



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 11: 2-16

“Covering the Head in Worship”

TRANSCRIPT

Well it's time for us to begin. Let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege again to open the word of God and to read and ponder the things that the writers of Scripture have said to their generation and to us as well. We thank Thee for the ministry that has been given and we thank Thee for the great results and impact that it has had down through the centuries. We pray Lord that it may continue and that in our age and our day the ministry of the word of God may continue to be fruitful and profitable.

We thank Thee for the content of the Scriptures as they set forth the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for all that he is as our Savior and Lord the second person of the eternal Trinity. We thank Thee for our triune God in heaven and father we give Thee thanks for all of the blessings that our ours as a result of the work of the Father the Son and the Spirit in our lives. We look back and think of the day when Thou didst touch our hearts and move us from our sin and from our need of redemption to understand what Jesus Christ has done for sinners and to bring us to the place of faith in him.

We thank Thee for the continued ministry of the Spirit our spirit in our hearts, and Lord, we pray that in accordance with the promises of the word of God that the Spirit as

our Lord Jesus has said may teach us the things that concern him. We ask that Thou wilt be with us in our study this evening. May our time together be enlightening and edifying for us and pleasing to Thee. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Well we’re turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 2 through verse 16, one of the really difficult passages of the Epistle to the Corinthians, and I think, of course, one of the real difficult passages in the New Testament, itself a passage over which there has been even within the company of believing students a great deal of difference of opinion. And so we look at it with interest, not expecting to solve all of the problems that have not been solved to this day by those who study the word of God.

I’d like to begin by reading beginning at verse 2. Those of you that were here last time you’ll remember that I made the point, and this is not something that is original with me. It’s generally true of most interpreters of 1 Corinthians that verse 1 of chapter 11 really belongs with the preceding context. In the New Testament, as you well know, chapter divisions are not inspired. They were made by individuals many centuries actually after the apostles, for example, wrote, and so those divisions are divisions that are uninspired, and it’s the work of an interpreter to analyze the passages interpret them and come to conclusions with reference to the paragraphing of the word of God.

In this case we said that verse 1 really belongs to the preceding context, and now we are beginning tonight reading at verse 2 in the section which concludes with verse 16. Again, I remind you I’m reading from the New King James Version, not because I think it’s the best version. It happens to be one that I had to look at for something that I was doing in the study of the word, and I’ve been using it for a good while. Verse 2 the apostle writes,

“Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things
and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you. But I
want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head

of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God. Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. (Now the shaving of the head indicated frequently a slave, and in Hebrew thought it represented an adulteress, and so you can see that this is something very shameful. Verse 6) For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of* authority on *her* head, because of the angels. (Now my text has the words, *symbol of*, a symbol of, in italics, suggesting of course, that this is an attempt to understand the word, authority; the text says very simply “ought to have authority on her head,” but interpreting that as a symbol then, the interpreters have said “ought to have a symbol of authority on her head” because of the angels -- a reference to the covering.) Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God. Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to

her for a covering.”

Again there are differences of opinion with reference to the rendering of the preposition “for,” translated for here -- I don’t have any objections to this, but there are different opinions with reference to it. Sometimes that preposition means “instead of” and some interpretations have even gone so far as to suggest, contrary, I think to the flow of the context, that the covering of the woman is not a special covering, but is rather simply her hair. That seems to go contrary to the whole thought of the preceding verses, but from the standpoint of Greek grammar it at least is a remote possibility. There isn’t anything that can be shown apart from exegesis of the passage to prevent such an interpretation in other context such a translation in other contexts.

“But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God. (Again another statement over which there has been difference of opinion.)”

As I have said frequently in recent years, the evangelical church is seriously troubled and confused by feminism. While affirming equality of the sexes, biblical evangelicals have resisted claims of undifferentiated roles in ministry. The Christian media have largely succumbed to the strident voices: are we unfair in opposing them?

I think a little prayer that was offered by a little girl to the Lord God -- and you can sense the cultural background of it -- “Dear God,” she said, “Are boys better than girls? I know you’re one, but try to be fair.” [Laughter] So the debate concerning the sexes has even gotten that far.

I have in my hands an editorial letter to the editor, some of the letters to the editor of *The Wall Street Journal* which a couple of years ago published an article entitled “The Lord’s Name” on page one and it had to do with women. I’m not going to try to read all

of it, because there were a number of responses to it. The article was written by Gustav Niebuhr, and one of the replies to it was made by the General Council of the Christian Life Convention of the Southern Baptist Convention, so Christian Life Commission, and he framed his answer in poetry. He said, “Gus Niebuhr did not make me doubt that God is not a he, but he surely made me wonder if the devil is a she. If they can call God Mother Earth or even Mother Goosey, then why don’t they change Lucifer to something soft like Lucy? Reverend Mary Ellen Kilsby wants to make the Lord PC (she was referred to in the article), but the devil she still calls a prince. How sexist can she be? I think I’ll stick with Scripture. Revelation gets my nod. Father Son and Holy Spirit best describe the triune God.” Well, we have someone who is part point and and part active in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Just recently in *The Wall Street Journal* also, in fact this very month, there was an article that had to do with O. J. Simpson and the media and particularly marital violence, and the author, who is a well respected author -- in fact, since I’ve read *Wall Street Journal* for thirty or forty years at least, I’ve read many of his articles -- Albert Hunt is well known as the Washington correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, had an article recently in which he suggested that the violence that exists between men and women is partially traceable to the religious right, which seems a rather strange thing, because the religious right, though they may have some problems and some serious shortcomings, is the one part of our society which does attempt to follow what Scripture has to say, and Scripture certainly is definitely opposed to the violence of the husband with reference to his wife.

In fact, the thing that the Scripture underlines, as you well know, is that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. So to suggest that the kind of teaching to which the Christian right claims adherence is responsible for violence is to my mind difficult to understand from a man who is an excellent writer and commentator on political affairs.

We all know also that in our society there are all types of discussions of things that have to do with feminism today. I have also an article which appeared just a couple of years ago concerning the craft of the wise and the worshipping of the goddess and as you well know, in our religious circles today there has been a great deal of discussion over the worship of the goddess Sophia. Sophia is the Greek term for wisdom, and since it is a feminine term, evidently that is thought to be suitable for the expression of worship of a feminine deity. I listened last night to some of the comments that were made at the Re-imagining Conference of a few months back, in fact last year, and in the course of it, the people who were there -- a large number of people -- were speaking about their god Sophia as their particular god or goddess. So when we come to 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we are coming to a chapter which seems to be entirely irrelevant to the kind of life that exists in our religious society today.

If I were to try to sum up some of the things that I think we should keep in mind as being biblical teaching, I would suggest first of all that the Bible teaches an equality between male and female in God’s image and in Christ. We do not believe those who study the Scriptures, we do not believe that the Bible does not teach equality. The Bible teaches full equality. The Bible however also teaches in various passages such as 1 Timothy chapter 2, 1 Corinthians chapter 14 -- we get to that in a few weeks -- the headship of the male in the family and also in the church. In other words, what Scripture teaches is an equality, but also a difference in function, and so the Scriptures speak of male and female being absolutely equal, but nevertheless the husband has certain functions in a family, and the wife has certain functions in a family, the children have certain functions in the family. The functions that we have do not in any way go contrary to the equality that the word of God teaches, as we shall see here in this passage; that is set forth plainly that in Christ there is an equality.

The male headship exists in the church, and consequently when the elders are chosen by the Holy Spirit and confirmed in the ministry of the local church, they should

be males, so the Scripture teaches. I know there is a great deal of difference of opinion over this now largely due to the rise of the feminist movement, but nevertheless the Scripture has not changed. Male headship in the family is also set forth very plainly in passages like 1 Peter chapter 3, in Ephesians chapter 5. Many other references make it very plain. It is not really a question of what Scripture says, I do not think. Headship is established in the creation of man, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It is unremoved by the fact of the Fall and the fact of redemption through Jesus Christ. One of the interesting things is that when the apostle, for example, refers to these matters, he does not cite Genesis 3 and afterwards he refers to Genesis 2, the section that has to do with the creation itself. In other words, these differences are differences that are related to the created order before the fall and before the promise of the Redeemer to come in Genesis chapter 3.

Now we can’t discuss all of those things, and if you are interested in it, two or three years ago there were a series of about six messages given on this topic in which various parts of it were set forth. In fact, I gave an exposition of this passage in that particular series as well.

What we are now to discuss is order in spiritual activity, the spiritual activity of prayer and prophesying. There are some other questions that one must think about with reference to this, too, because the apostle mentions praying or prophesying, and questions arise about what are the circumstances of this praying and prophesying. Are we talking about praying in tongues? Are we talking about praying apart from the gift of tongues? And prophesying; are talking about the kind of prophesying that the apostles engaged in or the prophets of the Old Testament engaged in? Is that what we mean by prophesying, or we do we just mean that someone rises up in a meeting and makes a comment -- what may be called what might be called and is called today in some circles, a word of knowledge. So those are questions we cannot solve in our meeting tonight. I want simply to begin with a verse 2 and trace through to the best of my skills what the

apostle is talking about acknowledging here. And there the questions I cannot solve in a few moments and might not be able to solve if I had a few hours.

Now first of all, the apostle speaks of the proper order in the assemblies of the saints in verse 2 through verse 10. In Genesis in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 28 there is a passage that bears on this topic, and I’m going to read it so we’ll have it in mind as we go along, but in Galatians 3 verse 28 the apostle writes, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Jesus Christ.” So that raises the question, Do the originally taught conventions that is set forth in Genesis chapter 2 -- the woman created for the man, men afterwards coming into existence through a woman -- do those things that pertain before the Fall and before the promise of redemption still pertain today? So that is a question that is raised by the statement in Galatians 3:28.

Now, we’ve already made a suggestion to the effect that when the apostle says that they are one in Christ Jesus that he means one in Christ Jesus, in their spiritual position in him, but the matter of different functions is what is taught in other passages of the Bible. In other words, there can be equality and difference of function together.

Now the feminists, evangelical feminists -- often we should distinguish between the feminists, because there are feminists who are not only not evangelical, they’re not even professing Christians, and then there are feminists who are professing Christians but their evangelicalism is questionable, and then there are feminists who so far as we know have made a valid confession of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and are generally recognized as evangelical feminists, but who do hold some feminist teachings, so we want to recognize those things before we look at what we are talking about here. What becomes evident I think is that Paul is not concerned with women’s dress out of doors. He’s concerned with women’s dress in worship, and he treats, as James Moffett said some years ago, “He treats the Corinthian innovation as irreligious rather than indecorous.” In other words this is a question of spiritual understanding and conformity to the word of

God. The question then is, if we’re equal, are there some things that are true of women that are not true of men?

Now he says in verse 2, “Now I praise you brethren.” That’s a very wonderful way to begin these words which obviously are designed to be something of a rebuke to the Corinthians. As a matter of fact, it appears from the context that there was a great deal of contention over this, because he says in verse 16, “If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom nor do the churches of God.” That would suggest that in Corinth there was a great deal of contention over just what he’s talking about. But he starts out by praising them.

I think it would be wonderful if we could be sure that if the Apostle Paul were here he would say to us in Believers Chapel and to our friends who are our friends here with us this evening, now I praise you brethren. And he says, he praises them because they remember him in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. What are the traditions? When we think of tradition we frequently think of things like the traditions that are common to the Roman Catholic Church, things that are very difficult to support from the word of God. But the word, tradition itself, is simply something that is handed down. So in Christianity we have traditions. Some of the traditions we have are the great creeds and the creedal statements which evangelicals accept whether they be Baptists or Presbyterian or Lutheran or Anglican. They accept these great creedal statements. And so those are traditions those are things that are handed down.

The apostle talks about them in the Thessalonian epistles. He talks about them here. And so in the sense of an apostolic truth handed down from one generation to another or handed about in the same generation, those are properly observed. But when we think of traditions as having no biblical foundation, but something that has grown up in a church without biblical foundation called a tradition -- that kind of tradition we don’t follow. The Lord Jesus refers to that kind of tradition when he talks about the Tradition of the Elders, because it was contrary to the teaching of the word of God; it was

something that had been handed down, but it was not grounded in the truth of the word of God. Paul is talking about those that are genuine truths that have come from our Lord and the apostles, and he praises them that they remember him, and they keep those traditions, just as I delivered them to you.

Now wouldn’t it be nice if we could have Paul with us, and he would say to us now in Believers Chapel, you have followed the things that I taught and you have held to, them just as I set them forth when I wrote them originally. I have no faith that he would be able to say that, but it would be wonderful to have him say, I praise you at least if he could say, I praise you for trying that would please me a great deal.

Now he starts here and he says in verse 3 something that sets forth a kind of structure of authority. I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ the head of the woman is the man and the head of Christ is God. So we have a kind of chain of originating and subordinated, or subordinating relationships set up here. There is God, in this case, of course, God is a term that applies to, as we’ve said so often, to the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The term, God, is not a personal term -- it’s a term that has to do with the being of deity, and so with a triune God we can say, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. That’s no new truth to you in Believers Chapel, because we have made that point over and over again. Occasionally looking at the context you have to analyze and decide which of the persons is referred to, and here of course when he says the head of Christ is God, he’s talking about God the Father. So we have a chain of authority, or we have God the Father, then Christ or God the Son and then we have man and then we have woman. I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ the head of the woman is the man. So we have woman, man, Christ, and the head of Christ is God.

Now Christ is God, so the reference is clearly to God the Father. He is the mediator. He’s the Son of God who came to carry out a mediatorial work, and so he

functions as the God-man in his ministry on the earth. So the chain of originating subordinating relationships is set up.

Now the Christian church, if we are a Christian church, we believe in the divine Trinity. Now if we believe in the divine Trinity, of course we believe that there is equality among the three persons. They each possess the divine being. The Father, the Son, the Spirit. They each are God. They each possess all of the attributes all of the properties of deity. There is nothing lacking in any of the three. We believe in one God who subsists in three persons and those persons each possess deity fully, but now at the same time there is a difference of function within the Godhead. The Son functions in obedience to the Father during the mediatorial work. That should tell us right at the beginning that it is possible to have an equality but difference in function. So when we say that men and women are equal, we are not denying equality when we say they have different functions. In fact, even a function of submission for a time. That should be plain to us. The New Testament teaches it plainly. But yet we have great difference of opinion in certain parts of this debate over the whole range of the debate. Many say if we have equality, we cannot have submission; submission does not exist in such relationships. This text teaches very plainly the opposite; that is, there is equality in the Godhead. There is distinction of function.

Now the apostle, after having set up this particular type of arrangement, what we call the structure of authority, goes on to talk about something that was particularly applicable to Corinth. Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered dishonors his head. A head covering dishonors his head, because man, as the king of creation – remember, God gave to man authority over the creation, to rule and reign; he will of course in the future bring it about that man does truly rule and reign on the face of this earth, so he is the king of creation. There is a dignity that pertains to the man. So every man praying or prophesying having his head covered dishonors his head. That

head covering dishonors his head, because what he is as God’s creation reflects the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same thing as if her head were shaved. In the public Christian assembly, is he talking about? If so, he says we must pray with a veil, but is he referring to leading in prayer or joining in prayer? These are some questions I cannot answer with any kind of definiteness. If we wanted to talk for two or three hours about it we could discuss them. When he talks about praying, are we sure that he means praying audibly? Does he mean praying in the sense of praying with a tongue, as in chapter 14 we have that? Those are many questions that cannot be answered in what we are trying to do, a survey of the teaching of 1 Corinthians. That’s something you have to do on your own you’re a study student of the word. You should be you should want to do that from time to time.

So at any rate if he’s talking about the public Christian assembly, he is saying that the women, if they pray in a public assembly, they must have their head covering on. Every woman who is praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonors her head for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. Incidentally, when he says prophesying, that raises another question because remember the apostle was talking in the 1st Century to the Corinthian believers. Prophecy was a very active gift given by the Lord frequently evidently at that time. We know from things said even outside of the Scripture that prophecy was something that was frequently given in Christian assemblies.

But then prophecy died out. The history of prophecy is that down through the years the prophecy that is biblical prophecy -- that is the authoritative prophecy -- the prophecy that could be actually infallible, was not given. And there are those today who claim that they are giving such infallible prophecy, then there are some who are saying they are giving prophesies but they are not infallible. Well I must say if it’s prophecy and it’s not infallible I’m not going to pay a whole lot of attention to it. Are you? We are

interested of course if the prophecy is infallible, but if it’s going to be fallible I’m not interested in that. But it’s -- some of my good friends with whom I’ve served on the faculty -- suggest that it’s possible to call a fallible prophecy a prophecy. Well I couldn’t call it a prophecy. I would call it something else. But that’s a debatable point. In other words there are a lot of questions about this.

It would be wonderful if we could just -- you know what I would like to have? I would like to have a Calvin’s little box. The time warp -- you know, he’s just gotten in it. Now again he’s going on one of his trips. He’s in it, and he’s going to advance into the ages that lie millions of years in the past. All I would want Calvin would be to get in your little box and go back nineteen hundred years that would be enough for me then I could find out exactly what was happening in Corinth in the church there. We cannot. We can study the word. We can ponder it. We can listen to what everyone with a sound mind has to say about it and try to find what the Scriptures do teach and some things emerge of course, but some things still are a bit difficult.

So if everyone who prays or prophesies -- as a matter fact I do not believe that the gift of prophecy is being exercised today. I do not deny that it could be. There’s nothing in the Bible that says it could not be. We’ll talk about that when we get to chapter 14, because the first verse of chapter 14 reads, “Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts but especially that you may prophecy.” So it was a gift that was available to them at one time that time in the sense that it was being given. Today it’s still available, but the evidence of history and the evidence of the reality of those that are claim[ing] to be prophesying is that that kind of foul infallible prophecy is not being given today. The Bible tells us it will be given again in the latter days. Your sons and your daughters shall prophecy -- not only the men the women as well, so the Scripture says. But we evidently are not there. Prophecy then is a temporary gift.

Well are there temporary gifts? Are not all of the gifts available for us? No all of the gifts are not available for us. The preeminent gift in Paul’s list is the gift of

apostleship. We do not have any apostles in the sense that the Twelve were apostles today. We have individuals who are sent from one church to another church on a particular mission; they are also called apostles in the New Testament on two or three occasions, but the gift of apostleship to speak the revealed word of God as the apostles of the New Testament did -- they spoke divine revelation. We don’t have such prophets today; we don’t have such apostles today, and so the standard or the principle of a temporary gift would be established thereby. There’s nothing wrong with saying there are some gifts that are temporary and there are some that are not.

Verse 7. He said in verse 6 if a woman is not covered let her also be shorn but if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved let her be covered. In other words, the apostle is saying, if you’re going to go contrary to the word, you should go ahead and shear your head -- be like a slave or be like one of those adulterers that the Scriptures speak about in the Old Testament. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of the man.

Now we have no question about man being the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of the man deriving her being from man. Eve derived her being from Adam. It was from his rib that God fashioned Eve, so there is a relationship of derivation. She is his glory. Here you can see that the apostle is following Genesis chapter 1 -- not Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 -- but he is following Genesis chapter 2 verse 18 through verse 25.

Now then in the 8th verse, “For man is not from woman but woman is from man.” In other words, Eve has come from man and that derivation from him has, Paul feels, scriptural significance.

Now in order that you might not get the impression that equality is not there, he goes on to say, “Nor was man created for the woman but woman for -- or on account of - -the man. In verse 9 in effect he says that it’s true man was created -- nor was man

created for the woman, but woman for the man. What the Scriptures say is that woman for the man, is through or on account of the man.

Now in verse 10 we have a difficult text. For this reason, the apostle says -- he’s talking about the authority -- for this reason the woman ought to have authority on her head, synecdoche. That is, an aspect of something is used for the whole thing. I remember one of the dictionary definitions of synecdoche is that a force of ships are coming, and the force is called a force of fifty sail. Well now there were fifty sails, but the meaning of sail is really fifty ships. Military terms use that as well. But anyway fifty sail, and here, authority is synecdoche for the symbol of authority. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels.

What an interesting thing that is. The angels. Why are the angels brought into the apostle’s discussion? Well for the reason that the angels were observers of created order, and in fact, it was also thought by many that the angels had been given certain authority, certain moral authority with reference to the created order. They were servants of God, and they ministered particularly in reference to the created order. But Paul has already made a reference to the angels. You might turn back to chapter 4 and verse 9 because here he suggests that the angels are fully cognizant of a great deal of our lives. He says, “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death for we have been made a spectacle (a theater) to the world both to angels and to men.” So the apostle looking at himself and his fellow workers says that we are a spectacle to the world of men and to the world of angels. They understand the things that are happening with reference to us, and they are looking down upon us with knowledge of the things that are happening here upon the earth.

In chapter 3 of the Epistle of the Ephesians he mentions something of the same thing, because he says in verse 10 of chapter 3, “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” In other words the wisdom and power of God are being made

known to the angelic world through -- Greek text says through -- through the church. Are they learning much from us do you think? Are they really learning from what is happening down here? Yes they are learning, because angels do not know the joy of divine redemption, and so consequently all that they see that God the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of individuals, turning them from sin to salvation, from a life of rebellion against God to a life of growing conformity to the word of God, must be an astonishment to them. And so every one of you in this room who is believer in Jesus Christ, you are also a spectacle to the angelic world. That’s solemnizing is it not, to realize that they know us? They know of us. They observe us, and there is no possibility for us withdrawing to our home or to our room and escaping the gaze of the world above us. So Paul says they ought to have the symbol of authority.

Now I’m not going to get into the discussion for the sake of time that has been uh has raged around the meaning of this text. I do think that the symbol of authority is really the sense of the passage. I don’t think that what Paul is saying is that the woman has authority, and that authority here is the woman’s authority to, as he says, pray or prophecy. I think the context indicates otherwise. In one of the articles in the work of recovering biblical manhood and womanhood, an evangelical scholar has written an article on head coverings, prophecies and the Trinity and in that article he has set forth about seven reasons why the interpretation that is sometimes now given that the authority is the woman’s own authority cannot stand the test of the exegesis of the text, so I’ll have to leave it at that. We don’t have time to talk about that.

Now in verse 11 and verse 12 he talks about proper order and interdependence. Verse 11. “Nevertheless neither is the man independent of the woman nor the woman independent of the man in the Lord.” In other words, in the Lord, they are dependent on one another. The relationship is the relationship of love for the husband; the husband for his wife and the relationship of the wife is submission to the husband’s authority in the home. They are interdependent. So he says the man is not independent of the woman

the woman is not independent of the man in the Lord. Now, that’s very important that in the Lord, because in the Lord these relationships exist.

Further for as the woman came from the man. Now here is the statement that I think makes plain the interdependence. The woman came from the man. See, Paul, all Paul is doing is in effect giving us an exegesis of Genesis chapter 2. He is saying the woman came from the man. The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, took the rib, out of that he formed Eve. The woman came from the man. Even so, man also comes through the woman. As far as I know, I haven’t made this statement before, I better check myself to be sure there’s not some exception, but I don’t know of any man who has not come into existence other than Adam apart from a woman’s womb. Man is through a woman. The interdependence is the created order of our all-wise God in heaven.

Now, so woman comes from the man, that “from” expressing the initial source or cause. Then man is through the woman, instrumentality of the woman. But then in verse 12, “Each alike owe their existence to God.” Notice what he says. “For as the woman came from the man even so the man also comes through the woman but all things are from God.” Man and woman. Everything ultimately comes from him.

Now the apostle in seeking to underline the fact that women if they pray and prophecy should have a covering appeals to natural propriety. He’s appealed to the creation. He’s appealed to presence of the angels, for example. He appeals to natural propriety here. This is an appeal to Christian reason, we might say. Chapter 10 verse 15 he said, “Remember I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.” So now he’s thinking of the natural world as God made it. So in verse 13, “Judge among yourselves is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it’s a dishonor to him?” Even nature itself.

It’s interesting the apostle uses three words for that might be called necessity here in this passage. This is one that means natural necessity. He call he’s translated “proper.” In verse 7 for a man indeed ought not to cover his head. In verse 10 for this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority -- one that has a word that has to do to with moral necessity, ought. And then in verse 19 there is a reference to the kind of necessity that could be called logical necessity, “for there must also be factions among you.” So in the general context there are three different kinds of word that are express some kind of necessity, but here even nature itself, a kind of natural necessity of things, tells us some facts with reference to the question of a head covering. Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it’s a dishonor to him? Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? But if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her for her hair is given to her, answering to a covering.

What Paul’s point is that the very fact that woman’s hair normally grows longer than a man -- I know that you in our day you know when I first started preaching forty or so fifty years ago, I didn’t have to make this point it was obvious everybody would say of course yes men’s hair short women’s hair is long. Now I look around and I see these shaggy long hairs and some of them I clap for -- some of those guys play baseball, some of those fellows play football, the hair stringing down their back. I still think it’s generally true, and I think that so far as I can tell the authority of the interpreters of the word of God written in recent years acknowledge this is generally true -- the women, their hair is longer than man’s hair, naturally. There may be some exceptions. They look odd. But anyway there may be some exceptions.

It is a glory to her but, there is also Paul says a lesson in it. It, that, itself, is an indication that a woman should have a covering. It’s as if nature itself is making a point that the covering if a woman prays or prophecies in the meeting of the church is to be observed. So her hair has been given for a covering. That little preposition has been translated “answering to;” it sometimes means “instead of.” Prepositions are very difficult

in all languages, because if you know anything about the English language you know that prepositions have all different kinds of meanings. For example, the little preposition “for.” I remember years ago a fine theologian saying to some of us who were theological students -- well I was a young faculty member at the Theological Seminary here -- he made the statement, we were referring to the preposition, for, and he said, “‘For’ and its meanings is like Heinz and its varieties. And you know of course that Heinz products are known for their varieties.” There are, it has been said, literally scores of meanings of the preposition, for, in the English language. Same thing is true of Greek. So her hair is given for a covering, answering to a covering, the natural propriety of the woman wearing the hat.

Then he says, finally our time is drawing to a close and there are so many things we haven’t had a chance to talk about, “But if anyone seems to be contentious we have no such custom nor do the churches of God.” Some have interpreted this as meaning that we have no such custom of being contentious. If anyone seems to be contentious we have no such custom of being contentious. That would make the apostle making an absolutely insignificant point. Everybody knows we don’t have a custom of contention. What would that add? That wouldn’t add anything. So he surely cannot mean anything like that. What he means is no doubt if anyone seems to be contentious and objects to a head covering for a woman praying or prophesying -- that’s what he’s talking about. We have no such custom of not observing that custom in our churches, nor do, he says, the churches of God. In other words, this is not something simply for Corinth. This is something for all of the churches representing the church of God at the time the apostle spoke. No unveiled women praying or prophesying in the church meetings.

Now this is a chapter as I’ve said of many puzzling things. Is the head covering merely a cultural matter? That’s frequently said today. We don’t really have to pay much attention to this passage because this is just cultural. Well let me say just one point. When we turn to cultural interpretation of the Bible, anything goes. For example, we

believe that the atonement of Jesus Christ is a blood atonement, and we believe there is no atonement if there is not a blood atonement do we not? Yes we do.

But that was a cultural thing as well. That was a cultural thing in Judaism. It was cultural that atonement was through blood. So if we want to interpret by culture, we have no standards ultimately. Cultural interpretation is not something upon which we can rely, and so let’s just say, and right at the beginning, that when we talk about cultural interpretation we would be giving away many, many things in the Scriptures that we would not realize we were giving away, blood atonement being one of them.

Last night I listened to a woman at the Re-imagining Conference speaking, and the question was asked her -- this was a conference as you remember that was funded by such churches, even as the Presbyterian Church and many others -- but anyway, they’re sorry they did now of course, but the question was asked, “What are we going to do with the atonement? What kind of theory of the atonement should we have?” I think those were the exact statements. I wrote that down I believe. Uh yes. What is our theory of the atonement? was the question asked the leader.

“I don’t think we need a theory of atonement. Jesus came for life to show us about life and about living together. What we need are figures like the fish and the loaves -- Jesus’ mandate is that we talk about touch love. The cross was a symbol of evil.” So, cultural? No. Look at what the reasons are the apostle says, the reasons that Paul gives, for what he’s talking about here are not cultural reasons. For example verse 8 and 9. For man is not from the woman, woman is from the man; nor was man created for the woman but woman for the man. Creation. Creation truth is the reason for Paul’s statement about the head coverings. That is not a cultural reason. That’s something found in the word of God.

Next in verse 10, for this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels. That’s not a cultural matter. We don’t know any angels, at least most of us wouldn’t claim that we know angels. I don’t I’m not talking

about our wives. No husband would ever qualify for that. I have heard wives say he’s just an angel; how blind can you be? [Laughter] No angels are males in our society. Anyway that is not a cultural reason. And then he appeals finally to the natural make up of women physically -- their long hair. So every reason that Paul gives for the head covering is not cultural and yet evangelicals frequently say, oh well, that’s a cultural thing; we don’t have to pay any attention to it. The reasons are not cultural. Creation. Woman’s hair itself. Nature itself. Angelic beings are looking down upon us. Those are not cultural reasons. The apostle I’m sure, I wish he were here. Isn’t that right Paul? Yes that’s right Lewis; you’re right that time at least once.

Well now we have a problem, and I’ll just mention it because we don’t have time but we’ll deal with it again. We have a bit of a problem here because in chapter 14 we have a statement that we have to harmonize. Verse 34 chapter 14, “Let your women keep silent in the churches for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be submissive as the Law says.” Well how can we harmonize that with a woman praying or prophesying, let her be sure to have a head covering? Well, in a few weeks we’ll try to harmonize that at least make some suggestions.

Fundamentally of course what the apostle says is the ground of everything is what our Lord Jesus Christ has done as the mediator who has come and has offered the atoning sacrifice in blood, and so we invite you we who are Christians invite you, if you are not Christian, if you don’t have the sense of the forgiveness of sins, if you would like to have the certainty of the knowledge of, my sins are forgiven now and forever, we invite you to turn to the cross of Calvary where Jesus died and said, It is finished, paid the penalty for human sin and made it possible for us to know the fullness of the forgiveness of sins. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him is our appeal to you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the word of God and we thank Thee for these difficult sections which remind us of the greatness of the word of God and of

our need for further pondering of the truth. Help us in our thinking to sort out the things that seem confusing to us. Give us, Lord, a desire to know the Scriptures, to know what Thou art saying to us in clarity, that we might be able to please Thee.

And we pray, Lord, that the ministry of the Holy Spirit may be powerful within our hearts, drawing us to him, drawing us to devotion to him and to that which concerns him which is the church of Jesus Christ all its members and the world about us, of those particularly who are to come to faith in him before he comes again.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.