little confusing.

So Paul speaks of the head here. Verse 3. “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman.” What does this word “head” mean in regard to the man and the woman? Well, some who fear that the idea conveyed might be inequality have said, “No. That’s not the meaning here. It’s not about authority. It’s about source. Like the head as the source of something.” We speak of the source of a river as the headwaters of the river. And so that’s the idea here. The man was taken from the woman. The rib was removed from Adam. God built that into a woman. She comes from a man. He’s the source. He’s the head in that sense. And it’s a way of really saying they’re equal. They are of the same stuff. There is equality and that’s what is being taught here. So this has nothing to do with authority and submission. That interpretation sort of takes that off the table. We don’t need to worry about it. It’s about our connection and equality. That’s a very popular interpretation.

But the word “head” frequently has the meaning of authority in the Bible. For example, in the Old Testament in Judges 10:18, the rulers are spoken of as heads. A person who is a ruler is a head. In fact, we have that expression in our own vernacular. We speak of the president as the head of state, or rulers as heads of state. And Paul clearly uses the word “head” with that meaning in other places. It’s clearly the sense of the word “head” in Ephesians 5:22-23, “Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife.” It doesn’t mean the husband is the source of the wife. It means he is the leader. He has the authority. And authority is certainly Paul’s meaning in Ephesians 1:22, where he wrote that God put all things in subjection under Christ’s feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church.” He’s the leader. He’s the head.

Again, a snag for many is this word “submission.” It smacks of servitude and it suggests inferiority. That there is a difference in essence between the man and the woman and the woman is less than the man. And it’s not the idea here. And in fact, there is nothing in the Bible that teaches that women are inferior to men. They are equal with men. Their difference is in role, not essence. The difference is in function, not in nature. That’s clear from the hierarchy given here in verse 3, if we follow out Paul’s logic. “God is the head of Christ.” Paul is not denying the Trinity by teaching some form of subordinationism, which would make Christ less than the Father. The doctrine of the Trinity is that there is one God who subsists in three persons. Not three Gods, one God, one divine essence, three persons. Each person is equal to the other. Each person possesses all of the attributes and deity of the others. If the math of the Trinity doesn’t figure properly in your thinking, remember we’re dealing with the infinite eternal God who is beyond us. And while there is a level of comprehension that we can have, final, complete comprehension is impossible. He’s infinite. He’s eternal. We’ll never reach the end of that.

But we know enough to put that together. There’s one God – not three Gods – one God who subsists, who exists in three persons. But there is a difference in role or function between them, and that’s what Paul is saying here. Christ is the mediator between God and man, between the Father and his elect. That involves submission. There would be no salvation if Christ had not willingly put Himself under the authority of the Father and become obedient to His will unto death. That’s submission. Now, when theologians discuss the Trinity, they often speak of the

Trinity in two ways. They speak of the ontological Trinity and the economical Trinity. And I’ve given you the ontological Trinity. That speaks of the being, the nature of the Trinity. There is one God who subsists in three persons. The economical Trinity speaks of how they work, of the relationship between the persons of the godhead.

And that relationship involves submission. You even see this within the Trinity itself. The Father drew up the plan of salvation. We’re putting this in human terms, but if we can think of it in this way, the Father drew up the plan of salvation, the Son agreed to carry it out. And so the Father sent the Son. As the eternal Son of God, He obeyed the father. And then the Spirit of God applied the blessings and the benefits of salvation to God’s people and He was sent by the Father and the Son. So there is a working relationship within the Trinity and we can speak of it in terms of submission, obedience. They are equal and yet there is that aspect of their relationship, and likewise, in our relationship as human beings to God, there is no salvation for any human being where the individual does not submit to Christ by believing in Him as the Savior. Man hates that.

The natural man hates that. What he likes is my head is bloodied but unbowed. I will not yield. I will not submit. Well, men can make that choice, but there will be no salvation for them. There is salvation in only one person, and that’s the person of Jesus Christ, and it’s only because of His work, and we can receive it as a free gift. Why anyone would reject that is hard for you and for me to understand with our eyes open by the grace of God, and we only come to it by the grace of God, but there must be that submission, submission of faith, bowing the knee of faith, so to speak, to God.

And likewise, we carry that over into the church. There is no proper function of the church if there is not submission. That’s Paul’s meaning here. The church can’t function if the women are not in submission to the male authority in the church. Authority and submission are inseparable. So Paul’s not being chauvinistic in denying the equality of men and women. The difference between men and women is not in personal worth or talent. It’s not in abilities or intellect. Women are equal to men in those ways and in their spiritual position before God. Paul states that in Galatians 3:28. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” And he doesn’t

mean in the church there are no men and women. There are. Those distinctions remain. But what he’s saying is before Christ, we’re equal. Before God, we’re equal. We have equal access to Him. We are equally valuable to Him.

Lots of women are more knowledgeable and spiritually mature than men. They often have better judgment than men, and there are examples of that in the Scripture. I could give you a number of examples from the Bible to make that point. But there is a difference in their role. Men have been given authority to lead. God has given them that status. They function as the head of the home and as the heads of the church under Christ. They should. That’s the divine order. And women exhibit maturity and spirituality by accepting that order of authority. In the early church, that was demonstrated by women wearing a head covering.

Paul explains the importance of doing that in verses 4 and 5. He says it is disgraceful for a man to wear a head covering while praying or prophesying and disgraceful for a woman not to wear one while praying and prophesying. In both cases, he says, they disgrace their head. Now that can mean they disgrace themselves. They discredit their calling. They bring dishonor upon themselves. That may be what he means. So again we have this word “head” and how we’re to understand it. I think it’s more likely that when he speaks of head here in these verses that he is speaking of Christ who is the head, head of the church. And what he means is they disgrace Christ as our head, and the man disgraces Him as the leader and so does the woman. They dishonor Him because by rejecting God’s symbol of male authority, they are denying the status and the position that God gave the man in the home and the church and the position that He gave the woman. Woman is denying her relationship to the man and the position God gave her in the church.

Paul says that’s a disgrace. It’s as disgraceful as it would be if she shaved her head. Men shaved their heads or cut their hair short, not women. That was the custom of the day. But by adopting the symbol of male authority by not wearing a head covering, she was in effect dressing for worship like a man. Men approached the worship without a head covering, with their head uncovered, but when women did that, they were basically dressing like men is what he’s saying. So he says in verse 6, if she is going to do that, if she’s going to adopt the symbol of male headship by not covering her head, then she ought to go all the way and just cut all her hair off and look like a man. Now a woman would never do that in Corinth and Paul isn’t

actually recommending that they do that. He’s making a point. A woman’s hair is her glory. That’s what he says in verse 15. Women wore their hair long and they piled up the hair on their head in elaborate styles, and you can see examples of this in some of the ancient statues of Roman patrician women and how they would elaborately wear their hair. So Paul’s point is just as she would not do that, she would not shave or cut off her hair, she should not go into worship with her head uncovered. It was shameful. It was masculine. “Let her cover her head,” he says.

The same is true for the man, Paul says in verse 7. It’s not clear from this that men were actually doing this, that they were covering their heads. I don’t think they were. I think this is hypothetical. Paul says this about men covering their heads in order to complete the argument, to show the reason why a man’s head was to be uncovered, and he explains it. It says, it’s because “he is in the image and the glory of God.” So I don’t think that what Paul is saying is that we’ve got two problems. Women are not covering their heads and are behaving like men and men are covering their heads and behaving like women. He’s talking about the men here. That wasn’t happening. He’s talking about the men so he can complete the argument and he can explain why a man was to have his head uncovered. And as he says here, it’s because “he is in the image and glory of God.”

Now that’s clear from – I should say as well by saying that the implication in saying that “man is in the image and glory of God” is not women were not in the image and glory of God. They are. And that’s clear from Genesis 1:26, where God says, “Let Us make man in Our image,” and the word for “man” there is in the Hebrew Adam, which refers to mankind. It refers to both men and women. That’s also clear from the next statement, where the Lord says, “And let them rule - ” not “let him rule,” but “let them rule,” meaning Adam and Eve. Both were created in the image of God, but Adam was created first. He was created directly for God and in God’s image. And Paul saw significance in that order of creation. He saw significance in the fact that the man was created first. Man’s position as first in that order implies male headship. He reflects God’s glory, so that glory was not to be covered.

The woman, on the other hand, reflects man’s glory. Paul explains the reasons for that in verses 8 and 9. There are two reasons. First, because she was taken out of man. And second, because she was created for man. Paul is referring to

Genesis 2:18-25, where the Lord took one of Adam’s ribs and He fashioned it into a woman. So she is derived from man. Her image of God is derived from man. But since she came from the man, she was meant to be his glory. So she should honor him.

Secondly, Paul says in verse 9, she was created “for man’s sake.” The man was not created for the woman’s sake. She was made to be a helper for him, to help in the tasks that God had given to the man. Man is the head of the relationship. He is first among equals. He has the role of leader, but he could not succeed in his work without the woman. Now, in verses 11 and 12, Paul gives a further statement of this to prevent the misunderstanding that women are inferior to men and to show that both are equal.

But before he does that, in verse 10, he gives another reason for the women of Corinth wearing head coverings. And it is a strange one. Maybe that’s not the best word to use when I’m talking about something in the Bible, but it’s odd. It’s because of the angels. Therefore - ” verse 10 “ - the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels.” in a very good article that I read on this passage in a book that was written sometime ago, I think it was written sometime ago titled *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, it’s a thick book, a number of very scholastic articles were written in it on a variety of topics. But in one that I read on this, the author asks what does this mean, “because of the angels”? And he answers his question by saying, “We don’t know.” This is not particularly helpful, but is a fact that is generally the consensus on what that means.

But I think we’ve got to give something of an answer and I think there’s a pretty good answer to that. What it probably means is that women should dress appropriately out of respect for the angels. They minister to the churches. They protect the churches. We know that, for example, from Revelation 2:1 and the angels that are connected with the seven churches of Asia Minor. And they watch what goes on in churches. You ever think about that? Does that ever come to mind when you sit down here on a Sunday morning or you come on a Sunday evening, that we’re not alone. There is an invisible company with us watching us. That’s what Paul tells us. They learn from the churches. Paul says in Ephesians 3:10 that “through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.”

Those are the angels. They watch what we’re doing. They learn from our services. Now you wonder if they learn very much, but they’re watching and they’re learning, according to this. I’d like to hear some of their comments. They’re singing that same verse for the tenth time. He’s been preaching this same kind of thing every week. We’re not learning a lot here. I don't know what they say, but I know what Paul says. He says they watch. They learn from us. We have a responsibility, evidently, to the angels. And they desire to see the order of God’s creation maintained in the churches and reflected in its ministry. That breaks down when women dress inappropriately, to put it to the specific issue at hand.

It is wrong to deny the distinction between men and women. It is rebellion. It’s also completely unnecessary. The Bible teaches the equality of the sexes. Paul teaches that in verses 11 and 12. “However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man *has his birth* through the woman; and all things originate from God.” The first woman came out of man, but after that, every man has come through a woman. We all have mothers, without exception. And what that shows is we are not independent of one another. We are dependent upon one another. The women go back originally to the original man, and all of us come through women. Neither one is independent, Paul says. We cannot live without each other. Plants and bugs do. Some plants reproduce asexually, and I read a report that queen ants in the Amazon jungle reproduce without sex. I read somewhere that jellyfish do, as well.

But life in the garden wouldn’t have gone very far if Adam had been alone. And neither would the work that was given to him been done completely if he had been single. He needed a companion who was a complement in every way. When God looked upon the man, He said, “It’s not good that man be alone. I’ll make a helper suitable for him.” That’s necessary. That’s not just a nice complement to who man was. It would be good to have a little company when he was out there plowing the fields. He needed that. It was essential. She’s made of the same stuff as he is. She is his equal. She can do things he can’t do. He can do things she can’t do. They need each other to work together to accomplish the task of serving God in this world.

And that’s uppermost in Paul’s mind here. The point of the woman and the point of the man and the rivalry between them that we see going on today is not to elevate women to a certain level and they can make a certain amount of money. There may be good reasons for all of that, but there’s something far greater than all of that. And that’s carrying out the work that God has given to his people. And we see what that is from our passage last week in 1 Corinthians 10:31. It is to glorify God. That’s our chief end in life. And that is what all of his comes to. We’re to be living and ministering to God’s glory, not to our own benefit, whether it be financial or whether it be in some other way. We’re to be serving God in this world.

Men are not more valuable than women. Paul wants to make that clear. Men and women are equal in essence. Nevertheless, what Paul has taught in this passage is still true. Men and women have different roles to play. Man is the head of the woman in God’s order. Women are to honor that. Paul then asks the Corinthians to use their own judgment whether a woman should pray with her head uncovered and in verse 14 he tells them to look at nature. “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering.”

How does nature teach this? Paul is probably referring to the natural sense of right and wrong that God has put within all people. That is a product of the image of God. We’ve been created in God’s image and we all have a sense of right and wrong. Philosophers, as I recall from past reading, speak of “a sense of ought.” We all have a sense of ought, of what ought to be, a sense of right and wrong. It’s not clear with most people. We need the Word of God. We need the special revelation of Scripture to define things specifically. But everyone has a sense of what’s right. We have a natural sense of what is a proper relationship between the sexes. In Romans 1:26-27, Paul describes homosexuality as unnatural, literally that is “against nature.” People instinctively know that. Now, as Paul goes on to speak about man’s relationship in that chapter with God, men suppress the knowledge of God and men can suppress their knowledge of what’s natural, and they’ve done that. And they rationalize it. But men instinctively know what is natural and what is not. They have a natural sense of what is masculine and feminine, and maintain the difference in such things as the way they dress.

Now that may differ from one culture to another, but there are distinctions that are made. Generally, men have reflected the difference – not always, but generally – they have reflected the difference between themselves and women by wearing their hair shorter than women do. That’s her glory, Paul says. Paul is saying that the way men and women dress or wear their hair is an indication of whether they are conforming to the created order or not. In meetings where women participated, weekly meetings, I don’t think he’s referring to the meeting of the church, but meetings in which women prayed audibly and prophesied publicly, they demonstrated that they were in recognizing their position with the men by wearing a head covering, and men did that in church by keeping their heads uncovered. They acknowledged this divine order of things in that way.

And Paul says in verse 16 that is the practice in all of the churches. It’s sort of his final argument and proof of what he’s saying. His reason for the veil or the scarf is that this is the practice in all the churches. The Corinthians knew that. So they were to conform to what was recognized by all the churches. But there was some rebellion in Corinth over that, just as there is today. Now this raises a question. Are women today in western lands, in our culture and society, required to conform to this practice? Many commentators today say no, that the covering was common to that culture and that time and its significance has no relevance to us today. What is important here is the central principle that Paul is teaching, and that is male headship in the church. While men and women are equal, God has ordained that men have the responsibility to lead and women have the responsibility of a complementary and supportive role to male leadership.

That’s a very thing that is under attack today, just as it was in Corinth long ago when women were throwing off the veil to signal that they were rejecting that authority. Paul was instructing them to submit to God’s order and show their obedience by wearing the symbol of the covering when they met during the week. Today, that’s done in various ways. One way is in the way that we dress. So clothes are a distinction between the sexes and conduct reflects a submissive attitude. All of that does. And that is what we should be concerned about. That which would express this submission, this recognition of the distinctions in our own culture.

Now the weakness of that is Paul’s explanation that the covering is for the angels. And that seems to transcend culture. And what worries some is the danger

of the proverbial slippery slope. In other words, if we say that head coverings are cultural, will that lead to dismissing other doctrines on the ground that they are cultural? That becomes an easy way to avoid things that we’re not comfortable with. And so we’ll just dismiss them as cultural. And pretty soon, it begins to water down much of the Christian doctrine.

That is a danger and that is a concern. But I think there is a difference here, and that is that head covering isn’t a doctrine. It’s a practice. The doctrine is male headship. That’s not cultural. It’s the order of creation and it’s the central lesson here. And there are practices in the New Testament that we consider cultural and that we don’t observe today. At the end of this letter, Paul instructs the Corinthians to “greet one another with a holy kiss.” We take that as cultural. We don’t literally carry that out any more. Now the point of that is to be welcoming, to express love for one another, to treat each other as equals, and we do that. We should do that. We do that in a physical way with a handshake, maybe a hug, something of that kind. The point of the instruction is the same, but the form of it may differ.

Still, this is not an easy passage. You know that. I don’t have to tell you that. There is a lot that we don’t know behind this. A lot that took place in Corinth that we don’t know. We don’t know the exact situation. And so in my opinion, we need to be very careful. In my opinion, women are not wrong if they choose to wear or not wear a scarf when they pray publicly in their meetings. I think that a rule that may govern this is one that Paul states in the book of Romans. It’s a different situation, really a more serious situation than this, in my opinion. But in Romans 14:5, he gives them counsel about their view of the days of the week. Really, it seems to have to do with the sabbath. There were Jewish believers in the congregation and Gentile believers, and they had differences of opinion on that day of the week, and so Paul is telling them that while some hold “one day above another, another regards every day *alike*.” He says, his counsel is that “each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.” In other words, you examine these things, and what you’re convinced about you follow that. Follow your convictions.

And in this matter of head coverings, where so many good men and women are divided over the meaning, we shouldn’t fret about it. We should study and then do what we or what you are convinced of in your own mind. What is certainly right is honoring the order of God’s creation. Men leading in spiritual matters and women

supporting them, giving counsel and advice in the midst of those decisions that men make. That’s a good thing. But men must be the leaders, and that is the only way that a church can function and be healthy. So the real issue here is are we going to conform to God’s order? Are we going to serve Him in a way that He has appointed all of us to serve Him? Are we going to do that humbly?

That’s the question that we face. Are we going to follow God’s order? The only way that we can do that and be part of the church is fundamental and first of all by believing in Jesus Christ for salvation. Have you done that? If not, we invite you to come to Him, to trust in Him. He is God’s Son. He is the only Savior of men, so recognize that you need Him. Recognize that you are a sinner. You’re not the only one who is a sinner. In fact, we’re all sinners, and we all need a savior, and there’s only one Savior. And the only way to receive Him and the blessings that He’s obtained at the cross, is through faith. It’s by, as it were, bowing the knee to Him and receiving the good blessings, the eternal blessings of eternal life as a free gift. May God help you to do that and help all of us to seek to serve Him faithfully and humbly in all that we do. Let’s pray.

Father, we do thank You for this time together. We’ve taken up a difficult subject. But it’s what we come to in our studies and it’s good for us, and we need to be reminded of some important things and be made to think. Help us to do that, to think clearly about these and seek to be obedient in all that we do. We can do that by your grace and only by your grace. So we pray that you would bless us with obedience and understanding and give us a desire to do what Paul has instructed us to do in everything, and that’s glorify You. We can do these things and we can do that by Your strength and by Your grace. And we pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.