Study in 1st Corinthians 13 - Part 4

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[0:00] Now, seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Now, we're just coming to this chapter for our text, but we'll be referring most of the time to the chapter we read, 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

But if you turn to 1 Corinthians 13, and at verse 4. Amen.
Charity, or love, suffereth long and is kind. Charity envieth not. Charity wanteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly.
And particularly that last expression there, love does not behave itself unseemly or inappropriately. Unseemly or inappropriately.
Now, we've been looking on the Sunday mornings when we've been together at 1 Corinthians chapter 13. And I hope we've seen that it's a pivotal chapter in the whole of 1 Corinthians.
[1:13] Because the Apostle Paul roots most of the problems in the Corinthian church to a lack of a proper exercise of love. In other words, the grace of love has become stifled or it has grown cold.

And that has shown itself in the various troubles that we find in 1 Corinthians right throughout the book. And so he reminds them in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is necessary in the Christian life.
It is absolutely necessary. He said, if I have faith to remove mountains, if I don't have love, I am nothing. And he reminds us that love is indispensable.
And then from verse 4 onwards, he begins to describe how Christian love should conduct itself and how it should behave. And most of us know the passage pretty well. Love is long-suffering.
It is kind. It doesn't envy. And so on. Now, he doesn't just give a random list there of qualities belonging to love. But he gives specific, he gives a specific list.
[2:24] In other words, things that very much involve the problems that are in the Corinthian church. In other words, he's been talking about the fact that they're taking each other to law and the fact that there's difficulties with respect to marriage.

There's problems with self-denial in relationship to a pagan world. There's problems with the observance of the Lord's Supper. There's problems with speaking in tongues in the public worship. All kinds of things. And these particular qualities of love relate to these very problems that are wrong in the Corinthian church. Now, we've looked at several of them.
And today, I want us to look at this first one here in verse 5. That love does not behave itself unseemly or inappropriately. And I suppose that immediately would lead us to ask, well, what is it in the Corinthian church that he has in mind?
What particular problem has he been discussing that is somehow inappropriate or unbecoming?
And I think we find the answer in the passage that we read there, 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 13.
[3:38] 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 13. Judge in yourselves, is it comely or is it appropriate that a woman pray unto God uncovered?

In other words, it is the appropriateness of this whole question of a covering in worship. That, I think, particularly has moved him to say that love should not behave itself inappropriately.
And so I want to look with you at this problem in the Corinthian church. And, of course, it's also a question that's discussed widely right throughout the church, certainly in the Western world today.
And I say the Western world because although the custom is declining of wearing or of woman wearing a head covering in church, although it's declining in parts of the Western world, still we should recognize that by and large throughout the world, it is still the done thing for woman to wear a head covering to church.
And so I want to look at the passage with you. Perhaps it's not a passage you've really thought about much before. Perhaps you've hardly ever read it. Or even if you have, maybe you've been

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confused by it. And that's quite understandable because it is a very difficult passage.
[4:57] So I want to look at it with you. And it might be useful, first of all, just to sketch in the background a little bit. And I think that's important because we sometimes misunderstand the kind of situation that the apostle was writing to.

And what I have in mind is this. There was a very strong women's rights movement in first century Greece. In other words, right in the area to which Paul was writing, there was a movement that was asserting absolute equality between women and men.
And that movement stemmed from Rome. It had begun in Rome and it had got quite a strong foothold in Rome. And from there, it had come to Greece. Now, in Rome, it was very old.
For example, in 450 BC, now we're talking there over 400 years before Christ, there were two forms of marriage permissible in Rome.
And those two forms were this. One form involved some kind of obedience pledged by the woman to the man. But the other optional form of marriage involved no pledge of obedience.
[6:14] Now, there you are. I'm sure you thought that was a very modern thing, a new form of vow which didn't involve obedience. But that was legislated in 450 BC in Rome.

And the fact is that by the first century in Rome, women were actually pretty well off socially. Divorce settlements were very common and they were very large in favor of the woman, which all indicated that their social status had risen considerably.
And they were free to join all kinds of clubs and societies, which had usually been held to be the reserve of men. And these things were widely opened to women. And it's interesting that some of the Roman moralists began to complain about this at the time.
People like Seneca, names that are well known in history, they began to complain about these kind of things. Now, from Rome, it came into Greece. And over 200 years before Christ was born, most of the major philosophical schools in Greece were open to women as well as to men.
And in those philosophical schools, and you know that Greece was famous for its philosophy, in those philosophical schools, equality was taught, absolute equality in every area between women and men.
[7:35] For example, one common textbook was a book called Zeno's Republic. Some people will have heard of Plato's Republic, but this is Zeno's Republic. And in Zeno's Republic, the ideal world would be a world where there was absolute equality between male and female, and that would be represented even in the clothing, so that there would be not one iota of difference between male and female clothing.

It's interesting, of course, in some extreme communist societies that they've also insisted on a tunic that hides any kind of distinction of sex whatsoever.
So then this was also commonly taught in the philosophical schools. The Epicureans also, another philosophical school, they taught the same thing, that there should be absolute equality, even extending to dress, and so on.
And again, in the first century, the very time to which Paul was writing, most of the plays, most of the performances on the stage, in the arts, also promoted the same idea of absolute equality.
And it's also true that in their religion, the same thing was happening. At this time in Greece, there was a large infiltration of Far East mystery religions.
[8:55] If you wonder what that's like, it's a bit like the New Age. And the New Age really is a rediscovery of most of these things, the Far East mystery religions, especially the cult of ISIS.

And there again, the same teaching was taught, that there was absolute equality in all areas between male and female. Now I don't wish to sound as though I would somehow be saying that there is an absolute inequality between male and female.
Of course there is not. The New Testament teaches us that there is neither male nor female in terms of our spiritual standing before God, in terms of integrity, in terms of intelligence, and in all these respects, there is equality.
But of course God teaches that in one important area, there is a subordination, there is a relationship to be kept, and I'll come to that in a moment. The only thing I wish to point out just now is that that is the kind of situation to which Paul was writing.
Now it seems to be the case that this has somehow infiltrated the church in Corinth. Now that shouldn't surprise us. For example, if something was going to come into Britain, you would be sure that it would hit London first.

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[10:10] If it was going to come into Scotland, you could be sure it would hit Glasgow first. Well, Corinth was the main city where most things happened and where most things came first. And so it's not surprising that it's the church in Corinth that is faced with this particular difficulty.

And I think the difficulty seems to be this, that women were rising up and when they were doing that, they were removing their covering, a covering that was over their head. We'll come to that in a moment.
They were removing that covering to rise up in order to pray and to prophesy in the church. And that is something that Paul says is unseemly or inappropriate.
Now, of course, lots of questions rise up here. What kind of covering was he speaking about? Is it a covering that still applies today? Now, I want to warn you, maybe a little at the outset, this is not an easy passage and I'm sure most of you have tried to tackle it at all, know that it's not an easy passage.
And I want you to bear with me and to try and concentrate by the Lord's help as best you can on what the apostle has to say to us here. Now, you'll notice that he begins this question of man and woman in worship by a brief introduction.
[11:30] And please remember that the whole passage really is related to worship. The Lord's Supper, the speaking in tongues, the whole thing from chapter 11 to 14 is involved with how the church functions when it comes together for worship.

And so he begins the whole section with a brief introduction in verse 3. If you turn back to chapter 11 and verse 3. Now, he, first of all, in the first verses, he commends them for keeping the ordinances that he gave them.
But then he says, but in verse 3, in other words, there's one area here that I wish to draw to your attention. I would have you know, he says, that the head of every man is Christ. And the head of the woman is the man.
And the head of Christ is God. Now, there's three relationships here. First of all, let's take the last one first. The head of Christ is God.
Now, that seems a strange thing to say. Is Christ not God? Well, of course he is. But what's brought before us here is this, that from the moment Christ became the God-man, when he became the mediator, when he humbled himself, he took on a new relationship.
[12:47] From that moment, he was also a servant of God. And he had a head. And the head over him was God, his own father.

And we have to remember that Christ has two natures. And that as man, he is subject to his father. And that's just what it means there, that the head of Christ is God.
And I think that constantly should bring before us the humiliation of the Lord in agreeing and condescending, as it were, to become subject to his own father when he was himself God.
The second relationship is this. We're told that the head of every man is Christ. In other words, God created man and he gave him dominion.
There is nothing in the world between man and Christ. There is no beast. There is no angel. There is nothing between man and Christ.
[13:54] Man has dominion over the world and over him there is Christ. But then strangely, he adds this. But he says, the head of the woman is the man.

Now, what does that mean? Well, that's taking us back again to creation. It reminds us that God made man male and female.
But he invested a particular headship in the male. And we see that even when Adam named his wife Eve. To name amongst the Hebrews indicated on authority.
Eve was brought out of his side as a helper to him. Now, they both constitute man. I was saying this just at the marriage service on Friday. I think it's important for us to remember it.
God made man male and female. He created him. In other words, man consists of male and female. But in that relationship, there is a special guiding headship that is given to the man.
[15:03] And we find that clearly taught in both the Old and the New Testament. And that's one reason why, for example, in the church, office bearers are to be male. Christ chose 12 male apostles.

Also, the evangelists were male. The deacons were male. In other words, we find that bearing office, bearing authority in the church belongs to male and not to female.

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Now, the apostle's very careful to guard this. Some people accuse him, of course, of misogyny or disliking women or whatever. Notice how careful he is in verses 11 and 12 to guard against that. There's other places in the Bible where he guards against it too. Nevertheless, he says, neither is the man without the woman. Neither the woman without the man. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man by the woman.
He says, of course, there is a mutual dependence. Man and woman are dependent upon each other and should love one another. But nonetheless, this headship is there. Now, after that brief introduction, he draws a couple of conclusions.
[16:08] First of all, in verse 4, he says this, Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. Now, that doesn't mean his own physical head.

That's not the head that he dishonors. Obviously, the head that he dishonors is Christ, his head, in verse 3. If a man covers his head when he is praying or prophesying, he is dishonoring the Lord Jesus Christ, his own head.
Now, how is that so? Well, it's difficult to say, but I think the reason must be this, that because God has invested a special headship in the man, he shouldn't wear a sign of subjection.
He should be uncovered in the assembly to show forth publicly the relationship to the woman in which Christ has placed him. In other words, that authority is showed forth by having an uncovered head.
Now, I suppose there's lots of customs we have that go back to that. For example, some men came here today with hats and I'm sure they left them at the door. Now, there may not be much conscious thinking about leaving it at the door.
[17:29] Maybe there is too, but maybe there isn't. But the actual reason why a hat should be left at the door is that a man should not wear a covering in the public worship because he is not just the image of God but the image and the glory of God too.

I'm sure that's why people still remove their head coverings at grace or at funerals that people take off their head covering when prayer is said. It stems from this, that the man should not be covered praying and prophesying.
But then again he says this too. In verse 5, every woman that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.
That's the man. For that, he says, is even all one as if she were shaven. Every woman with her head uncovered dishonors her head.
Now, why is it dishonoring to man for the woman to be uncovered? Well, because it seems to be some kind of assertion of equality.
[18:38] Some assertion of absolute spiritual equality so that in God's house there is no difference between man and woman. Now again, I'm conscious that there are people, there are women who do not cover their heads in the assembly.

Again, I'm not saying that that is their motive for doing so, that I am asserting my equality. Again, maybe like a man leaving his hat at the door, it might not be something that these people have really thought of too much.
Or maybe I've heard other arguments or whatever. But what I'm saying is this, that that is the way in which Paul speaks about it here, that it is inappropriate because what it actually means is some kind of assertion of equality.
In other words, the covering should not be removed, he says, to prophesy or to pray, rather it should be kept on. In other words, the woman should remain silent in the public assembly.
And that's what he teaches in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, let your woman keep silence in the church. And again, 1 Timothy chapter 2, I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over the man.
[19:43] And again, that's in spiritual things, in spiritual matters. It doesn't mean that a woman is never to be a teacher or so on, but it means that in the spiritual realm, the woman's place is subjection in the church, that is silence.

She is not to remove her covering in order to pray or to prophesy. And we'll come back to that a little bit more later. But he says this, that if, he says, she is uncovered, that is all one as if she were shaven.
Verse 5. It's just the same as if she is shaven. For he says, verse 6, if the woman is not covered, let her be shorn. But if it's a shame for a woman to be shorn or to be shaven, then let her be covered.

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Now, what he says there is just this. He says, you know that to have closely cropped hair or shaven hair is a mark of an adulteress.
Now, it was a common thing to be done when a woman was caught in adultery. that her hair was shaved. To India, it's also another fact that those women who preferred their own sex for want of a better expression and those who know what I mean will know what I'm saying, that they also had their hair closely cropped, interestingly, as you still find today.
[21:09] And that was a mark of that kind of woman too. And Paul says, this shaven or closely cropped hair, he says, is a shameful thing. And so, he says, it is too to throw off that covering that God designs for you to have in the public worship.

It is also something that you should be careful to keep on. And to reinforce this, he appeals to nature. Verse 13, Judge in yourselves, he says, is it comely or is it appropriate that a woman prays unto God uncovered?
Does not even nature itself teach me that if a man have long hair, it is a shame 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.
Now again, there are difficulties here. What he's saying to them is this, step back, he says, and think about it. What does nature itself teach you?
Now nature, in Paul's writings, never means custom. It doesn't mean what does the custom teach you. Whenever Paul uses the word nature, it means our sense of the fitness of something.
[22:27] Our sense of the rightness of something. And Paul says, what does nature itself teach you? Does it not teach that long hair is a shame on a man, but that it is not a shame on a woman?

Now, you think about that and you will notice that that is actually true. In fact, a bit of historical research will demonstrate that too. It is a fact that nearly every single culture throughout the world at all times has believed that long hair on a man is sensual and effeminate, but that long hair on a woman is a beautiful and glorifying thing.
I think the only exceptions to this rule are the Greek philosophers who wore their hair long and also the heroes of Sparta in Greece.
They also, their warriors, wore their hair long. And interestingly, if you wonder why Christ himself is pictured by people as having long hair, that really came into vogue when people were trying to blend the image of the Greek hero with the Lord Jesus Christ.
That was why he was portrayed as having long hair. In fact, according to Ezekiel 44 and according to the scriptures, we wouldn't understand Christ to have long hair at all.
[23:56] It's interesting that when people try to portray him and I don't believe you should, but when people try to portray him, they always have their own preconceptions of how he should look. It was very common recently for him to be portrayed as an American hero.

In other words, he would often have blue eyes and fair hair. Now, I'm quite sure that he did not have blue eyes and fair hair. And we can also be sure that he was not like a Spartan or Greek hero.
In other words, we have to always be controlled by the scripture on all these things. Absalom, of course, had long hair. He gloried in it.
He cut it. He weighed it every year. And he was a sensual and effeminate man. And it was his hair that killed him. He was caught in the thickets of the oak tree by his hair.
And when he dangled there, Joab threw darts into him in order to put him to death. He was a rebellious man. Now, what Paul is saying, there's a sense of fitness in this.
[24:52] And I wonder if you yourself have thought, when you've seen a man with very long hair, you've said to yourself, well, there's something not right about that. And you say to yourself, well, it's just my conditioning, it's my culture.

But what Paul is saying is, no, it's deeper than your culture. It's an innate sense of the fitness of what a man is and what a woman is. It's an innate sense. And you say, is there anything else like that?
Well, yes, there is. We also have an innate sense of there being a God. Paul says that if you're an atheist today, you've argued yourself into that.
You weren't born believing it, you've argued yourself into it. And in spite of your best arguments, Paul says, deep down you still have a witness that says to you that there is a God.
Well, this is the same kind of thing. You may have got quite used to men wearing long hair. That does not mean that deep down you feel there is a sense of fitness in it.

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[25:57] Deep down you feel there is a sense of unfitness in it. I just ask you the question and I leave it with you. That's what the apostle Paul himself says, that long hair is a shame to a man, but it is a glory to a woman.

And I think, again, it's something you'll notice that by and large, women care more for their hair. God has endowed them with a fuller head of hair and also with hair that seems to stay longer, of course, than men's.
And it is a fact that that hair is more of a glory to her. Now, you have to be careful about being caught up with questions like how long is long? It's not a matter of going around with a ruler to see whether hair is long or short.
After all, it's Paul that says it, not me. I'm not saying here that long hair is a shame to a man. And then you say to me, well, how long is long? Ask God how long is.
Ask Paul how long is. He says that long hair is a shame to a man, but that it's not to a woman. I think that you must apply some kind of sense of fitness.
[27:00] Again, in other words, that a woman's hair should look womanly and a man's should look manly. I think that's all you can say. I don't think you can start making rules about shoulders or about how long it goes, but that a woman's hair shouldn't be cropped or shaved to look like a man's.

And then again, that a man's shouldn't be so long that it looks like a woman. It's a general thing, and I put it across to you as general. You apply that scripture. Don't leave it to me to bring out the measurements.
You apply the scripture. Let the thing be distinct between man and woman. So he draws that comparison between long and short hair. But then he moves on from that.
And I think it's important for us to ask the question, what does he mean here by covering? What does he mean by covering? Now there are three possibilities.
Some people say it's a veil. Some people say that it's long hair that he means. And some would say that it's something else. Now let's look at them all.
[28:04] Is Paul saying that women should wear a veil in worship? Now that's commonly believed by some people. And they use that as a reason why not to wear any covering at all.

That he was speaking to an old culture or to an old custom. We don't wear veils anymore, therefore this doesn't apply. Now I've got one or two things to say to that.
First of all, Paul never talks in this passage about covering the face. He talks about covering the head. Now the reason that's important is this.
When Paul speaks about covering the face elsewhere, he uses a definite Greek word for face. In 2nd Corinthians he talks about Moses putting a veil on his face so that the Israelites wouldn't see his face.
But that's not what he says here. He's talking about the head, not the face. Women never veiled themselves in public worship amongst the Jews, never did.
[29:06] For example, when Hannah was praying in the temple, Eli was seeing her mouth move. Now how was Eli seeing her mouth move if her face was veiled? Women were never veiled when they were worshipping God.

The second thing is this. We're in Corinth here. We are not in Arabia. In other words, you mustn't draw the picture in your mind that we're way out in the Far East in a Muslim country where women are completely covered from head to feet except for a certain slit that leaves their eyes exposed. That is you transporting a certain culture onto another one. Women were not veiled in Corinth. That is just the bottom line.
That's just the fact they were not veiled in Corinth. This is a European country. It is a European city. It is a cosmopolitan city.
And women were not veiled in that way. In other words, the discussion is just not about veils at all. Secondly, is it long hair that Paul is saying?
[30:13] Well, if it is, then what he's saying is this, that men should not pray or prophesy with long hair, and women should not pray or prophesy with short hair.

Now, I have some difficulties with that. The first one is this, that if the length of hair was the problem, why didn't he just say so? Why focus on what happens in the public worship?
If it was just something to do with the hair, why not say so and leave it be? The second thing is this. You try reading verse six to make the covering long hair, and it becomes absurd.

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Now, you try that. Chapter 11, verse six. Now, remember where we are here. I know this is a bit difficult, and sometimes it's awkward to follow, but please try and bear with it.
we're here saying what some people say, that covering your head means to have long hair. I don't think that's right, but you try it in verse six.
[31:13] If the woman be not covered, in other words, if she have short hair, let her also be shorn, but if it is a shame for a woman to be shorn or to have short hair, let her be covered.

That doesn't make sense. What he's saying is this, if it is a shame to have short hair, let it be shorn or let it be shaven. It's three degrees of short hair.
Now, that becomes absurd, and the whole thing becomes impossible. Whereas, if you make the covering a fabric of some kind, it becomes very simple. What he says is this, that if the fabric covering is not there, well, she might as well actually just sheer her hair or closely crop it.
because to be uncovered in the public worship without fabric is also a shame. And if you're going to be shameless in that way, willfully shameless, then the same thing might as well apply outside the church.
You might as well closely crop your hair and make a statement that you are openly, as it were, asserting equality in every kind of way. So again, you see that covering here must mean some kind of fabric.
[32:26] But the important, the very important thing that proves it to us is verse 15, where it speaks of hair. It says this in verse 15, If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her, for her hair is given for a covering.

Now, at that point you say, ah, surely that's the covering that he's talking about. But, this word for covering is not the same word that is used for covering right throughout the passage.
He's constantly talking about covered heads and uncovered heads, and he uses the same Greek word. But the minute he passes on to hair, he uses a different word. Why?
Because he's talking about a different kind of covering. He says that a woman's hair means something to her in the natural world that is similar to what a fabric covering means in the spiritual world when she comes together to worship.
So it's a fabric covering. What kind? Well, most women wore a shawl. Now, it wasn't a heavy shawl. It was a loose linen fitted thing that they had around their shoulders.
[33:38] Again, most of us will be familiar with that certainly from the past that a woman would wear a scarf or shawl of some kind. The point was that when they entered the worship, they would slip it over their heads.

it was this idea of picking it up and putting over your heads.
It's not something they wore all the time over their heads, but they would bring it up over their heads either in bad weather or when they went to worship. In other words, the point was not what kind of covering, but the point was just a covering, that an acknowledgement was made that there be a physical, visible sign of the headship that God appointed in the church, that that should be present there in the church, a simple covering.
And again, you can get sidetracked on this. People say, well, the hats are too elaborate, so I'm not going to wear one, or I can't afford one. Well, don't worry about the size as such or the appearance. Think of the principle. Whether it's a lace covering, whether it's a silk scarf, whether it's a berry, it's the sign that matters. And when the sign matters, it takes the detraction away from all the side issues.
[35:17] And it was a simple thing for those women, they just put what they had on over their heads. It wasn't a major elaborate thing, and then it was taken back down again. It's the principle that matters.

And this covering, like your hair, is a glory to the woman. Now, you may say, well, how can a covering be a glory to the woman? Well, let me put it like this, and I think it's the best way that I can put it.
in the Christian church, being willing to be a servant or to be subordinate is always a beautiful thing. Let me apply that in a couple of areas. Let me first apply it in the highest area of all. Look again at verse 3. Marvel at the last sentence of verse 3, that the head of Christ is God.
How's that for subjection? That was a voluntary subjection. Christ, who was equal with God, was willing to take a position of being subject to him.

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[36:20] And he continues in that position as God man eternally. Isn't that a marvelous thing? That it actually could be said that the head of Christ is God.

He was willing to come down and to be subject. Although in himself, he was absolutely equal with God. The whole Christian life requires it.
There are some people in this congregation who show me respect because I'm a minister. And they were professing faith years and years before I was born.
Why do they do that? Out of reverence and love for Christ. That is why they do it. And I hope God willing the same is true of me. In your ordinary everyday life, you will sometimes find yourself subject to people who actually have less intelligence than yourself.
And you know it, but you are expected to be subject. And it's a beautiful thing in you to be subject. And if God says to the woman that she recognized the headship of the man, why should that be an objectionable thing?
[37:31] In fact, he says, even the angels are like this. In verse 10, this is a difficult text too. For this cause, ought the woman to have power on her head, or a sign of authority on her head, because of the angels.

Now, I wouldn't even dream of giving what I would consider an authoritative exposition of this. I find it very, very difficult to know exactly what the apostle is saying. For this reason, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head because of the angels.
But I would suggest it's this. Why does he bring in the angels? Well, first of all, the angels are present whenever we worship, and I think we should remember that.
When we worship here today, the angels of God are with us. It's a marvelous truth. It's a spiritual truth. It is a truth. The angels are here. But there's something else about them too.
They are here as creatures who never fell. They're here as creatures who never sinned. They're here as beautiful holy creatures who have access into the presence of God, but they're not ashamed to be your servants.
[38:41] We're told in Hebrews chapter 1 that the angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. Their designated role is to help you and to serve you, and they're not ashamed to do it.

They never say to God, I never fell. They never say, I am far more intelligent than all of these men and women put together. They never say that. What they do is to serve because God asked them to.
But when the angels see the sign of subjection thrown off in the church, it is offensive to them too. In other words, God's order for worship and for life should always be observed.
Now, if you have a quarrel with what I say, then bring me the quarrel in the scripture, and I'll deal with you on the level of scripture. scripture, but let's always try to interact with what the Lord himself is saying.
For this reason, the woman ought to have a sign power or a sign of power on her head because of the angels. So it is a glory to her, and to wear a head covering should be a glory.
[39:49] Now, I think that reminds us that pride has no place in the Christian life. Whether it's my pride or yours, an elder, a deacon, a member, person, adherence, pride has no place. And we should always be ready just to do what the Lord says.

Now, I think there are another very brief set of questions that I want to ask. First of all, some people will say, well, very well, Paul was wanting a fabric covering in the worship.
But was that just for Corinth? Was it a local custom? Well, if Paul is wanting them to conform to the local custom, again, surely he would have said so.
In the scripture, we should always assume that a thing applies to everybody unless he says, I'm only talking to you here in this city. If you take that approach to the Bible, you're in trouble because you'll say that when Paul was writing them to the Ephesians, he says, oh, well, he's only writing to the Ephesians.
Or when he's writing to the Philippians, well, he's only writing to the Philippians. In other words, is there any reason here why we should suppose that he's only writing to the Corinthian church? No. All the time he's talking about men and women.
[41:02] He's not talking about Corinthian men and Corinthian women. He's talking about men and he's talking about women. Another thing is this. I'm sure most of you have heard of the catacombs in Rome.

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Now, the catacombs in Rome are a system of underground tunnels and dwelling places where the Christians used to go when they were persecuted.
There was vicious persecutions in Rome and the Christians would gather in these underground catacombs. They're famous. And on the walls they would paint pictures.
Some of them date to the first century A.D. Every single picture there of a Christian worshipping assembly has a woman with a headdress on.
Never a veil, but always with some fabric on her head. Why? If this was a local Corinthian problem, why would it be on the pictures in the catacombs if it wasn't the ordinary form of worship right throughout the church?
[42:07] And again, there's this. You'll notice this last verse 16 here. If any man seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

God. Now, what custom is that? Is Paul saying this? If you're going to be contentious, he says, against what I'm saying, we don't have the custom of being contentious.
When I give an apostolic precept, he says, I give an apostolic precept. Is that what he means? Well, it may well be, but I think it's better to take it like this.
If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither do the churches. In other words, what I present before you is what the Lord gave me and what all the churches observe.
And therefore, he's asking the Corinthian church to fall into line with the rest of the apostolic churches. And the last thing I'll say on that is this. Whenever Paul roots a thing back to creation, don't say it's a custom.
[43:09] Whenever he says, look, man and woman are created in this way and so on, don't then say it's a local custom. When he roots a principle back into the very order of things and into the fitness of things, let's take it that he means this to apply right across the church.

And in any case, why waste so much time over something that is a matter of just custom? No, it is a universal problem. And I'm sure the Lord allowed it to happen in Corinth so that it would address any similar situation that came up later.
The last question I want to ask is this. Is this important in the first place? Now some of you may have sat there and said, well, this is such a trivial issue.
Really, in the church today, it is a trivial issue. Why bother with it? Now, all I have to say to you is this. Are you telling me that I shouldn't bother preaching it? Is that what you mean by saying that? He gave it 16 verses here in chapter 11. He gave it half the chapter and the other half deals with the Lord's Supper. Are you saying let's have the second half of the chapter five or six times a year, but let's never have the first?
[44:23] Is that what you mean by saying it's not important, that we should never preach on it, that we should never hear it, we should never think about it, we should never act on it? Well, surely Paul wrote this for a reason.

He addressed the problem for a reason, for us to read and for us to apply. That's the first thing, there's 15 verses, 16 verses about it. The second thing is this, none of us ever has authority to relegate anything God says to the level of unimportance.
Now, I'm the first to say and to admit that there are some things in the word of God more important than others. I hope we believe that. There are some things without which you cannot enter into heaven.
I'm the first to acknowledge that. But I hope you'll be as quick as myself to acknowledge too that when God says anything and tells us 16 verses about it, it's not up to us to say it doesn't matter. We just don't have that privilege. We don't have that right. Third thing is this. You say, well, surely, you know, it's not meant to bind us or the details of it are not all that important.
[45:38] Surely we can substitute something else in its place. Well, if God gives us a thing in detail, let's keep it in detail. For example, I hope you don't think I'm being facetious here.

I'm just trying to bring before you the situation. Let's say someone said, well, let's keep the Lord's supper, but we could use crisps and lemonade. You would say, no.
And if the person said, why? You would say, because God said bread and wine. God said bread and wine. And if God says bread and wine, it's not up to me to say, well, according to circumstances, you can change it.
Or it could be rice and milk. It's bread and wine. Because God wants it to be bread and wine. They are symbols that mean something.

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Well, so is the head covering a symbol that means something. It is a visible statement in the presence of the angels in the presence of the church and in the presence of God that we acknowledge the order and the headship that God himself has given.
[46:44] That really is what it is saying. And I hope that our brief look at this passage may have seemed long to some, but I hope it has demonstrated that God wishes the man to be uncovered and wishes the woman said to be covered.

Perhaps I could close by saying this. if you want to know how it wears, how you're supposed to wear it, what I would say to you is this, wear your head covering with understanding.
I hope we do everything in the church with understanding. I hope men know why they don't cover their heads and women why they do. We should do everything with intelligent understanding, whether it's the Lord's Supper or covering our heads.
and you should keep to that practice and to that scriptural directive wherever you are. And I suppose too it's worthwhile saying this. I remember once a minister saying that your worship begins when you put the collection on the plate.
But it might be worthwhile to point out too that your worship meaningfully begins when men uncover their heads and when women cover theirs. In other words, putting on your covering is not just the same as putting on your shoes.
[47:58] It's not just part of your dress. You're making a statement. It's a statement that belongs to your spiritual worship. When you sit there as women, I hope, with heads covered or as men with heads uncovered, you are saying something to the Lord and it is part of the worship.

And I hope that we would do it just like that. And I am conscious, as I said, certainly in the Western world, I think we should always remember that head covering may be becoming more unusual in our country, but certainly the Eastern Orthodox still do it, the Greek Orthodox still do it, Eastern European churches still have it, Brethren churches still have it, it is still largely, African churches too, still largely done for women to cover their heads.
I hope it's not taken in any way of unnecessary offense. I hope I have dealt with it in a thoroughly biblical way, and if I have not, then you're at liberty to bring that before me.
But I would hope to impress upon you that it is a custom that I wish to be meaningful in the church, and that by God's grace we would see continue in the church. Let us pray.
Lord, our God, we pray to be mindful always of the many ways in which thy word brings things before us.
[49:26] And we pray to have a ready heart and a ready mind, to be willing always to interact with it. We are conscious that every one of us is defective in our understanding of certain areas, and we all have need for these things to be brought before us.

and we pray with David that if there be any way in us that is not right, that they would bring that to our attention and give us grace to put it right. Help us, O Lord, to be mindful of others and their situations and circumstances, and give us grace to reflect the order and the beauty of the God in itself in everything to do with our worship.
And pardon our sins for Christ's sake, we pray. Amen. Amen.

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