

Paul's View of Headship (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, March 12, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 11; Ephesians 5; Genesis 2; Mark 10; John 13
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:01:50 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Paul is using a cultural practice — a piece of cloth — to defend something that is not cultural at all: Adam and Eve, and Christ and his church, acted out by married couples. The cloth says nothing in our culture, so the cloth goes. What stays is the theology, and once you look hard at the Christ a husband is supposed to be representing, headship stops looking like the better half of the deal.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Where scripture is unclear, our obligation is small; as clarity grows, obligation grows with it. That principle is what lets an honest reader say “I don’t know” about the angels and still act on the rest.
- ◆ “Head” in Greek can carry the sense of source, and it can carry the sense of authority. The two are not rivals, and Paul’s own balancing move in verse 11 makes authority hard to get rid of.
- ◆ The head covering is a cultural way of showing a theological thing. Cultures change; the thing being shown does not.
- ◆ Matt would not have Hope adopt head coverings even as a nice gesture: with no cultural meaning left, the practice would only breed legalism.
- ◆ Paul is not saying men have more dignity or more brains. He is casting a married couple in roles — Adam and Eve, bridegroom and bride — and roles are not rankings.
- ◆ Every objection that headship is inherently oppressive is answered either by naming real historical abuse as abuse, or by fixing a bad picture of Jesus.

- ◆ Jesus washed feet because feet were dirty and dinner was on the floor. It was a real chore, not a ceremony — which is the standard for what a husband owes his wife.
- ◆ Our culture runs a race to the top: who gets more than they give. A Christian marriage should be a race to the bottom.

► 1:01:50

Matt opened with an apology to anyone who had been invited that morning by a friend. “They probably didn’t know I was going to preach on head coverings, so don’t blame them.” Hope was working through First Corinthians a passage at a time, and this was simply the Sunday it landed on.

1. Before the hard passage: a word about Lent

► 1:02:58

He wanted to rephrase what he had been asking of the church through Lent. There are many ways to feel opposition — ideas, people, evil itself. “But there is one opponent you cannot withstand and you will never overcome, and that is God himself.” God opposes the proud, so walking in arrogance is picking the one fight that cannot be won. His proposal: “One thing we can do as we engage in spiritual warfare is to wrestle with God and to let him win.” Name an area of failure or weakness and hand it over. Not incantations and spinning three times — less creepy and spooky, more walking in victory by faith. Fasting was his suggested on-ramp, with the ordinary sense that nobody nursing or on prescriptions that require food should attempt it.

2. Why not just skip it

► 1:06:33

He admitted he wanted to skip the passage. What stopped him was that he asks people to read their Bibles: “It would be weird if I never lifted a finger to exert any effort to teach on weird stuff” and left the congregation with nothing but themselves plus the internet. He also asked, before anyone got triggered, what the room’s commitments actually were — how willing are we to let the beauty of a text speak when it collides with our preferences.

Then he set expectations honestly with another verse from the same letter:

“why are people baptized on their behalf?” Nobody knows what that practice was. And that is fine, because where there is no clarity there is not much obligation to act, and with clarity grows an obligation to act. Some of this passage may stay in the first category.

3. The text, read straight through

► 1:08:30

He read 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 in one pass, then went back through it slowly. The hinge is verse 3:

“But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:3 ↗

He dealt first with the two escape hatches. Some argue Paul is quoting the Corinthians back at themselves, as he does with “all things are lawful” and “food is for the belly” — but this would be an enormous quotation that he then declines to answer. Others argue it was inserted later, since some manuscripts place it elsewhere in the letter. The trouble there is that it is always in them; the only question is where. “If I had to say, with academic honesty, I don’t think those are the best responses.”

4. Does “head” mean source or authority?

► 1:15:32

Source is a real option, and English does the same thing — a trailhead is where a trail starts. Read that way, the source of every man is Christ, the source of a wife is her husband. It works for the first clause and strains at the second, unless you are thinking of Adam and Eve. Authority is also attested in Greek, sparsely but genuinely. Matt’s conclusion was that the choice is false: “It could just be both.” And then, with a shrug: “Probably what you don’t want it to be is probably right.”

What makes source-only hard is Paul’s own balancing. If source were the whole of it, every man would have his mother as his head, and Paul plainly is not saying that:

“Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:11–12 ↗

You balance in the opposite direction from where you have been leaning. The fact that Paul feels the need to say *we need each other* tells you what the previous sentences weighed. And the same author uses the same four words — Christ, head, husband, wife — somewhere he cannot be quoting anyone:

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”

EPHESIANS 5:22–24 ↗

5. What was cultural, and what was not

► 1:20:40

Context first. This is not a veil or a burka — a piece of fabric at the back of the head, the sort of thing you see on Roman women. It is not general public conduct either; Paul specifies praying and prophesying, which is to say church. And it is not simply Roman practice, since Roman men sometimes covered their heads to sacrifice.

Then the tell. Paul argues that an uncovered head is “the same as if her head were shaven” — logic that worked for them and does nothing for us, since short hair on a woman shocks nobody here. That is a cultural argument reinforcing a theological one. And the appeal to nature is the same move: Paul is not denying that hair grows, he is pointing at male pattern baldness and beards as a real and visible difference.

► 1:22:34

Which leaves the strangest line in the passage.

“For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:8–10 ↗

Matt laid out the options without picking a winner. The word means *messenger*, so it could be human visitors from other churches — don’t be strange in front of the guests. It could be the reading current in Jesus’ day from the Book of Enoch, where angels lust after women. It could be that angels are present in worship and want to see propriety, which he thought was probably the best of them, since nothing in the text pushes away from the plain celestial sense. Or it could be another baptism-for-the-dead: “You can ask God when you meet him.”

6. Adam, Eve, and a marvel

► 1:25:34

He was candid that verse 9 is “a serious buzzkill to every progressive interpretation of this passage,” and equally candid that he had gone looking for one: “I’m rooting for that team sometimes.” What he found underneath the argument was not a ranking but a creation account. Adam is made first and stands as a type of humanity — the point Paul makes explicitly in Romans. God glories in Adam; Adam is astonished at Eve, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. Glory here is the pleasure of companionship, not a rung on a ladder. Eve is the mega-mom, Adam the first man, and neither is a comment on anyone’s brains.

The mystical part, as Matt called it, is where she came from: a woman made from a man’s opened side, exactly as the church is made from the broken body of Christ. “We don’t repeat these phenomena. We represent them. We reflect them. We act them out like a skit.” If someone has to play the bridegroom in that skit, it makes sense that it is the husband. His wife is two days older than he is; he could not possibly be her source.

7. The other reading, and who actually wore it

► 1:28:48

Before leaving the cloth he took the popular alternative — that Paul means hair worn up rather than fabric at all. Convenient, as he noted, because “I already wear a ponytail, so it doesn’t matter what he’s saying, I’m good, check.” The trouble is the word. When Paul calls long hair on a man a covering, and a disgraceful one, he says nothing about whether it is up or down; he is talking about length. On the done-up reading, long hair covers a man but somehow does not yet cover a woman until she takes a further step — same word, two different meanings, in the same breath. “So the done-up view is self-contradictory.” Then Paul finishes it off:

“If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 11:16 ↗

Which is a problem for us rather than a solution. The appeal is to what everyone does, and this is no longer a universally embraced practice; “guys, so just keep doing it” would now offend the very people it once reassured, because most of America does not do this.

► 1:30:18

So he went back to his questions. Who was supposed to cover, and with what? Tertullian, a North African writing in the 200s, shows a church already confused about it — certain that married women should, unsure whether widows and unmarried women were included. That, plus Paul's own wording, where the word is *her man* and means her husband, points to married women. When? At church, praying or prophesying publicly. With what? Probably real cloth, not hair pinned up. And it read as respectful behavior in a religious context — “whole other sermon, which I won't do.” Was the covering a cultural tradition or a timeless principle? “Yes to both.” The fabric is cultural; what the fabric showed is not — Adam made first, Eve taken from his side, superimposed onto married couples, with Jesus and his church superimposed on top of that in Ephesians 5. “Even though my wife wasn't made from my side. Neither was your wife made from your side.” All of it, he said, resting on a much longer study he did not share: “this is just all Cliff's Notes — well, Matt's notes.”

8. So does Hope do this?

► 1:33:12

No — and he declined to be neutral about it. Hope has never asked women to cover their heads to pray or prophesy publicly, and adopting the practice now would be a contentious source of religious legalism. “I'm going to recommend we don't do this. I don't want to get culty.”

Paul's own closing appeal is to universal practice, and the practice is no longer universal; keeping the cloth would communicate the opposite of what the cloth once communicated. The fabric was cultural. The truth it pointed at was not, and it should still translate — into behavior.

9. Two objections, taken seriously

► 1:34:15

The first is that the whole scheme rests on a gender binary. Matt granted the premise — it does — and pushed back on the statistic usually deployed against it, that being neither male nor female is as common as red hair. Intersex conditions, where a person has neither XX nor XY, are real and extraordinarily rare; the larger figure is reached by folding in hormonal and glandular conditions that are a different category. A missing or misplaced chromosome, he noted, is described that way precisely because there is a place it is supposed to be.

► 1:36:37

Then he went off his notes deliberately, and asked the room to pray for him rather than defend him online if it went badly. He spoke about people who transition and later carry regret, and who have nowhere to turn because the acceptance they were promised is withdrawn the moment they change their tune. He said he could identify with feeling lost and overlooked. “There's a great place for you

here. You may not feel like the church generally will accept you, but if you come here, we will hug you.” And then, twice: “We never hated you.” What he said he hated was the false promise that this would satisfy the deep longings of a soul.

10. The oppression objection, and the christology under it

► 1:38:08

The second objection is that male headship is inherently oppressive. Matt said that rests on two things: real historic abuse against women, and poor christology.

► 1:38:57

Before either, he cleared away the crudest version of the charge: “Paul is not saying a man has inherently more dignity or brains.” The whole argument has been about Adam and Eve, and about Christ and the church — roles in a skit. And the skit has an audience, which is the part he did not want missed: “in the home we take on a preachment of the gospel with the very way we behave,” for the kids, for the neighbors, for friends and family. A theatrical way of acting out the gospel at home, which mattered most of all to ancient people who might have been literate but almost certainly did not own a Bible. None of which licenses the fabric: “I don’t recommend pieces of cloth on the back of your head. I don’t want us to get legalistic about that. We just went through how you could be theologically correct and wrong a couple chapters ago.”

► 1:42:37

Historic abuse he condemned flatly, and he named the appetite behind it: “I know a lot of guys want that. They want to be like, I’m the big man, I’m the man of this house, big guy, do what I say.” Jesus took that off the table with his own disciples:

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you... For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

MARK 10:42-45 ↗

“If one of you is dominating over the other — I don’t care who — that’s just stop.”

► 1:43:43

The second is the one he spent the most time on, because it decides everything. Between Jesus and the church, who humbled himself more? Who gets more than they deserve? Who gives more than he gets back? The answer is never the church. So a lot of men want the title, the best seat at the table —

the seat Jesus made fun of men for taking — and the grand gesture that ends the conversation: *I built the deck, honey, now you do all the laundry*. That was not Jesus' way of operating. "The king of glory died naked on a stick, humiliated" — and then did not check out. He continues to care, to show concern, to intercede and speak for his bride, to seek and save the lost. He does not sit in heaven with his feet propped up while the church serves him without his help. "That Jesus isn't real."

► 1:47:09

He was pointed about the difference between dying for someone in theory and living for them in fact. Men hear "husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" and land on the dying part — *I would fight to the death for you, honey, so keep doing the laundry*. Matt gave the wife her line: "Oh, so you would fight to the death for me? That's awesome. Would you do the dishes for me?" Jesus took a towel and washed feet the night before he was betrayed — and Matt argued the meaning of that has been inverted by ceremonial foot washings, where nobody's feet are dirty and the guest is doing you the favor. Jesus was doing a real chore, the kind you would hire someone to do, because dinner was on the ground and nobody wants to eat next to filthy feet. So: what is the thing in your house you are tempted to pay someone else to do?

And the assumption that a paycheck settles the account gets the same treatment.

The Proverbs 31 woman is running a small business. Christ provides everything and still engages, still gives gifts, still shows patience.

11. A race to the bottom

► 1:50:33

The culture runs what Matt called a race to the top: I want to get more than I give. He hears it in how men describe the women they want to marry — *I love the way she makes me feel* — and asked the obvious follow-up: does she like being with you? What are you providing?

A Christian marriage should be the opposite, and it should be visibly strange — strange to the culture, and strange to earlier versions of Christian culture too, the ones that said *man is head of the house like Christ is head of the church* while quietly carrying a weird version of Jesus. A wife honoring her husband out of respect for Christ, not because of anything he is; and the husband climbing underneath her, debasing himself further, working to prop her up and present her glorious and prized the way Jesus does his church. Both of them racing downward. Anything else, he said, is not the scriptures — it is good old boy country culture wearing them. "All doctrine breaks down with bad views of Jesus, because it is kind of all about him anyway at the end of the day."

Then he handed the morning back to the room with the question he had opened it with. “Remember at the beginning I said, what are our commitments? Do we really want to do this, or don’t we?” — and he could feel where some of the fellas had landed: *I don’t know if I want to do this anymore.*

Next Sunday

► 1:51:40

Matt goes to [1 Timothy 2](#) to defend why Hope has women preach — and then, in his words, swears the subject off for the rest of the year. He called the prayer teams forward and sent the room out the ordinary way: “You’ve all been very patient. Good job. Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- James 4:6
- 1 Corinthians 15:29
- 1 Corinthians 6:12–13
- 1 Corinthians 11:2–16
- 1 Corinthians 11:3
- 1 Corinthians 11:11–12
- Ephesians 5:22–24
- Ephesians 5:25
- 1 Corinthians 11:14–15
- 1 Corinthians 11:8–10
- Romans 5:14
- Genesis 2:23
- 1 Corinthians 11:16
- Mark 10:42–45
- Luke 14:7–11
- John 13:4–5
- Proverbs 31:10–31
- 1 Timothy 2:11–15

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt asked the room what its commitments were before he read the passage. When a text collides with what you would prefer it to say, what do you actually do with it?
2. Where clarity is low, obligation is low. Which passages are you treating as clear when they may not be — and which are you dodging as unclear when they are not?
3. If married couples are acting out Adam and Eve, and Christ and the church, what is your household currently preaching to the people who watch it?
4. Matt said a lot of men want to die for their wives in theory but not do the dishes. What is the real chore in your house that nobody wants and everybody notices?
5. Where is your marriage, or your closest relationship, running a race to the top — trying to get more than you give? Name one thing that changes this week to turn it around.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-qxKQR1A3bE&t=3710s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.