

# Head-Coverings in Worship Part 9

by Milton Vincent

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*The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the passage of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and its application in different settings, while acknowledging the complexity and difficulty of the passage.*

**Duration:** 1:00:01

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

**Topics:** "Head Coverings"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of following Paul's instructions regarding prayer and prophecy. He emphasizes the themes of the glory of God and the honor of Jesus Christ. Paul states that men should not have anything on their heads when they pray or prophesy, while women should have something on their heads. The preacher acknowledges the practical questions and concerns that arise from this passage and addresses them, emphasizing the need to have an open heart and a willingness to obey God's word.

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## Transcript

Good morning. Let me invite you this morning to turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

And for those of you that are visiting with us this morning, we are doing a verse-by-verse study through the book of 1 Corinthians. And as we continue in our study of this book, we find ourselves once again in one final time, at least for the present, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 2 through 16. And the title of the message this morning is Head Coverings in Worship, Part 9. Head Coverings in Worship, Part 9. This is a passage of Scripture that has been fraught with a number of difficulties, both interpretation-wise, but then also practically speaking, as some of you are going to be able to observe from the message this morning.

But this is a passage that has not made my life any easier, and I know it's not made many of your lives any easier either. But I have had to comfort myself with the realization that God did not call me to make your lives easy. He did not call me to a task that is always to be easy.

He has called me to preach the Word. He has called us to have open hearts to His Word. And as difficult as that may be sometimes, we need to be faithful to have open hearts to all of God's Word.

There are some passages in Scripture that are just easy to understand, and then there are some that are difficult to understand. There are some passages in Scripture that are a total delight to preach and to hear preached on. And then there are passages that are difficult to preach and to hear being preached on.

And all of those things collect in this particular passage. It's a passage that is difficult in some ways to understand down to the finest detail. It's also a passage that is difficult to preach and perhaps even to listen to.

But God, as I just mentioned, God calls all of us to have open hearts to His Word, and I want to just take this opportunity, and I'll do this again at the end, to express my appreciation to those of you who, regardless of how you've ended up landing on this issue and whether you've even agreed with me or not, I want to express my appreciation to all of you who have had an open heart and an earnest zeal to just know what God says in His Word and an openness to the Lord that says to Him, Lord, whatever you do say, however I understand what it is that you're telling me in this text, I will do it. And I've seen that attitude manifested in many of your lives and the interactions that we've had, and that's been a great source of blessing to me. Having said that, I have a feeling that not a one of you is going to be happy with me by the time we're done with the message this morning.

And I'm glad no one thought to bring any rotten tomatoes this morning, because if you did, I'm sure you would use them probably within about ten minutes into the message this morning. But hopefully you'll listen to everything that I have to say and be able to receive it with as much grace as possible, and patience with me and with our study of 1 Corinthians. But what we've done so far in 1 Corinthians 11, verses 2-16, is we have done our best making several passes through the text to exegete the passage.

And what I mean by that is to explain the passage and to try to understand what it is that Paul is instructing God's people to do with regard to head coverings, an issue that we may not think to be an important issue. However, Paul attaches great importance to this issue. And he talks of themes such as the glory of God and the honor of Jesus Christ.

He even brings angelic beings into his argument. And overall, his point that he is trying to make, as he's regulating the behavior of born-again children of God when they pray and when they minister through prophecy, is Paul tells us in verses 4 and 5 that a man should not have something on his head when he prays or when he prophesies. But he tells us in verse 5 that a woman should have something on her head.

She should have her head covered whenever she prays or prophesies. And we've tried to understand the argumentation and just the fullness of what Paul is trying to convey to us in this text. And we've spent a lot of time doing that.

But then we moved on from there a couple Sundays ago to address an interpretational problem with the text. And that is exactly what is the covering that Paul is telling men not to have on their heads and that he's telling women to have on their heads when they pray and prophesy. There are three views held by different commentators.

And we walked through those views. And I told you what I think is the one that is the most faithful to what this text is actually teaching. And I tried to walk you through my own process of thinking and why I personally have arrived at that conclusion.

Last Sunday we then began to address the question now that our exegesis of the text is largely done to address the question last Sunday morning, is Paul's specific teaching on head coverings in this passage applicable to us today? In other words, are head coverings for today? And my answer to that last Sunday was I believe that the answer is yes. And I tried to walk you through what my own thinking process has been to make a contribution to your own thinking as you sought to reason this out from the text of Scripture. Last Sunday night we then addressed another question.

That is, if this teaching is for today, then why do so many people say it's not for today? And I gave you a packet last Sunday night of about 10 pages in length where there were 13 objections or concerns that people expressed that causes them to think that maybe it's not for today. And we looked at those concerns and then we responded to those concerns and I tried to walk you through at least my own thinking and how I respond to some of those concerns. Understand that some of the concerns that we went through Sunday night are not even concerns I've heard anyone say to me or that I've even read in a book.

They're concerns that came out of my own heart as I thought it through. And an objection comes to my mind and I would write that down and some of those concerns were my own concerns and objections to this being applicable for today. And so in some of those responses I'm responding to myself, to the part of me that would say that maybe it is not for today.

But we tried to walk through those. We made it through nine of them verbally from the pulpit and we did not go through the final four in the packet that I gave you last Sunday night. But hopefully those of you that were here have taken the time to read those.

We're not going to go through those this morning. But I told you last Sunday that the issue that we would address today is the practical dimensions of this passage. How, just from the text of Scripture, how was it that Paul was envisioning that this passage would be applied in the lives of God's people? And I told you last Sunday that today we would try to answer the burning practical questions that are in many of your hearts, no doubt.

Well, I want you to know that I really went to work at that this week on Tuesday and I began working through some of the practical questions and I made it through the first one, and that is, does this passage apply to single people or does it just apply to married women? And I made it through and kind of processed through that and I'm not going to go over that this morning. But if you would like the notes that I developed from the text of the passage and how I reasoned through this from the passage itself, then you're welcome to ask me for that and I'll get those to you. But I successfully made it through that issue and I thought, so far, so good.

But then I began to encounter some very significant obstacles that really severely hindered me and my ability to fully think this out in a way that I would want to confidently present to you in a sermon. And it... how do I say this? In fact, let me have you go to chapter 14 because this was the major obstacle that I encountered. In fact, go back to chapter 11.

I'm sorry. The impression that I've operated under as I've studied this passage and you may think it's well-founded or it's not at all is that Paul seemed to me to be regulating the behavior of Christians in an assembly. In an assembly of saints, when the believing community gathers together, the impression I had is that Paul was regulating behavior regarding head coverings during those times of assembly.

And there are some things from the text that made me think that. It seems like he's not speaking all inclusively that women always need to wear head coverings. He limits it only to those occasions when a woman will pray or prophesy.

In verse 16, he says, If one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. And that word churches could be understood as assemblies. That's literally the idea of the term there.

Nor have the assemblies of God. And he then moves right into verse 17 and saying, Now, in giving you this instruction, I don't praise you because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For in the first place, when you come together as an assembly is the idea of what he's conveying there.

And so, in my mind, I linked this section of chapter 11 with the rest of chapter 11 and with chapter 12, 13, and 14 where Paul seems very burdened to regulate the behavior of believers when they were assembled together. So I was operating under that assumption as I've been studying this passage. However, what I realized this week, as you look in verse 5 and then I'll have you go to 14, Paul says in verse 5, Every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head.

Personally, the way that I look at verse 5 is that Paul seems to be allowing women to prophesy and allowing them to pray verbally and he seems to envision that happening and he seems totally okay with it as long as a woman has her head covered. And there are some commentators that look at that and say, Well, Paul really doesn't approve of women prophesying, but he's going to deal with that later. For now, he's just taking offense at the fact that some of them weren't wearing a head covering.

I have a problem with that personally. It seems like Paul is allowing men to prophesy and to pray as long as their heads are uncovered and he seems to approve of and to allow, in verse 5, women to pray and to prophesy as long as their heads are covered. However, now go to chapter 14 and look at verse 34 and 35.

And any of you that have studied this passage at any depth, you know what I mean when I tell you that in order to fully be able to figure out the practical ramifications of 1 Corinthians 11, you have to come at that by way of chapter 14, verses 34 and 35. You have to figure out what is Paul saying in these two verses in chapter 14 in order to fully figure out what he's trying to say in chapter 11. Look at what he says in verse 34.

The women are to keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Now, these instructions and prohibitions that Paul gives in verses 34 and 35, and no one would disagree with this, they are given in a context where prophecy is the subject on Paul's brain.

Paul, in verse 29, says, Let two or three prophets speak, let the others pass judgment. If a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent, for you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be exhorted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

And now, boom, the women are to keep silent in the churches. And then he continues in verses 34 and 35. On the surface, now I'm not saying this is my interpretation, but just on the surface, Paul prohibits women from speaking in a mixed assembly.

You have to agree that he's talking about a mixed assembly here. No one disputes this. He says the women are to keep silent in the what? In the churches.

In other words, in the assemblies. And folks, he has to be talking about mixed assemblies, right? He can't be talking about an assembly of saints that's all women, and Paul says you're not allowed to talk. Imagine women gathering for a Bible study, and it's all women, but they all have to keep silent.

What kind of Bible study is that? So he has to be talking here about a mixed assembly. So the idea is the women are to keep silent in the mixed assemblies of the saints. On the surface, and again, I'm not saying this is my view yet, but on the surface, it seems that for this prohibition to occur in a passage where Paul is clearly talking at least about prophecy, that it would seem that what Paul is saying is that women are not allowed to prophesy in a mixed assembly.

On the surface, that's how it would appear. Now, if that is the case, folks, you think about chapter 11, and your impression may be that he's regulating behavior in the mixed assemblies, and in chapter 11, verse 5, Paul seems to be allowing women to prophesy. He envisions times where they're prophesying and praying verbally, and he's totally fine with that, but he says, just make sure that you have your head covered.

But now in chapter 14, he seems on the surface to be saying that women are not allowed to prophesy in a mixed assembly. If all of those things are true, and I'm not saying that they are yet, if all of those statements I just made are true, what that means then is that in chapter 11, verse 5, Paul must be envisioning other settings other than a mixed assembly where women are prophesying. Does everyone understand that? And if that is the case, folks, then Paul is not in chapter 11 merely regulating the behavior of Christians in the mixed assemblies.

He's also regulating the behavior of Christians in settings other than mixed assemblies, and he's regulating the behavior of men and women even in those settings where they're not in a mixed assembly. He's regulating the behavior of women when maybe women would gather perhaps for a prayer meeting, and it's just women and that they're praying or maybe doing some prophesying. And just that fact alone, folks, it kind of explodes chapter 11 in my own mind and enlarges the scope of Paul's instruction in chapter 11 to now begin to include settings other than the mixed assemblies of the saints together.

Does everyone understand where I'm coming from with that? Now, having said that, you say, well, Milton, is that your view that women, you know, dogmatically in chapter 14, Paul is prohibiting women from prophesying? That is not my view yet. I want you to know I tried to work on chapter 14, verse 34 and 35 this week, but I realized, you know what, I'm not going to get this done. And it's frustrating to me because the most difficult section of Scripture, maybe in all of the New Testament, is 1 Corinthians 11, 2 through 16.

And in order to figure out those verses, you've got to figure out chapter 14, verses 34 and 35, which are perhaps the second most difficult passage of Scripture in all of the New Testament, if not tied for 1 Corinthians 11, 2 through 16. There are many commentators that look at chapter 14, verses 34 and 35, and they say, well, what Paul is doing here is he's absolutely, totally prohibiting women from verbalizing anything in a mixed assembly. This is a total, unqualified prohibition from women speaking whatsoever in any capacity in a mixed assembly.

I know of one man who, based on this passage, and not in this church, but one man that I know of would not even allow his wife to sing in the choir because she would be verbalizing. And he would not let her sing

in the choir because of this passage of Scripture. I don't know what he did as far as letting her sing when the congregation sang.

To me, if she's not going to be able to sing in the choir, she shouldn't even sing during the congregational singing. But there are some who take this as all-inclusive. Women are not allowed to speak in a mixed assembly.

Others say, no, that's not what he's saying. What Paul is prohibiting is noisy and disruptive speaking by women. My response to that, though, would be why does he single women out? Men are just as capable of noisy and disruptive speaking.

It's kind of an insult to women to take that view. But there are some who do take that view that that's what Paul is doing. He's merely preventing and prohibiting noisy and disruptive speaking.

Some say, no, Paul is not... this is not an all-inclusive prohibition of any speech by women in a mixed assembly. What Paul is doing is... and he's not even prohibiting prophesying by women. But what he's doing is he's prohibiting women from participating in the verbal evaluation of prophecies.

And they've got their reasons for why they take that view. And there are some decent arguments for that particular view. Others, folks, look at verses 34 and 35 and they say, you know what? These verses aren't even Paul's thoughts.

Paul is merely quoting from something that the Corinthians wrote to him in their letter. And Paul is merely quoting the sentiments of some. And then in verse 36, Paul responds to that by disagreeing with it.

And so they say that the whole point of the passage is that Paul is actually disagreeing with the thinking of some that women need to keep silent in the church. One other commentator, a very great, fantastic commentator that I've used so far throughout my study of 1 Corinthians. He's an evangelical, a solid commentator.

He takes the view that, you know what? Verses 34 and 35, I don't know what to do with these verses. You know what I think? Paul didn't write these words. Some copyist who was copying an early Greek manuscript of this book wrote these two verses into the text.

Now, every single Greek manuscript of 1 Corinthians has these two verses in them. Every single one of them have these two verses in them. However, there are some manuscripts that have verses 34 and 35 after verse 40.

Kind of strange, but that's a minority of manuscripts. But just based on that evidence alone, every Greek manuscript does have these two verses. But this guy says, I don't know what to do with it.

It seems to contradict 1 Corinthians 11, verse 5. Therefore, my conclusion is Paul didn't write these words. Some guy later on put these verses into the text and now somehow it made its way into every single Greek manuscript of 1 Corinthians. Why am I going through all of this? I'm going through all of this, folks, to tell you that this is an absolute monster.

This passage is, and it's one that's going to require a huge amount of study by me before I'm able to speak with any degree of confidence on it. And yet, I have to determine what Paul is saying here in chapter 14, verses 34 and 35 before I can speak with any confidence about the full range of the application of 1

Corinthians 11, 2 through 16 that Paul is envisioning. Do you understand me there? And you say, well, get to work on chapter 14 then, Milton.

Work on these verses so that you can walk us through the applications of 1 Corinthians 11. My response to that is I will. After we're done with the rest of chapter 11, 12, 13, and then 14, and then we study these two verses in their context, and I promise you that when we are done with chapter 14, we will come back to chapter 11, 2 through 16, and we will take what we have learned from chapter 14 and try to bring that knowledge to bear on how we understand 1 Corinthians 11, 2 through 16.

This is the time where you throw your rotten tomatoes at me. Also, folks, Paul says when a woman or man prays or prophesies, we need to figure out what prophecy means. What does it mean to prophesy? And we know that it means to speak forth words from God, but what does that mean? Freshly inspired words from God? Or am I prophesying even today when I speak already revealed revelation from God that's contained in His Word? What actually is prophecy? There's actually a lot of dispute over what the gift of prophecy really is, and some would say the gift of prophecy doesn't even exist today.

It ceased at the closing of the canon of Scripture. And others say, no, it does still exist today. Well, how are we going to know what it means? Well, we're going to have to wait until we get to chapter 14 where prophecy is talked about a lot, and I believe in chapter 12 as well, and we'll see how the word is used and we'll try to figure out what that means as we study those chapters, and then we'll take that knowledge and come back to chapter 11 and bring that knowledge to bear on how we apply the full range of what Paul is teaching us in 1 Corinthians 11, 2-16.

So I'm going to have to plead your indulgence and your patience on this matter as we carefully... See, I don't want to be reckless and I don't want to just spend a little time in chapter 14, 34, and 35, and then to come giving you guys confident answers to practical questions from chapter 11. I can't do that. As I've told you before, I don't want to tamper with the consciences of God's people.

My conscience is bound by Scripture and I don't want to go above and beyond what is in Scripture in saying anything to you from the pulpit that I think God wants you to do. So it's that constraint that has forced me to a decision that we need to wait until we're done with chapter 14 before we can get into the practical dimensions of chapter 11. Another constraint, folks, is that we as elders have spent quite a bit of time talking over 1 Corinthians 11, 2-16 as a board, all of us together, and then also a number of individual conversations with various elders.

And I have to tell you guys that we as an elder board are not yet unanimous on all of the interpretational issues in 1 Corinthians 11, 2-16. It's not like we're all over the map though. Please understand me on that.

Every elder to a man agrees that this passage is for today and all of us agree that whatever Paul is explicitly teaching in this passage does need to be fully applied today. However, we as a board are not unanimous on exactly what the covering is that Paul is advocating in this passage. Some on our board view Paul is advocating a cloth covering and that is my own view as well as I've explained, whereas the view that Paul is advocating long hair as a sufficient covering is also represented on our elder board.

And so we're not unanimous on that issue, which is a significant interpretational challenge in this passage of Scripture. I also want to tell you though that even though that right now as we've talked this through and we're not unanimous on this, every elder to a man and I've seen this has demonstrated a humble and an earnest and an open attitude. Every elder's attitude has been God, whatever you say in this text, we want

to do it.

And we want to do it to the very fullest degree. However, even though every elder I've seen has that attitude of openness to the Lord and to this text of Scripture, we do not yet fully agree and we are not yet unanimous on some of these interpretational issues in the passage. And all of us as elders are unanimous in our belief that the lack of unanimity on this passage is some kind of indication from the Lord as to how we need to proceed from here.

And every one of us as elders agrees that we need to wait until we're done with chapter 14 before determinations are made as to the practical application of 1 Corinthians 11. We also all agree that if this is a battle that we're going to choose to fight, if this is a hill that we're going to choose to try to reclaim in this church for the glory of the Lord, then it's absolutely important that we as elders be on the same page. And all of us feel very strongly about that.

I have to tell you guys that one of the things that I have so much appreciated about our elder board is the principle of unanimity that we've always operated by over the last 20 years. And I have felt such a peace about that. When I came to this church, I was 27 years old, and I had never been a pastor of any church before.

I had been a youth pastor at a church of about 30 people for about three months. I had a growing youth group of four kids. And I did that for three months in a summer internship, but I had never been a pastor before.

And I shared with the elders my own... You know, they were telling me they wanted me to be pastor. I'm like, but you don't know me. I don't have any experience.

And I have some concerns about my ability to do this. And they assured me that they would be there for me. And I have felt such safety on our elder board in knowing that it's not all about me and it's not just my decisions that I make unilaterally for this church body, but that whatever we do, we do as a team and we always seek to be unanimous.

Constitutionally, we're required to do that. Even if we weren't required to do that, I would insist that we did that because that's such an important principle. I have found, even in my own short life, that many church splits that occur begin in the leadership.

And the leadership makes a very important decision. They're not unanimous on that. It's a 5-4 vote or what have you.

And they press ahead anyway. And that division that now occurs on the leadership level begins to play itself out amongst the congregation. I've seen that happen even in churches that I've been a part of.

And so I value this principle of unanimity that guides us as an elder board. There have been times where over the last 10 years, I've come to the elders and most of the time when I come to them and I've been passionate about something, they're like, yeah, you know what? We agree. Let's do it.

But there's been a couple times I've come to the elders and said, man, I really think we ought to do this and I've been kind of passionate about it. And the elders aren't unanimous about it. And to me, I receive that as an indication from the Lord that that's not what we're supposed to do as a church body at this time.

There's also been times where I've come to the elders with something and it seems like most elders agree with me. But then I remember one occasion where one elder spoke up and said, Milton, you know what? You seem to really want to do this and you're passionate about it. And I don't want to stand in your way.

And it seems like others agree with you. And you know what? I can't vote for it, but I won't vote against it and I'm not going to stand in the way. And I'll just abstain from the vote.

And I said to that elder, I said, no, you're not going to abstain. We're not going to do this because the fact that you don't have a piece about it and that you cannot join us, to me, I receive that as from the Lord that we're not supposed to do this. And you know what? Two months later, I was glad we didn't do it.

I saw the wisdom of this elder. I've seen it happen too that we've had discussions as an elder board and every elder is thinking we ought to do something and then one elder speaks up and says, I disagree and here's my reasons why. And an hour later, all of us are on the side of this one elder and we all agree with his way of thinking.

I really value the unanimity that we have as an elder board and because of that, I don't want to forge ahead with this if we as an elder board are not unanimous. I value that principle of unanimity so much. So what we're going to do, here's the upshot of what I'm saying.

We're going to have to wait until we're done with chapter 14 that gives us time to learn about what prophecy is, about the role of women in the church as Paul instructs us in chapter 14 verses 34 and 35. It also gives us as elders time to really work this through and hash this out and try as best we can to get on the same page so that when we are done with chapter 14, I can come to you guys having studied the word more with a higher degree of confidence as I speak to you as a pastor and an expositor of God's word. You say, well, what do we do in the meantime? Well, let me give you some pastoral counsel here.

I want all of you to know, as I have said in one way or another every single sermon over the last month that every one of you has liberty of conscience to practice this passage. However you feel the Lord is dictating through this text and or any other text of Scripture that you bring to bear on your understanding of this passage. If you sense that the Lord is leading you through this text to practice this passage by wearing some kind of a head covering while praying or prophesying or while ministering publicly in any sort of capacity either in a mixed assembly or beyond the mixed assembly, then I would encourage you to do that if that's what you believe the Scripture is teaching.

And we as elders very strongly feel that we want the climate at this church to be such that anyone who wants to practice this passage in that way should have total freedom to do so without fear of being judged by those who disagree. We also believe very strongly that if you disagree with the viewpoint that I've articulated over the last month and perhaps you think that the covering Paul is advocating is the hair or hair bound up on top of the head or after thinking the issue through you think that this passage is not for today, we as elders want to preserve your right to interpret and practice this passage differently without being judged for that either. It may happen that you see a lady up here who's wearing a head covering and you may see one that's not.

We should not be judging either one of them. Folks, we do not glorify God by just being in lockstep cookie cutter images of one another and we just totally agree on absolutely every issue. We glorify God best by in spite of our differences we love one another.

And I would encourage some of you to read Romans chapter 14. I think right now we need to treat this as a gray area issue and there are some who are going to be persuaded. There are others who are not going to be persuaded and we need to realize that every person is going to stand before God and they're going to have to give an account.

God will be their judge and let's stop playing junior God and judging people who hold to a different view than we may on this particular issue. And I'm speaking to people on both sides of the issue. I've seen some evidence of some judging going on on both sides of the issue.

Not bad, just little glimpses of it that made me at least want to say this to you. Also, if you want to wait until we get done with chapter 14 before deciding what to do, you have total liberty to do that. And I also want to say in connection with this, folks, that if you study this passage out and you think the passage through and you try to study the issues that are involved and you end up disagreeing with the conclusions that I have presented to you guys that I personally have come to in my own thinking process, I want you to know that I'm fine with that.

I don't want you to take the time we've spent and the passion that I have exhibited at times to mean that if you disagree with me, I think you're an evil person. I don't want you to understand or to misunderstand my passion or the length of time that we have spent on this issue in that way. What I do want, guys, and I feel very passionate about this, is I want you to do the work.

And what I don't like is people who just, this is not for today and I just know it and this commentator and this commentator says it's not for today and I got a lot of respect for them and how could they be wrong and so, you know, I don't even want to hear what Pastor Milton has to say. I don't even want to take another look at the passage. I already know it's not for today.

That's not a good attitude. That is not from the Lord. That is a closed and a defiant spirit and I know dogmatically that that's wrong to have that attitude.

But if you have the kind of attitude that's open and earnest and you've thought through the issues and you've come to different conclusions than what I've come to, not only is that okay with me, but I want to hear from you if you're willing to do so so that you can share with me what you're thinking is because there may be something that I'm missing. And I've tried to state that almost every Sunday that we're having a conversation here and I want to hear from you guys and I've heard from many of you guys as to what you're thinking is so that I could be benefited from that. You say, well, Milton, you seem pretty passionate at different points.

Well, you know what? I have a right to be passionate about what I believe God's word is teaching. Don't take that away from me. I'm a preacher of the word.

That's who I am. And if I believe God's word is teaching something, I'm not going to get up here and be ho-hum about it. I'm going to be excited about it.

I'm going to be passionate about it. But don't mistake that passion to mean that if you disagree that I think you're a bad person. You guys remember back when we were in 1 Corinthians 7 and, you know, we spent 13 sermons on marriage, divorce, remarriage and singleness.

You remember those days? And you remember where we took a couple messages to walk through the issues of the Scriptures teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage? And that was a difficult time for

some people in our church. And what I tried to do then is basically the spirit of what I'm trying to do now. And that is, I told you guys, I walked you through.

This is how I interpret the Scripture. This is what I personally believe that the Scripture is teaching. However, there are other views and here's what the other views are.

And here's what their arguments are. And here's what my response is to those arguments. But nonetheless, what I left with this body was I told you guys, I'm merely trying to make a contribution to your thinking on this subject to ensure that you do the work of thinking through this issue rather than just saying, well, I agree with this commentator and therefore I think this is okay.

And without even thinking about it and doing the work that you need to do and sorting through the issues. And you know what? When people, in fact, over the years there have been three times, I'd say in the last four years, three times where someone has come to me for counsel regarding divorce and remarriage issues. I'm speaking primarily of the remarriage after divorce issue.

And they've wanted to get counsel on that. And in every case, what I have done is I've said, well, I've got two sermon tapes for you that I myself have preached. And I have given those tapes to them.

And I've said, here's what I want you to do. I want you to listen to these tapes. I want you to study these passages on your own.

I want you to pray through them with an open and an earnest heart. I want you to consult whatever other resources that you can get your hands on. I want you to work through this issue rather than coming to a quick conclusion.

And I told them, if at the end of your study you come to a different conclusion than what I have come to and you disagree with me, whatever your conclusion is, I want you to call me up and I want you to tell me what you have decided. And if you've done your work with an open heart, I'm not going to tell you that you're wrong even if you disagree with me. I just want to know that you've done the work rather than coming to a quick conclusion.

Three people in the last four or five years have come to me for that. I've given three people that assignment. All three of them have come back to me and said, Pastor Milton, thanks for the tapes but I want you to know I disagree with you and this is my view.

And in all three cases I've said to them, you know what, I commend you for the work that you have done. And I commend you for just laboring through this issue rather than coming to a quick conclusion. And I cannot just dogmatically say from the scripture that I believe that you're wrong.

But I applaud you and commend you for the work that you've done. Folks, that's basically what I'm trying to convey to all of you guys with regard to this issue as well. I just, you know, I'm disappointed in some, and I'm not saying in this church, but I'm disappointed in Christians, especially of the last century who just so quickly just skim over these verses in chapter 11 and they take a real quick look at it and go, well this isn't for today because people in our culture don't do this today and so therefore this doesn't apply to us today rather than stopping to ask the question, you know what, is there a reason people don't do this in our culture today? Is this an innocent fashion trend? And they don't really work through the issues and labor through them.

They quickly pass this section of scripture because they don't want to deal earnestly with it. If you come to the conclusion that this is not for today or you disagree with me on what the covering is, all I really want to know is did you labor over that? Did you approach this passage with an open heart to whatever the Lord is saying? If that is the case and I see that evidenced in you, then I'm pleased with that. In fact, I said to one elder who disagrees with me on what I presented to you guys just on Friday of this week and I said, you know what, after talking with you even about this issue, I feel closer to you than I did two months ago and I also feel that I know your heart better than I did two months ago and I like what I see.

I like what I see. So, I'm not saying that if you agree with me, you've got a good heart. I'm not saying that at all, but what I am saying is you need to do the work on this passage and I don't want anyone coming to a rash or quick conclusion that well, this automatically is not for today simply because people don't do it and if the time that we've spent on this passage has made any contribution to that end at all, then I'm very pleased with that.

I've actually had some who they haven't said it this way, but what I picked up from them is that they want from me, Milton, just tell me what to do and I'll just do it whether or not I'm convinced that that's exactly what the Scripture teaches and that's not what I want from people. What I want is for you to do the work on the passage and then consult your conscience, pray through the matter, talk with your spouse about the matter and then you do what you believe God is leading you to do and wherever you end up on that, if I know that you approach that with an open and an earnest and a humble disposition approaching this passage in that way, then I could commend you for that and be very pleased with that as a pastor and a shepherd of this flock. Having said that, folks, I want to, just a couple closing thoughts.

I want to have you go to Luke 2 to the passage of Scripture that we looked at in our Scripture reading this morning. This is a passage that I've thought about numerous times this week at high points and at low points. Simeon sees Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms and he says of Jesus the incarnate word of God in the middle of verse 34.

Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel and for a sign to be opposed and a sword will pierce even your own soul and for a sign to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Part of what Simeon is saying is that you will be able to know people's hearts based on how they respond to this child. And that's true today.

You know about someone's heart based on how they respond to Jesus Christ, right? And you know whether their heart is the good soil or whether it's the bad soil or the rocky soil or whatever as Jesus talks to us about that in Mark chapter 4. You can tell things about a person's heart based on how they respond to Jesus Christ who is the living word of God, the incarnate word of God. And folks, by way of application, not interpretation, but by way of application, what Simeon says of the living, incarnate word of God could also be said about the written word of God. That you can tell things about a person's heart based on how they respond to the written word of God.

And with 1 Corinthians 11, 2 through 16 being a part of the written word of God, I'll tell you folks how people respond to this passage of Scripture and the kind of attitudes and dispositions that they manifest reveals many things about their hearts as well. And I personally have found this passage in 1 Corinthians to be unique in its ability to expose people's hearts in interesting ways unlike any other passage that I've ever preached on. You say, well, how do you know that? What have you seen in people? You know what? I don't have to look at any of you to know that that is true.

This passage has touched me on so many levels and has revealed crud in my own heart that I didn't even know was there. It's been there all along. But as I shared with you guys last week, there have been points along the way where I have resisted this passage in various ways more than any other passage that I have ever preached on.

There have been moments where my heart is beginning to close and I'm like, no, it can't mean this. And even this week, I said to someone in the office, as I was working through the practical application of the passage, and I said, you know, I really want Paul to just be saying this, but it doesn't seem like he's just saying this. It seems like he's saying more.

And I was frustrated over that and this person said to me, you know what? You've said that a lot in the last month and a half. And I don't say that proudly at all. I mean, this passage has exposed just issues of defiance even in my own heart towards the written Word of God.

And it's brought me to some very low points where I've even questioned whether I'm fit to even be a preacher of God's Word. And folks, I'm not the only one who has self-examination to do. Regardless of your viewpoint, all of us have issues that we need to look at in our own hearts and just ask ourselves, what is my disposition towards this passage of Scripture? Am I really letting it say what Paul and the Holy Spirit want it to say? Or is there any aspect to which my heart is closed to this passage? And I have to confess to you guys that there are still ways that I see that my heart is closed to certain ramifications of this passage of Scripture.

And God has a lot of work that He needs to do with me. And I'm grateful that I have until the end of chapter 14 for Him to work me through the ringer on some of these things so that I can then come to you with the Lord having dealt with me in these various dimensions. My wife also a few weeks ago made a list of all the heart issues that this passage has touched on in her own life.

And some of those have been great. And other things she's really had to struggle with. And I think if the truths were known, all of us would probably say that.

I was talking to someone this week who said, you know, I'm having trouble sleeping at night over this issue. And I find myself waking up and thinking about it. And she was very frustrated over that.

And this is going to sound perverted, but I was comforted when she said that to know that I'm not the only one who wakes up in the middle of the night sorting through some of these heart issues that this passage has brought to the surface. But folks, just in closing, can I just share a couple things that have encouraged me? I have to tell you, this has been the most difficult month and a half of my ministry. It has brought me lower than I've ever been in the ten years of ministry at this church.

And I'm the reason for that. And my own wicked heart is the reason for that. And I've also been plagued with a lot of self-doubt at various points.

You know, is what I'm saying even right? Am I handling this in the right way? Is my attitude right? You know, I said last Sunday night that passages like this don't split churches. But carnal attitudes split churches. And arrogance and pride and fleshliness, that's what splits churches, not the text of Scripture.

And when I said that, part of what I'm trying to convey is that even in my own heart, if I got up here and with an arrogant attitude and pride in my heart, was preaching what I think this passage is saying, I would be capable of beginning to contribute to splitting this church in two. So I've got to watch my heart. All of us

need to watch our hearts as we respond to this particular passage of Scripture.

There is so much fertile ground here for the devil to just take advantage of to bring division between people in this church body. And I don't want that to happen. And I don't want to do anything that contributes to that either.

But what has blessed me, even in the low points, folks, is first of all, the fact that we're family. I told myself this on the very first Sunday we preached on this because I couldn't sleep the night before and I was just all worked up. And after that first Sunday, I couldn't sleep that night and I was like, what have I done? And I played with so much self-doubt.

But I kept telling myself, you know what? We're family here. We're brothers and sisters. And you know what? If we stumble along and if I make mistakes, you know what? I know that it will be, I hope, but I believe that it will be received with grace and we'll learn together.

You know, in our church brochure, we don't say that we're a teaching church. What we do say is we're a learning church. Because it's not like I got all the answers and then you guys come and get taught.

No, I'm learning. And then I pass along to you what I'm learning. We're all learning and growing together.

And that works best when we have that spirit of grace towards one another. And so I've comforted myself with that. I've also comforted myself and have been truly blessed by a number of you that have come up to me sometimes with tears in your eyes and you say, I've really struggled with this, but this is what God has done in my life.

And I have seen evidence that God has ministered to so many people on so many different heart levels over this last month that really encourages me in a wonderful way. I had one college girl come up to me and we were talking about the issue and she said, you know what, when you first started talking about this, I felt a lot of defiance in my heart. But when that came to the surface, I realized, you know, and what I'm thinking about is this attitude really right? And she says, and I'm really looking honestly at that.

And you know what, I don't even know where this girl has ended up on the issue of head coverings, but I was blessed to know that she was dealing with the heart issues that this passage brought to the surface in her life. I ran into someone who attends this church, they're not a member, at the Home Depot a couple weeks ago and I was there with my son and we encounter a young man in our church, I believe of like college age and he said, by the way, I got a question about the head covering thing. And immediately, I just kind of thought, you know, here's a young person and I know he probably hates what I'm saying and, but he wasn't, he had a practical question.

He was asking for himself and on behalf of his girlfriend, and you know, I tried to answer his question as best I could and then he said, you know what, God has, you know, been working in my heart. He said, you know, we visited some other churches but I realize this is the place where God wants us right now. And he demonstrated such an open attitude to the Word of God that I almost wanted to weep standing there in front of him.

It truly blessed me and I told him so. And then he began to speak for his girlfriend and he said, you know what, her attitude is, hey, if this is what God says, then we're all over it. We're all over it.

And I was so blessed by that. I don't even know where they have ended up or will end up on this issue and whether they agree with me or not, but the openness and the humility and the earnest attitude to just know what Scripture says that was manifested on that occasion really blessed me. One other thing has blessed me and I don't want this to come out wrong, but I have been very queasy about anyone visiting our church over this last month.

And there are three or four couples that I have in my mind that started attending our church right in the middle of this. And every one of them, at first opportunity, I've tried to apologize to them and say, hey, this isn't normally what we talk about and don't judge us based on just what we're doing right now. But you know what? These visitors, every one of them, has had such an open attitude to God's Word.

Their thought is, I just want to know what God's Word says. You don't need to apologize for anything. And to my amazement, and they're even here this morning, they kept coming back week after week after week.

And you know what, guys? Those of you that I'm talking about, God may lead you to another church one day and we may never see you again, but the fact that you've showed up week after week and have had an open heart attitude towards God's Word, that has blessed me more than I'm able to convey from the pulpit. And I will never forget that blessing and I want you to know that. Folks, the thing that I want to urge of all of us is that we have an open and an earnest attitude towards Scripture.

And you know what? Not that I'm expecting an answer from you guys, but let me ask you. Do you want to continue in 1 Corinthians? Because it's not going to get much easier. I can go to the Sermon on the Mount.

In fact, the Sermon on the Mount is looking quite delicious to me. But do you want to continue in this book? Because there's going to be a number of issues that we're going to encounter that may do violence to what we've believed all along or what we've practiced all along. Are we willing to undergo that? Or do we want an easy life? Do we want to just focus on passages that make us feel good and that everyone agrees on and there's no difficulties? Folks, if we're going to continue through this book, you've got to be up to the challenge.

And I've got to be up to the challenge. And it's absolutely vital that all of us approach God's Word and passages like chapter 11, 12, 13, and even 14, verses 34 and 35, that we approach God's Word with the attitude of, God, whatever You say, I don't even know what You're going to say yet, but whatever You say, I will do it. Speak to me, Lord.

I am Your bond slave and I am listening. Is the audience listening? That's the question that God would ask of all of us. Let me ask you to bow your heads.

I think, folks, sometimes we have so domesticated the faith, we've tamed the Scriptures like we would domesticate a dog or a cat that we have in the home. We've domesticated the Scriptures to where it only says what we want it to say. It only speaks when we want it to speak.

And we only focus on those things that we want to focus on. And then passages like 1 Corinthians 11-16, we don't want to hear what that says because that may change us or it may prove that we've been wrong. When what God wants from us, folks, is to have an adventurous faith, not a domesticated faith.

And the way to have that is to have an open heart to whatever God says. And would to God that all of us, including myself, could come to God and say, God, whatever You say to me from Your Word, I want to do

it. Even if it shatters my dreams and lays waste things I've always believed or practiced, I don't care, Lord.

I want to follow whatever You teach me in Your Word. Do you have that kind of high view of Scripture? Some people look at the head covering issue and they say it's not important. Well, in my way of thinking, God is the single most important person in our lives, and therefore, every word that falls from His lips ought to be as important to us as He is.

And people who love God don't sort through the words of God and say, well, this is important and this isn't, and so I'll heed this and this I'll ignore and it probably won't be much of a big deal to God if I ignore this. No, people who love God, they're looking at God's Word and say, God, whatever You say, I'm going to view it as being as important to me as You are to me. I want to show my love to You.

And it's not a bondage. It's a joy to just be able to look at what Your Word says and just do it because I love You so much. And in obeying You, I can show my love to You.

And there are times we look at Scripture and it seems like God is asking a lot of us. And yet, folks, don't lose sight of the Lord Jesus Christ who gave up so much for us. He who wore a crown of thorns upon His head.

He had no stately form nor comeliness. He was ridiculed and spat upon. He was hanged naked upon a cross, clothed with nothing but our sin.

And He comes to us through His Word and says, here's what I ask of you. Do we dare look at anything that He asks of us and say, this is too much, Lord? Our heart's attitude ought to be, is this all? Is this all? You who gave up so much for me are asking just this of me? Where do we get this kind of attitude, folks? We get it from experiencing the Gospel fully. I want to encourage you guys to come back tonight.

We're going to spend some time in Titus 3 and just be rehearsing some Gospel truths as we find them affirmed in Titus 3. But I want this to be a day of just renewed commitment to the Lord and obedience to Him. Not just obedience to what we know He says, but just a willingness to obey what we don't even know yet that He's going to say. That's the kind of attitude God wants to see among His people.

Take just a moment to speak to the Lord and make whatever commitments to Him that the Spirit of God is leading you to make. I'm going to ask Alvin to go ahead and come forward for the announcements. Let's go ahead and pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who has loved us so. And the only reason we love You is because You first loved us and drew us to Yourself with the cords of Your love. We thank You for the Lord Jesus who died for us that we might have atonement for all of our sins so that we might stand righteous before You and be Your children having received the gift of Your Holy Spirit and to experience the loving presence of Your Holy Spirit who is continually pouring out Your love inside of our hearts that we might live in the enjoyment of the sensation of being loved by You in the deepest recesses of our being.

Oh Lord, we thank You for this. We thank You for the salvation that You've accomplished in our lives through Jesus. We thank You for passages like this that challenge us and that call us to a higher standard in our hearts and that cause us to examine our own hearts and how much do we love You.

How highly do we value every word that falls from Your precious lips. Father, I pray for this church body that You would protect us from harm, protect us from the devil's schemes who would love nothing more than to bring division, disunity in this church body. Lord, we just renounce his efforts and may the devil find no foothold and no base of operations in my heart and may he find no base of operations in the hearts of any in this room.

I pray, Lord, that You would nurse the bond of love that exists between us and that we would grow together as a church not only in love for one another, but in appreciation for Your Word and even more, grow in our appreciation of the One from whom this Word has come. May we always, Lord, value You far above anything or anyone else, making You far and away the most important person in our lives. And may we always be careful to relate to You solely on the basis of gospel truths.

We just give ourselves to You, Lord, with these commitments and desires in our hearts. In the name of Jesus we pray and all God's people said...

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