

Head-Coverings in Worship Part 7

by Milton Vincent

Milton Vincent argues that Paul's teachings on head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 are relevant and applicable to worship today.

Duration: 51:42

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Topics: "Head Coverings"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the topic of head coverings for women in the church. They analyze a passage from the Bible, specifically 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, to determine whether Paul is advocating for long hair or a cloth covering. After careful interpretation, the speaker concludes that Paul is indeed advocating for a covering other than hair. They emphasize the importance of having an open and receptive attitude towards scripture and encourage the congregation to examine their hearts before partaking in the Lord's table. The speaker acknowledges that arriving at this conclusion was a difficult and challenging process for them personally.

Transcript

Well, good morning. Is there anybody who did not receive a packet for this morning? If you did not receive one and you need one, go ahead and raise your hand. We got a couple.

We need some ushers to. But while those are being distributed, let me go ahead and invite you to turn in your Bibles to. First Corinthians chapter 11.

First Corinthians chapter 11. And for those of you that are visiting with us, we're doing a verse by verse study through the book of First Corinthians. And as we continue in our study of this book, we come this morning to First Corinthians.

Are we find ourselves once again in First Corinthians chapter 11 verses two through 16. And the title of the message this morning is head coverings and worship part seven. And tonight we'll be on this topic.

And then tonight we are this morning. We'll be on this topic. And then tonight we will pick up where we leave off this morning.

And for those of you that may be getting weary of this subject, let me give you a word of encouragement. You'll notice that the page number for the material today is page 14. And it goes all the way through page

20.

My goal tonight is to give you up to page like 32 or 33. And what I want to deal with this morning is the question of our head coverings for today. And then tonight begin to get into the issue of if head coverings are for today, then why do so many people say that they're not.

And we tonight begin to deal with what some of those concerns and issues are that people bring up to say that this passage is not for today. And my thinking is that we're going to try to cover as much as we can tonight. But if we don't cover everything that's in the packet, then that's fine with me.

I'm thinking right now that even if we don't cover all the material from the pulpit, at least you're going to have that in writing. And then next Sunday, we'll get to the issue that I know that many of you are wanting to study. And that is the practical issues.

If you do accept the fact that head coverings are for today and that the covering that Paul is advocating is some kind of covering other than the hair, then you're then beset with a number of practical questions. Who wears them, married women or single women? And where in the church or outside of the church or just when you're ministering publicly or all the time? What should the covering look like? How big should it be? We'll begin to deal with what some of those issues are next Sunday. And I may be naive here, but I would like it if somehow by the end of next Sunday night, we can say that we're done with this matter.

All right, just know that's in my heart and that's my goal. We may not be able to do that, but I'm sure going to shoot for that so that we can continue in our study of First Corinthians, verse 17 and beyond. But anyway, over the last few weeks, over the last month, we've tried to deal with the exegetical issues of the passage.

And when I say that, I just mean the interpretive issues. We've tried to walk through the passage and turn over just about every stone and discern what it is that Paul is teaching in the passage. And even last Sunday morning and evening, we dealt with the issue of what is the covering that Paul is advocating in the passage? Is it hair bound up on top of the head? Is it long hair or is it some kind of other covering other than the hair, i.e. a cloth covering of some sort? And we tried to narrow it down just looking at the information that's in the text and following Paul's train of thought.

We attempted to narrow it down to the fact that Paul in this passage is advocating some other kind of covering other than the hair. Well, having done that, what we always do when we study a passage of Scripture is after we've done our work of interpreting the passage, we always want to back away from that passage and say, alright, here's what the passage says, but what does this mean for me today? And with this passage, we need to do that. And that's what we're going to be doing from this point on as we deal with this issue.

And the question we're going to ask today is, are head coverings for today? Is Paul's specific teaching in this passage telling men do not have a head covering on, women do have a head covering on when you pray and prophesy? Is Paul's explicit teaching in this passage applicable to us today? Do we need to heed Paul's instructions regarding head coverings as he tells us about it in this passage? Now, just by way of very quick review, we have seen how Paul gives what amounts to five arguments or five explanations telling us why it is that we need to heed his instructions on head coverings. In verses 3-6, he says you need to heed my instruction on head coverings because of the structure of relationships in God's economy. God the Father is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, the man or the husband is the

head of the wife, and therefore, Paul says, because of these realities, if a man has something on his head while praying or prophesying, he disgraces his head.

If a woman does not have something on her head while praying or prophesying, she disgraces her head. That is clearly what Paul is teaching in this passage. And then, Paul, beginning in verse 7 through the first half of verse 10, moves to a second argument telling us why we need to heed his instruction on head coverings, and that is because of the order, the manner, and the purpose of God's creation of man and woman.

Man was created in the image and glory of God, the woman is the glory of man in the sense that she was created from Adam and was also created for Adam or for the man. He then gives a third argument at the end of verse 10, and that is because of the angels. It is because of the angels, Paul says, that you need to heed my instruction that I'm giving you on head coverings, and we have looked in detail at what that probably means.

And then in verses 13 through 15, Paul uses the analogy of the hair, and he says you need to heed my instruction on head coverings because nature also teaches this, and we have seen how this is actually another creation argument. He's arguing from the way that God created men and women to be, and he uses that as an argument for the need to wear head coverings for women and for men not to wear a head covering that he is teaching in this passage. And then in verse 16, he gives a fifth and a final argument, and that is because this is the practice in all of the churches.

So that's an overview of what we find in this text. Having looked at all of that, the question we're going to ask today is, are head coverings for today? Now, folks, before we get into walking you through some of this material, let me just say this, and I know I've said this before, but I have come myself to the decision that Paul's explicit teaching on head coverings is for today, and I want you to know I have not arrived at that conclusion quickly or easily. I would say that in ten and a half years of preaching, it's been the most traumatic decision for me, an interpretive decision, the most traumatic interpretive decision for me to arrive at in ten and a half years, and I may even be saying this thirty years from now, that this has been the most difficult decision to arrive at.

I have almost come to this conclusion kicking and screaming the whole way. I've resisted it at every turn, and I have tried very hard to come to another decision, and as I told you, when I would read a commentator who says, here's what Paul's teaching, it's a cloth head covering, but it's not for today, my heart would leap, and I would go, okay, what's his arguments? Because I hope they're good, and then I would read what he would say. Sometimes they wouldn't say anything at all, they would just state it as a fact, but other times they would give an explanation, and I was always disappointed, very disappointed, because if there was anything in my heart when I began to study this issue a month and a half ago, my bias was to try to come to some kind of way of being able to say in good conscience that this is not for today.

I have to admit that to you, that I had that bias, and for me to come to the conclusion that I am articulating to you over the last few weeks and especially this morning, I'm coming to a decision about this that is different than what my belief has been over the last 37 years. It's different than what I've been taught, it's different than anything that I've practiced in our home and in our family, and I get no special thrill, trust me, out of arriving at a conclusion that basically admits that my thinking has been wrong for 37 years. That's not an easy conclusion to arrive at, and I have tried to find every way around this, because my heart at

times has been resistant to this, and yet I've not been able to do so.

I'm also aware of just the can of worms that this opens up in coming to this conclusion, and just as a pastor being concerned about that, and the potential division that could be caused, that's made me all the more, as a shepherd, want to try to find a way to say this is not for today. But folks, I've got to look at myself in the mirror in the morning, and I've got to know that I've been faithful to preach God's Word, and as I've honestly looked at the text of Scripture as objectively as I could make myself to be by the grace of God, and as I've honestly tried to look at historical and cultural information, I have found this conclusion irresistible. Though I've gone kicking and screaming to this conclusion that I'm explaining to you this morning, it's not been an easy one, but I have found it nonetheless irresistible.

And so I'm going to arrive at this conclusion, at least this is where I am right now, and I'm going to leave the rest to the Lord to just guide us and to show us where to go from here. But my present thinking on the matter, by way of answering the question of our head coverings for today, just stated in brief, I would say there is nothing in the text of Scripture that gives me any indication that Paul's instructions on head coverings only applied to Christians living in his own day and or to Christians living in a similar culture to the first century Roman world. That's my thinking as of right now, and I want to share with you at least my thinking process as I have come to this conclusion.

There are reasons that I've arrived at this point of view that my heart many times has been resistant to, and I want to explain those reasons to you. And folks, let me say something I said about a month ago, just to kind of put this into perspective. When you're reading a passage in an epistle, such as 1 Corinthians, and there's something that is clearly being taught, and if somebody says, wow, this thing that Paul teaches in this epistle, I think this is for today.

But then there's someone else who reads that same passage and says, I don't believe this is for today. Between those two people, upon whom does the burden of proof rest? We would all agree, I think, that the burden of proof would rest upon the one who says this teaching in this epistle is not for today. Looking at what Paul says later in this chapter about the Lord's Table, another symbolic practice, if I said, wow, this is what it teaches, I think we ought to celebrate the Lord's Table.

But Christian, Joe Christian over here, looks at the Lord's Supper teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 and says, man, this was for the first century. This is not for today. And if I were talking to that person, and he says, what do you think of this teaching on the Lord's Supper? I would say, well, this is what it says, and I think we ought to practice this today.

And he says, no, I disagree. I think it was just for the first century and it's not for today. And then I say, well, I disagree.

I think it is for today. And then this guy says, you prove to me, show me why this is for today. Well, I would try to do that, but I would also say to this guy, wait a minute, I think the burden of proof is on you to explain to me why you would take this clear teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 on the Lord's Supper and just write it off as not being for today.

So the burden of proof is really upon those who would say that Paul's teaching on head coverings is not for today. And if you hold that point of view, I want you to know that I respect your right to hold that point of view, but I want to put on you that burden. If you're going to hold that point of view, I would ask you to talk to me and show me, give me an explanation from Scripture, from culture, and from history.

Explain to me why this passage is not for today, because you're the one who really has that burden of proof. Nonetheless, though I don't feel that the burden of proof necessarily has to be on me, I understand practically speaking that because so many people say that this passage is not for today, because of that, it's kind of been turned around, and now the burden of proof is on those who say that it is for today. I'll go ahead and accept that burden and just at least explain to you what my thinking has been in arriving at the conclusion that Paul's explicit teaching on head coverings and 1 Corinthians 11 2-16 is indeed for today.

Look at number one. This is something that's been compelling to me, and that is that none of Paul's arguments in 1 Corinthians 11 2-16 are drawn from cultural practices in the pagan world of his day. If Paul wanted to give a cultural argument or if cultural considerations were the real motive behind his instructions on head coverings, Paul was perfectly capable of saying so.

But nonetheless, there are many people who would say, well, you know, yeah, Paul gives all of these arguments and stuff, and none of them are cultural, but his real motive is to simply tell ladies, hey, all ladies in our culture today wear head coverings when they go out in public, so go ahead and conform to what the cultural practice is so as not to offend people and just conform to the cultural norm. There are people who would say that that's really what Paul's heart is, but my response to that is that if that is what Paul was thinking all along, why didn't he say so? Instead, he gives all of these theological arguments. Why didn't he just say, ladies, hey, this is just what everyone does.

Go ahead and do it so as not to offend people. I think the notion that Paul is only being guided by cultural considerations here doesn't give Paul the respect that he deserves as an eloquent and inspired writer of Scripture. If even just one time in this passage, Paul would have said, hey, this is what people do in the culture, and if you do this, you're not going to cause any offense.

If he would have just said that, that would have been very compelling to me, but he never says that in this passage. Not a single one of his arguments are drawn from cultural practices in the pagan world of his day. Paul's arguments, rather, are all based on realities that transcend temporary cultural norms.

He argues from the structure of relationships in God's economy, talking about the Trinity. The Father is the head of Christ. Christ is the head of man.

The man is the head of the woman. This is just the way that it is, Paul says. He argues and reasons from that.

In verse 7, he begins to bring the glory of God into this discussion and into his argumentation. He draws from creation truths, talking about Adam and Eve. He even brings the angelic beings into the picture.

He argues from nature, and if at any point he argues from custom, he argues from church custom in verse 16. And he says, hey, this is just what the churches do, and if you're going to advocate something different than what I'm teaching in this passage, I'm just going to dismiss you by saying it's just not what we do in the church. And the reason the church had these practices in the first century were because of all of the significant theological explanations that Paul gives in this passage.

So all of Paul's arguments basically are, they're drawn from locations and from theology that transcends temporary cultural norms. Number three, if I, and this is a challenge that I would give, and it applies to perhaps some of you, but not all of you. Here's a quandary that I have.

If I'm going to say that Paul's specific instructions on head coverings, which are backed up by significant theological explanations, are not for today, then how would I go about making my case that Paul's prohibition of women exercising teaching authority over men is for today without, at the same time, being inconsistent? Let me have you guys turn to 1 Timothy 2. 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 11. Now, there are some of you, I would imagine, that would say that what Paul's going to instruct regarding women here doesn't apply today. And so what I'm about to say doesn't really apply to you.

Just for the sake of argumentation, look at verse 11. Paul says, "...a woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness, but I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet." Now you say, Milton, what is this passage saying? Well, that goes beyond the scope of what I want to accomplish this morning. What I want to pose to you is this.

Whatever these instructions mean, do these instructions apply today? Do you believe that they apply today? Whatever he's saying here, do you believe that these specific instructions apply today? Do you realize that there are many Christians, I've spoken with some of them, they're godly people, who would say that these instructions don't apply today. And you know what they say? They say, and they're accurate to a point, they say in the first century it would have been a disgraceful thing for a woman, even in pagan society, to get up in front of men and to try to teach men in a mixed audience. And so that was the culture of Paul's day.

And so Paul is merely being guided by the cultural norm and he's simply telling ladies, you know what, just go along with the cultural norm so as not to make waves. However, because we live in a more egalitarian society today and our culture is different than the first century culture, because our culture is different, Paul's instruction in verse 11 and in verse 12 don't apply today in our culture. There are actually people who would say that they use the same line of argumentation that many people use in 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

However, if you and I were talking and I said to you, I don't think verse 11 and 12 are for today at all, I think it was just a cultural thing, what would you say in response to what I've just said? Well, what you probably would say if you've studied this passage at all is you would say, no Milton, this is not a cultural thing at all because look at verse 13. Paul argues for his instruction and he doesn't give any cultural arguments. In fact, he goes back to creation, Pastor Milton, and reasons from creation to make his point.

He says in verse 13, for it was Adam who was first created and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression. You would say, Milton, he's not talking about culture here.

He goes all the way back to creation truths, back to Adam and Eve, to say that this is the way it needs to be in the church. And so you would look at this passage and say this does apply today and your reason for that would be because Paul's argumentation has nothing to do with culture. He goes all the way back to creation truths.

Now, I'm only talking right now to those who would handle 1 Timothy 2 in this way and say this does apply today because Paul reasons from creation truths. If that's what you believe and yet you come over to 1 Corinthians 11 and say, well, this is not for today. It's a cultural thing.

My question to you is how would you explain that to me without being inconsistent? How would you explain to me that 1 Timothy 2 is for today without at the same time shooting yourself in the foot with

regard to 1 Corinthians 11? Let me show you one example of this inconsistency. And this is from John MacArthur, a man that I just have mountain loads of respect for. And in letter A and letter B, I totally agree with what he does.

In fact, look at what he says in letter A. He criticizes those who say that Scripture writers were merely teaching culturally determined customs. He says, some leaders and writers in the name of Christianity have gone so far as to teach principles that attempt to redefine or even alter biblical truths to accommodate the standards of contemporary thinking in the world. To do that, of course, they have to believe that the apostles sometimes taught culturally determined customs rather than divinely revealed standards.

And John MacArthur is so right on that. Folks, this is happening in more and more areas of Scripture. There are people who say, yeah, when Paul condemns homosexuality, he's doing that because of the cultural thinking in the day with regard to homosexuality.

Today, we have more understanding about it. It's more acceptable. And so Paul would not speak the same way to Christians today living in these great United States.

And there are other examples of this. Women exercising teaching authority of men. There are people who say that's just a cultural thing.

And MacArthur rightly criticizes those who take a clear teaching in Scripture and just say, well, it's just a cultural thing. He disagrees with those who do that. And I applaud John MacArthur for saying that.

Look at what John does. Look in Letter B. With regard to First Timothy 2, John MacArthur believes that Paul's prohibition of women exercising teaching authority over men still applies today. And if you said, Pastor John MacArthur, tell me why.

Prove to me why that this prohibition applies today in First Timothy chapter 2. Listen to what he would say. Paul's argument was not based on cultural standards, but on two historic and foundational facts. Number one, Adam was first created and then Eve.

And number two, it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman. MacArthur would tell you, listen, Paul's not arguing from cultural facts here in First Timothy chapter 2. He's arguing from creation realities, going back to Adam and Eve. And so obviously that transcends cultural practices.

This does apply today. And I totally agree with the way that MacArthur argues that. However, look at Letter C. Observe what he says now about First Corinthians 11 4. In verse 4 of chapter 11, Paul says every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head.

MacArthur says, generally it was regarded as a disgrace for a man to worship with his head covered. It seems, therefore, that Paul is not stating a divine universal requirement, but simply acknowledging a local custom. MacArthur comes to this conclusion without seeming to notice that he's done the very thing that he criticized others for doing three pages earlier in the same commentator.

And by the way, look at the first statement there. He says, generally it was regarded as a disgrace for a man to worship with his head covered. I'm quoting from his commentary that was published in 1984 in his study Bible, and I'll show you this tonight.

In the MacArthur study Bible, he actually retracts that and says the exact opposite of that first statement that you see there in the quote. But nonetheless, I think that this is an example of inconsistency in the handling of the passages. And for me, if I'm going to say that First Corinthians is not for today, then I would have a lot of trouble convincingly arguing with someone that First Timothy 2, 11-14 is for today.

And I would merely suggest to you guys that if you're going to say First Corinthians 11, 2-16 is not for today, then at least be consistent and say that Paul's prohibition of women exercising teaching authority over men is not for today as well, because I would see that as an example of inconsistency. But nonetheless, go to page 15. This is another consideration that went through my mind as I was trying to determine is Paul's explicit teaching here for today? And that is, technically speaking, Paul is only requiring that women wear a head covering while praying or prophesying.

And I don't say this, but Paul is also only requiring that men not wear a head covering when doing the two things of praying or prophesying. That's the only two activities that he's talking about here. And he's only telling women you need to wear a head covering while praying or prophesying.

And to my way of thinking, this is a pretty narrow instruction to give that he was being guided by the cultural practices of the pagan world of his day. The feeling you get from the text and also from 1 Corinthians 14, 4 is that even the prayer and the prophecy that he's talking about is happening in an assembly, in a gathering, in an audience of fellow believers. So Paul's regulating behavior not necessarily just for those who attend a certain assembly of believers who are gathered together, but he's only regulating a woman's attire when she prays or prophesies in that assembly.

And to me it would be strange that he would limit it to that if indeed all the while he's only being guided by pagan practices of the world of his day. There are people who say, well, all women back in this day wore head coverings when they went out in public, when they went to the grocery store and whatever. And so that's really what's guiding Paul here.

If that's really what was guiding Paul here, Paul would not have limited it to just prayer and prophecy, right? He would have said just wear a head covering wherever you go so as not to offend people. Instead, he's only requiring this certain behavior when someone prays and when they prophesy. And to me, that's a pretty narrow instruction to give if after all Paul is only being guided by the cultural practices of the pagan world of his day.

A fifth consideration, and this is drawn from verse 16. Paul says in verse 16, but if one is inclined to be contentious with me about this, we have no other practice nor have the churches of God. And what I would say here is without fear of rebuttal.

And when I say rebuttal, I mean without fear of argument. If someone's saying, no, I disagree, Paul, and here's proof that you're wrong. Without any fear of rebuttal, Paul is able to say that the customs he was advocating in 1 Corinthians 11 were the practices of the churches of God.

Paul could only say this if all the churches from Jerusalem to Rome were doing this. The widespread and universal teaching and practice of the church in this matter, in spite of the various cultural settings in which these churches found themselves, makes it evident that Paul cannot be advocating customs that were merely local to Corinth. Folks, whatever Paul is teaching the Corinthians to do here in 1 Corinthians 11, it's the same thing that all of the churches had been taught to do throughout the Roman Empire.

If there were some churches, for example, the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church or the Northern African church, if there were some churches where women did not cover their heads, then Paul knows there could have been people in the Corinthian church who say, no, Paul, you're wrong. Paul would only be able to say what he says in verse 16 if all of the churches universally taught and practiced what he is saying here. And these churches have a wide range of cultural environments in which they would have found themselves.

And to me, this indicates that Paul is not advocating customs that were merely local to Corinth, but that they were widespread throughout the Roman Empire throughout all of the churches in the Roman Empire. Also, folks, and this is the next two points are kind of an accuracy check. Number six here, while historical evidence indicates that head coverings on women were more usual in Paul's day than they may be in ours, evidence also indicates that it was not unusual for a respectable woman to appear in public without a head covering.

Such evidence dispels the notion of some who suggest that for a woman to appear in public without a head covering would have been scandalous to the culture and that Paul's real motive is simply to prevent cultural scruples from being violated. And let me just give you a little bit of evidence for this, and you can read this at your leisure. But David Gill, one scholar, he wrote an article back in 1990 entitled The Importance of Roman Portraiture for Head Coverings in 1 Corinthians 11, 2-16 and listen to what he says.

Public marble portraits of women at Corinth, and by the way, I'm going to show you some of these portraits tonight. Public marble portraits of women at Corinth are most frequently shown bareheaded. This would suggest that it was socially acceptable in a Roman colony for women to be seen bareheaded in public.

And one other example, women with veils drawn over their heads are shown in the frieze of the Ereptases. These women appear to be the Vestal Virgins who are fulfilling a religious role. However, most of the other women in the frieze do not seem to have their heads covered.

A frieze is basically like the wall along here, just before it reaches the ceiling, if we had like some wallpaper to kind of border the upper part of the wall, that would be a modern day equivalent of a frieze in the first century, but what they often did in some of their buildings in the first century and before then is they had sculpted images that would border the upper wall just before it reached the ceiling. And historians look at those sculpted images that are inlaid into the wall, and they're able to learn a lot about cultural practices in this day. And this is actually a religious frieze that is shown, and there are women in this religious setting who don't even have their heads covered.

However, there are some that do. And in the next paragraph, one of the best known examples of a woman without a head covering is the painting of a couple from a house in Pompeii dating in the middle years of the first century. This image of the middle years of the first century A.D. shows that women could be presented with uncovered hair alongside an image of their husbands.

And I don't want to go through all of this, but letter B, just from the research that I've been able to do, I've tried to catalog everything that I've seen. And this is chronicled in the book Women in Greece and Rome, Grecian women and Roman women. And as you look at this evidence that I'm not going to read word for word, what you find is that in the majority of cases, women do not have a head covering on their heads in the various depictions of them, both Grecian women and Roman women dating from centuries prior to Paul's day and even a little bit after Paul's day.

So folks, if you're going to say, well, women just all the time wore head coverings wherever they went, I would just say, you know what, you need to investigate that a little further because the evidence, if there is evidence at all, the evidence is that it was not uncommon whatsoever for a woman to appear in public without a head covering. In fact, most of the images of women that we still have in existence today dating back to the first century and before shows them actually bareheaded, even married women. Sometimes they're in a sculpted image right by their husbands and there's the woman without a head covering on dating in the first century AD.

So at least keep that in mind. And then number seven, this is one of the things that really proved to be pretty compelling to me as I was trying to wrestle through this issue. And that is this guys go to verse four and we'll look at verse seven to look at what Paul says in verse four.

Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. Look at verse seven 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.

Paul in verses four and seven is explicitly telling men not to wear a head covering when they pray and when they prophesy. Now look at page sixteen number seven in verses four and seven Paul is actually advocating the precise opposite of the cultural practice for men in the Roman world. Paul tells men they ought not to cover their heads when in fact the custom for Roman men was to cover their heads just as women did when praying or engaging in a religious exercise especially when doing so in some sort of leadership capacity.

The overwhelming evidence folks is that Roman men would cover their heads just as Roman women would do when they prayed to a God or when they prophesied or when they were involved in a very active way in a religious exercise. And you say well that was the Roman custom but hey Corinth was in Greece and so Corinth was probably more Grecian in their customs right? Well keep in mind folks and this is what I try to explain in letter A here Corinth yes it was in Greece but Corinth folks was a Roman colony don't forget that. Around 150 BC the Romans wiped out the Grecian city of Corinth in a battle and then it kind of lay in ruins and not a lot was going on in that city for about a hundred years but then around 45 to 50 BC the Romans came in and they rebuilt the city according to their own designs and when Rome would establish a colony a lot of times they would move their own people into that city and they would make that colony an outpost for Roman culture.

They would try to make it a copy of Rome and as a center for Roman learning, Roman culture and Roman religious practices as well. So when Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians when he writes 1st Corinthians the city of Corinth has been a Roman colony for about 110 years alright? So keep in mind Corinth is a Roman colony and so scholars would tell you that the likelihood just from that fact alone would be that they would be more Roman in their customs than they would be Grecian in their customs but we don't have to rely upon conjecture for that. There's also overwhelming evidence that this indeed was the custom even in Corinth of men to cover their heads when involved in a religious exercise.

Look at letter B Regarding the prevalence of the Roman custom of men wearing head coverings in Corinth and elsewhere in the Roman Empire, David Gill describes the archaeological evidence as follows At Corinth several images of men with their heads covered have been found The best known is a slightly larger than life-size statue of the emperor Augustus who was shown wearing a tunic and a toga the dress of a Roman citizen which is drawn up over his head This image of Augustus is one that is not confined to

Corinth and there are about 20 known statues showing him as a sacrificant. In other words as a man offering a sacrifice and in those other images that have been found he is depicted with a shallow dish in his hand for pouring out a religious libation. Now most of the images that you would find of the emperor Augustus show him with a head uncovered. However when there's an image of him with a crooked staff in his hand or with a bowl in his hand for pouring out a religious libation and he's clearly involved in a religious activity. Guess what? The images show him with his head covered. He's wearing a head covering. So from the emperor on down that was the custom.

Whatever the emperor did, that was what would set the tone for the customs of men in the Roman Empire. Look at letter C. Richard Oster, another scholar, draws from additional evidence in his article *When Men Wore Veils to Worship* the historical context of 1 Corinthians 11.4. He says this: In addition to numerous literary references, this Roman pietistic practice of covering the head is attested archaeologically not only in Italy but also in Corinth and Asia Minor from the time of the Roman Republic well into the later Roman Empire. Look at the next paragraph. In addition to observations by the Greek authors Dionysius and Plutarch on this topic, the conventionality of this Roman practice and the Latin expression *is capite volato*, which means covered head is attested by Greek and Latin text, monuments, coins, statuary remains all reflecting Roman devotional patterns and mores on both the western and eastern regions of the Empire. So the evidence is overwhelming that the custom amongst men in the Roman Empire when involved in a devotional exercise was for them to actually cover their heads. And we'll skip down to letter F here.

Plutarch was a guy who was from Greece and he came to be a prolific writer and just to give you a perspective on this, my son Brendan is 10 years old that's exactly the age of Plutarch when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Plutarch was about 10 or 11 years old living somewhere in Greece when Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians. Well Plutarch grew up and became a man and did a lot of writing and in one of his works look what I say here he attempted to explain 113 Roman customs in his work entitled *The Roman Questions*. One of the customs he attempts to explain is that of Romans covering their heads when worshipping the gods. And listen to what Plutarch says: Why is it that when they, the Romans, worship the gods, they cover their heads but when they meet any of their fellow men worthy of honor, if they happen to have a toga over their head, they uncover. So he's asking the question he's not ridiculing it because it's causing him consternation or creating a problem.

He's trying to educate people on what the Romans do and their reasons for it and he goes on to give an explanation as to why the Romans would cover their heads when they prayed. Look at what he says: They thus worship the gods either humbling themselves by concealing the head or rather by pulling the toga over their ears as a precaution, lest any ill-omened and baleful sound from without should reach them while they were praying. So in other words, they covered their heads in a show of humility.

They also perhaps, he says, were covering their heads to drown out any distracting noises that would hinder them from being focused on their prayers. So he's not ridiculing them. He's giving an explanation of why the Romans had the typical practice of covering their heads when they worshipped the gods.

And folks I'll show you tonight. I was going to show you some this morning, but just for the sake of time we'll do this tonight. I'll show you some images this evening on a coin and also some statues of men who are involved in a religious exercise and the men are wearing head coverings.

Just their toga is pulled up over their heads. And so folks, and by the way, you say, well, you know, this is just what some scholars say. I have not read a single scholar who tries to argue with this.

In fact, I'll show you tonight that even John MacArthur for whom this information is very unhelpful to his point of view, even MacArthur now acknowledges that this is true and he includes that information or at least an acknowledgement of this fact in his study Bible and I'll point that out for you tonight. Nobody that I've read tries to argue with this because the evidence is overwhelming. And so a summary of where I am at right now in my thinking is this.

Look at the bottom of page 17. Neither from the text itself nor from historical cultural evidence do I find anything that would lead me to conclude that Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 2 through 16 are not for today. In fact, I see cultural and historical evidence that suggests that Paul pays no regard to cultural norms, especially in his instructions to men in verses four and seven.

And this gives me reason to believe that Paul would show similar disregard to cultural practices today in instructing men and women regarding head coverings. If back in Paul's day, Roman men covered their heads and Paul says to the Christians at Corinth don't do that. I know it's the cultural norm, but don't do that.

Then if Paul was willing to go totally against the grain of the cultural norm in the first century, then what makes us think that if he were speaking to us today, he would look around and go, well, it doesn't seem like in this feminist culture that women cover their heads. So therefore, I won't teach that. No, I mean, from his example in the first century of advocating the opposite of the cultural norm for men tells me that Paul would do the same thing today in instructing women, even though most women in our society do not cover their heads.

Look at the last paragraph on page 17. Also, it is very likely that Corinthian men were covering their heads precisely because it was customary for men to do this in their day. Yet Paul does not allow them to follow the Roman custom.

Instead, he insists that they follow apostolic custom. I mean, these poor guys in the Corinthian church, I mean, all their life, whatever pagan religion they came from, they covered their heads all the time. It's what the man's dad did, his granddad did, and what his brother still does, and the pagan religion that he's still involved in.

It's just what it seems like everyone does when they pray, when they prophesy, and they're involved in a devotional exercise. And so they're doing that, no doubt, because it was the custom. And yet Paul says, no, you cannot follow the custom in the Roman Empire.

I'm insisting that you follow apostolic custom. You must follow the custom that I, an apostle, am teaching you. And look what I say here.

To my way of thinking at least, if the men of the Corinthian church were not allowed to reject Paul's teaching on the grounds that it contradicted the cultural norms of their day, then what makes us think that we can disregard Paul's instructions on the grounds that his teaching contradicts the cultural norms of our day? And that's a question that I've had to just keep asking myself, that if we're entitled to say, well, women just don't do this today, so we can disregard it, then in the first century, the Roman men in the Corinthian church were just as entitled to say, well, that's what Paul says, but it's just not what people do today. And so Paul is just not up with the times. And so we're going to disregard what he says here in this passage.

If they weren't entitled to throw away what Paul is saying, then why are we entitled to throw it away just because it's not the cultural norm in our feminist culture today? Now, folks, we'll pick up here tonight, and I would encourage you this afternoon to take a little bit of time to read from some of these commentators. I am well aware, I am painfully aware, that in coming to this conclusion, I am in the minority amongst modern commentators. I'm aware of that, but I do want you to know that I'm not alone, and here are at least 13 commentators who would advocate essentially the same position of what I am advocating this morning.

I do want you to know that while I'm in the minority amongst modern commentators who've written commentaries from 1930 till today, prior to 1930, I am in the majority. Every commentator taught this before the 20th century. Everyone taught basically what I'm advocating in this passage.

It was almost the universal teaching in the church from the 1st century all the way up to the 20th century. So I'm in the majority as far as commentators go throughout the history of the church. However, most modern commentators would say that what Paul teaches is not for today.

But do go through some of these quotations. I don't want us to take the time with this morning, and I don't want to take a lot of time with it tonight. It would help me a lot if you guys would take the time to read through these this afternoon just to familiarize yourself with the thinking of these commentators that would suggest that Paul's explicit teaching is for today.

Anyway, come back tonight and we'll pick up where we leave off this morning. Let me ask you to bow your heads. I want us to really give focus to the Lord's table this morning.

But, you know, one relationship I see between these two issues is that our attitude towards this passage needs to be that of openness to the Lord, saying, Lord, I don't even fully know what all you're going to tell me to do, but I want you to know I'm totally open. My heart is open to whatever you say to me in this passage. And even if it's different from what everyone else does, that's fine.

I want to do what you tell me to do. And whether we all end up in the same place or not, I do know all of us should have that heart attitude towards this text of Scripture and any text. And when we celebrate the Lord's table by opening our mouths wide and taking in the bread and the cup, one of the realities we symbolize is that of openness to the Lord and a receptivity to all that God wants to give us through the death, through the resurrection of Jesus, and through His word as well.

And if we're going to celebrate the Lord's table with a clear conscience this morning, I want you to know it would not be appropriate for you to have a closed and defiant attitude towards this text and then to partake of the elements and symbolize a reality that's not really true in your life. Now, I want to be very careful. I am not in the slightest way suggesting that you have to agree with what I'm saying to partake of the elements.

I'm speaking of the attitude that all of us should have towards this text and any other text. And I would just encourage all of you to just examine your heart and see if your heart truly is open to the Lord and to whatever He has for you in His word and all that He desires to bless you with and the benefits He desires to give you through His death and through His resurrection. I'm going to ask that the helpers and the ushers be ready to come forward as soon as I close in prayer.

We won't do a closing song just for the sake of time. But let's look to the Lord in prayer and prepare our hearts for the Lord's table. Our Heavenly Father, we just come before you right now and we thank you for your word.

Lord, there are so many things in your word that I don't want to say they're easy, but they're easier to take in. They're easier to process. But then there are some things in your word, Lord, that are very challenging and this is one of them and they're godly people that handle this in different ways and that's, Lord, why we're trying to be so careful with this.

Not only in trying to understand what you're saying, but also careful in our attitudes even towards those who disagree. Lord, I just pray that you would keep our hearts open to you. Our hearts would be open wide to all that you have for us.

Lord Jesus, that our hearts would be wide open to you, not just this morning, but this afternoon and tonight and throughout the days of this coming week that we would just fully receive and embrace all that you desire to give us through your word and through your death and resurrection. Lord, we also know that as we celebrate communion, we celebrate not just our communion with Jesus, but our communion with one another and I'm well aware of the fact that this issue that we're talking about could potentially be divisive and yet, Lord, help us to realize that our relationships with one another, our communion with one another transcends whether we agree or disagree on every detail of this passage, but our union with one another comes from our union with you and our relationships are very important and very precious and may we work all the more diligently, Lord, to preserve the bonds of love and peace that are between us. As we partake of the elements, all of us this morning, we partake of them, celebrating our communion with you.

We celebrate as well our communion with one another. Thank you for bringing us to Jesus. Thank you for bringing us together in the family of God.

I thank you, Lord, for all of my brothers and all of my sisters and the privilege that we all have of being able to celebrate the Lord's table together. Guide us in our meditations and in all of our thoughts over the next few moments. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

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