

# BURIED TALENTS

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*In Search for a New Consensus*

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### CHAPTER I PREFACE

The Christian community has struggled with understanding the Bible's teachings on the role of women in the church since the First Century. The Restoration Movement,<sup>1</sup> of which I am a part, has struggled with these teachings since its inception. In fact, the Restoration Movement's long insistence on congregational autonomy and the right of each Christian to interpret the scriptures for himself (or herself)<sup>2</sup> has resulted in quite a divergence of opinion over the years. And yet, while it is easy to document a wide variety of opinions among the leading thinkers of the Restoration Movement, our practices within the Churches of Christ have been remarkably uniform. Our uniformity is all the more remarkable given how very little biblical support there is for much of what we do (and don't do).

Consider this: There are only a handful of verses that deal particularly with what women can and can't do in the church:

(1 Cor. 14:33b-35) As in all the congregations of the saints, *women should remain silent in the churches*. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

(1 Tim. 2:11-15) A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man*; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

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<sup>1</sup> An American religious movement beginning around 1800 resulting in the present-day Churches of Christ, Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (Independent), and Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), with combined membership of around 4,000,000. The author's background is Church of Christ, distinguished from Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (Independent) primarily by its practice of *a cappella* congregational singing and non-use of conventions and missionary societies. Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) are distinguished from the other branches of the movement by having a national denomination organization and tolerance of liberal theology, as defined later in this book.

<sup>2</sup> I have not changed references to "brothers" or "he" to non-sexist terms like "siblings" or "he" to "he/she." Such changes make the reading very tedious. We'll just have to agree that such "male" references are of indefinite gender unless the context otherwise indicates, as is always the rule in standard English. While I must concede the bias inherent in our language, no one has come up with a readable alternative.

Additionally, the familiar passages in 1 Timothy and Titus setting forth the qualifications for elders and deacons state that an elder or deacon must be “the husband of one wife.”<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, if one considers these verses to pronounce laws that are independent of local culture that thus remain in effect today, we should not have female elders or deacons and we should not allow women to speak in the assemblies or to teach or to have authority over a man. But where in all this do we find a command denying women the privilege of silently distributing the Lord’s Supper? Where does the Bible say that teenage boys—and not girls—should silently pass out handouts during the services? Or that only men should pass out the announcement sheets? And what scripture denies women the right to attend church business meetings? Even if they must be denied the right to vote on church business, to prevent their exercise of authority, isn’t their input worthy of consideration?

Where does the Bible permit a woman to confess Jesus during a church service? Why don’t we wait until church is over to take her confession? How can we allow a woman to head the pre-school department when there are some men who volunteer for nursery or Vacation Bible School work? And how can we have women as non-deacons taking on greater responsibility and authority than many men take on as deacons? For example, if a man must be a deacon to be in charge of cutting the grass, locking the building, or counting the collection, how can a woman be in charge of Vacation Bible School, the pre-school, or taking food to the bereaved?

Surely, we must admit that our practices do not strictly comply with our doctrine. We impose non-biblical restrictions on women out of traditions born out of nothing but the sexism of the past, while at the same time granting women authority as program heads and administrators that we would require a man to be a deacon to undertake.

And while we claim to teach a strict interpretation of these passages, we are not really all that strict. After all, while we don’t let women ask questions during the assembly (and rarely men!), we do allow women to ask questions in Sunday School class. Moreover, we never require women to ask their husbands at home. We freely allow them to ask the preacher questions about his sermon at church—just not during the service. Paul did not say for women to wait until after services to ask questions—he said the women should ask their husbands at home.

And, of course, we allow women to teach men—in our colleges, junior colleges, and high schools—so long as the subject is not the Bible. But Paul did not say that women should not teach men the Bible. He said that women should not teach men. Similarly, we don’t require our wives to give up non-church jobs that involve having

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6.

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authority over men. If one of our wives is promoted from grade school teacher to principal, her husband will gladly cash the increased paycheck, even though this promotion puts her in authority over male teachers, custodians, bus drivers, and lunchroom workers.

But Paul did not limit his command limiting a woman's authority to church affairs. Indeed, our traditional interpretation is that Paul bases his command on the relationship of men and women founded in the Garden of Eden, millennia before there were churches, Sunday Schools, or church colleges. If God put men over women, He did not do so only in their marriages and in church.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, we have some hard thinking to do in this area. And certainly the problem is not limited to the Churches of Christ or even the Restoration Movement. I've seen Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Baptist Churches fight and divide over these very same issues.

And I must add that current issues such as women's liberation, the Equal Rights Amendment, or "equal pay for equal work" do not cause the controversy. Any honest church historian knows that these questions were being debated long before women could vote or even own property.

The purpose of this book is not to pursue a personal agenda. Being of the male gender, as we say in West Alabama, I have no dog in this hunt. Rather, I only insist that we teach a doctrine that we are willing to practice and can defend from the pages of scripture. We should impose no restrictions on women that the Bible does not impose, and we should grant them no power that the Bible disallows. We should stop pretending that we "speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent"<sup>5</sup> and actually do what we say we do.

I began my investigation into this area with just such thoughts in mind. Clearly, we are tradition-bound—but what does the Bible really say? Is it possible to discover the truth of the matter despite our layers upon layers of tradition, orthodoxy, biases, and all?

And perhaps not so surprisingly, I have found my position changing over the years. I can recall teaching a series of Sunday School classes on this topic three times before composing the first draft of this book. Each of the first two times that I taught, I

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<sup>4</sup> Osburn, in *Women in the Church* 2, p. 232 ff., cites Kevin Giles, "A Critique of the 'Novel' Contemporary Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Given in the Book, *Women in the Church*," *Evangelical Quarterly* 72 (2000), as providing a thoroughly researched argument that until the last few decades the near unanimous view of the Christian community was that women could not exercise authority over men in any circumstance, including in the workplace, due to the innate inferiority of women. Those who contend that women are to be subordinate to men at church but may supervise men at work have produced an interpretation just as novel to Christianity as the view that women are not required to be subordinate to men.

<sup>5</sup> One of the defining slogans of the Restoration Movement, coined by Thomas Campbell.

concluded that although we are not true to the scriptures, such passages as 1 Timothy 2:11-15, while seemingly somewhat arbitrary, are binding today because Paul based his conclusions on eternal principles that he says are found in Genesis.

The third time I taught the subject, I decided to prepare more carefully and to pay particular attention to what the accounts of the Creation and Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-3 really say. Paul finds his commands in Genesis (he doesn't re-write Genesis or add his commands to Genesis). Therefore, before coming to any conclusion, I set as a standard that a true understanding of Genesis would yield a true understanding of Paul's commands. If someone were to present an interpretation of Paul's writings that is not found in Genesis 1-3, that interpretation must be false.

With this insight reached before knowing the conclusions that it would lead to, I undertook my study. I was, quite frankly, surprised at the results.

### **Notes on better understanding this book**

**Use of translations.** All biblical quotes are taken from the New International Version translation (NIV), unless otherwise indicated. I will often disagree with the translators of the NIV and will offer alternative translations. Translators are human and make mistakes just like the rest of us.

**Definitions.** Some definitions will prove helpful. When I refer to an opinion or practice as "traditional" or those holding to the tradition as "traditionalists," I do not imply that such opinions are wrong. Rather, I am referring to those views that have been typically taught by mainstream Churches of Christ in the southeastern United States over the last several decades.

When I speak of the "Church" I am normally referring to the Churches of Christ. I do not thereby intend to judge the salvation of the those outside the Churches of Christ.

By "conservative" I normally mean "believing in the inspiration of scripture and that Christ literally became flesh." This is what the word means in theological circles. If I ever say "liberal," I mean not conservative, that is, denying the inspiration of scripture and the incarnation.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, when we in the Churches of Christ say "conservative," we usually mean legalistic, that is "inclined to find a rule." When we say "liberal," we usually mean "not a legalist," that is, "not inclined to find a rule." Because I know what a "liberal" really is, I do not call any of my brothers in Christ liberals, no matter how much I disagree

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<sup>6</sup> The Bible's teaching that Christ, a member of the Godhead, became literally human in literal space-time in the form of Jesus, son of Mary.

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with them. To do so would be to slander them, which would be a sin. Because I know what “conservative” really means, I will not call those who find rules in the Bible that I cannot find conservatives. I am a conservative. I try not to be a legalist.

Thus, when I speak of “legalists,” I refer to those who are inclined to find a law when there is doubt. The term will take on differing shades of meaning as we learn more about legalism.

**Further reading.** I must give due credit to the works of many authors who have guided me through this wilderness of conflicting opinions. I strongly recommend the following sources for further reading:

Carroll D. Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity, vol. I & II* (College Press Publishing Co., Joplin, Mo. 1993 & 1995) (hereinafter “Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women*”). These volumes collect essays by faculty members of Abilene Christian University, David Lipscomb University, Harding University, Harding Graduate School of Religion, and other schools as well as a few prominent preachers. These (needless to say) conservative authors consider the major passages and biblical issues dealing with women.

Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church—Refocusing the Discussion* (Restoration Perspectives, Abilene, Tex. 1994) (hereinafter “Osburn, *Women in the Church 1*”). Osburn wrote the book to encourage productive discussion of the women’s issue, based on a reasonable, intellectually sound approach to Bible study, rather than emotion, traditionalism, or Pharisaism. This book should be considered required reading for all who approach the subject.

Carroll D. Osburn, *Women in the Church—Reclaiming the Ideal* (ACU Press 2001), is a substantial rewriting of *Women in the Church 1*, reflecting much of the research found in *Essays on Women* (hereinafter, “Osburn, *Women in the Church 2*”).

Everett Ferguson wrote a review of *Women in the Church 2* that questions many of Osburn’s conclusions, providing one of the more responsible and useful critiques of Osburn’s egalitarian views. *The Christian Chronicle* (2001)<sup>7</sup> (hereinafter, “Ferguson”). Ferguson, a professor at Abilene Christian University, along with Osburn, is well known for his book *Early Christians Speak* (Sweet Publishing Co. 1971).

Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Mass. 1992) (hereinafter “Keener”). This is a thorough, conservative discussion of the primary texts and is very well documented.

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<sup>7</sup> Available at [http://www.christianity.com/partner/Article\\_Display\\_Page/0,,PTID254851CHID133750ICIID787258,00.html](http://www.christianity.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID254851CHID133750ICIID787258,00.html)

J. Stephen Sandifer, *Deacons: Male and Female?* (self-published P. O. Box 35296, Houston, Tex. 77235-5296, 1989) (hereinafter “Sandifer”). This is a scholarly, very well researched book. Sandifer is a minister of a Church of Christ and has written what must be considered the definitive resource in this area.

Robert H. Rowland, *“I Permit Not a Woman ... To Remain Shackled,”* (Lighthouse Publishing Co., Newport, Ore. 1991) (hereinafter “Rowland”). No other author does as good a job of pointing out the inconsistencies of the traditional positions of the Churches of Christ. He’ll surely persuade you of wrongness of many of our traditionally held views.

My earlier book, *The Holy Spirit and Revolutionary Grace* (Power Source Productions, Nashville, Tenn. 1995), sets forth in much greater detail the views on God’s grace expressed herein.

I have searched out and read books by authors from schools of thought that I ultimately chose to disagree with, including Goebel Music’s *Behold the Pattern* (Goebel Music Publications, Colleyville, Tex. 1991); and F. Lagard Smith’s *Men of Strength for Women of God* (Harvest House Publishers, Inc., Eugene, Ore. 1989), and *The Cultural Church* (20th Century Christian, Nashville, Tenn. 1992). Those arguments of authors such as Smith that are not dealt with in the text are dealt with at length in the previously cited texts, especially Osburn and Keener.

Of particular value to my own study is Jack Cottrell’s *Gender Roles & the Bible: Creation, the Fall, & Redemption: A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (College Press Publishing Co., Joplin, Mo. 1994)(hereinafter “Cottrell”). This is the most intellectually honest work by those insisting on the subordination of women to men that I have found. Indeed, because Cottrell is a professor at Cincinnati Bible Seminary, affiliated with the Christian Church (Independent), I am sure that his book will soon become a standard source for many with traditional views within the Churches of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Cottrell carefully reviews and criticizes the writings of the egalitarian (women are not subordinate to men) school of thought. Where the arguments of the hierarchalist school have been shown wrong by the egalitarians,<sup>9</sup> Cottrell often admits the error. Cottrell carefully lays out the basis for his views, generally refusing to hide behind purely emotional appeals or to question the integrity or salvation of those with whom he disagrees.

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<sup>8</sup> The Churches of Christ and Christian Church/Churches of Christ (Independent) were a single religious movement until about 1906, when they divided over instrumental music and missionary societies. The two groups retain much in common and often use one another’s books and even Sunday School literature.

<sup>9</sup> I’ll define these terms shortly.

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**I make no claim to be free from error.** This material is offered for your consideration. Despite my best efforts, because I'm human and thus imperfect, it probably contains some mistakes. I'd be delighted to get your input. It is offered to help you understand the Bible better and to allow the Church to better serve our Lord. Please approach it from that standpoint. Take nothing personally. Consider only what is best for the work of the Lord. Our own needs are subordinate to the needs of the work of the Church, the need to reach out to others, and the need to help the poor.

If you find any mistakes or think of any way to improve the book, or if you have questions, please pass them along to me. I will not be offended by your pointing out my mistakes! I'd far rather fix them so that I don't repeat them.

This book does not reflect the "official" or accepted position of any congregation or any person other than the author.

## CHAPTER II INTRODUCTION

### A. Avoiding Biases and Bad Habits

We all have a tendency to find in the Bible what we expect to find. The Pharisee finds plenty of commands to impose on his brothers. The liberal finds language that excuses just about any conduct. The male chauvinist pig finds verses putting down women. The feminist finds verses putting down male chauvinist pigs. This is why the world likes to say that you can prove anything by the Bible, and certainly it must seem that way to many.

The reason anything can be “proven” by the Bible is that we often only look for what we want to find, and we thus accept as proof anything that supports what we like. If this is not so, then why are there so many denominations all studying the same Bible, using many of the same reference materials, with 2,000 years of research and scholarship available for all who will look, and yet disagreeing about very many things? Why can’t members of even the same Sunday School class or eldership agree on every point?

To avoid simply studying to prove ourselves right, we must first look at ourselves squarely in the mirror. After all, no one reads the Bible consciously intending to misunderstand it. Those who misunderstand it do so for reasons that are invisible to themselves. They think that they are applying logic when they are actually applying their personalities, culture, and traditions to the task. Anyone reading this who feels that he or she is not guilty of such bias is actually guilty of the worst bias of all—having so little self-awareness and introspection that he can’t do anything about his biases. I am not foolhardy enough to believe that we can shed all our biases like an old overcoat. But we should all be honest enough to at least admit that we have some biases.

A critical step toward shedding our biases is disciplining ourselves to read, and even study, the opinions of those who disagree with us. We study those with whom we disagree because it is, after all, those who disagree with us who have the most to teach us. If we only listen to those within our own party, we will soon consider ourselves virtually inspired, because we will have not been proven wrong for years! But testing our views against the steel of those we disagree with (and I mean the most talented of our opponents) allows us to match our reasoning against someone with very different biases from our own. And we must study our opponents first hand. If I study, for example, the views of Creation science by reading the criticisms of Creation science written by those who disagree with it, I will only understand Creation science as distorted by those who disagree with it. If I study evolution by only reading the works of those who disagree with it, then I will only understand it well enough to disagree with it. We must have the courage and the integrity to study both sides—not one side and propaganda about the other side.

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Only an intellectual coward would refuse such a test, and yet we do not routinely study commentaries, books, or articles by those we disagree with, even within our own Restoration Movement. I cannot believably contend that I have reached a conclusion based on logic and the facts without having even bothered to study the views of any side but the side that I decided should win—before I began my study.

To be truly honest students of the Bible, we must be as open to persuasion as we ask others to be. If I ask a Presbyterian friend to study predestination with me, I should not only expect him to be willing to change his views based on the evidence our study produces, I should be willing to do the same. Of course, I think that I'm right, and I'm sure that I've studied the question very carefully. But so has he. I have no monopoly on strongly held opinions. I am nothing but a pompous, self-righteous hypocrite if I think that everyone is wrong except me and that everyone except me should be willing to reconsider his views.

This bit of insight did not come to me in a flash. Rather, I figured all this out by being humbled over the years. I once thought that I knew all the answers. As I grew older, I found my positions changing. Before each change, I knew to an absolute certainty that I was right, but I later learned that I was wrong. I am still certain of my positions, but I now know that I am capable of being wrong regardless of how sure I am. But as I gain experience, I am slowly peeling off the layers of biases, intellectual laziness, and just plain bad habits that have clouded my thinking in the past. And I am sure that I am picking up a new set of biases in the process, but hopefully some that aren't quite as Pharisaic as my last set! And so I must continually rededicate myself to ridding myself of these corrupting influences, but never imagine that I have totally done so. I must be vigilant against cowardice, bigotry, and catering to culture and even to the editors of influential Church periodicals.

So, what are our biases? What should we look for in ourselves before beginning this study? The following are some of the ones that I've encountered, in myself and in others:

**Change.** We are very, very afraid of change. Even the slightest variation in our practices will throw many of our members into a panic. We struggle with children's church, decorating the auditorium with a cross, skipping the invitation, and singing unfamiliar or "trendy" songs. I've read letters and articles condemning singing during the Lord's Supper (we can't have two acts of worship at once), baptizing at home instead of at church (we must make converts loyal to the church), clapping (where is that in the Bible?), multiple song leaders (someone might think that it's a quartet), men serving at the Lord's Table without coats and ties (disrespectful), men serving at the Lord's Table with coats and ties (pretentious; tending toward clerical garb), and even a preacher having a gold pen in his pocket while speaking (distracting). There are biblical arguments to be made on a few of these points, but the reason that these sorts of things are as emotional as they are is our fear of change. Any change at all. And that feeling is a bias. To become Christians, we had to accept change. To mature as Christians, we must continue to change.

**The past.** We venerate the past. The way we did things when we were children or how daddy used to do it is often more important to us than how Jesus said to do it. Some of this comes from our Southern heritage. Most Church of Christ members live in the southern United States, and we Southerners all have strong attachments to our families and our collective past. Nonetheless, none of us wants to go back to the horse and buggy or even black and white TVs—or to give up our air conditioning. Southerners celebrate the past, but we don't really try to live in it. And yet in the Church, we tend to think that we'd be more comfortable if we could just conduct church just like we used to, with seven-day long meetings, an occasional tent meeting with sawdust on the floor, and preachers who never preach on anything we don't already believe in.

**Conformity.** While the Churches of Christ take a certain pleasure in not conforming to the practices of other churches, among ourselves, conformity is the name of the game. One false sermon and the church down the road will disfellowship you, someone will publish an article declaring you “marked,” and your preachers will never be able to get a job anywhere else. We practice church autonomy in theory only. Too many churches claim the right to judge the positions of every other church on whatever issue is in fashion and visit God's wrath on all whom they disagree with by the severest peer pressure. God says, “Vengeance is mine!”<sup>10</sup> but far too many of us are self-appointed angels of retribution, and we routinely arrogate to ourselves the judgment of God Almighty.

**Modern culture.** We cannot escape the society in which we live. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century whether we like it or not. We are all being forced by events beyond our control to deal with questions of homosexuality, divorce, extra-marital sex, abortion, and the like. In the 1950's such matters were not even discussed in polite society. Now they fill the headlines and TV news reports.

We can hardly be surprised that these times influence our views on the role of women, worship, and such. And the influence cuts two ways. Some of us are too tied to the present, and we expect God's church to be just like the world. If society accepts a homosexual couple, then so must the church, we feel. Others are contrarians. Such people feel that if society is pushing for a greater role for women in the church, then we must not. We sometimes go out of our way to differentiate ourselves from the world, even if it means being wrong. Both views are wrong. We must define our beliefs by the Bible only—neither by society nor by opposition to society.

**Pandering to the right wing.** As a group, we are guilty of pandering to those more legalistic than us. It is considered fair game to call those on the left wing (less legalistic) “liberals” and to question their acceptance of the inspiration of scripture.

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<sup>10</sup> Rom. 12:19 (KJV), paraphrasing Deut. 32:35. “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath ... .”

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However, it is considered bad taste and divisive to call those on the right wing “Pharisees” (at least in print) or to criticize them as divisive. We are anxious to maintain good relations with those more legalistic than us, but we take wild swings at those less legalistic. We see unity as a virtue only if it is with someone more legalistic than ourselves. Not surprisingly, those more legalistic than us apply the same unwritten rule, declare us to be liberals and make little effort to be united with us. Unity across doctrinal lines is a one-way street, and therefore exists much more in theory than in practice.

In our sermons, we are very careful to say nothing that will offend those on the right. I have heard sermons that were designed to teach a broad view of grace or the indwelling of the Spirit preached in such watered down terms that the more legalistic members of the church were convinced that the preacher agreed with them on every point. We rarely state plainly why the Pharisees are Pharisees, for fear that they will be “offended” at the criticism. But in so doing, we also fail to persuade them of their error or to effectively rebuke their false teachings.

This bias of ours gives the legalists a platform and opportunity to be heard, while those less legalistic than us often get no hearing at all. Not surprisingly, this bias puts strong pressure on the Church toward legalism and away from grace. We lop off our leftward members and kowtow to our rightward members, and so the church as a whole continually drifts toward its legalistic side.

And yet Christ spent far more of His brief time on earth preaching against the Pharisees, the legalists of the day, than preaching against the Saducees, the “liberals” of the day. And His condemnation of the Pharisees was not just that they were hypocrites, but that they insisted on a salvation based on rules made by men, binding unbearable interpretations in an effort to be safe from the wrath of God. We should heed the warning of John 12:42-43:

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

**Safety.** We are now getting to the heart of the matter. We want to be saved, and to be saved, we must be safe. Thus, when in doubt, we do the most legalistic thing possible—we make a rule. When we are discussing some controversial point of doctrine in class, doesn’t the class nearly always end with someone saying, “Well, those arguments are all well and good, but the safe thing to do is what we have always done”?

When in doubt about what the Bible says, the safe thing to do is *not* to make a rule. Adding to God’s Word is just as wrong as taking away from it. The safe thing to do is trust God’s grace and lean on the great, overriding principles of scripture—God’s love for us, His forgiveness, the personality and example of Jesus, the cross, God’s grace, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and our relationship with Jesus.

**Rules upon rules.** We often assume without proof that the Bible has a rule for whatever concerns us. For example, many believe that the Bible plainly teaches about how to use the church building. They open their Bibles, go looking for such rules, and—sure enough!—they find them. This is so even though church buildings weren't even built until the Bible had been finished for nearly 300 years!

Jesus is not the second coming of Moses. Moses was a lawgiver. Jesus came to rescue us from law. We find safety in the cross and graciousness of our Lord. Rules don't save and rules don't condemn. Jesus saves, and we are in Jesus by faith—that is faith that He is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:8-9).

**Conclusion.** Certainly, not all congregations are guilty of the biases and misconduct that I am describing. I'm sure that only a minority of churches behave as I describe. I hope that is the case. But enough of our brothers behave in this manner that we always take their condemning attitudes into account in making decisions, and subconsciously, even when we read our Bibles. Even in those congregations where such attitudes do not predominate, there will nearly always be enough members steeped in such attitudes that the leaders feel compelled to consider their intolerance in setting policy. Given the contentious, divisive attitudes of so many of our brothers, no leader within the churches would look forward to finding some biblical command that compels him to lead his church away from conformity.

### B. How Do We Escape Our Biases?

Ridding ourselves of our biases is very hard, of course, but the Bible provides key insights into this problem.

**Accept one another.** The answer to many of our difficulties is plainly stated in the Bible. For example, Romans 15:7 states,

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

We are to accept one another. And the standard for whom to accept is plainly stated. We are to accept<sup>11</sup> just as Christ accepted us. How did Christ accept us? First, note that this part of the command is in the past tense—as Christ *accepted* us—not *accepts* us. Christ *accepted*<sup>12</sup> us when we were saved. And we were saved in five familiar steps: by hearing, believing, repented, confessing, and being baptized. Period. No one asked us our position

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<sup>11</sup> The Greek word translated “accept” is in present tense, which in Greek indicates that we are to *continuously* accept.

<sup>12</sup> The Greek word translated “accepted” is in the aorist tense, indicating that acceptance occurred at a single point in time.

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on the role of women, or kitchens in the building, or divorce and remarriage when we were baptized. We were asked whether we believed that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. We were asked whether we repented. We were baptized. And we were accepted by God. We must, therefore, accept (present tense!) all those who have done the same and who have not repudiated their belief that Jesus is the Son of the Living God or their repentance (1 John 4:3; Heb.10:26).

Thus, we should put behind us our willingness to reject any fellow Christian who disagrees with us on any issue that we happen to feel strongly about. We have been commanded to accept all those who have been accepted by God. We can set no higher standard than that set by God Almighty.

**Grace reaches even the saved.** Now let's look at a closely related passage in Romans 5:6-8:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul tells us that God saved us (when we were baptized) while we were powerless, ungodly, and sinners through the death of Christ. We have always well understood the power of God's grace at the moment of our baptism. We are saved! Our sins are washed away, our souls are made "whiter than snow" (Psalm 51:7) and our sins are removed "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

But we have a tendency to believe that our condition after salvation is less certain. We feel that some of our sins committed after salvation may still be charged against us. We feel that we sometimes fall away, lose our salvation, and must be restored. This kind of thinking makes us afraid that any mistake, any error in doctrine at all could be enough to separate us from the love of God. But Paul, by inspiration, tells us differently in the next two verses:

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! 10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Having already been saved, Paul says that we shall now be "much more" saved than we were even at the point of baptism! You see, at the point of baptism, we were God's enemies and we were saved through Christ's death. We are now in God's family and we are saved through the life of the resurrected Jesus! Indeed, we are "much more" saved through His life! In other words, God's grace "much more" effectively washes away our sins now that we are saved than when we were baptized.

Now, this language is very, very plain. It tells us much about our relationship with God, and it tells us about the relationship that other Christians have with God. It tells us why we must accept other Christians (those who've been saved)—God accepts them. Indeed, God's acceptance of them is now "much more" effective and powerful than it was at the time of their baptism.

I am not teaching once saved, always saved, and neither is Paul, but the passage quoted above is not limited to exceptional cases or to the most holy of Christians. It applies to every Christian. This how Paul can speak the literal, absolute truth in Romans 8:

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

How can there be lost Christians if there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus? Obviously, it would be impossible and this passage still speak the truth.

But Christians can lose their souls. They do so by no longer being Christians. They give up their salvation by giving up the things that allowed God to save them in first place—faith and repentance.

(1 John 4:2-3) This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

In this and many other verses, John tells us that who give up their belief that Jesus Christ came in the flesh will be lost. The Hebrews writer explains that those who give up their repentance are also lost:

(Heb. 10:26-27) If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Giving up one's repentance is not the same as disagreeing with some self-appointed gospel policeman with a printing press. Being wrong on some subject or even having sinned is not deliberately keeping on sinning. Committing an intentional sin is not deliberately keeping on sinning. Rather, one must no longer make Jesus his Lord.

If I disagree with you about the role of women in the church, I have not lost my soul. This is plainly so because, even if I'm wrong, I'm not intentionally wrong. I'm really trying to get this right! If a congregation allows women to have authority or speak in a manner that you consider sinful, even if you're right, they are not deliberately

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sinning. They think that they're right. And you should take considerable comfort from God's promise that you will be saved despite being wrong on the subject—if you're the one that's wrong.

It is unconscionably arrogant to believe that all who disagree with you are intentionally sinning by doing so. And yet we have brothers who feel called by God to condemn to hell all who disagree with them on any number of subjects that have very little to do with faith in Christ as the Son of God come in the flesh or deliberately continuing to sin. We must be grown up enough to concede that there may be people who have been saved and who are continuing in their faith and in repentance and who honestly disagree with us.

Jesus speaks very plainly to the issue.

(Matt. 7:1-5) "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

In the same vein, Paul says in Romans 14,

4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

And Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10,

29b For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?

Paul's point is not just that we are hypocrites for damning fellow Christians who disagree with us on some point, but that those who disagree "will stand," that is, be saved—not by being right, but by being in grace. God will make those who disagree with me stand, even if they're wrong!

## CHAPTER III THE ROLE OF WOMEN

### A. Beginning Thoughts

Before we begin this study in detail, we must remind ourselves of certain key principles:

1. **Grace extends to this area too.** A Christian will not be lost if he or she in good conscience violates God's will regarding women. Such a Christian will be wrong, will have sinned—and will be forgiven. Nowhere does the Bible say that God will not forgive or will apply a stricter standard in this area.

2. **The biases we discussed earlier, being the biases that we all have, are particularly strong in this area.** The relationship of men and women is very, very strongly influenced by culture, and it is very hard to avoid reading popular culture into our interpretation of the Bible.

I remember reading an article first published in the *Gospel Advocate*<sup>13</sup> in the early part of this century written during the Women's Suffrage Movement. The author was convinced that it would be sin for a woman to vote, because submissive women should not be allowed to decide things that may affect men. He then pointed out that a submissive wife would have to vote as her husband voted, and therefore giving the women the vote would only double the votes received by each candidate, but could never change the outcome! When was the last time you heard a sermon against women voting? Or instructing women to vote as their husbands vote? Has the Bible changed, or our culture?

Similarly, when I was a child the Bible taught that women must wear hats in church. Now it no longer does. Did the Bible change, or did we? Did we change due to closer Bible study, or due to a change in popular fashions? If our reading of the Bible in the 1950's was influenced by the latest fashions from Paris, why should we suppose that we are now immune from such influences?

3. However, **the scriptures are true without regard to culture, and the truths in them can be ascertained.** Our difficulty is often not the vagueness of the scriptures, but the fact that we often try to find answers to problems that are not really problems. If we read the Bible looking for the limit on what women can do, we have *assumed* that there is such a limit! If we read the Bible looking for the rules on how to

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<sup>13</sup> Until recently, the leading publication and doctrinal standard-bearer for the southeastern United States Churches of Christ.

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conduct a Sunday morning assembly, how to handle church funds, or what institutions a church may support, we have *assumed* that there are such rules. Do I deny that such rules exist? The answer is that I have no opinion at all—until I read the scriptures. The life of a Christian presents enough problems without us inventing new ones of our own. Let's please be careful not to assume that there are rules and then go looking for them. The rules that matter are indeed discussed in the Bible, and they are discussed plainly enough. If we can't find a clear answer to the doctrinal problem, maybe—just maybe—there isn't a problem.

4. **Whatever the Bible teaches about the role of women is a part of the doctrine of grace—and not an exception to grace.** If what we believe about women contradicts the Bible's teaching on grace, our beliefs about women are wrong. We should find that the Bible's teachings on women are a natural, spiritual consequence of God's good gift of grace.

5. **Whatever the Bible teaches about the role of women is a natural consequence of the perfect law of love.** We must be able to derive our conclusions about women from "Love thy neighbor" (Matt. 29:39-40; Rom. 13:9-10; Gal. 5:13-14; James 2:8). It is not enough to claim that our conclusions are consistent with "Love thy neighbor," rather they must *derive* from the command to love. Jesus says that the Law and the Prophets "hang" from the command to love. Paul says that nothing else matters (Gal. 5:6). We cannot add to the Bible.

6. **Whatever the Bible teaches about the role of women is a natural consequence of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit is mentioned hundreds of times in the New Testament. Paul, especially, repeatedly refers to the Spirit as the basis on many of his teachings. The Bible's doctrine of women cannot contradict the doctrine of the Spirit.

### B. Principles of Interpretation

While I would not wish to burden the reader with an essay on hermeneutics,<sup>14</sup> we should pause briefly to reflect on just how we test one competing interpretation of scripture against another.

We have already stated the first rule of interpretation—**know your own biases** and avoid interpreting to satisfy them. It is far too easy to find a shallow, too-convenient argument that just happens to support what you want to believe and then persuade yourself that the argument is God's own truth.

Second, we must not take the most difficult passages, impose our preferred views on them, and then use our human conclusions to reinterpret (or just ignore) the plainer

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<sup>14</sup> Not the "new hermeneutics," for those readers who keep up with fashionable Church controversies.

passages that don't suit our prejudices. For a seeker of the truth, the path is clear. **Start with the basics**, meaning what the Bible says are the basics. And then work toward the more ambiguous passages.

It is easy to unconsciously reason in circles. For example, suppose that we read 1 Timothy 2:11-15 with our traditional church biases in mind to conclude that women cannot have authority over men. This passage bases its teachings on Genesis 2. We then turn to Genesis 2 and interpret it to say that women cannot have authority over men—basing our interpretation on 1 Timothy 2:11-15. We then turn back to 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and argue that our interpretation must be right because it is supported by our interpretation of Genesis 2!

To avoid this, we must first look at the scripture that is not so difficult. Does the Bible support our position from unambiguous passages interpreted without benefit of the difficult passages? **Or do the unambiguous passages actually contradict our proposed interpretation of the difficult passages?** If so, to avoid reasoning in a circle, we must discipline ourselves to reject the proposed interpretation and to accept an interpretation that is consistent with the rest of the Bible.

Third, and most importantly, the “basics” are not just the plainer passages. Rather, we must **begin with the first principles**, that is, what the Bible says are the first principles. Anything that contradicts the New Testament's teachings on salvation by grace is false doctrine, no matter how appealing the arguments may be. Any interpretation that contradicts the New Testament's doctrine of the Holy Spirit and His working within each Christian is a lie. Of course, there is much more.

And yet we immediately see one of the biggest problems facing the Churches of Christ today. We don't even agree on the principles that form the basis of *all* New Testament doctrine. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in nearly every opening of the New Testament from John through Jude (and in the other books, but just not as often), and yet we are still debating whether the Holy Spirit has done anything since AD 100! If we can't agree on what all the verses dealing with the Spirit mean, how can we hope to reach agreement on the other verses? They cannot be interpreted independently of an understanding of how God works in our lives as Christians today! And for that matter, we still struggle with the nature and scope of grace. Grace permeates every Christian doctrine. In fact, everything we are told in the New Testament is a logical corollary of a sound understanding of grace and the workings of the Spirit. And yet we still find our brothers bickering over whether Christians are saved by faith or works.

Until we reach a common understanding of how we're saved, why we're saved, and even whether we're saved, we are in no position to discuss much of anything intelligently—or more importantly—spiritually. To speak plainly, discussing any difficult issue, such as the role of women, with someone who deeply misunderstands the workings of the Holy Spirit or the power of God's grace is like trying to explain space travel or the

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theory of gravity to someone who believes in a flat Earth. You simply do not have enough of a common understanding of the nature of things to converse on the subject.

I do not mean that you and I must agree on every nuance of theology to be able to talk about women and the Church. Far from it. But the answers to the hardest questions, such as those regarding women, ultimately are found in a deep, rich awareness of our relationship with God and what He has done and is doing for us. The failure of the Churches of Christ to reach a consensus on these elements has quite naturally resulted in disputes in many other areas. But studying the role of women, and even reaching an agreement on the subject, if that were possible, would only be treating a symptom and not the cause of the problem. When we are all more spiritually minded, many things that seem very hard today will appear trivially easy, and much of what seems easy will prove to be very hard indeed.<sup>15</sup>

I will make many arguments that draw support from my understanding of grace and the Holy Spirit, and these arguments will appear senseless to those who see things fundamentally differently. But here is where the test of truth is found: **is my position grace-filled and Spirit-filled? or is my position law-filled?**

(2 Cor 3:6) He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Finally, we will often be forced to **decide whether a command is binding today or was imposed due to temporary circumstances that no longer apply**. Some will feel very uncomfortable with such considerations and will even wonder whether such an approach is “liberal.” But such questions are far from liberal. In fact, we have traditionally taught that very many commands no longer apply.

For example, we don’t greet one another with the Holy Kiss, despite the New Testament’s repeated commands to do so (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; I Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14). We correctly reason that people always greeted one another with a kiss in the First Century (much as Arabs and Southern Europeans do today). Therefore, we conclude that the choice of greeting—kissing—is a feature of the local culture, rather than an eternal command. We determine whether kissing is to be an eternal ordinance for the church by looking not just at the command itself, but also at the reason behind the command. Clearly, there is good reason to urge a warm greeting among brothers and sisters (“Love thy neighbor.”) Is there a good reason to make kissing the forever-form of the greeting? Finding none, we conclude that the command to greet warmly is to last for the life of the church, whereas the means of greeting depends on the local and temporary culture. Thus, we “culturally limit” the command, and this is sound Bible scholarship.

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<sup>15</sup> The author’s *The Holy Spirit and Revolutionary Grace* deals extensively with exactly this problem.

So even “direct commands”<sup>16</sup> do not always bind Christians today. We must always look at the reason behind the command and ask whether the reason is eternal and whether the way that the command is to be honored is also eternal. The command to greet one another warmly is eternal. The means of so doing was temporary.

We feel very comfortable with this approach in areas that preserve our traditions. But we feel uncertain, even unsafe, when this approach is applied to challenge our traditions. But the principle is sound and the Churches of Christ have followed this principle since our beginnings.

### C. Four Alternative Views

In *Women in the Church I*, Osburn reviews the literature on the role of women in the church and states that the positions of the authors may be summarized in four categories (I really have to apologize for the hard to pronounce—and hard to type!—words):

1. Radical feminism
2. Paternalism
3. Evangelical<sup>17</sup> egalitarianism<sup>18</sup>
4. Complementarianism or evangelical hierarchalism.<sup>19</sup>

The **radical feminist** considers his views on women as overriding any contrary scriptures. Such feminists are liberal in the true sense of the word. Many would consider

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<sup>16</sup> Traditionally, those within the Restoration Movement have found commands and authority for practices in direct commands, necessary inferences, and binding examples. But we often forget that we don’t insist on all commands, even the direct ones, or all inferences, or all examples. Thus, we must have some guidelines for determining just which commands, inferences, and examples are binding today.

<sup>17</sup> “Evangelical” is a word coined by Martin Luther and refers to the gospel (*euaggelion* in the Greek). It should not be confused with “evangelistic.” An evangelical church is a Protestant church that is grace and Christ centered and not liberal. The word has come to be used in contrast to fundamentalism, which, in the context of American Protestantism, refers to rule-based churches. Many Churches of Christ are in transition from fundamentalism to evangelicalism.

<sup>18</sup> Cottrell uses the term “biblical feminism.” Osburn refers to the egalitarian school of thought as “evangelical feminism.” I consider each a poor choice of terms. “Feminism” seems to me to indicate a desire to advocate the cause of women. Thus, “feminism” seems to me to imply a bias in the interpreter.

<sup>19</sup> I will later suggest that “complement” is an appropriate term for the role of wives as to their husbands, based on Genesis 2’s account of the creation of Eve. “Complement” does not carry any connotation of subordination. It is ironic that those who call themselves complementarians have chosen to refer to themselves by a term that is inconsistent with their defining viewpoint.

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1 Timothy as uninspired and not truly written by Paul purely on the evidence of Paul's command that women not teach or exercise authority over men in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Some would question Paul's inspiration in general, arguing that no inspired man could have so demeaned women.

We need not spend much time with this approach to the Bible. I devoutly believe in the inspiration of scripture and am writing this book for the benefit of those with the same conviction. The radical feminists are not invited to this discussion.

We must be careful, however, not to confuse those feminists who challenge the inspiration of scripture with those non-radical interpreters who find equal rights for the sexes in the scriptures. It is easy for those who believe that women are subordinate to men to ridicule the views of those who find equal rights in the Bible by treating all egalitarians the same. There is, of course, a very large difference between those who accept the Bible as inspired and those who accept only those parts of the Bible that happen to suit their biases.

**Paternalism** is a view of women that is equally as wrong as radical feminism. A paternalist not only believes that women should be subject to men, but a paternalist often feels free to legislate rules in addition to those found in the Bible to assure that the church will operate as he wishes. It is, of course, just as wrong to add rules to the Bible as to take rules away. Thus, the paternalist is just as wrong as any true liberal.

Osburn cites F. Lagard Smith as an example of those writing with a paternalistic view. In Smith's *Men of Strength for Women of God*,<sup>20</sup> Smith struggles to bring his traditional views on women to a practical conclusion:

I don't mean to cop out on this point, but it is the main principle about which I am most concerned.

Smith then mentions the difficulty in finding any verse or biblical principle that would condemn allowing women to serve communion in a silent role or to hand out church bulletins. He then concludes,

*Somewhere* along the line, the biblically mandated principle of male spiritual leadership is eroded. And *somewhere* along the line, the participation of women in the life of the church is contrary to God's way . . . . This is why women participating even in relatively neutral activities, such as passing the communion or leading the singing or reading the Scripture, is dangerous—even if they do not lead ultimately to headship roles. . . . Crack the door open in biblically neutral areas of service, and we will soon find it

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<sup>20</sup> Republished in 1998 as *Male Spiritual Leadership*.

to be a threshold to the biblically ordained leadership roles themselves.<sup>21</sup>

It is hard to imagine how one can seriously argue that it is wrong to allow women to perform “biblically neutral” roles. You and I might well disagree over what is biblically neutral, but surely we can agree that no one has the right to legislate against women taking on a role that the Bible itself does not deny them.

One of the fundamental principles on which the Restoration Movement—and, indeed, the Protestant Reformation—is based is the All-Sufficiency of Scripture. (*Sola scriptura* is the famous Latin slogan used by the Reformers for this principle.) It is simply the idea that the Bible is all that we need and that it is wrong to invent rules in addition to the Bible itself. This is much of what we mean when we say that we are to be “silent where the Bible is silent.” We readily criticize the Catholic Church for seeking to bind rules imposed by popes and church councils, but we are every bit as wrong when we state that—even if the Bible does not condemn the practice—women cannot silently pass communion or hand out church bulletins!

Another characteristic common to paternalists is a tendency to demean both women and men. For example,

On the plus side, women are more open to the supernatural and spiritual realm—more willing to trust in the mystical and miraculous. On the minus side, many women go too far and succumb to fraudulent spiritual leaders and emotionally appealing but spiritually deceptive ideas.

... On the plus side, men are ideally suited to be in positions of spiritual “authority.” They provide a rational, cautious stability which, if sometimes overly entrenched, prevents spiritualism from running unbridled to its own destruction.<sup>22</sup>

This kind of argument is not only insulting to many women; it is also downright silly. After all, the “fraudulent spiritual leaders” that women are supposedly inclined to follow are men. How does this make men better qualified to lead? Some men are rational and cautious. Some are foolish and impetuous. Some elders are very emotional. Others very studious. Do congregations that have no male leadership characteristically run unbridled to their own destruction? I’ve seen some of our congregations do exactly that. They were all headed by an exclusively male eldership. Why does being “overly entrenched” make men “ideally suited” for authority? Isn’t this plainly self-contradictory?

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<sup>21</sup> Pages 292-294 (italics in original).

<sup>22</sup> F. LaGard Smith, *Men of Strength for Women of God*, page 264.

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Burton Coffman, who is normally a very sensible commentator, in a note captioned “On the Deceivableness of Women,” states,

It is a gross mistake to view the natural capacity of women for being deceived as in any manner whatever a reflection upon womankind. It is positively her most adorable characteristic. ...

But are there not historical examples of strong-willed, powerful women, impossible to deceive, who now and again have held the rod of empire or the affairs of state with great ability? Yes, indeed! But exceptions do not make the rule. Wherever such leadership exists in women, it is still a masculine trait. ... Nature produces a two-headed calf now and then, but that is not the rule.<sup>23</sup>

Also consider F. Lagard Smith’s analysis:

Far from men being spiritually superior to women, and therefore exclusively entitled to occupy positions of spiritual leadership in the home and the church, I believe the reason is just the opposite. I suggest that men may be put in positions of functional leadership because they are *less* inclined to be spiritual than women, because they are not *naturally* as spiritually oriented as women. Therefore God thrusts them into leadership roles so that they may maintain spiritual strength through the ongoing exercise of spiritual responsibility.<sup>24</sup>

Excuse me? Smith is saying that God wants men to be elders because they aren’t very spiritual, but by being elders maybe they’ll catch up with the women. If Smith’s opinion of men is close to true, we can only pray that we will have women elders soon! How can we justify appointing the *least* qualified to positions of authority? Does this comport with God’s teachings on the use of our talents and gifts?<sup>25</sup> And how can Smith simultaneously contend that men are ideally suited for church leadership and that men are less inclined to be spiritual than women?

Such views of men and women insult *both* sexes. Whatever God’s will for men and women may be, it is not based on such a misunderstanding of the human condition. The paternalistic views of men and women being published today would not have made much sense in the 1950’s, and are absurd in light of recent experience. Who would call Margaret Thatcher, Sandra Day O’Connor, Golda Meir, Elizabeth Dole, Condoleezza Rice, or Indira Gandhi “gullible” or incapable of leadership—not to mention Elizabeth I

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<sup>23</sup> James Burton Coffman, *Commentary of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, (Firm Foundation Publishing House, Austin, Tex. 1978) page 172.

<sup>24</sup> Smith at 267 (italics in original).

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., 1 Cor. 12. This question will be addressed in more detail later.

and Catherine the Great? Are we to dismiss all such women as “two-headed calves” and freaks of nature, or does God have a place in His Kingdom for women with the gift of leadership? Certainly any view of the Bible that leads to demeaning God’s creations is wrong.

Paternalists are thus further characterized by the following errors:

1. Paternalists are often insensitive to the influence of culture on their own thinking and would even vigorously deny that such a thing could be possible. Thus, paternalists do not consider the possibility that the only reason they oppose women passing out church bulletins (while gladly permitting women to supervise the church nursery) is that they are used to seeing women in some roles and not in others—and not based on any disciplined approach to scripture.

2. Paternalists overly rely on “proof-texting” scripture. Rather than analyzing what Paul or Peter wrote in the context of the entire Bible, the historical setting, and the particular purpose of the letter, paternalists insist on interpreting verses that suit their biases out of context.

3. Paternalists often have a legalistic view of grace, and thus see any deviation from traditional lines as “apostasy,” that is, falling away from salvation. They thereby make agreement on every minute detail of the role of women a test of salvation and fellowship. (Certainly there are many paternalists who have a fairly broad view of grace—F. Lagard Smith would be an example.)

4. While never so intended by its adherents, paternalism results in serious cases of abuse of wives and children. Far too many men find in this school of thought a rationale to dominate their wives to the point of abuse. The abuse is often psychological rather than physical, and often the only scars are a loss of the woman’s self-esteem and personhood. And yet the problem is real—ask any experienced Christian counselor.

Being in a college town, my congregation often has to deal with emotional scars left on the daughters of church members who found in this mode of thinking a ready excuse to emotionally ruin their children. I assure the reader that the percentage of daughters of church members who arrive at college with serious emotional problems resulting from physically or emotionally abusive homes is far higher than most would imagine. While the men who teach this view of scripture never intend that their view be distorted in this manner, the fruit of the tree is apparent to the counselors and therapists.

Subtler but just as troubling is the lack of self-esteem that many of our older women suffer from. The older women in church beg to hear lessons on self-worth over and over again, and yet cannot persuade themselves that they have value in the eyes of God. No one ever preached that women have no value—not as such—and yet very many of our older women have *learned* that they are unimportant. This is why I am unimpressed by the assertion of many authors who state that their paternalistic views are

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supported by many of the older women in their home congregation. While I don't doubt for a minute that many older women would strongly avow that the paternalistic view of the world is their own view and the view that they are happiest with, these same women will often have very deep emotional scars and adjustment problems resulting from a lack of self-esteem.

The problem is real and cannot be rationalized away. Denial is easy, but denial only condemns our daughters and wives to continuation of a serious and severe problem. Neither can the problem be solved by telling men not to abuse their wives and children. Too often the men think that they are not being abusive at all, but are simply insisting on God's plan for female submission. And too often our daughters leave home and arrive at college either taking the notion of submission to men far too literally or fleeing the church to escape this notion altogether. There must be a better approach.

And yet the Bible repeatedly teaches submission. Nothing that I've said or experienced changes that. But we are not teaching the true, biblical view of submission. If we were, our mothers, wives, and daughters would be far better adjusted and happier, and far freer of emotional scarring.

Finally, I must add that not all who agree with the paternalists are guilty of these errors. Many have been influenced by these teachings without having independently considered their merits. Thus, I do not intend to characterize all who believe this way. Rather, I am speaking only of the intellectual champions of this school of thought that has had such a great influence over the Church's practices.

This leaves for consideration the "moderate approaches": **hierarchalism** and **egalitarianism**. The two views differ markedly in some areas but also find much common ground.

**The egalitarian school of thought** finds that the Bible teaches that in Christ "there is neither ... male nor female" (Gal. 3:28), such that, although men and women are not the same, those passages that limit the role of women in the church should be understood as speaking only to the cultural circumstances to which they were written. Thus, these passages are no more binding today than the commands to greet one another with the Holy Kiss, to wash one another's feet (John 13:1-11; 1 Tim. 5:10), to forsake the wearing of jewelry (1 Tim. 2:9), to lift holy hands in prayer (1 Tim. 2:8), to maintain a list of widows over the age of 60 to serve as church officials (1 Tim. 5:9-10), or to abstain from the eating of meat sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29. Cf. 1 Cor. 8).

**The hierarchalist school of thought** finds that God's creation of Eve as Adam's "helpmeet" (KJV, Gen. 2:18) or "suitable helper" (NIV, Gen. 2:18) denies to women any

role as leaders of any men for all time.<sup>26</sup> Hierarchalists point to numerous New Testament passages as affirming the subordinate role of women while simultaneously contending that the subordination of women does not make women in any way inferior.

While not universally the case, hierarchalists tend to consider 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 as applying only in the cultural situation in which it was written but consider 1 Timothy 2:11-15 as still binding.<sup>27</sup> Some hierarchalists would permit women to take on any role, even limited public speaking, that is not a “headship” role (see 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23). Thus, women could publicly read scripture or give testimony but could not teach, preach, or be elders.

Egalitarians, however, believe that the Bible requires each Christian to be allowed full use of his or her gifts and talents in the service of God.

Common to both is a strongly held belief in the inspiration and inerrancy of scripture. While some falsely accuse the egalitarians of rejecting scripture, in fact, unlike the radical feminists, egalitarians insist on holding to the inerrancy of scripture—although they refuse to be bound by traditional interpretations of scripture.

Also common to both is a tendency to bring their own biases to the consideration of scripture. As is true of all four positions, it is easy to assume that the Bible supports a particular view without seriously and objectively considering the text of the Bible in textual and historical context. It is easy to find blatant examples of this error in all schools of thought. Thus, we must carefully discipline ourselves to avoid this error. And we cannot reject a school of thought by pointing to the errors of some of its adherents. All schools of thought have made bad arguments and false accusations at some time or other.

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<sup>26</sup> Cottrell admits that this argument doesn’t hold up to scrutiny and instead relies on the fact that Adam was created before Eve as creating an eternal hierarchy. See the later discussion on 1 Tim. 2 for a discussion of that argument.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Rubel Shelly, “A Responsible Challenge to Traditions,” *In Search of Wonder* (Howard Publishing Co., West Monroe, LA 1995) (Lynn Anderson, ed.), pp. 90-92.

### CHAPTER IV THE GENESIS ACCOUNTS

The most important scriptures dealing with the role of women are found in Genesis. In a number of places, Paul refers to the Creation accounts as the basis for his teachings regarding women (see 1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). Other times he refers simply to the “Law,” but we understand that Jews refer to the first five books of the Old Testament as the Law—not just the Law of Moses (found primarily in Leviticus and Deuteronomy). In fact, there is nothing in the Law of Moses commanding that women be subject or even submissive to men. Therefore, we take it that Paul is referring to the Creation accounts.

Because of this, the key to finding the truth of the matter is Genesis 1-3. We must first look to Genesis and find out what God’s plan for men and women really is. Only then can we look to Paul’s references to these accounts and determine the point that Paul was intending to make. And we must interpret the New Testament to be consistent with the Old Testament. We don’t choose a position, find verses that seemingly support our position, argue that Genesis must say the same thing since these verses refer to it, and then ignore all that contradicts our view. Rather, we start at the very beginning. We read the Genesis accounts for the truths that are in them. And we rigorously apply those truths to every passage that deals with men and women. We will not find a contradiction, but we may find some surprises.

**Genesis 1.** Genesis 1 and 2 describe the world as it was before sin entered it. We study Genesis 1:26-28 first:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

This passage describes God’s final creative act, occurring on the sixth day. What does it tell us about men and women?

1. Both are created in God’s image.
2. Both have the rule over the Creation.
3. God made man male and female.

4. Man (that is, male and female) is to be fruitful.

So far as can be told from this passage, there is no distinction between men and women. The passage deals with the authority of man (male and female) to rule God's Creation, but does not give the male authority to rule the female. Not only is the female not declared to be inferior to the male, both are declared to be made in God's image.

**Genesis 2** contains a more detailed account of the creation of woman.

(Gen. 2:16-25) And the LORD<sup>28</sup> God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Now, what does this teach us about males and females?

1. The male is incomplete and inadequate by himself. It is "not good" for him to be alone. Indeed, the only creation declared "not good" is Adam—until God's creation of Eve to complete the creation of man.

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<sup>28</sup> The NIV translates YAHWEH, the Jews' holiest name for God, or Jehovah, as LORD in all capitals.

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2. Neither God Himself, who walked with Adam in the Garden, nor any of the animals were helpers suitable for Adam. The lesson is that man's helper could neither be superior (God Himself) nor inferior (an animal), but rather must be flesh of his flesh.

3. God chose to make woman out of a rib. First, this teaches us that woman and man are the same flesh. God certainly could have made woman from scratch, just as he did man. But God chose to teach a lesson by making her from the identical material as Adam—Adam himself. The Jewish rabbis have taught since before the time of Christ that God's choice of a rib is also significant. God did not make woman from Adam's head, as though she were to rule over him, or from his feet, as though to be in subjection to him, but from his side, to be close to him. We frequently teach this lesson in our wedding ceremonies.

Moreover, the ideal of "one flesh" is eternal as well. In the case of Adam and Eve, it means that the two were of literally identical flesh. But for us, it must mean that the husband is required by God to recognize his wife as a part of himself. He must love her as though her body were his body. He cannot treat her as an inferior or as a part of his domain.

5. Adam called Eve "woman" because she "was taken out of man." In the Hebrew, the words for "woman" and for "man"—"*adam*" and "*adamah*"—are very similar, and Adam's choice indicates and emphasizes the similarity between man and woman. After Eve was made, Adam referred to her as *ishshah* (woman or wife) and to himself as *ish* (man or husband) (Gen. 2:23). Again, the similarity of the names indicates their unity and similarity. In fact, Eve wasn't called "Eve" until after the Fall (Gen. 3:20), with the new dissimilarity of the names indicating the new barrier between husbands and wives.

6. God made man before woman. Some argue that woman is subordinate to man because Adam was made before Eve. But cows and birds were made before man, and yet man (male and female) is plainly given rule over all that was created before them (Gen. 1:26). Being made second does not in and of itself indicate subordination. Rather, the lesson is that the male was incomplete—not good—until the female completed the Creation. In other words, the Creation order is from incompleteness toward increasing completeness, and hardly from superior to inferior.

7. God made woman to be a suitable helper. This concept is far too important to be passed over lightly. Many within the paternalistic or hierarchalist schools of thought consider this verse the linchpin of their position. It is, they contend, God's designation of Eve as a helper that makes women subordinate to men for all time.

**What does "helper" really mean?** The word translated "helper" is the Hebrew word *'ezer*. Following are all the other occurrences of the word in the Old Testament:

(Exo. 18:4) [T]he other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my *helper*; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh."

(Deut. 33:7) “And this he said about Judah: “Hear, O LORD, the cry of Judah; bring him to his people. With his own hands he defends his cause. Oh, be his *help* against his foes!”

(Deut. 33:26) “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to *help* you and on the clouds in his majesty.”

(Deut. 33:29) “Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and *helper* and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places.”

(Psa. 20:2) May he send you *help* from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion.

(Psa. 33:20) We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our *help* and our shield.

(Psa. 70:5) Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my *help* and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay.

(Psa. 89:19) Once you spoke in a vision, to your faithful people you said: “I have bestowed *strength* on a warrior; I have exalted a young man from among the people.

(Psa. 115:9-11) O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—he is their *help* and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—he is their *help* and shield. You who fear him, trust in the LORD—he is their *help* and shield.

(Psa. 121:1-2) A song of ascents. I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my *help* come from? My *help* comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

(Psa. 124:8) Our *help* is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

(Psa. 146:5) Blessed is he whose *help* is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,

(Isa. 30:5) [E]veryone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them, who bring neither *help* nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace.”

(Ezek. 12:14) I will scatter to the winds all those around him—his *staff* and all his troops—and I will pursue them with drawn sword.

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(Dan. 11:34) When they fall, they will receive a little *help*, and many who are not sincere will join them.

(Hosea 13:9) “You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against me, against your *helper*.”

In the vast majority of cases, *‘ezer* refers to God Himself. In a few cases, the enemies of God’s people are criticized as not being the helper that God is. Indeed, *‘ezer* is seen as a central element of God’s relationship with His people.

Obviously, God’s calling Eve *‘ezer* does not mean that Eve is subordinate to Adam or that women are subordinate to men. If that were so, then God’s inspiring Moses, David, and the prophets to call God *‘ezer* would mean that God is subordinate to Israel! Calling Eve “helper” certainly means that Eve was Adam’s complement. She completed what was lacking in Adam. But there is no basis in the scriptures to find subordination or a principle of male leadership in this word.

Perhaps our difficulty in interpreting *‘ezer* can be better seen by noticing how we use “helper” in English. We speak of “mother’s little helper,” a “plumber’s helper,” being a “good helper.” In current English, “helper” carries the connotation of a subordinate—even a child.<sup>29</sup> Thus, if I were drowning, I’d call out, “Help!” But I wouldn’t refer to the person who rescued me as my “helper.” My rescuer truly helped me, but calling him “helper” would be too condescending—even belittling.

But these thoughts are utterly foreign to the Hebrew *‘ezer*. There is no condescension in the Hebrew word at all, so that “helper” (or “help meet,” as in the King James Version) is truly a clumsy translation. In other verses, *‘ezer* is used in the sense of “rescuer” or “liberator.” The word is also used in the sense of “one who fights alongside against a common foe.” “Comrade” or “ally” would come close to the sense in many contexts. Thus, the psalmist sings that God is Israel’s help, not a mere helper—but an ally so powerful that Israel must prevail.

When the United States’ armed forces came to the rescue of Kuwait, we were there to help, but we were not mere helpers—the U.S. military was an ally, a comrade, and an overwhelming superior to any military capability that Kuwait could have mustered. This is the sense *‘ezer* used with respect to God and His relationship to His people.

Therefore, because Eve was unto Adam as God was unto Israel, *‘ezer* carries with it no notion that a “helper” is inferior or subordinate. An *‘ezer* is one who helps another,

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<sup>29</sup> *Roget’s International Thesaurus* (5th ed., Harper Collins, New York, N.Y. 1992), page 919, lists “subordinate” as the first choice for synonyms for “helper.” The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* (2nd ed., Random House, Inc., New York, N.Y. 1993) lists as synonyms of “helper” aid, assistant, supporter, backer, auxiliary, and ally. Of these, only “ally” does not connote inferiority.

but not one who necessarily helps from a position of inferiority. After all, in Ezekiel the “helpers” were the king’s staff—inferiors.

“Complement” is therefore a proper if not excellent translation. The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*<sup>30</sup> defines “complement” as

1. something that completes or makes perfect: *A good wine is a complement to a good meal.* ... 3. either of two parts or things needed to complete the whole; counterpart. ... To *complement* is to provide something felt to be lacking or needed; it is often applied to putting together two things, each of which supplies what is lacking in the other, to make a complete whole.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, a complement may be the more important or less important of the two parts of the whole under consideration. God was the complement of the Israelites, in that He won battles for them that they could not have won without Him, and yet the Israelites also had to fight. Just so, a general’s aides may be considered his complement, as those whom he needs to perform his duties. Thus, the word connotes neither superiority nor inferiority. Accordingly, I will normally use “complement” when referring to Eve as Adam’s helper or helpmeet.

Now ‘ezer does have a deeper significance. God’s declaring Eve as complement means that God gave Eve a special role in relationship to the man. She is to complete, finish, and make God’s creation of man good. Clearly, therefore, a wife may not, consistent with her God-given role, belittle her husband or injure his reputation. Neither may she act as an independent agent, free of concerns for the impact of her behavior on her husband. She must act as part of a greater whole.

**Genesis 3:1-24.** The subordination of women did not begin in Genesis 2, but in Genesis 3.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Italics in original.

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“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. *Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*”

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree

Let’s first look at the particular curses.

**The curse of the serpent.** First, God cursed the serpent. The “seed” of the woman is prophesied as bruising the head of the serpent. The use of “seed” here is very unusual. The ancients normally used “seed” to refer to the male element of reproduction, likening the sex act to the man planting seed in the woman. In fact, until only a few centuries ago, it was believed that babies were contained in the sperm. If a baby was born looking like its mother, the resemblance was considered to be because the baby’s development was affected by the mother’s characteristics while in the womb. The ancients never spoke of a woman’s seed.

Thus, most commentators take this use as the first prophecy of the Messiah and His virgin birth. Jesus bruised the head of the serpent by delivering a truly severe blow to Satan’s kingdom. But the serpent bruised Jesus’ heel by being a constant opponent and, thus far, preventing the Kingdom of Heaven from including the entire Creation.

**The curse of Eve.** The curse and prophecy as to the serpent are followed by a curse on Eve. God tells her that her pain in childbearing will greatly increase. The significance of this cannot be understated. Until very recently, there was a very high death rate in childbearing. The pain of childbearing before modern antibiotics, sanitation, Cesarean sections, and such was many times greater than it is now.

God next curses the woman by causing her husband to rule over her. Notice these things:

1. This was a change. If Adam already had the rule over Eve, then why did God say He was doing this to her because of her sin? Thus, nothing in Genesis 1 or 2 can support an argument for male rule.
2. God states that *husbands* rule over *wives*—under His curse. He does not curse all women with being under the rule of all men.

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3. God also states that the wife's desire will be for her husband. This curse has been interpreted many different ways.

a. Some suggest that this refers to sexual desire, the idea being that the woman cannot avoid the pain of childbearing due to her sexual desires. But this makes sexual desire by a wife for a husband a curse, which is clearly not God's plan. Moreover, Adam and Eve were commanded on the Sixth Day to be fruitful and multiply. Sex was a part of the plan from the beginning and is not a result of sin.

b. Others suggest that wives are cursed with wanting to do their husband's will. But this suggestion fails for lack of evidence.

c. A third group suggests an interpretation based on the close similarity of the language of the curse to Genesis 4:7:

“If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

In the King James Version, this verse says that “unto thee shall be [sin's] desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” The NIV translators have paraphrased this passage to interpret “unto thee shall be his desire” to mean “it desires to have you.” Thus, in Genesis 3, the virtually identical phrasing, only a few verses away, must mean that woman's desire for her husband is her desire to rule her husband. God is saying that although the wife may want to rule her husband, under His curse, the husband will rule the wife.

A result of Adam's and Eve's sin is strife in marriage. Both husbands and wives will want to be in charge, but in the ordinary case, the husband will succeed in ruling over his wife. And certainly the last several thousand years have proven this to be very true indeed.

**The curse of Adam.** God next curses Adam for his sin. Adam will be required to earn a living by the sweat of his brow, and the ground will produce thistles and thorns.

**The curse of mankind.** Finally, God makes man mortal. We all die because of the sin of Adam and Eve.

**The meaning of the curses.** Genesis 3 is known to students of the Bible as the Fall of Man. It is the account of the first sin and marks the beginning of the separation of man from God. It is exactly this separation that Jesus died to cure. Jesus came to earth to undo the curse. Man sinned, both male and female, and therefore death came into the world. Paul explains this in Romans:

(Rom. 5:12-18) Therefore, just as *sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men*, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. ... For if, by the trespass of the one man, death

reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. *Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.*

But the Fall of Man affected much more than our own mortality and our relationship with God. The entire Creation was corrupted by man's sin.

(Rom. 8:20-23) For *the creation was subjected to frustration*, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

We see, therefore, that the curses pronounced in Genesis 3 are only examples of the complete corruption of the Creation. Everything decays. Nothing is permanent. All that is living will die. This corruption affects our marriages, our work, our childbearing, our relationships with God, and everything made.

(Eph. 4:22-24) You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being *corrupted* by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

(1 Pet. 1:22-23) Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of *perishable* seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

(2 Pet. 1:4) Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the *corruption* in the world caused by evil desires.

The italicized word in each quoted passage is from the same Greek root as "decay" found in Romans 8:22. Because of sin, Paul says in Romans that we are in bondage to decay (or corruption, or perishability). He then says in Ephesians that we had been corrupt before our salvation, but our new self is to be like God (that is, not corrupted by sin). Peter tells us in 1 Peter that by being saved we have relinquished our perishable, fleshly nature (that is, our corrupted nature) and replaced it with an imperishable nature.

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In 2 Peter he tells us that God gives each of us a part of his divine nature (the Holy Spirit, immortality) that allows us to escape the corruption of the world. But we know from Romans and 1 Corinthians that the corruption of the world came from the curse in Genesis 3, which followed the entry of sin into the world. Thus, we are instructed to *escape* these curses, not to impose them on one another!

We are all going to keep sinning, but sinning is still sinning, and we are bound to our Lord to try to stop and to rid ourselves of sin so far as it is within our abilities.

(1 Cor. 15:21-26) For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.*

We see in 1 Corinthians that death, which came through Adam, is Christ's enemy and will be the last enemy destroyed. Moreover, we see that Paul describes the corruption of Creation as the enemy of God.

Therefore, we must understand that the curses pronounced in Genesis 3 are curses and not commands—far from it. They are evidence of the decay and corruption produced by sin and the frustration Creation has been subjected to while awaiting the end of time. How then can we command our women members to obey a “command” that is not a command but a description of the consequence of sin?<sup>32</sup>

This argument will surely be hard for many readers to accept, but it becomes much clearer when we consider the other curses. The man is cursed to work by the sweat of his brow. Does this mean that air conditioning is a sin, because it is contrary to God's eternal design? Are anti-perspirants wrong? Is it wrong to use herbicides and pre-emergents to prevent the growth of weeds? Didn't God intend that we work the fields by hand to rid them of weeds? Must all men work in the fields? Is office work a sin?

Is it a sin to use anesthesia to relieve the pain of childbearing? Or is that also part of God's eternal plan? For that matter, why should we resist any of the world's corruption? God corrupted it, who are we to oppose it?

I read with horror the description of the fate of Eufame MacLayne ... . Eufame was a woman living in 16<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>32</sup> “Adam's rule over Eve (3:16) was not God's original design in Creation, but the curse God placed on Eve for her disobedience. It is a perversion of God's intentions for the relationship between a man and wife, and never has been his real desire.” John T. Willis, “Women in the Old Testament,” published in Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women I*, page 35.

Scotland, pregnant with twins. Her labor was complicated and very painful, and during it she requested painkilling herbs to help her deliver her babies. Births had high mortality rates in those days, but Eufame and her twins were able to come out of it alive. Unfortunately, word got out that Eufame had used painkillers. Painkillers were forbidden, said the church leaders, for it was God's law that women suffer in childbirth. Therefore, the babies were taken from this new mother, and she was tied to a stake and burned.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jo-Ann Tsang (1996), <http://falcon.cc.ukans.edu/~luthien/fem/fem8.html>, quoting Gundry, P. (1986) "Why We're Here" in A. Mickelson, editor, *Women, Authority, and the Bible*.

Another version of this and similar events, related in the context of a discussion of the impact of Christianity on modern medicine, appears in Lynn Winters, *Our Judaic-Christian Heritage, An Inquiry into the Ideas and Forces that Link the Thought of Our Time with Our Religious Past*, <http://www.mac-2001.com/philos/crit/DOCTOR.TXT>.

During all this time, there was no tradition of using painkiller to relieve the pain of women going through labor. (Opium can halt the progression of labor, although alcohol does not). Women midwives could be accused of witchcraft if they employed such drugs. One such case occurred in 1591, when a woman of high social standing, Eufame Macalyane, asked Agnes Sampson to help relieve her pain during the births of her two sons. Agnes Sampson was later arrested and tried before King James for this heresy. She was condemned as a witch and burned alive at the Castle Hill of Edinburgh.

It was not until 1846, that ether was successfully administered as an anesthetic during an operation. In 1847, Dr. James Y. Simpson, professor of obstetrics at the University of Glasgow successfully used chloroform to relieve the suffering of a woman patient in childbirth. After he published a report on his success, he was denounced because the pain of childbirth was claimed by many to go against God's plan for mankind-- ie that women "deserved" to suffer due to Eve's crime in the Garden of Eden.

...

One clergyman for example argued: "chloroform is a decoy of Satan, apparently offering itself to bless women; but in the end it will harden society and rob God of the deep earnest cries which arise in time of trouble for help." (Haggard, *Ibid*, p 108)

...

In 1853, when Queen Victoria, announced she wanted to use chloroform during the delivery of her seventh child, Prince Leopold, the Archbishop of Canterbury warned her that this was unbiblical—and reminded her of the verse, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children!"

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We are quite properly repelled at the thought of punishing a laboring woman for taking painkillers. We instinctively know that pain in childbirth is a curse, not a command, and a curse that we are free to overcome. But we can't consistently reject the views of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century English church and at the same time insist that Genesis 3:16 commands husbands to rule over their wives.

Adam and Eve corrupted the world, not God, and we are God's children charged with working to undo the curse. We do this by bringing others to Jesus to escape the curse of death, by alleviating suffering, by struggling against the corruption of this world any way we can—and this certainly includes doing so within our marriages. We are compelled as Christians to work to rid our marriages of sin, including the quest for dominion over our spouse, and to rid our churches of sin as well.

At this point, many readers will wonder how this interpretation of Genesis can be reconciled with New Testament passages on the role of women. We will be getting to these other passages, and we certainly don't believe that Paul or any other Bible author contradicts the lessons of Genesis 1, 2, and 3. But the meaning of the curses pronounced in Genesis 3 is plain. They simply are not commands, and should not be taught as commands. If the curse of a husband's dominion over his wife is a command, then so are the other curses, and we should deny our wives painkillers in childbirth. We can't have it both ways. Because Genesis 3 is a curse on Creation when we study the Fall of Man, it is a curse when we study the role of women.

**CHAPTER V  
BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF GODLY WOMEN**

Any doctrine of women that we consider must pass several stern tests. First, it must measure up against the passages dealing with the relationship of men and women, and not just the ambiguous ones.

Second, whatever position we take on the role of women must be consistently adhered to in all passages, and we can't change interpretations depending on the course title. When we study the Fall of Man while studying Romans, we must treat the curse of Eve the same as when we teach Marriage, and the same as when we teach The Role of Women in the church. Read the literature in your Sunday School classes on these topics over the last few years, and you will find that we often change interpretations with the course title.

But third—and this may be the hardest one—we must be able to measure the interpretation against God's own application of the rule. If we insist that a rule is eternal, then we have all of history to see if God agrees. How has God dealt with women throughout time?

We must remember that God's curse on Eve (Genesis 3:16) was squarely in effect throughout the Old Testament, and even today the domination of wives by husbands continues even in some Christian homes. Thus, when we look at history, we don't expect to see men and women treated equally. Rather we expect that men will dominate women, as God said in Genesis 3. But if Genesis 3 is a curse rather than a command, we also expect there will be notable exceptions from the general rule, proving the curse to be a curse and not a law and pointing us to God's Edenic ideal.

**Patriarchal Age.** During the Patriarchal Age, so far as is recorded, God spoke primarily to the heads of households—who were invariably male. This is hardly surprising considering the male-dominant culture that arose after Adam and Eve left Eden. In fact, we will find that all society outside the Church has been male-dominant ever since the Fall of Man, and even the Church has been male dominated in most locations. But this fact merely proves what we already know—that following God's curse of Eve, men would dominate women.

**The Mosaic Dispensation.** During the age of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, there were no woman rulers. But after the Law of Moses was given, things changed.

The Law of Moses normally treats men and women exactly the same. There are some places, however, where men are preferred over women.

For example, only a man may divorce his spouse (Deut. 23:21-4), but Jesus reversed this bias (Mark 10:1-12).

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In the temple, there was a Holy of Holies that could be entered by the high priest (always a man) and only on the Day of Atonement. But the writer of Hebrews tells us that these rules have been eliminated. All Christians may now enter the Holy of Holies itself (Most Holy Place, in the NIV):

(Heb 10:19-22) Therefore, brothers, *since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus*, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

All Christians are able to enter the Most Holy Place, regardless of what position they would have had under the Law of Moses. Moreover, Peter teaches us that we are now *all* priests. The Church is a “holy priesthood.”<sup>34</sup> And so we see that even the most “sexist” rules of the Mosaic Dispensation have been reversed and eliminated in Jesus!

**Miriam.** Miriam, the sister of Moses, was subject to Moses, as was all Israel, and yet she was a prophetess.

(Exo. 15:20) Then Miriam the *prophetess*, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.

In fact, the Bible also calls her a “leader” of all Israel.

(Micah 6:4) I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. *I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.*

Miriam was certainly lower ranking than Moses, but no distinction is made between her and Aaron. Aaron was the high priest, and while Micah subordinates the prophetess and the priest to Moses, he subordinates neither to the other.

**Deborah.** The Law of Moses ushered in the Period of the Judges, during which God ruled Israel through individual judges. Notable among the judges is Deborah.

(Judg. 4:4-5) Deborah, a *prophetess*, the wife of Lappidoth, *was leading*<sup>35</sup> Israel at that time. She *held court* under

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<sup>34</sup> 1 Peter 2:5.

<sup>35</sup> Also translated “judging.” The root word is *shaphat*, which means not only to judge, but also to lead or to exact vengeance or retribution. Judges 2:16-19 refers to all the heroes of Judges as “judges [*shaphat*] who saved them of the hands of these raiders,” clearly emphasizing the role of “judges” as military leaders, rather than adjudicators. Only a few of the “judges” are referred to as actually judging disputes. Therefore, modern commentators and translators, including the NIV, often prefer to translate

[Continued next page]

the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, *and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided.*

Plainly, Deborah was literally a judge. She decided disputes, and thus had authority over men and women. Moreover, the Bible calls Deborah a prophetess and a leader. How could this be true if God has decreed for all time that women can have no authority over a man and cannot teach a man? How silent was Deborah when men were present?

Judg. 4:6-9,14 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"

Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."

"Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman." ...

*Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?"* So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by ten thousand men.

Here we see that Deborah gave orders to the general of Israel's army, and he obeyed. She was obviously the highest-ranking person in the nation. She was married, and yet God granted her a role of genuine authority and leadership over men.

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*shaphat* as "leader" in the book of Judges. R. K. Harrison, in *Introduction to the Old Testament* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1969), pp. 680-681, concludes,

The term "judge" carried a wider meaning in antiquity than does its English counterpart. ... In this latter sense of "ruler" the Hebrew term *shaphat* corresponded the *shuphetim* or regents of Phoenicia, the Akkadian office of *shapitu*, and the *sufetes* or chief magistrates of Carthage, who were similar in status to the Roman consuls. The concept of the "judge" in Judges can thus be seen to be related to similar offices in the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean regions on the one hand, and to the situation that existed in days of Moses (cf. Exod. 18:21ff; Deut. 1:9ff) on the other.

As Harrison was writing in a context far from the dispute over the role of women, his conclusions carry considerable weight.

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To celebrate the victory won at Deborah's command, Deborah wrote the Song of Deborah with Barak, which is an inspired writing and which comprises the fifth chapter of Judges. And so we add to her accomplishments: author of a chapter of the Bible.

F. Lagard Smith argues that Deborah is an apparent exception to the universal, eternal rule of female subordination only because God could find no man in Israel to act as judge. God thus called Deborah to urge "a return to *strong* male leadership."<sup>36</sup> The problem with Smith's interpretation is that nothing in the Bible indicates that God was unhappy with existing male leadership. God was unhappy that Barak refused to honor Deborah's command to attack without Deborah's going with Barak (Judges 4:8-9), and thus Deborah declared that Barak would not have the honor of the victory. But nowhere does God declare that he is displeased with male leadership in general or that Deborah was called to be a judge to teach the men a lesson. Moreover, the "evidence" that Smith relies on, the reluctance of Barak to go to battle without Deborah's presence, occurred well after Deborah was made a judge and leader—indeed, after Deborah had command over Barak. Most importantly, Barak's mistake was in failing to take orders from a woman, not in failing to give orders!

Moreover, there are numerous cases where God raised up a male leader who initially refused to take on leadership. For example, Gideon was reluctant to honor God's call to leadership (Judg. 6:11-15) if not downright cowardly.<sup>37</sup> But God made Gideon into a mighty warrior. Similarly, Moses was very reluctant to honor God's call to leadership (Exo. 4:1-17), and yet God raised Moses up as the greatest of all leaders. Plainly, God can raise up male leadership when He wishes, regardless of the willingness of men to lead, and therefore God did not make Deborah a leader for lack of men to lead.<sup>38</sup>

William J. Webb<sup>39</sup> points out that the judge Shamgar ruled at the same time as Deborah,<sup>40</sup> so that God clearly had a male judge available had He preferred a male ruler.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Men of Strength for Women of God*, pages 114-118.

<sup>37</sup> Judg. 6:11. It has often been suggested that Gideon chose to thresh his wheat in a winepress to hide from the Midianites, rather than confronting the enemies of God's people.

<sup>38</sup> Remarkably, Cottrell never mentions Deborah in his 319-page critique of egalitarian thought!

<sup>39</sup> *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals—Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 2001)

<sup>40</sup> The text says that Shamgar ruled "after Ehud" (Judges 5:6, compare to 3:31 and 4:1). It is clear that many of the judges had overlapping terms of office.

<sup>41</sup> Harrison, *ibid.*, p. 180, points out that "whether the Judges were tribal heroes or national leaders, it is quite possible that their careers were sometimes contemporaneous and not generally in continuous succession, as a casual perusal of the narrative might seem to imply." He further finds, p. 692, that "the Hebrew text does not warrant the assumption that all the Judges exercised consecutive periods of leadership, whether or not the individuals concerned were local or national heroes. At least three principal groups appear to have been partly concurrent ... ."

**The Kings.** Many have suggested that the fact that Israel's kings were all men indicates that women are to be subordinate to men forever. But this argument fails. First, Israel has kings at a time when the curse of Genesis 3 was in full effect. Second, God Himself opposed the establishment of kings, and thus the nature of kings (inheritance of the throne by the oldest male child) cannot be considered a part of God's eternal design.

We see from the following passage that God replaced the system of judges with male kings only grudgingly, saying that asking for kings was equivalent to rejecting God:

(1 Sam. 8:4-8) So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD.

And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you."

Clearly, the rule of Israel by judges was God's preferred method. Moreover, God individually selected each judge—even Deborah—while after David, kings were selected either by birthright or by coup.

**Old Testament Prophets.** While the kings of Judah were all men, during the period of monarchy God's prophets, who were called directly by God, included women.

(2 Kings 22:14-20) Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to *the prophetess Huldah*, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District.

She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me,

'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.'

Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you

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humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.” So they took her answer back to the king.

In response to this prophecy, Josiah, king of Judah, led his nation in its last reformation before being taken into Babylonian captivity. Even the king—among the godliest of all the kings—heeded the words of Huldah the prophetess.

**The Good Wife.** God’s vision of the ultimate women in Old Testament times is found in Proverbs 31:10-31, which describes the “good wife” in a frequently quoted passage.

A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls.

She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.

In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.” Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. Give her the

reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

Interestingly, the proverb states that the husband “has no lack of gain” and is known at the city gates due to his wife’s industry. She is, therefore, not only a working wife, but also a wife active in community affairs. She develops a mercantile business on her own initiative and engages in very successful agricultural ventures.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, “faithful instruction is on her tongue.” She is a teacher. For all these things she is praised by her husband, her children, and her community.

This ideal woman has much in common with the “you can have it all” woman of today—a good marriage, children, her own businesses, and a role in the community. While she is indeed a homemaker, she is not just a homemaker. To be honest students, we must ask, why does God describe as the ideal woman a woman who is not only a homemaker, mother, and wife, but also a business woman and teacher?

**References to God as Female.** There are also a number of Old Testament passages where God refers to Himself as a mother: Isaiah 46:3; Isaiah 49:15; Isaiah 66:12-13. The imagery of these passages showing God as female is minimized in some translations, such as the New International Version. The American Standard Version, for example, is more true to the original language and more plainly shows God using female images of Himself. These passages have fallen into some disrepute due to their abuse by some liberals, such as the Sophia “Goddess” cult that worships God as the goddess of wisdom. But the fact that a few have pushed these passages too far does not change the fact that God honors women by comparing Himself to the female.

Indeed, Jesus declared in Matthew 23:3,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, *as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings*, but you were not willing.

Thus, both God and Christ refer to themselves with female imagery. According to John T. Willis, professor of the Old Testament at Abilene Christian University,

To be sure, OT writers frequently compare God with a father ..., but God is not a sexual being. “Father” is simply one of many human figures that may appropriately be used to denote certain attributes or characteristics of God. ... There are ways in which God is like a father; there are also ways in which God is like a mother. The OT writers do not hesitate to call attention to these

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<sup>42</sup> Willis, *ibid*, at 36.

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latter, but in doing so, they indicate their highest regard for woman.<sup>43</sup>

**The Gospel Prophetesses.** Before the birth of Jesus, and therefore under the Mosaic Dispensation, three prophetesses were inspired by God to speak and to instruct men. The first is Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:42-45). Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also inspired to praise God in response to learning that God had selected her to bear the Messiah (Luke 1:46-55).

Anna the prophetess also prophesied about Jesus, and did so in the temple courts, the most public place of worship in all Israel (Luke 2:36-37). Moreover, she testified about Jesus in the temple courts “to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). The words of all three prophetesses are preserved in scriptures as inspired speech. Anna was not only prophesying, she was teaching. Her words were the teaching of men in public.

**Christian Dispensation.** In the New Testament, the women are given even greater honor than the women of the Old Testament.

**Jesus.** Jesus said much that relates to the theme of this book, and His words will be referred to as we work through the key passages. We should note, first, that Jesus never talked down to or subordinated women. He uniformly honored women. His attitude toward women would be considered “liberated” today and it was revolutionary in the First Century. Women were a part of His inner circle. As is discussed in more detail later, the Jews in the First Century believed that it was wrong to teach women about God’s law (except for the penalty for adultery!), and yet He taught women (such as Mary and Martha) even when men weren’t present. He dealt with the Samaritan woman as a sinner but a significant person worthy of His time and effort. His dealing with the woman taken in adultery repudiated the hypocritical sexism of the day. After all, the man she was with was not taken out to be stoned! Just as important, Jesus never taught the subordination of women to men or even wives to husbands. Jesus never denied women the right to speak, to teach, or to exercise authority.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Willis, *ibid*, at 38.

<sup>44</sup> Ferguson points out that “Jesus described the end of distinctive functions based on sex as abolished in the resurrection, not in the present (Luke 20:34-36).” Luke writes,

Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.”

Jesus is plainly not discussing “the end of distinctive functions based on sex,” but rather, the end of sex. Sex ends, of course, because death is eliminated in the after life and there is no further need to propagate the race. Thus, contrary to Ferguson, Jesus does not declare that the sexes will have distinct functions until the resurrection, only that sex itself will end in the resurrection.

Less frequently observed are the compliments Jesus paid to women.<sup>45</sup> The sinful woman who washed his feet with her tears “loved much” (Luke 7:47). The Canaanite woman with a demon-possessed daughter had “great faith” (Matt. 15:27). The widow who gave two very small copper coins “put more into the treasury than all the others” (Mark 12:43). On the other hand, Jesus accused the apostles themselves of being of “little faith” (Matt. 8:26). It was Peter who had to declare his love for Jesus three times after denying Jesus three times. It was a rich young ruler who refused to surrender his wealth for Jesus. It seems Jesus had an extremely high view of women.

**Pentecost.** Jesus’ inclusion of women among his disciples begins a pattern that is reflected in the conduct of His apostles. Women disciples were with the apostles at the very beginning:

(Acts 1:12-14) Then [the apostles] returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, *along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus*, and with his brothers.

The text is ambiguous as to whether the women were present when the Spirit descended, but clearly Peter understood that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were for women. He quoted the prophet Joel in his sermon that day:

(Acts 2:17-18) In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. *Your sons and daughters* will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, *both men and women*, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

The passage emphasizes the equal rights of men and women to the gifts of the Spirit. We know that prophecy is more than predicting the future. It includes “forthtelling” as well as “foretelling.” Thus, Joel prophesied that women would have the miraculous power to speak words of encouragement, rebuke, exhortation, and condemnation. The prophets of the Old Testament are still legendary for their ability to so vividly declare the word of God that even kings trembled, and Joel prophesied that the Messianic age would be ushered in with this gift—in women! Thus, it is not surprising that in Acts 21 we read of the four daughters of Philip the evangelist who prophesied or that in 1 Corinthians 11 we read of women prophesying in the presence of men in the assembly. Paul rebukes their failure to cover their heads, but not their prophesying.

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<sup>45</sup> From a sermon by Buddy Jones at University Church of Christ, Tuscaloosa, Alabama on September 11, 2005.

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It therefore appears probable that women were among those who received the Spirit at Pentecost. After all, the essence of Peter's argument is that those listening to his sermon were seeing the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. And the essence of Joel's prophecy is that the gift of prophecy will be given to women! Peter could have picked numerous other Old Testament prophecies of the Spirit arriving in the age of the Messiah, but Peter chose as his text the only passage that emphasizes women having the gift of prophecy.

**Junias.** Junias (Junia in the KJV), a feminine name, is described by Paul as outstanding ("of note" (KJV)) among the apostles (Rom. 16:7). Even the early church fathers<sup>46</sup> (hardly a "liberated" group) considered her to have had an apostolic role.<sup>47</sup> Certainly she was not one of the Twelve, nor must we conclude that she was of the same order as Paul, and yet her role as an "ambassador"<sup>48</sup> must have been quite important to earn such a title, especially from Paul, who defended his rights as an apostle vigorously. Notice that the Bible also refers to Titus (2 Cor. 8:23),<sup>49</sup> Andronicus (Rom. 16:7), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25),<sup>50</sup> James (Gal. 1:19; 1 Cor. 15:7),<sup>51</sup> and Barnabas (Acts 14:14) as "apostles."<sup>52</sup> This is certainly a worthy group, and we must acknowledge the teaching and leadership roles of all the members of the group whom the Bible describes in any detail at all. The title must imply some role analogous to the apostles themselves.<sup>53</sup>

The notion of a woman being referred to as an apostle by Paul is so foreign to many that two arguments have been offered to avoid the implication of the statement. First, many have suggested that Junias was a man, despite the plainly feminine form of the name.<sup>54</sup> However, all early Christian writers commenting on the passage considered Junias female, with the first suggestion that Junias was a man appearing in the late 14th Century.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Uninspired Christian leaders from the 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, whose writings have been preserved but not as part of scripture.

<sup>47</sup> James Walters, "Phoebe and Junia(s)," published in Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women 1*, pages 185-190. Walters is an associate professor of New Testament at Harding University.

<sup>48</sup> The literal translation of the word normally translated "apostle."

<sup>49</sup> The NIV translates "apostles" as "representatives."

<sup>50</sup> The NIV translates "apostle" as "messenger."

<sup>51</sup> This James is the brother of Jesus, not the apostle, and the author of the book of James.

<sup>52</sup> The translators sometimes obscure these references. Thus, the NIV does not consistently translate *apostolos* as "apostle."

<sup>53</sup> Walters, *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> In Greek, "-as" is a feminine ending.

<sup>55</sup> The early church considered Junias a female much longer than the early church insisted on *a cappella* singing.

Second, some suggest that “outstanding among the apostles” means “considered outstanding by the apostles,” thus avoiding the sense that Junias was an apostle. However, scholars are virtually unanimous in interpreting Paul as referring to Junias as an apostle. “This is the way the phrase was understood by all the patristic writers,<sup>56</sup> by most all modern commentators, and by virtually all English translations.”<sup>57</sup>

John Chrysostom, writing in the late 4th Century, states the view of the early Christians:

To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles—just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title apostle.<sup>58</sup>

**Phoebe.** Phoebe, a woman, is described by Paul as a deacon of the church at Cenchrea (not as a deaconess, the word being masculine).<sup>59</sup> Some would translate *diakonos* in this passage as “servant” rather than deacon. This issue will be taken up later when we discuss deacons in particular.

**Priscilla.** Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila are a familiar pair. Contrary to the customs of the day, the wife is often mentioned first. In fact, of the Bible’s six references to Priscilla, she is mentioned first four times. “Evidently, she was an outstanding person in her own right.”<sup>60</sup> This would occur in the First Century only if everyone, including the husband, understood that the wife held the more important or prominent position. Moreover, Priscilla is specifically referred to as having taught Apollos—a man.<sup>61</sup>

**Other Women.** Paul’s many other references to particular women as being among his circle of evangelists and worthy of honor are too numerous to list.

**Summary.** We see, therefore, that men certainly held most of the leadership roles throughout biblical times. And yet the record plainly contradicts any notion that God

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<sup>56</sup> Early Christian writers.

<sup>57</sup> James Walters, “‘Phoebe’ and ‘Junia(s)’—Rom. 16:1-2,7,” in Osburn, *Essays on Woman*, at page 187.

<sup>58</sup> Translated by Walters, *ibid*, page 185.

<sup>59</sup> Romans 16:1. There was no Greek word for deaconess until many centuries later.

<sup>60</sup> Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Wm. B. Eerdmans 1978), page 246.

<sup>61</sup> Acts 18:26. Priscilla is mentioned first in this passage.

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prohibits women from leading men, having authority over men, teaching men, or speaking in the presence of men, as we have traditionally interpreted these commands.

Neither the Law of Moses nor Jesus ever commanded women to be submissive to men, except in the sense that we are all to submit to one another or that wives are to be complements to their husbands. If God made an eternal law that women are forever subordinate to men, you would think that Moses or Jesus would have said so plainly.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**EPHESIANS 5—MUTUAL SUBMISSION**

While this book is primarily concerned with women's roles in the church, we cannot untangle this issue without also delving into the relationship of husbands and wives. After all, the Genesis accounts that we've already studied deal with marriage, not church governance.

Paul's most thorough discussion of the relationship of husbands and wives is found in Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Because Paul deals very particularly with the subject, we must begin our New Testament study here.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the *head* of the wife as Christ is the *head* of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve

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wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

This familiar passage is often studied and taught in our Sunday School classes, most often when marriage is being studied. In fact, I have observed that those teaching this scripture in the context of how to have a good, Christian marriage often interpret it differently from those who are teaching regarding the role of women in the church. Certainly, we must understand it the same way in both contexts.

**Headship in non-biblical sources.** Before interpreting the passage, we must first come to an understanding of the meaning of “head” in 5:23: “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.” In First Century Greek, what did “head” mean when used figuratively of a person? Kenneth V. Neller, assistant professor of the New Testament at Harding University, offers some very helpful research on this question.<sup>62</sup>

In extra-biblical Greek literature, *kephale* (head) refers primarily to what is first or supreme, or to an extremity, end, or point. As such, the term was used to designate not only the head of a person or animal, but also the prow of a ship, head of a pillar, top of a wall, source or mouth of a river, or start of a period of time. The word could also signify what was prominent, outstanding, or determinative. ... Nevertheless, there is no example of “head” being used figuratively for a person as “leader” or “chief” before the Septuagint.<sup>63</sup>

Neller then points out that while “head” does indeed mean ruler in Hebrew, the translators of the Septuagint rarely translated the Hebrew word for head (*rosh*) as *kephale*, preferring Greek words that literally mean ruler or leader (typically *archon*). Thus, it appears that, with the occasional exception, the translators did not consider the Greek *kephale* to be a fair translation of the Hebrew word for head when used of a leader or ruler.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “‘Submission’ in Eph. 5:21-33,” published in Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women 1*, pages 251-258.

<sup>63</sup> The translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek that was made in the centuries between the Old and New Testament, beginning about 250 BC. Because Greek was the standard language of the eastern Mediterranean world in the First Century, most Old Testament scholars were well familiar with the Septuagint, and its use of language influenced the writers of the New Testament.

<sup>64</sup> Unlike the Greek *kephale*, the Hebrew *rosh* means both head and ruler. But *rosh*, when used to mean ruler, is translated *kephale* only twice in the Septuagint. Isa. 9:14-15 uses *rosh* in a play on words to mean both a literal head and a metaphoric head as ruler, a play on words permitted in Hebrew (as well as

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In the First Century, *kephale* could also mean “source.” This use is found, for example, in the writings of Philo, a contemporary of Paul. Philo was a Hellenistic Jew who wrote extensively on the Jewish religion. Thus, his use of “head” to mean source is an indicator of the background against which Paul wrote.

Ultimately, however, there is little evidence for the use of *kephale* to mean “ruler,” “leader,” or “source,” although certainly all three meanings are found and are possible. This scant evidence allows commentators to argue for whichever position suits their biases by allowing them to point out the obvious weakness of the evidence supporting their opponent’s interpretation. Ultimately, while these and other meanings are possible in New Testament Greek, the meaning of “head” as a metaphor must always be derived from the context. This is in marked contrast to the English use of “head,” where “head” as meaning ruler is idiomatic. Thus, in English if I say that I am the head of the committee, the head of Joe, or the head gardener, no context is needed to know that I’m the boss. This is just not true in Greek.

For those not practiced in translation, it can be quite difficult to imagine how a word can carry entirely different connotations or idiomatic readings in different languages. “Head” is so well-established in English as “ruler” or “higher in authority” that it seems unimaginable that “head” could mean something else in Greek. But for those of us raised on the King James Version, changing body-part idioms are actually fairly familiar. For example, the KJV accurately translates Philippians 1:8 as “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in *the bowels of Jesus Christ*.” In Greek, this surely was easily understood and dignified, but in English, this language is absurdly incomprehensible. That’s because in First Century Greek-speaking lands, the intestines were considered the seat of the deepest affection. Thus, the NIV translates, “the affection of Jesus Christ.” If a First Century Greek were to read a modern text about the importance of having “guts,” he’d think we were talking about love, rather than courage, and he’d be astounded that anyone would associate courage with bowels. The fact is that we just can’t read our idiomatic use of words into other languages, no matter how natural it would seem.

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English) but not in the Greek. The translators had to choose either the Greek word meaning literal head, *kephale*, or the Greek word meaning ruler, *archon*, and so chose *kephale*. This does not mean that the translators considered *kephale* to mean ruler—only that the passage demanded a word meaning physical head.

The one passage that uses *kephale* to mean something like ruler is Judg. 11:11, where the meaning is unmistakable. Bristow, *ibid*, argues that *kephale* means something like “leader into battle” in this context, but his argument fails since the Septuagint translation declares Jephthah as the *kephale* “over” others. The use of “over” disallows a softened meaning such as “leader.”

Taken alone, the Septuagint translation of Judg. 11:11 might justify translating *kephale* as ruler, but this verse stands alone in contrast to many scores of translations of *rosh* into other Greek words, typically *archon*, meaning ruler. Thus, it is much more likely that the Septuagint’s uninspired translation of *rosh* is simply a mistake by scribes who knew their Hebrew better than their Greek.

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**Headship in the context of Ephesians.** The solution is to find Paul's meaning from the context—

(Eph. 1:21-23) In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And God placed all things under [Christ's] feet and appointed him to be *head* over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Paul refers to Christ as “head” over everything. But clearly Christ's relationship with the church, His body, differs from His relationship with “everything.” Christ is head—not *over* the church—but *for* the church. His headship is for a purpose, and that purpose is for the benefit of the church. Moreover, we see the church referred to as Christ's “body.” Paul then says that the church is the “fullness” of Christ “who fills everything in every way.” As stated by Francis Foulkes,<sup>65</sup>

We may paraphrase this by saying that it is God's purpose that the Church should be the full expression of Jesus Christ, who Himself fills everything there is.

The conclusion that Christians are not viewed in this passage as being *under* Christ as a “head” is confirmed by Ephesians 2:6-7:

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

First, we are shown a picture of Christ sitting on His throne in heaven at the right hand of God. Paul says that God “seated him ... in the heavenly realms.” We now read that all Christians are seated *with* Christ in the heavenly realms. In this highly symbolic language, the thought is not that Christians (the body) are ruled by Christ (the head). Rather, the thought is that we Christians rule *with* Christ! This is not to say that Christ has no authority over Christians—only that Christ's authority over the church is not the thought contained within the metaphor “head” as used in Ephesians.

Thus, the church is pictured as not so much in subjection to Christ as an extension of Christ. And being a part of Christ, there is no question of being “under his feet.” After all, the church cannot be both under Christ's feet and a part of His body!

The next occurrence of “head” in Ephesians is in chapter 4:

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 *From him* the

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<sup>65</sup> *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 1963), published as part of the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, edited by R. V. G. Tasker.

whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Once again, Paul refers to Christ as “head” and the church as His body. But we also see the image of the body growing “from him” with the “head” being seen as the source of growth and building up.

While the ancient Greeks did not have the understanding of anatomy that is familiar to 21st Century readers,<sup>66</sup> it would have been easy enough for a First Century reader to see the “head” as the source of nourishment for the body, and this certainly seems to be Paul’s image. And once again we see the image of the body as the extension of the personality of Christ, with each part doing its own work as part of a single living organism.<sup>67</sup>

To this point, therefore, we see that Christ has the entire universe under His feet, and that He sits on His heavenly throne as a king, and yet we see the church made a part of the person of Christ Himself—not ruled, but a part of the ruler! The church can hardly be in rebellion to Christ, because it is a part of Him.

Understanding of this mystical language comes from an appreciation of Paul’s teachings on the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ indwells His church and all Christians:

(Eph. 3:16-19) I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through *his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts* through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of *all the fullness of God*.

In these and other verses, Paul teaches that Christians are indwelled by the Spirit and that this indwelling allows Christ to live in each Christian’s heart (seat of emotions) and gives Christians power to be filled with all the fullness of God. These are very similar

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<sup>66</sup> We modern folks know that thought and control come from the brain, that is, a part of the head. First Century Greeks thought of thought as coming from the midriff. “Bedale reminds us that the functions of the nervous system were not known to the ancients, who, accordingly, did not view the *head* as we do (they held that man thinks with the midriff, the *phren*).” Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, *ibid*, pages 151-152. Thus, “head” does not refer to the man as the thinking member of the household.

<sup>67</sup> We see a very similar image in Col. 2:19: “He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.”

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thoughts to those taught by Paul with regard to Christ's headship. This is how Christ fills everything in every way through the church (1:23).

In the imagery of Ephesians, Jesus does not "rule" His Christians through laws and edicts. Rather, He lives within the heart of each Christian to change how each Christian feels and desires. In so doing, the Christian is caused to want the same things that Jesus wants and the Christian becomes an extension of Christ's love.<sup>68</sup> I don't deny the Lordship and rule of Christ. Rather, Christ's rule of the church is just not the meaning of "head" in the image Paul paints for us.

This brings us back to 5:23: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior." Plainly, the "headship" of Christ here is to be interpreted in light of what Paul just said regarding the relationship of Christ to His church. Indeed, the thought is quite similar to the "one flesh" relationship of husbands and wives described in Genesis 2. The church is the "fullness" of Christ and His body.

Thus, the husband, as head of the wife, has an obligation to nourish her, that is, to provide her with her needs for growth and for being built up, just as the church grows and is built up by Christ as its head. Just so, the husband's headship is "for" his wife, not over his wife, just as Christ's headship is for the church, with the world being under His feet (which feet are, of course, a part of His body, the church).

Likewise, the wife has an obligation to her husband, to be his "fullness," that is, to complete that which is lacking in him—that is, to be a suitable complement. And this is to be done by the wife and husband becoming one—not just legally and physically, but one in heart, with common feelings, desires, and goals. This is the Ephesians metaphor of headship—and it is entirely consistent with Genesis 1-2.<sup>69</sup>

**"Submission."** The next key concept that we should consider is submission. Verse 21 states that *all* Christians are to submit to one another. In the following verses Paul gives examples of this principle in practice, in marriage, between parents and children, and between masters and slaves. The subject in each case is clearly submission to one another. Paul, having so stated once, does not need to restate the command to

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<sup>68</sup> (Phil. 2:12-13) "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." See also Heb. 8 and Rom. 8. This doctrine is discussed in greater detail throughout the author's *The Holy Spirit and Revolutionary Grace*.

<sup>69</sup> One might object to this interpretation, relying on Col. 2:9-10 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." In this verse, "head" appears to indicate "ruler." But the NIV mistranslates by adding "over" after head. The word is absent in the Greek text, and the KJV is more accurate in translating "of." Christ's being the "head of" every power thus means that He is the source of all earthly power. See Dan. 4:17; John 19:11. In any event, the meaning of "head" in Ephesians must be found in Ephesians.

submit in each paragraph to make it true. Slaves must submit to masters, but masters must also submit to slaves. For example, in verse 6:9 when Paul commands masters to treat their slaves as the slaves are commanded to treat their masters (“in the same way”), he is explaining how the general command to mutually submit is to be fulfilled by masters toward slaves.

Paul first addresses how wives are to submit to their husbands. Wives are to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord.”<sup>70</sup> At first, this would appear to make husbands dictators. After all, the church is compelled to do all that Christ commands. And yet there are immediate and obvious limitations. For example, when was the last time that Jesus uttered a new command to the church? It’s been nearly 2000 years! While the church has been given some very general instructions, most decisions that the church must make are left to the Christians’ discretion. How much should the budget be? Which programs receive how much money? Do we build a new building? Who should be appointed to head a committee? Who should be our preacher? Should we even hire a preacher? The day-to-day grist of church activity is simply not dictated by our Savior, although the principles certainly are. But there are many different ways to comply with the principles in a given situation.<sup>71</sup> As we will discuss in much more detail regarding Galatians 3:28, Jesus has given us but one command: “love your neighbor” and our relationship with Christ is one of freedom, not subservience.

But Paul does not leave husbands to speculate on what he means. And we cannot press the analogy farther than Paul suggests that we should. He tells husbands that while they are “heads” of their wives as Christ is head of the church, they must love their wives as Christ loves the church. The “headship” of Christ includes the burden of sacrifice. Husbands must give up their lives as Jesus did. Adam gave up a rib. Christian husbands give up everything.

Paul refers specifically to the Genesis 2 account, that husbands and wives become one flesh. In Christianity, husbands and wives are to be restored to the relationship that they had before the curse was pronounced. They must become one flesh. Husbands don’t have dominion; they sacrifice. They give up their quest for control by giving up their lives. And plainly the reference to husbands (and not wives!) leaving their fathers and

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<sup>70</sup> Osburn, in *Women in the Church* 2, p. 156, points out that the verb “submit” does not appear in 5:22, but is implied from the verb in 5:21 (“Submit to one another”). Therefore, it is very unlikely that Paul meant wives to submit to husbands in a way much different from the mutual submission commanded in the preceding verse.

<sup>71</sup> (Matt. 11:30) “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

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mothers means that husbands must do the most giving up. But this only makes sense. Due to Eve's curse, husbands have the most to give up!<sup>72</sup>

Many authors conclude from this passage that husbands and wives are "equal" or that they are "partners." Unlike most authors on the subject of marriage, I can talk authoritatively of partnership (in the Greek, the word for partnership, *koinonia*, is also translated fellowship or sharing). As a practicing attorney, I have worked as an employee, been (and am) an employer, and have partners. Some of my employees have been my friends. But I would never consider asking my wife to be to me as my employees are to me. The subordinate relationship of an employee to employer creates barriers and a distance that cannot be bridged by any amount of friendship and love. The relationship imposes limitations on sharing and giving that are insurmountable. No one will deny this who has been both an owner and an employee. Those who disagree are fooling themselves.

Likewise, I would never want to be on the subordinate side of such a relationship. I must say that I never enjoyed being an employee. Being in an inferior relationship to someone else goes against my independent personality and imposes inhibitions that would destroy a marriage.

But being a partner is very much like a marriage. In fact, my partners and I advise new partners entering the firm that becoming a partner is like getting married, except that you'll spend more time at the office with us than with your husband or wife! The comparison is based more on experience than any scripture, but Ephesians 5 bears the conclusion out.

But partnership is often misunderstood. It is not equality. It is mutual sharing and mutual submission. There is no "boss," but the partnership works quite well with an orderly chain of command anyway. The system is a meritocracy. The partner with the ability to handle employees handles employees. The partner with the ability to work hard and generate revenues does so. The partner with the ability to deal with our bank does so. Who is the boss? It depends on what the problem is. The other partners are often required to participate in a decision, but there is not time in the day to participate in them all. And when all the partners must participate, they do so under the leadership of the partner who has the most experience or skill as to the matter under consideration.

The same is true in marriage. Who decides what's for supper? Who decides what the children are to wear? Who decides what bills to pay? Who decides when the kitchen is clean enough? To hear some traditionalistic authors tell it, the husband decides

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<sup>72</sup> While the command of one flesh is found in Genesis 2 and was spoken by Adam before the Fall of Man, the statement that men are to leave father and mother and cleave to their wives is a comment written by Moses, the author of Genesis, in the nature of commentary on "one flesh." Clearly, Adam was not expected to leave his father and mother! Thus, the reference to men leaving their parents was written and speaks to the time after the Fall of Man and the curse of Creation by God.

everything but may in his benevolent discretion delegate some of this authority to his subservient wife. That is simply not what Ephesians 5 says. The husband gives up his dominion and becomes one with his wife. Decisions are not made by domination or even consensus or agreement. They are made in the most biblical of all ways, based on to whom God has given gifts.

As radical as this may seem to some readers, it is nothing new or strange at all. It is how healthy marriages work. Any marriage that works differently is seriously dysfunctional. Frankly, we are very fortunate that most Christians base their marriages on their love and respect for one another—and what works—and not on the theorizing of our theologians.

And this explains very nicely Paul's command that husbands present their wives "holy and blameless." Remember that Paul explicitly refers back to the Genesis 2 account of Adam and Eve before their sin as the ideal for Christian marriage. Any marriage that is based on dominion of one spouse over the other is a corrupt marriage, suffering from the corruption that all Creation suffers from—sin! Christians are called to leave the corruption of the sinful world, and our marriages are included. If we do not do so, we take the holiest of all human relationships and make it wicked. The husband, therefore, is called on to give up his dominion and become one flesh, to rid his marriage of sin, and to present his wife unsullied from the curse of Eve.

Moreover, just as stated in Genesis 3, if the husband demands domination, then he makes his wife a sinner, because her desire will be to rule the husband. Women deeply resent male domination. Consider the wide-ranging sympathy that many women feel for Lorena Bobbitt, for the many battered wives who have killed their husbands, and for the many other women who have taken cruel vengeance on their domineering husbands! A husband may well be able to dominate his wife and even destroy her self-esteem, but the relationship will never be a happy one, even if commanded by the preacher from the pulpit.

**Christ's example of submission.** But there is more. We can learn much more about husbands and wives from those passages that tell us what Jesus did for the church. Paul plainly states that men are to be unto their wives as Christ is unto the church—in terms of Christ's sacrifice. Paul tells us plainly which aspect of Christ's relationship with the church he has in mind. It is the sacrifice of Christ. We cannot add to Paul by suggesting that Paul also had the Lordship of Christ in mind. Paul just doesn't say that.

The better we understand our Savior, the better we will understand how husbands are to relate to their wives.

(Phil. 2:1-11) If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being

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one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This familiar passage is obviously parallel to Paul's exhortation to husbands in Ephesians 5. Although this passage is about Christ and the church, we can learn much about husbands and wives by taking the same passage and applying the lessons to husbands just as Paul instructs in Ephesians.

Paul begins with instructions on Christian unity. He then explains that Christ Himself is the best example of the attitude that we should have. Thus, when we emulate Christ, we are fulfilling the command to unity. Equivalently, the command of unity, being a command to be like Christ in His sacrificial life, is also a description of how husbands should treat their wives.

Pursuing Paul's analogy, we find that Paul first says that Christ and the church (metaphorically, husbands and wives) should be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and in purpose. The emphasis on unity fits perfectly the principle of "one flesh." Paul then instructs husbands and wives to have no selfish ambition or vain conceit. Selfishness is plainly the opposite of the one flesh that spouses are called to. Indeed, Paul says that husbands and wives should each consider the other better than himself or herself.

This is the answer to the old question of who should be the boss. The answer is that the wife should consider the husband better than her—but the husband must consider the wife better than himself! Neither can claim superiority. But there is a very important limitation. While wives and husbands must look to the interests of the other, they are each commanded to also look to their own interests. Neither husbands nor wives are commanded to be doormats or to be consumed by the ego and personality of the other spouse. Each has rights as an individual and is entitled to insist on them. Both spouses are entitled to insist on a full measure of self-esteem and personhood.

Paul then uses Jesus as the ultimate example of how Christians should live. Christ chose to give up His superior position. He decided that his superior role was not something to be “grasped,” meaning literally, to be “greedily clung to.” Instead, Jesus chose to take on the form of a servant. Just so, in the world, husbands can, by force of their greater physical size and strength and by leaning on a male-biased culture, dominate their wives. And yet husbands are called to give up their “natural” dominance and take on the role of a servant. If Jesus could do it, then we husbands are not too good to do so.

Paul then explains the consequence of Jesus’ taking on the form of a servant—crucifixion! And this is very same point made by Paul in Ephesians 5. Jesus was willing to die for the church. Husbands must die for their wives. His point is in the nature of Romans 12:1, which tells Christians to offer themselves to Jesus as living sacrifices. Husbands must do the same for their wives.

Another relevant passage is also familiar, but the application to husbands is perhaps unconventional. Nonetheless, in Ephesians 5 Paul tells husbands to emulate Christ’s servanthood, and John 13 gives us an excellent lesson in this.

(John 13:1-5) It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

The most interesting point is found in the second sentence of the second paragraph in the word “so.” We naturally conclude that Jesus knew that He was ruler of the universe, and despite this, he chose to wash His disciples’ feet. But that’s not right! The Bible doesn’t say that Jesus did what he did “despite” who He is. He washed their feet (including the feet of Judas Iscariot!) *because* He rules the universe! How amazing!

The application is this: the greater a husband thinks that he is, the stronger, the more intelligent, the more stable, or the more mature, the more he has a duty to become his wife’s servant. Husbands, if you are perfect, so perfect that God would give you the entire universe as your private kingdom, you would be just the sort of person who would

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volunteer to wash Judas Iscariot's feet. Thus, we husbands are caught in a perfect trap. The more we think that we're entitled to dominate, the more plain is our duty to serve.<sup>73</sup>

Some would argue that the foregoing interpretation fails to properly take into account the command that women submit to their husbands. But I have no dispute with Paul's teaching at all. Rather, my disagreement is with those who fail to take into account the command that a husband must "give himself up" for his wife as Christ gave Himself up for the church. We too readily read over this command and falsely assume that husbands are to be like Christ as Kings and Lawgivers. This shallow interpretation is not only contradictory to Ephesians 5, but it also misunderstands the nature of our Savior. Jesus did not come to earth, take the form of a servant, and give Himself up to become a lawgiver—He did these things to free us from law:

(John 8:32) "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

(Rom. 8:1-2) Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

(Gal. 5:1) It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

(Heb. 2:14-15) Since the children have flesh and blood, [Christ] too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Nothing in Ephesians 5 even remotely suggests that the role of husbands is to dominate their wives. Our role is to free our wives from the dominion of sin—to present them "holy and blameless," unspotted from the curse on the Creation.

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<sup>73</sup> These points rely heavily on lessons taught by Prof. Randy Harris, David Lipscomb University, in February 1994. Prof. Harris was speaking of the church, and the application to marriage is my own.

CHAPTER VII  
1 PETER 3—CO-HEIRS OF GRACE

We next note 1 Peter 2:11-3:7, a passage very similar to Ephesians 5:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. *Submit yourselves* for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. *Show proper respect to everyone*: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

*Slaves, submit yourselves* to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

*Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands* so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own

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husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

*Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*

In the next-to-last paragraph, Peter commands wives of non-Christians to be submissive to their husbands. More precisely, wives of non-Christians are to submit in the same way that slaves are to submit to brutal masters. Does God command masters of slaves to beat them or treat them unjustly? Hardly. A command to submit does not mean that the relationship being submitted to is just or sinless. Thus, the command for a wife to submit to her non-Christian husband “so that they may be won over” does not condone dominance of a marriage by the husband.

Peter’s allusion to Sarah calling Abraham “master” doesn’t change this conclusion (Gen. 18:12). Sarah and Abraham hardly had an “Ozzie and Harriet” marriage. Recall Sarah’s lack of faith in God’s promise evidenced by having Abraham father a son by the handmaiden Hagar (Gen. 16:1-4), Sarah’s abuse of Hagar after the birth of Ishmael (Gen. 16:6), and her laughter at the Lord’s promise of a son and her lie in denying it (Gen. 18:10-15). Sarah hardly suits our stereotype of submission.

Peter uses Sarah as an example of how a wife is to live with a *non-Christian* husband. Peter may well have had Abraham’s sins against Sarah in mind. He twice allowed his wife to be taken into the harem of a local king (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18)—not the sort of conduct that most women would easily forgive. And where the husband is not a Christian, Sarah’s submission to Abraham’s at-times outrageous behavior is an appropriate example indeed. When the husband is not a Christian, Peter cannot command him to become one flesh with his wife. Rather, the wife must make do in an unequal relationship, and Peter’s counsel is wise and consistent with what has been said before.

But Peter takes a very different tone toward Christian husbands. He doesn’t tell them to claim the throne that God gave them in Eden. He says be considerate “in the same way.” “In the same way” clearly refers to the command to slaves to submit to their masters, the example of Christ’s submissive suffering, and the command to wives to submit to their husbands. Peter’s command to husbands is to be submissive. Yield to the needs of your wife, he commands. He then says to recognize that your wife is a co-heir of salvation.

The term “co-heirs” is poorly translated in the NIV as “heirs with you.” The term literally refers to two people who each simultaneously inherit the same property from a

deceased parent.<sup>74</sup> The term is one of equality—equal legal rights to the same shared piece of property. It is also a very precise term. 1 Peter is considered to be written in some of the best Greek in the New Testament. The author is noted for his expertise in language. This choice is no mistake. Moreover, we must remember that under the Law of Moses, daughters generally could not inherit from their parents—only sons.<sup>75</sup> Thus, Peter is declaring a dramatic change—women can be heirs just the same as men!

Peter also describes women as the “weaker partner.” Certainly Peter did not have moral character or intelligence in mind. Clearly, he was referring to the physical distinctions between the sexes. In fact, it has often been the greater size and strength of men that made it possible for men to take such a dominant role in society and in their marriages. Peter says to men: “While your size and strength may allow you to dominate your wife, to do so would be sin. Her weakness compels you to be considerate and to honor her as a fellow, not an inferior.” No other interpretation is fair to the command to treat the wife as a fellow heir of grace.

Peter says that being a co-heir of grace has significance beyond just access to salvation—it affects how we should treat one another. Thus, Peter tells us that mutual submission is a necessary consequence of equal access to salvation.

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<sup>74</sup> “A joint heir, co-inheritor,” W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, page 212.

<sup>75</sup> Num. 27:1-8. Daughters inherited only if there were no sons.

### CHAPTER VIII 1 CORINTHIANS 7—SEX AND THE MARRIED CHRISTIAN

Many good Christians argue from 1 Timothy 2:12<sup>76</sup> that women can have no authority over a man and no wife may have authority over her husband. But Paul explains the relationship of a husband and wife very differently in 1 Corinthians 7:

(1 Cor. 7:1-7) Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.

Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.

Notice first how carefully Paul treats husbands and wives exactly the same.<sup>77</sup> There is no distinction in this passage. And notice the application of the Genesis 2 principle. While Paul does not mention Genesis or the Law, what better example is there of the ideal of a husband and wife being one flesh? The wife's body does not belong to her alone, and neither does the husband's body belong to him alone. Each has given up so much of themselves that even their bodies belong to the other!

Does this mean that the wife has authority over the husband? Absolutely! He may not deny her his marital obligation, and she has authority over his body! In the most intimate of biblical passages, there is not a hint of subordination or submission, other than *mutual* submission. This is what "one flesh" means, but we understand rightly that one flesh involves much more than sex. Rather, a mutually submissive sexual relationship must be the product of a mutually submissive relationship at all other levels.

The critical points are these. First, Paul goes to great lengths to point out that wives and husbands have an identical duty to the other. The one flesh principle is

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<sup>76</sup> 1 Tim. 2:12 "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."

<sup>77</sup> We will not consider the rest of chapter 7 in detail, but the remainder of the chapter continues Paul's precise language treating men and women equally.

## **1 Corinthians 7—Sex and the Married Christian**

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perfectly symmetrical. The duty owed by one is necessarily owed by the other—a concept dramatically contrary to both Jewish and Greek culture of the day. Second, there is no reference to the curse of Eve still being in effect. Men aren't allowed to dominate their wives. Rather, each has the same rights—but without being the same.

### CHAPTER IX 1 CORINTHIANS 11—THE HEAD OF THE WOMAN IS THE MAN

The first part of 1 Corinthians 11, dealing with veils, hair length, and such, is a puzzlement. No, “puzzlement” is not strong enough. This chapter is a consternation. Commentator after commentator throws up his hands in frustration at trying to reach a clear sense of Paul’s meaning. Our respect for inspiration and the brilliant Paul is too great to even imagine that Paul was unclear to his readers in Corinth, but today the chapter is indeed very challenging—and it is challenging to those who take any position on the women’s issues. It is not made hard by my view of things. It is just hard.

(1 Cor. 11:2-16) I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

*Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.

*For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.*

*In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.*

Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering.

If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

**What is a “head”?** For our purposes, the most important portions of this scripture are those dealing directly with the relationship of men and women. Paul begins by

## 1 Corinthians 11—The Head of the Woman is the Man

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pointing out that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. This statement is puzzling, in that nowhere else do we see the Bible refer to Christ as the head of man as opposed to woman. Certainly, if by “head” Paul means “Lord,” then Christ is the head of both men and women. A woman does not need a man to serve as mediator between her and Christ.

**“Source.”** As mentioned earlier with respect to Ephesians 5, the Greeks did not use *kephale* or “head” in quite the same way as 21st Century Americans. While *kephale* occasionally took the meaning “ruler,” this was not the normal or usual sense. Indeed, it appears that there was no well-established idiomatic usage of “head.” In modern English, we use “head” so often to mean ruler or leader that we forget that we are using a metaphor. The Greeks also used the word metaphorically, but the metaphor was not nearly so standardized. The meaning must therefore always be taken from the context.

Moreover, as much as we’d like to do so, we can’t turn over to Ephesians to determine the meaning of “head” in 1 Corinthians 11, because this chapter was written many years before Ephesians was written—and to different people. The Corinthian church members could not turn to Ephesians to interpret Paul’s meaning, and so we must resist the temptation to do so.

One use of “head” found in then contemporary Greek literature is “source,” much as we speak of a river’s “headwaters” today. The sense of “source” certainly can fit the verses themselves. The commentators hotly debate this, and it is true that “source” was not a common metaphor in First Century Greek. But there are precedents for “source.” Indeed, the nature of metaphors is that there doesn’t have to be a precedent. We all freely coin metaphors all the time. The only test is whether the context makes the meaning of the metaphor clear to the original readers.

The Bible speaks of God “begetting” Christ (John 3:16; Acts 13:33; Col. 1:15).<sup>78</sup> Christ is pictured in the New Testament as the immediate Creator (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and hence as the source of Adam. And Eve was made from Adam’s rib.

Verses 8-9 also build an argument based on the source of woman.

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

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<sup>78</sup> Some confuse this concept with Arianism, as though God being the source of Christ would make Christ a created being, rather than co-eternal with God. But Heb. 1:3 refers to Christ as the “radiance” or “effulgence” (RSV) of God’s glory. The radiance is the shining brightness that surrounds a light—imagine a picture of a candle with a flame in the middle and a glow around the flame. The glow is the radiance. The radiance clearly finds its source in the light and yet is as old as the light. If the candle has been burning forever, the radiance has been around the flame forever.

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The use of “head” as “source” is reinforced by verses 11-12:

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

Clearly, this passage extends the thought in verses 3, 8, and 9 in terms of the source or origin of man and woman. Plainly, Paul’s argument hinges on the notion of man as the source of woman and woman as the source of man.

**“Ruler.”** There is also limited support in First Century Greek literature for “head” to be used of a ruler. While there is clear support for “head” to mean source in 1 Corinthians 11, is there language in 1 Corinthians 11 referring to the head as a ruler? (obviously, other than the word “head” itself—we can’t argue in circles!)

Verse 9 states that woman was created “for man,” while man was not created for woman. But we have already studied the Creation accounts. Clearly, the reference to woman being created for man recalls that Eve was created as Adam’s complement.

But God did not give Adam *rule* over Eve until He cursed the Creation. Therefore, Eve’s being created “for” Adam—before the curse—cannot be interpreted as making Adam her ruler—or as making men rule women. It means, rather, that Eve (and any wife) is to make up what is lacking in her husband, since it is not good for man to be alone. Moreover, as man’s complement and helper, woman must not bring shame to man.

Verse 10 states, in the NIV, that a woman is to have a “sign of authority on her head.” But “sign of” is absent in the Greek and has been added by the translators. The KJV is more literal in translating that the woman must have “power on” her head. As noted by Mark C. Black, assistant professor of the New Testament at David Lipscomb University,<sup>79</sup>

Another possible reading would translate “the woman has to exercise control (*exousia*) over her head,” and therefore does not directly refer to the head-covering at all. Because of the creation principles (8-9) and because of the angels (10), she must behave correctly with regard to her head (which of course means wearing the covering).<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the reference to “authority” in verse 10 is the woman’s exercise of authority, not the man’s. Since the woman is never referred to as a head but is referred to as exercising authority, “head” does not mean one with authority in this passage.

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<sup>79</sup> “1 Cor. 11:2-16—A Re-investigation,” pages 208-210, published in Osburn, editor, *Essays on Women*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, page 210, footnote 79.

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More traditionally, “authority” has been interpreted as the veil itself, the idea being that the veil is symbolic of the husband’s authority over the wife or the authority of a woman to be in public while veiled. However, the suggestion that “authority” is the woman’s own authority makes the best sense because it is consistent with the fundamental notion that Christians have freedom coupled with responsibility not to use their freedom to harm others. This thought is the essence of Paul’s teachings.

Moreover, there are serious difficulties with interpreting “head” as ruler. Jesus, at least while on earth, was subordinate to His Father’s will. Men are subordinate to Christ. And so, one might argue, the meaning is that women must be subordinate to men. But Paul says that God “is” the head of Christ, long after Jesus announced, “All authority has been given to me on heaven and on earth” due to His resurrection (Matt. 28:18). Thus, the relationship between God and Christ at the time 1 Corinthians was written was one where God had yielded “all authority.” Paul is not speaking of what Christ’s relationship with God was before His glorification.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, we cannot impose especially on women the example of Christ while on earth as a servant learning obedience. Indeed, as we’ve already seen, Christ’s example of service and obedience is particularly applied to *husbands* in Ephesians 5.

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<sup>81</sup> Paul deals with the same subject later in 1 Corinthians:

(15:23) But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign *until* he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, *then* the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

We see that Paul makes clear that Christ’s authority does not extend to God Himself and that the authority of Christ is temporary until He has truly extended His authority over all things, with the last step being the conquest of death itself. The resurrected Christ is not pictured as being “subject to” God until death is conquered. Thus, we are in a period during which Christ has been given rule over the universe while not subject to God (except, of course, in the sense the Christ and God are One).

A similar conclusion may be drawn from Phil. 2:5-11, where Christ is said to have been equal with God before He came to earth (v. 6). Following Christ’s return to heaven, God “exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.” How could Christ be higher now than He was before His incarnation—when He was already equal with God? If we understand Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 15 correctly, Christ has been given complete rule over the universe, not subordinate to God until the entire history of the Creation is finished.

Obviously, such considerations are very difficult and confusing, especially when we consider Christ and God as One and yet two persons. Their relationship is far beyond human understanding and very dimly expressed in mortal language. And yet we see clearly enough that comparing the relationship of men and women to the present relationship of God and Christ hardly argues for women as either inferior or subordinate.

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Thus, both men and women, husbands and wives must follow Christ's example of sacrificial living, and the comparison of men and women to God and Christ no more justifies male domination over women than Paul's command in Ephesians that husbands follow Christ's example justifies wives dominating their husbands. Both passages make the same point—we must submit to one another just as Jesus gave Himself up for the church.

Moreover, the headship of men no more means that women are inferior to men or may be dominated by men than the headship of God means that Christ is inferior to or dominated by God. In fact, it would seem to plainly teach that the relationship of men and women is much like the relationship of God and Christ. They have different roles. They take on different responsibilities. But they are equal. And they are One!

(John 10:30) "I and the Father are one."

(John 17:20-21) "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, *just as you are in me and I am in you*. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

In John 17 we see Jesus praying that *all Christians be one* in the same way that He and God are one. It would be remarkable indeed if Jesus intended that husbands and wives be *less* united than Christians in general! Whatever Paul meant with regard to the headship of God and the headship of men, it must be considered in light of the relationship of the resurrected Christ and God the Father. This relationship is so close that we refer to them as God in One Person. Moreover, we refer to them as equals and as being of the same essence. *This* is the Bible's pattern for the relationship of husbands and wives.

Some commentators argue that because the relationship of men and women is like the relationship of God and Christ, women can be subordinate and equal simultaneously. Jesus was obedient to God while on earth, and this arguably demonstrates that Jesus could be equal with God while being subordinate to God. But Philippians 2:6-11, which we've previously studied, teaches that Jesus had to *give up* equality in order to be obedient (verses 6-8)! God and Christ are equal—now, but not while Jesus was on earth, as the author of Hebrews says, "learning obedience" (Heb. 5:8). But in 1 Corinthians 11, written when Jesus had already been glorified and His equality with God had been re-established, Paul was explicitly referring to the relationship that God has with Christ *after* the resurrection and glorification of Christ.

But the difficulty of interpreting "head" as ruler goes much deeper. First, if man is the ruler of woman, then this is the first time in the entire Bible that this doctrine appears. In Genesis 3:16, wives are cursed with the domination of their *husbands*, but women are

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not subjected to men in general.<sup>82</sup> And if men are to rule women, just what is the extent and nature of this kind of headship? Does it apply to the workplace? Home? Church? Friendships? And just what service may men command from women? To what extent must your daughters submit to whatever man they should happen across?

The difficulty is this: While many fine and studious Christians have concluded that men are the heads of women—meaning rulers of women—these same Christians cannot agree what this means in practice or in theory. By interpreting “head” as ruler, these commentators impose a doctrine with boundaries that cannot be found in the pages of scripture. It is as though God has told us just enough of His will for us to know that there is a rule, without knowing what the rule is! Each hierarchalist commentator seems to reach different conclusions as to where to draw the lines. Some frankly admit that they don’t know where the lines are but insist that there be lines limiting a woman’s role somewhere. Finding these lines thus becomes an exercise in human wisdom and bias rather than biblical exegesis.<sup>83</sup>

Some would limit the impact of this headship to just the explicit passages dealing with men and women: women can’t be elders, can’t speak in the assembly, can’t teach, can’t usurp authority—but this approach begs the question. What is the male authority that cannot be usurped? Can women teach teenage boys? What if the boys have been baptized? We simply have no guidance without a unifying principle.

Others would find these to be but examples of a larger principle—the universal principle of male leadership. But they are unable to agree or prove from the Bible just what this principle is. And thus such persons find themselves construing the command of male dominion over women to suit their personal prejudices but with very little in the way of biblical support for the particulars and boundaries of their doctrine.

The 21st Century notion of a biblical principle of “male leadership” is often pronounced by hierarchalists, but the verses they rely on fail to support a leadership principle. Thus, Genesis 3:16 declares that husbands *rule* their wives, not that they just lead them. 1 Peter 3:6 urges women to emulate Sarah by calling their non-Christian husbands “master” or “lord,” much stronger words than “leader.” The Greek language studies regarding translating “head” support “ruler,” as a possible but not necessary meaning—not “leader.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, finding “leadership” in contrast to “rule” in the New Testament is a 21st Century bias not found in scripture.

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<sup>82</sup> (Gen. 3:16) “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your *husband*, and he will rule over you.’”

<sup>83</sup> Theological term meaning to extract truth from scripture rather than reading our biases into scripture.

<sup>84</sup> The only example of the Septuagint translators using *kephale* as “ruler” is found in Judges 11:11, where Jephthah is declared “head and commander” over the people. Here, “head” clearly means “ruler,” not

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**Conclusions regarding “head” as “source” or “ruler.”** Thus, we find—

(1) that there is support both in contemporary Greek and in the context of chapter 11 for “head” to mean source;

(2) that “source” is suggested by Ephesians 4:15-16, where Christ as “head” is pictured as the source of growth or nourishment of the church, as “body.”

(3) that while “head” conventionally means “ruler” in today’s English, this was not true in First Century Greek unless compelled by the context;

(4) that there is nothing in 1 Corinthians 11 outside the word “head” that suggests that men are to rule women;

(5) that imposing the meaning of ruler on “head” leads to serious theological difficulties, such as (a) making men and women, husbands and wives less united than Christians in general, who are commanded to submit to one another, to be united, to be of one mind, and to consider others as more important than self; and (b) creating a doctrine that has undefined boundaries (for example, does it apply in the workplace? on a date?); and

(6) that we cannot bail out of the difficulties of calling husbands rulers by recharacterizing their role with the euphemism “leader.”

This is quite enough reason to conclude that the correct reading of “head” in verse 3 is source. The meaning is clearly not ruler.

### **A. An alternative interpretation of “head” in 1 Corinthians 11**

I suggest the following alternative interpretation of “head” with some trepidation. I don’t believe that any commentator has ever made this proposal, and one should walk lightly when trying to be the first in nearly 2,000 years of scriptural exposition to propose a new idea. But I see another possible meaning for “head” in the context of 1 Corinthians 11 worthy of consideration.

**“Image.”** In verses 7-9 of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul states that man is the image and glory of God, and woman is the glory of man. Surely, this is a reference to the Genesis accounts. Genesis 1:26 plainly states that the Godhead made *both* man and woman in their image. And yet God made Adam first, in His image, and then made Eve from Adam’s rib. Eve was also made in God’s image, and so Paul does not state that woman was made in the “image” of man. Rather, she was made as the glory of man. Certainly, the fact that woman was made in God’s image, as was man, does not argue for the

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just leader, due to Jephthah being made head “over” the people. Thus, the only Septuagint passage that supports “head” as ruler does not support “leader” as a possible meaning.

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subordination of women (except in the sense that all Christians are to be in submission to all other Christians).<sup>85</sup>

Now Paul does not say so in chapter 11, but he states in a number of other places that Christ is the image of God:

(2 Cor. 4:4) The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

(Col. 1:15) [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Thus, we see that Christ is the image of God and man is the image of Christ.<sup>86</sup> Just what did “image” mean when 1 Corinthians was written?

In an account appearing in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus uses *eikon*, the Greek word translated “image” in 1 Corinthians 11, in an instructive way:

(Matt. 22:16-22) They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. “Teacher,” they said, “we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose *portrait* is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

“Portrait” translates *eikon*. An “image” was simply a portrait, especially one made by engraving as on a coin. Certainly, the word could be used in a broader sense, but the most literal definition of *eikon* is a portrait.<sup>87</sup> And a portrait is a representation of what? A

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<sup>85</sup> Eph. 5:21.

<sup>86</sup> See also 1 Cor. 15:49. “Likeness” in the NIV translates *eikon*, translated “image” in 1 Cor. 11.

<sup>87</sup> “The word *eikon*—sometimes in its diminutive form *eikonion*—was the word which was used for a *portrait* in Greek. ... It is the nearest thing to our modern word *photograph*.” William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia 1959), page 142.

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head. Thus, if I'm metaphorically your image, then you're metaphorically my head. The closest English equivalent I can think of is "model." If I'm your image, you're my model.

We haven't yet come far enough to be confident of this conclusion, and I readily concede that it would not be standard English usage. After all, "head" in English connotes "ruler," and this is a thought that is very foreign to being the source of an image.

**"Glory."** To test this theory, we must look at the meaning of "glory." Like image, "glory" is a word rich with theological meaning. The glory of God first appears while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness. It represented the presence of God Himself:

(Exo. 24:15-18) When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the *glory* of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the *glory* of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

When the Israelites finished the tabernacle, the glory of God descended to dwell in the Holy of Holies:

(Exo. 40:33-35) Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the *glory* of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the *glory* of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

God then began to speak to Moses from within the cloud of glory "face to face."

(Exo. 33:10-11) Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD would speak to Moses *face to face*, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.<sup>88</sup>

In the Psalms 8:3-5 we again see glory associated with the head or face, with glory being pictured as a crown surrounding the head:

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<sup>88</sup> The same thought is found in Deut. 5:4, "The LORD spoke to you *face to face* out of the fire on the mountain."

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When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and *crowned* him with *glory* and honor.

The picture is that glory is much like a halo, being a radiant presence surrounding the head.

In the account of the Transfiguration, we see that Luke places emphasis on the face of Jesus as showing His glory:

(Luke 9:28-32) About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his *face* changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his *glory* and the two men standing with him.

In one of the Bible's most lyrical passages, Paul associates the image of God with God's glory. Paul states that God glorifies (brings into the presence of His glory, that is, heaven) those whom God has conformed to the likeness (*eikon*, or image) of Christ. Thus, all Christians are re-made by God in the image of Christ, and so they ultimately partake of God's glory.

(Rom. 8:29-30) For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the *likeness* [image] of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also *glorified*.

The same thought appears in 1 Corinthians:

(15:42-49) So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in *glory*; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we

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have borne the *likeness* [*eikon*] of the earthly man, so shall we bear the *likeness* [*eikon*] of the man from heaven.

Among Paul's points is the idea that Christians shed the image of Adam (the earthly man) and replace it with the image of Christ (the man from heaven). By taking on the image of Christ, we will be raised in glory, that is, in the presence of God where His glory dwells.

(2 Cor. 4:4-6) The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the *glory* of Christ, who is the *image* of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the *glory of God in the face of Christ*.

Once again, Paul associates "image" with "glory" and with "face." Here, we are told that Christ is the image of God. Accordingly, the glory of God shines forth in the face of Christ. Logically, then, we would expect that Christians, who are the image of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3), would show forth the glory of Christ in their faces.

And as we read earlier in the Psalms, glory is sometimes pictured as a radiant crown surrounding the head:

(1 Pet. 5:4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the *crown of glory* that will never fade away.

We see the glory of God repeatedly connected with the face or head, such as the face of Christ, the face of Moses, the face of all Christians, or a head crowned with glory. "Glory" is thus pictured in the Bible as much like the halos that we see around the heads of "saints" in much Christian art.<sup>89</sup>

And so we see that the Bible repeatedly associates "image" and "glory" with the head or face. Moreover, except for the relationship of women to men (which we've not yet considered in this context), we see that the relationship God:Christ:Man is a relationship that follows image and glory. Christ is both the image and glory of God. Man is both the image and glory of Christ (as well as God). Therefore, since Paul describes the same relationship in terms of "head," we see that God as Christ's "head," and Christ as man's "head" is simply the reverse of Christ as God's glory and image and man as Christ's glory and image.

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<sup>89</sup> Paul could have begun 1 Corinthians 11 referring to each person's "face" rather than "head," but this would not have made the point he was intending to make regarding veils. As Black points out, the "veil" worn in First Century Corinth did not cover the face, but rather was more of a hood, extending the fabric of a cloak up the back of the neck and over the top of the head, covering primarily the hair—but not the face (unlike the veil worn in Muslim lands today).

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**Moses' veil and the glory of God.** Perhaps the key passage to understanding 1 Corinthians 11 is found in Exodus, where we see an association between God's glory, the face, and a veil:

(Exo. 34:29-35) When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them.

Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai. When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a *veil* over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, *he removed the veil* until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

This may well be the passage that Paul had in mind in his teachings in 1 Corinthians 11. We see that Moses removed his veil when talking to God. Paul may well be reasoning that if Moses considered it appropriate to remove his head covering when speaking to God, the same rule should hold true when Christian men address God.

This passage is the basis for Paul's teachings in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

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Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of the account of Moses' face becoming radiant from being in the presence of the glory of God. Paul says that all Christians also reflect the glory of God due to the workings of the Holy Spirit within us. But Moses' glory was temporary and faded away. He even wore a veil to hide the fading of his glory. But the Christian's glory is not only permanent, it is ever increasing.

The idea behind this passage is surely very much the idea behind 1 Corinthians 11. Christians reflect the glory of Christ. Because our glory is greater than Moses', being permanent and ever increasing, we should not veil the glory when speaking with God, but should boldly speak with unveiled faces. In fact, one advantage of this interpretation is that it explains why concern for someone's metaphorical "head" affects what one wears (or doesn't wear) on one's literal head. This aspect of 1 Corinthians 11 has puzzled commentators, but if Paul is urging us to follow Moses' example of speaking to God without a veil, the metaphor makes sense.

**Why does Paul treat women differently from men?** The difficulty that this interpretation leaves is why should women be veiled when men should not? While the doctrines of man being in the image of God and Christ and of Christians sharing in the glory of Christ are well documented, why are women treated differently from men? After all, women Christians are just as much in the image of God and just as reflective of the glory of God as men! Paul's explanation is in verses 7-9:

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

Paul is referring the Genesis 2, where Eve was made as a suitable complement for Adam. Paul does not refer to woman as the image of man, because Genesis 1:26 plainly states that she is made in the image of God ("our image"—which includes Christ's image, too). But Paul concludes that woman is nonetheless the glory of man because Eve was made "from" Adam, and Eve was made "for" Adam.

(1 Cor. 11:10) For this reason, ... the woman ought to have [control over] her head.

Thus, Paul concludes that woman's role as suitable complement to her husband requires her to exercise control over her literal head.

(1 Cor. 11:13-16) Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you ... that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone

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wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

Paul reasons that since a woman must exercise authority or control over her head in a manner consistent with her role as a suitable complement to her husband, she must wear long hair and must have her head covered while praying to God. Why?

The reasons that Paul gives are “the very nature of things” and “we have no other practice.” In verse 5 he stated that she would “dishonor her head,” meaning dishonor her husband, by violating these directives. Indeed, in verse 6 Paul declares that to do otherwise would be a “disgrace.” These statements by Paul are references to the expectations of other people, that is, culture. Paul doesn’t say that failing to wear a head covering would be a violation of God’s eternal command regarding head coverings; rather, he sees such a failure as a violation of propriety and convention.

Black makes the point that Jewish women were expected to wear head coverings, regardless of where they were in the Roman Empire.<sup>90</sup> The Jews formed the core of many, if not most, congregations at the time 1 Corinthians was written,<sup>91</sup> and many church practices were borrowed from Jewish synagogue practice—not necessarily as doctrine but as a convenient standard of behavior that would not offend the Jewish members.

As to the two other major cultures that made up Corinthian society (as well as the society of the eastern Roman Empire in general), the Greeks and the Romans, Black comments:

Though we cannot be sure, the evidence seems to favor the position that in Corinth, women in the marketplace would often be covered, and in religious contexts they would usually be covered. All that can be stated with assurance, however, is that “the wearing of a head-covering by an adult woman (especially in ritual context) was a traditional practice known to Jews, Greeks, and Roman.”

If we look ahead to 1 Corinthians 14:35, we again see Paul’s particular concern for the sensibilities of the Jews in the role of women. After restricting women as to their speech in the assembly, Paul states:

1 Cor. 14:33b-34a, 36 As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. ... Did the word of

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<sup>90</sup> Black, *ibid*, page 204.

<sup>91</sup> Most commentators consider 1 Corinthians to be among Paul’s earliest writings, dated to around 53 or 54 AD, early enough that the churches still had a Jewish core of members, if not a majority Jewish membership.

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God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

Of course, the word of God originated not with the Corinthians but with the Jews in Judea, and it reached the Jewish people first. This is a plain reference to the sensibilities of the Jewish members with respect to the role of women, and the language is remarkably similar to 1 Corinthians 11:16:

1 Cor. 11:16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

Thus, we see that there are eternal principles involved. Christian men and women are made in the image of God and Christ. Christ is the image and glory of God. Christian men and women are the image of God and Christ. And Christian wives are the complements for and, therefore, the glory of their husbands.

And being someone's glory has significance, demonstrated throughout the Bible. For example, God's glory radiantly and powerfully showed forth the very presence of God. Indeed, God spoke and acted by the means of His glory. By declaring that Christ is God's glory, Paul tells us that God speaks and acts through Christ and that the words and actions of Christ bring praise to God.

Thus, the fact that Christians are the glory of God and Christ means that the Godhead speaks and acts through all Christians (through the Spirit's indwelling).<sup>92</sup> Therefore, Christians bring glory (or shame) to God by their actions and by how they exercise the authority and control over themselves that God has given them.

In the ordinary circumstance, Christians do not wear head coverings when speaking with God. Moses uncovered his face when speaking with God, even though his glory was an inferior, temporary, fading glory.<sup>93</sup> But our glory as Christians is permanent and increasing—not fading. Therefore, we should boldly show forth God's glory—not only in public but especially when addressing God in prayer. If Moses' relationship with God was such that he spoke to God with an uncovered head, then Christians have much less reason to cover their heads. Head covering evidently showed not respect so much as unworthiness—hiding one's face or head from God. Christians have no reason to hide.

But this is far from an absolute rule. While there is important symbolism in this practice, and while it reminds us of our intimate relationship with God—we who can speak with God with more intimacy than Moses—there may be concerns that override such symbolism.

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<sup>92</sup> For example, Rom. 8:1-17; 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 3:3; 3:18; Phil. 2:12-13; Eph. 5:18-19.

<sup>93</sup> 2 Cor. 3:7-18.

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One overriding concern is the role of wives as complements to their husbands. Any practice that might appear unsubmitive or rebellious against the marriage covenant must be avoided. In the First Century, a woman having her head uncovered in a public place—especially a place of prayer—indicated to many that the woman was in rebellion to her husband—even brazenly immoral. While the symbolism may not have been universal, it was common enough that the early church had to take it into account in its practices. Therefore, women could not pray with uncovered heads without reflecting badly upon their husbands to whom they owe a duty to bring no shame, but only glory. In particular, the practice of covering a woman’s head showed respect for the sensibilities of Jewish Christians.

Accordingly, the lesson flows not from the power of men over women, but from the unity and one flesh ideal of husbands and wives. The actions of the wife reflect on the husband, for good or bad. What is perceived as a bad reflection may often be defined by the local culture, and so wives must be willing to forego some of the freedom that they otherwise enjoy in Christ for the sake of reputation.

**Reconciliation of “source” and “model.”** One further advantage of the “model” interpretation of “head” in 1 Corinthians 11 is that it shares the advantages of taking “head” to mean source. After all, the essence of the idea behind the “model” interpretation is that a person’s head is the source of the glory shown forth through that person. Thus, God is the source of Christ’s glory, thereby making Christ like a portrait of God.

**A re-translation.** Thus, we can re-translate verse 3 as follows:

3 Now I want you to realize that the *model* of every man is Christ, and the *model* of a woman is man, and the *model* of Christ is God.

or as

3 Now I want you to realize that the “head” *of which every Christian man is a crown of glory or portrait* is Christ, and the “head” *of which a woman is a crown of glory* is man, and the “head” *of which Christ is a crown of glory or portrait* is God.

Plainly, woman is modeled on man, man is modeled on Christ, and Christ is modeled on God. Just so, shameful behavior by a woman reflects badly on her husband, since she represents her husband to the world. Shameful behavior by a man reflects badly on Christ, since men are to represent Christ to world. Accordingly, any behavior considered to shamefully reflect on one’s “model” in terms of local culture is forbidden.

The balance of this passage would then be translated as follows:

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4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors *Christ*. 5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her *husband*<sup>94</sup>—it is just as though her head were shaved. 6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.

7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of *her husband*. 8 For *the husband* did not come from *the wife*, but *the wife* from *the husband*; 9 neither was *the husband* created for *the wife*, but *the wife* for *the husband*. 10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the *wife* ought to have *control over* her head.

11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not *culture* teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. 16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

**Are men and women independent?** We need to also consider verses 11-12:

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.

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<sup>94</sup> “Man,” or *aner*, can mean husband or man. The true meaning can only be determined by context, with “husband” being the more common usage in the New Testament. “Her head” becomes “her man,” which certainly would mean “her husband.” Moreover, since women are complements to their husbands, not to *all* men, any other translation would make no sense.

Some commentators protest using *aner* as both “man” and “husband” in the same passage, but Paul’s word play cannot be so limited. He uses *kephale* to refer both to a person’s literal head and to a metaphorical head, that is, to a body part and to someone to be glorified. Paul is thus changing the meaning of his words to use word plays to make or illustrate his points.

*Gune* can mean either woman or wife, and we see Paul similarly shifting meaning 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, where *gune* is translated “woman,” but requires women to ask their husbands questions at home, clearly indicating that wives are in mind. But, of course, it is improbable that Paul meant to allow single women to ask questions and prevent married women from doing so. Rather, the Greek language itself uses one word for either man or husband and for either woman or wife, and this leads to a subtle tendency in Greek writing to assume that all women and all men are married, which was typically the case but certainly not always the case.

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Paul was understandably concerned that his readers might conclude from verses 3-10 that he was teaching that men have dominion over women. He refutes this interpretation in unambiguous language. Paul had earlier pointed out that woman was made from man, thereby giving rise to a duty of wives to be complements to their husbands. But Paul points out that every man since Adam has been made by God from a woman. Indeed, in the Ten Commandments, we are all (husbands included) commanded to honor our father *and mother*. This command applies to adult children as well as under-age children.<sup>95</sup> Thus, we find that all men are commanded to submit to their mothers—that is, to a woman. Certainly, this notion contradicts the false interpretation that all women are subordinate to all men!

Moreover, Paul takes pains to place men and women in precisely equal relationship to one another. The key to understanding this verse is found in the first four words: “In the Lord, however.” This marks a contrast and a clarification of what Paul had earlier stated.

Certainly what Paul said in verses 3-10 was also said “in the Lord.” After all, Paul was reasoning from the relationship of Christians with God and Christ. By declaring that what he is about to say deals with those of us “in the Lord,” Paul is saying that he is about to announce a change from how things used to be before Christ. And Paul’s “however” indicates that Paul is contradicting a possible misunderstanding of what he’d just said. Thus, a reader might misunderstand verses 8 and 9, dealing with Adam and Eve, as referring to a husband’s rule over his wife, in Genesis 3:16. And so Paul instead goes to pains to make clear that his argument that man is the source of woman does not allow man to claim superiority over his wife.

Rather, Paul points out that the biblical role of man as source of woman is balanced by the biblical role of woman as source of man. Thus, man may not bring disgrace to woman anymore than woman may bring disgrace to man. Indeed, God is the source of all, and this relationship overwhelms any argument based on man’s relationship to woman. By not bringing disgrace to God, we also bring no disgrace to our spouses—which God made in His image.

Some commentators find that verses 11-12 soften the impact of Paul’s earlier instruction but that the verses do not eliminate the subordination of women. But Paul had earlier argued based on woman’s source—man—that women may not bring shame on their husbands. Verse 8. He also uses a source argument in verses 11-12, plainly following the same train of thought as in verse 8 and plainly intending to contrast and balance his teaching in verses 11-12 with his teaching in verse 8.

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<sup>95</sup> Mark 7:10-13.

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If the fact that a woman's source is man requires her to submit to man, then the fact that a man's source is woman just as clearly teaches that he is to submit to woman. Neither can claim independence, and thus neither can insist on dominance.

**Advantages of the proposed interpretation.** The notion that all women are subordinate to all men is foreign to the Bible taken as a whole and contradicts much within the Bible, including the account of Deborah and the command for sons to honor their mothers. Moreover, the merit of the proposed interpretation is shown by its richness. The interpretation is consistent with and digs deeply into numerous passages throughout the Bible. It delves into the doctrines of the glory of God, the image of God, the relationship of God with Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the very nature of Christ, and much more. It is consistent with the teachings of Genesis, Exodus, Judges, and Ephesians 5. Moreover, this interpretation makes Paul's commands logically drawn conclusions from the Genesis accounts—not arbitrary rules.

The notion that man is the ruler of woman cannot claim such a rich heritage. Indeed, this notion suffers the embarrassment of being best supported by God's curse on Creation, separating the Creation from God, the very act that Jesus died to undo!

## CHAPTER X SUMMARY

Thus far, while there is a great deal more to consider, we have laid a foundation and built the scaffolding for our study of the role of women in the church. When we get to the church itself, we must remember that the passages that cause such controversy must be consistent with the other passages that deal with closely related issues. Genesis 1, 2, and 3 say the same thing whether we are discussing marriage or deacons.

Genesis 2 describes the perfect marriage. Genesis 3 describes what sin does to a marriage.

Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 start with the Genesis 3 concept of marriage and correct it by calling men into a Genesis 2 relationship with their wives. This is why the Ephesians 5 spends much more time instructing men than women. It is the men who most need to change!

1 Corinthians 7 describes the relationship of men and women, how husbands and wives as Christians are to act when not limited by cultural restraints. There are no cultural limitations in the bedroom—only equality!

In 1 Peter 3 and 1 Corinthians 11 we see that the sinfulness of the world, where the curse of Eve still prevails, can sometimes place restraints on Christians who are freed from the power of the curse. Women married to non-Christians must contend with the fact that their husbands are not subject to the command for husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

The command for wives to submit—as a suitable complement—continues in effect, and this submission may take different forms in differing cultures. In the Roman Empire, it certainly affected the hair dressing, clothing, and veiling of women.

We must now take these verses and these conclusions as our guideposts as we delve into more treacherous waters.

### CHAPTER XI 1 CORINTHIANS 14—SILENCE IN THE CHURCHES

1 Corinthians 7 and 11 are not the only passages in 1 Corinthians dealing with men and women—they are not even the most controversial.

1 Cor. 14:33b-36 As in all the congregations of the saints,<sup>96</sup> women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

**Scriptural context.** Like all scripture, we must first consider the context of this passage. The following synopsis of chapters 11 through 14 will serve to set the stage:

1 Cor. 11:2 *I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings*, just as I passed them on to you. 3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

4-16 [discussion of prayer, prophecy, and head coverings]

17 *In the following directives I have no praise for you*, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18-19 [condemnation of division]

20-34 [discussion of the Lord's Supper]

12:1 *Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.* 2-30 [discussion of spiritual gifts and the unity of believers] 31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

*And now I will show you the most excellent way.* 13:1-12 [discussion contrasting faith, hope, and love to other spiritual gifts] 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

14:1 *Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts*, especially the gift of prophecy. 2-25 [spiritual gifts are good, but must edify the church when used in the assembly].

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<sup>96</sup> Osburn, in his *Women in the Church 1*, indicates that “As in all the congregations of the saints” is properly a part of the preceding sentence and that Paul’s discussion of women begins with “women should remain silent.” There was no punctuation in the original Greek, and First Century Greek was written entirely in capital letters. Scholars disagree on where this sentence begins.

26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

37 If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

This long quote shows the structure of these four chapters of 1 Corinthians. You should first notice that chapter 11 contains two general discussions—head coverings and the Lord's Supper. Paul ties them together. He introduces the first by saying, "I praise you." In clear contrast, he introduces the next section of chapter 11 by saying, "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good."<sup>97</sup>

It is possible that the lack of praise relates not only to the Lord's Supper, but also the abuses of the Spirit that are discussed in chapter 12-14. Paul says that he has no praise "in the following directives," indicating that there would be a series of critical directives. And certainly the criticisms made in chapters 12-14 fit well within Paul's pointed "your meetings do more harm than good." Chapter 14 in particular describes meetings that do more harm than good and fits Paul's words as well as Paul's discussion of the Lord's

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<sup>97</sup> KJV: "I praise you not ..."

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Supper in chapter 11. Also tying the chapters together is the theme of condemnation of division.

The point is simply this. All of chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14 are closely related discussions dealing with division and related problems in the Christian assemblies. Different particular problems are discussed, but the general theme is the same—stop sinning in your assemblies, especially the sin of division.

### A. Exposition—Introduction.

With this in mind, let's take a closer look at the passage.

“Women should remain silent.” What does this mean? As tempting as it is to say, “Means what it says; says what it means,” no thinking Christian can believe this passage really means that women must be silent during the assembly. Why not?

First, we conventionally allow women to break their silence in the assembly for any number of reasons, including:

1. Singing. We allow women to sing even when men do not accompany them. Many songs have not only female leads, but also female section solos.

2. Speaking in unison. There are many occasions where the congregation speaks in unison. Some churches say the Lord's Prayer or some other prayer in unison. Others recite scripture in unison. Some do responsive readings. In each case, the women are not silent.

3. Praying. Many of our favorite hymns are prayers. For some reason, some have fallen into the habit of omitting the “amen” at the end of such songs, but the song is a prayer nonetheless. Women sing these prayers out loud, in the presence of men, and our only justification is that the women do so to a tune. I suppose we justify it due to the commands to sing, but these commands do not command women to sing apart from the men, nor do they even require singing in the assemblies. They just say sing with other Christians. They don't say when or where.<sup>98</sup>

4. Greeting. How many times have you attended a church where the service was interrupted while the members were asked to greet one another and the visitors? Were the women required to stay silent?

5. Confessing Jesus. When a woman comes to the front to be baptized, do we make her fill out a card to say that she believes in Jesus? Or does she say it out loud? I've

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<sup>98</sup> Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16. Of course, if the general commands to sing grant women license to sing in the assembly, one might argue that the general commands to teach, preach, spread the gospel, pray, etc. would also grant women the right to obey these commands in the assembly.

never seen anyone make a candidate for baptism wait until after services or write down the answer to this question. And yet the passage says “silent.” It doesn’t say members only. It says “women.” And there is really no necessity for a confession during services. After all, we could wait until after the closing prayer. But that’s not our way.

So what’s my point? Those who insist on a strictly literal interpretation of this passage must admit that their interpretation is neither strict nor literal. I have just offered a truly literal interpretation, and yet common sense tells us that this is not what Paul meant. So while we are searching for the truth of the matter, let’s remember that no one at all occupies the “high ground” of literalness or even strictness. And while the interpretation that I will offer of this passage may not be very traditional, it is stricter and more literal than the traditionalists.

Second, the Bible’s text itself, and not our culture or tradition, raises certain questions that must be taken into account in whatever conclusion we reach:

1. 1 Corinthians 11 is a discussion of appropriate headcoverings for women while they prophesy or pray in an assembly with men present. If it is a sin for a woman to pray or prophesy in the presence of men, why didn’t Paul simply condemn the practice? If it is a sin for a woman to pray or prophesy in the presence of men, then Paul’s instructions are on the order of instructing women on what to wear while committing adultery! If it’s wrong, it’s wrong, and Paul has no business discoursing on appropriate dress during sin.<sup>99</sup>

2. There is nothing in the text that suggests that the assemblies under discussion in chapter 11 are different from those in chapter 14. As pointed out above, there is good reason to believe that the same assemblies are under consideration. After all, chapter 11 is part of the same discussion that concludes in chapter 14. But if we conclude that only one chapter is discussing the general assembly, comparable to our Sunday morning assembly, and the other is discussing some special assembly, it is much more logical to conclude that chapter 11 is discussing the general assembly since it is most closely tied to the discussion of the Lord’s Supper. Moreover, the reference to angels being present in the assembly in chapter 11:10 indicates that much more than a casual gathering is at issue. To argue, as many do, that chapter 14 deals with the Lord’s Supper assembly and chapter 11 is dealing with something more like our Sunday School classes is to ignore the textual evidence and impose our traditions on the scriptures. The argument simply has no support in the Bible.

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<sup>99</sup> Ferguson criticizes Osburn for concluding that Paul approves of women prophesying in chapter 11. “The text does not say Paul ‘approves’ of the practice.” True, but Paul would hardly spend so much effort addressing proper apparel for a practice that he disapproved. It is an absurd thought.

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3. That the assembly is in mind in chapter 11 is also plain from our own history. Until the last few decades, Church of Christ women felt compelled to wear hats (and even fashionable veils) to the assembly. If chapter 11 doesn't apply to the Sunday morning assembly, why did we require women to wear hats to such assemblies for nearly a century? I grant that the hat interpretation is false, but the assembly interpretation is actually quite sound.

And so we have what appears to be a perfect contradiction. Chapter 11 indicates that women may pray and prophesy in the presence of men in the assembly, but chapter 14 compels them to be silent in the assembly. How can both be true? How are we going to get out of this fix? And I must hasten to point out that the problem derives, not from any effort to impose modern culture on the text, but from the text itself. Commentators were struggling with this issue long before the women's liberation movement began.

We must remember that the challenge is not to come up with some theory that is merely consistent with these passages. That would be to add to the Bible. No, the true challenge is to state an interpretation of the passage that is both based on the passage and consistent with all scripture. God does not have a book of rules that is outside the Bible and that is only hinted at within its pages. Indeed, the only principles that we are accountable for are those *in* the Bible.

With these limitations in minds, let's consider how to interpret this passage:

### **B. Overriding Principles.**

Let's first remember that our relationship with God as Christians is defined by the overriding principles of love and grace. God doesn't just make up arbitrary rules and impose them on us. It is, therefore, entirely proper to ask if our usual way of reading this passage actually makes sense.

For example, if it is disgraceful and wrong for a woman to speak in the worship assembly, wouldn't it be equally disgraceful and wrong for her to speak in a Sunday School class? Most Churches of Christ prohibit female speech in the assembly but permit—and even encourage—female questions and discussion in a classroom setting. I mean, Paul was particularly clear that women are not to ask questions—but we traditionally only allow question asking in Sunday School. We don't even allow men to ask questions in the assembly! If there is some eternal principle prohibiting women from asking questions in the assembly, why not in Sunday School classes?

The distinction has often been suggested that woman are not to speak or ask questions in a "public" setting, and the Sunday School classes are said to be "private." But this is plainly wrong. We advertise our Sunday School classes to the public just like we advertise our assemblies. Our classes are in no real sense private.

Another distinction made is that, in context, Paul is addressing the assembly, not a class, as is evident from all of 1 Corinthians 11-14. And I agree that this is true, but the

answer to my question must come from more than context. It can't be *just* a rule! The question is *why* are Sunday School classes different from the assembly—if indeed they are? Why is speaking in the assembly disgraceful and speaking in a Sunday School class okay—even good?

If we can't come up with an intelligent answer to that question, we are forced to confess that we really just don't understand this command. Paul didn't just order women to remain silent. He gave reasons, and he surely meant for those reasons to be well understood by his readers.

First, Paul explains that women “must be in submission, as the Law says.” We will spend some time discussing the meaning of “the Law.” Plainly, Paul believes that asking questions in the assembly is unsubmitive. Now, I ask again, what makes a woman unsubmitive when she speaks—particularly when she asks a question—in the assembly but perfectly submissive when she asks a questions somewhere else? What “magic,” if any, does an assembly have that compels female silence?

Next, Paul states that it is “disgraceful” for a woman to “speak in the church.” Why? Must women be more submissive at church than at the workplace? More submissive in the assembly than in the foyer? Is the requirement to be submissive purely about the assembly? And how can “the Law”—surely a reference to some part of the Old Testament—create a rule for the Christian assembly that doesn't apply to other gatherings of Christians? I mean, there were no comparable assemblies in Old Testament times.<sup>100</sup>

Finally, Paul refers to the sensibilities of those from whom the “word”—meaning the gospel—originated, certainly a reference to the feelings of Jewish Christians. And what possible impact could the feelings of First Century Jewish converts have on the eternal pattern of how men and women are to relate to one another?

And what on earth does this passage have to do with love and grace? Is this just an arbitrary rule, with no real purpose, or does it somehow further the overarching command to love my neighbor?

Is Paul saying that woman are too stupid or foolish to be allowed to speak before a large group? Surely not! And besides, why allow women to speak in a class of 100 members but deny her the right to speak before an assembly of 25?

And what about “ask their own husbands at home”? How does Paul intend for this to work? What about the woman who is unmarried? or whose husband is not a Christian? or whose husband wasn't at church that day?

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<sup>100</sup> The synagogue, which elements of the Christian assembly are often patterned on, was not invented until after the completion of the Old Testament.

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Notice that Paul does not tell the woman to ask the preacher about his sermon in the lobby after services—he tells her to ask her husband at home. Why not allow questions of other men in private after services? Why may she only ask her own husband?

Let's be honest enough to admit that we have never really enforced this passage as it's written. I've never attended or heard of a church that requires women to only ask questions at home of their own husbands! Indeed, we quite often encourage women to ask questions in the hallways, in the foyer, and certainly in the classroom. After all, we really encourage Bible study and it would make no sense to deny a woman to ability to sincerely inquire into the Word with the help of her fellow Christians.

### C. The Status of First Century Women.

With these questions in mind, we should consider the very real possibility that Paul's command was caused by temporary cultural circumstances that no longer apply.

There is considerable support from history that First Century Jewish and Grecian women were very uneducated and lived extremely sheltered lives. This was especially so among the Jews, who formed the core of most congregations in the church's early history. The questioning of a teacher by such women would have been ignorant and a burden on the time of the men. Thus, the women had to be brought to a better understanding by some means other than remedial instruction before the entire congregation.

Also in support of this view is the phrase, "If she should learn<sup>101</sup> anything ... ." This language seems to be a reference to the extreme lack of education and degradation of women of the day. Few women could read or write and few could have profitably participated in the Socratic debates that characterized teaching in ancient Greece and Judea. Thus, Paul begins with an "if." He does not assume that the woman will choose to learn anything. This is not due to Paul's sexism, but a simple recognition of the degraded state of women in those days. In fact, Paul's encouraging of the education of women put him well out in front of society (which took nearly 2,000 years to catch up with Paul!)

Similarly, the asking of questions of a teacher could often become a confrontation. In a society where submissive women did not provoke confrontations with men (especially before an audience) such as the First Century Roman Empire, no Christian woman would have been considered moral or honoring God if she engaged in a debate with the teacher before the congregation (all or a part). "Silence" therefore refers only to the asking of questions—or more precisely, to engaging in Socratic-style debating with the teacher.

**Jewish women.** The ignorance of women in the First Century was not unique to the Jews, but the Jews of that time took special care to keep their women ignorant. There

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<sup>101</sup> KJV. The NIV incorrectly translates "inquire about" rather than "learn."

was a saying that wives should only be taught enough of the Torah<sup>102</sup> to know the penalty for adultery! And there was no exaggeration in the saying.

This conclusion is buttressed by history:

In Jewish law a woman was not a person; she was a thing. She was entirely at the disposal [of] her father or of her husband. A woman was forbidden to learn the law; to instruct a woman in the law was to cast pearls before swine. Women had no part in the Synagogue service; they were shut apart in a section of the Synagogue, or in a gallery, where they could not be seen, and were allowed no share in the service. A man came to the Synagogue to learn; but, at the most, a woman came to hear. In the Synagogue the lesson from Scripture was read by members of the congregation; but not by women, for that would have been to lessen “the honour of the congregation.” It was absolutely forbidden for a woman to teach in a school; she might not even teach the youngest children. A woman was exempt from the stated demand of the Law. It was not obligatory on her to attend the sacred feasts and festivals. Women, slaves and children were classed together. ... Rabbi Jose ben Johanan is quoted as saying, “ ... Everyone that talketh much with a woman causes evil to himself, and desists from the works of the Law, and his end is that he inherits Gehenna.”<sup>103</sup>

Barclay also notes that among the Jews, a strict follower of the Jewish *Talmud*<sup>104</sup> would not even speak to his own sister in public.

That Paul had the Jews especially in mind is evidenced by his exclamation at the end of the paragraph, “Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?” Certainly the word of God originated with the Jews. It had reached many other nations, but in the church’s early history, the other churches were largely either Jewish or had a large Jewish component. Thus, the “disgrace” referred to by Paul was particularly in the eyes of the Jewish members of the congregation, the people from whom the word of God originated.

It would seem, therefore, that there is ample evidence in the text that Paul had concluded that preservation of unity and fellowship with the Jewish members and congregations demanded that women take a submissive role in certain church services.

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<sup>102</sup> The Hebrew word for the first five books of the Bible, that is, the books of Law.

<sup>103</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon—The Daily Study Bible* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pa., 2nd ed. 1960), page 77.

<sup>104</sup> A compilation of the traditional laws of the Jews.

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**Grecian women.** Corinth was a very cosmopolitan city, being a major port and a Roman colony. Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans and then rebuilt as a colony. But the city was squarely in the middle of Greece, and all north-south land traffic had to go through Corinth. Moreover, Corinth was an important east-west port city, making it one of the Empire's premier commercial centers. By the First Century, Corinthian culture was predominantly Greek, but highly mixed. Due to its wealth and vigorous trade, Corinth had also become notoriously immoral. The city worshipped Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and her temple had 1,000 temple prostitutes who plied their trade on the streets of the city. Immorality was not only common, it was considered a religious duty!

Osburn quotes the Grecian historian Plutarch, a near contemporary of Paul: "Not only the arm but the voice of a modest woman ought to be kept from the public, and she should feel shame at being heard, as at being stripped. ... She should speak either to, or through, her husband."<sup>105</sup>

Barclay comments,

The respectable Greek woman lived a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone: she never went to any public assembly, still less did she ever speak or take any active part in such an assembly. The fact is that if in a Greek town Christian women had taken an active and a speaking and a teaching part in the work of the Christian Church, the Church would inevitably have gained the reputation of being the resort of loose and immoral women.<sup>106</sup>

The risk of being considered immoral was, therefore, very real. Moreover, to appease the sensibilities of the various levels of society, especially the Jews, strict rules would have to be followed.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the silence commanded is the avoidance of such

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<sup>105</sup> Plutarch, *Conjugal Precepts* 31.

<sup>106</sup> Barclay, *ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Ferguson disputes this view of First Century women. He concedes the low estate of Jewish women of this age, but points out, "There were plenty of priestesses in Greco-Roman religions, and one historian of ancient Rome, Carcopino, describes a women's emancipation movement in Rome in the first century."

Ferguson misses some key points. First, the fact that there was an emancipation movement for women plainly tells us that women felt the need to be emancipated. Moreover, there is no evidence that the movement succeeded. Recall the Women's Suffrage Movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Women actually prevailed, gaining the right to vote, and yet continued to suffer severe discrimination for decades thereafter. If a successful emancipation movement doesn't necessarily grant women equal legal rights, plainly a *failed* emancipation movement hardly proves that women were emancipated.

Finally, the fact that women could serve as priestesses in pagan religions doesn't indicate emancipation in their roles as housewives—or even as priestesses. In fact, many of the priestesses were little more than

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speech as might open the women to charges of moral laxity as measured by the culture of the community. Thus, singing, speaking in unison, and such would not be prohibited. Neither would prayer and prophecy. However, the direct addressing of a man, where a woman engages in conversation or debate with someone else's husband, would be a violation of propriety. This conclusion is supported by Paul's statement that such speech is "disgraceful."<sup>108</sup>

**"Own."** Notice the word "own."<sup>109</sup> Wives are to ask their *own* husbands at home. *Strong's Dictionary* translates *idios*, the word translated "own," as "pertaining to self, i.e. one's own; by implication, private or separate." Thus, the meaning is not just that the wife should ask her husband at home, but that she should ask her *own* husband and not someone else's husband!

The command is thus a prohibition on conversation between a woman and another woman's husband. It would have been unseemly in First Century society for married women to speak freely to married men. Such consorting would have opened the church up to accusations of unchastity.

**Summary.** In context, and taking into account the emphasis on a woman speaking to her *own* husband, the command is a prohibition on speaking to another woman's husband. It is, therefore, a command founded on the appearance of immorality in a society where women were not permitted to speak in public to men other than their own husbands. Paul's command is therefore a reference to local cultural standards.

The sense of Paul's teaching can be seen in an example from the mission field:

My mother used to compare the situation in Corinth to the one she and my father faced in northern China. Back in the 1920s when they were first to bring God's message to that forgotten area, they found women with bound feet who seldom left their homes and who, unlike the men, had never in their whole lives attended a public meeting or a class. They had never been told as little girls, "Now you just sit still and listen to the teacher." Their only concept of an assembly was a family feast where everyone talked at once.

When these women came to my parents' church and gathered on the women's side of the sanctuary, they thought this

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prostitutes, certainly not an elevated status. As Barclay writes in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, "To that temple [of Aphrodite], there were attached one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and at evening time they descend from the Acropolis and plied their trade on the streets of Corinth . . . ."

<sup>108</sup> Verse 35.

<sup>109</sup> Verse 35. KJV fails to translate *idios* ("own"), but most modern translations do.

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was a chance to catch up on the news with their neighbors and to ask questions about the story of Jesus they were hearing. Needless to say, along with babies crying and toddlers running about, the women's section got rather noisy! Add to that the temptation for the women to shout questions to their husbands across the aisle, and you can imagine the chaos. As my mother patiently tried to tell the women that they should listen first and chitchat or ask questions later, she would mutter under her breath, "Just like Corinth; it just couldn't be more like Corinth."<sup>110</sup>

### D. Some Definitions.

With this cultural background in mind, let's search out the meaning of a few words and phrases.

**"Speak."** The Greek word translated "speak" throughout the chapter, *lalein*, takes its exact meaning from the context, and can refer to anything from silent meditation (v. 28) to disruptive speech of about any kind. There is nothing in the word itself to indicate what kind of speech is in mind. However, the verb is in present tense, indicating continuous action. Thus, Paul is saying something like "they are not allowed to *continually speak*."<sup>111</sup>

**"Silent."** The Greek word translated "silent" in 1 Corinthians 14:34, *sigao*, does not necessarily mean "not speak at all." Rather, the word may mean nothing more than "be quiet" or even "keep a secret." The italicized portions of the following verses are all the other occurrences of the word in the Greek New Testament:

Luke 9:36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples *kept this to themselves*, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

Luke 20:26 They were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. And astonished by his answer, they became *silent*.

Acts 12:17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to *be quiet* and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

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<sup>110</sup> Kari Torjesen Malcolm, *Women at the Crossroads* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity, 1982), pages 73-74, as quoted by John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (San Francisco, CA; HarperCollins, 1991), page 64.

<sup>111</sup> Osburn, *Women in the Church 2*, p. 199, citing F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians* (Eerdmans 1971), p. 135. The present indicative refers specifically to continuing action, while the aorist infinitive indicates neither point time nor continuing action.

## 1 Corinthians 14—Silence in the Churches

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Acts 15:12-13 The whole assembly became *silent* as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Rom. 16:25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the *mystery* hidden for long ages past ... .

1 Cor. 14:28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should *keep quiet* in the church and speak to himself and God.

1 Cor. 14:30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should *stop*.

1 Cor. 14:34 [W]omen should *remain silent* in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.

Notice that in its normal use in the New Testament, *sigao* refers to a temporary silence, typically the courteous silence of not interrupting while another speaks. In 1 Corinthians 14, *sigao* is used in verses 28 and 30 to refer, not to total silence, but to abstaining from rude or inconsiderate speech.<sup>112</sup>

In verse 28 Paul told the tongue speakers to “keep quiet [*sigao*] in the church,” a phrase not significantly different from verse 34’s “remain silent in the churches.” And yet we readily see that Paul did not mean for tongue speakers to be completely silent, only that they should not speak in tongues when no interpreter is present. Other speaking by those with the gift of tongues is not banned by the “keep quiet” command.

Similarly, in verse 30 Paul tells the prophets to stop speaking, literally to “be silent [*sigao*].” But this command to silence clearly only means to stop talking long enough to let another speak. Thus, in each case, in context, *sigao* means “refrain from inconsiderate speech” of a certain type.

Thus, when Paul tells women to “remain silent” because they “must be in submission,” we should understand that the command to silence is limited to speech that is not submissive. After all, the Law only requires submission of women, as complements for their husbands, not silence. Women should be silent to the extent that speaking would, in the circumstance and at the time, violate the command to submission, that is, their role as suitable complements. Nowhere in the Old Testament do we find women told to be silent in the presence of men.

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<sup>112</sup> *Sigao* is a synonym of *siopao*, frequently translated as “keep one’s peace.”

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But prophets and tongue speakers are given the same limited command—not that they should not use their gifts to God’s glory, but that common courtesy and mutual submission of Christians to one another requires the taking of turns, using gifts in a manner that edifies, and behaving decently and orderly.

Clearly, where considerations of courtesy and orderliness do not prevent speaking, tongue speakers and prophets are free to speak, even as stated in verse 28, “in the church.” Likewise, in a culture and place where a woman may speak in the presence of men without causing a scandal or being perceived as immoral, the command to silence has no application. This interpretation will become clearer as we proceed more deeply into the scripture.

**“The Law.”** Paul’s reference to the Law as supporting his command is either (a) the Law of Moses, (b) the curse pronounced on women in Genesis 3, or (c) a reference to the “one flesh” relationship that God created, described in Genesis 2. No one has plausibly suggested any other possibility.

But Paul cannot be arguing from the Law of Moses, since the Law of Moses never commands women to be silent in the presence of men or even to be submissive to men. And Paul cannot be arguing from the curse in Genesis 3, as many would suggest. This is a curse and not a command and is the result of sin, not a pattern for righteous living. Thus, the only possible explanation is also the most appealing explanation. Paul is referring to the command that husbands and wives be one flesh and the role of women as suitable complements—for their husbands.

**“Women.”** The Greek word translated “women” is *gune*, which can be translated “wives” or as “women”—the distinction can only be found in the context. Translating *gune* as “wife” solves a number of problems and has much to commend it. First, only a wife can ask her husband at home. A widow, divorcee, or other unmarried woman could hardly do so. Second, the Law (Genesis 1 and 2) imposes submission on *wives*, and then only to their husbands. Nowhere does the Law require all women to be in submission to all men. Genesis 2 only talks about husbands and wives. Eve was Adam’s helpmeet, not a helpmeet to all men.

**“Inquire.”** In the New International Version, Paul is translated as saying, “If they wish to inquire about something ...,” but the King James Versions translates, “And if they will learn anything ....” In this case, the King James Version has it right. For reasons mentioned earlier, Paul makes it clear that while woman are certainly permitted to learn, he is unwilling to assume that they will.

With these definitions in mind, let’s try our hand at a clearer translation:

As in all the congregations of the saints, *wives* should not *speak in a way considered rude or immoral* in the churches. They are not allowed to [so] speak, but must be in submission, as *Genesis 2* says [about wives being suitable complements for their husbands]. If they want to *learn* about something, they should ask

their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a *wife* to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you [rather than the Jews]? Or are you the only people it has reached [the gospel has reached many people who consider female questioning of men very immoral]?

### E. Cultural Limitation.

Doesn't this passage remind you of the abuses of the Lord's Supper discussed in 1 Corinthians 11? Paul commanded the Corinthians to eat "at home" (1 Cor. 11:34). We readily understand that this is a response to the local situation in Corinth and not a universal rule, and yet it is phrased very similarly to the command to silence in 1 Corinthians 14:34.

Also, Paul's reliance on arguments using such phrases as "as in all the congregations of the saints" and "it is disgraceful" are very similar to his statements made in 1 Corinthians 11 dealing with veils. We readily acknowledge that such arguments show that only temporary cultural concerns were at issue when veils are under discussion. We should hold to the same standards here. Note the close comparison:

1 Cor. 11:14-16 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a *disgrace* to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, *we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.*

1 Cor. 14: 33b-36 *As in all the congregations of the saints,* women should remain silent *in the churches.* They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is *disgraceful* for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?

The same traditionalist commentators who insist that "As in all the congregations of the saints" in chapter 14 makes the command to be silent an eternal rule will argue that "we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God" applied only in the First Century so that veils are no longer required<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> D. A. Carson suggests an alternative interpretation in his excellent *Showing the Spirit* (Baker Books 1987), pages 129-131. Carson first argues that the First Century gift of prophecy differs from the Old Testament gift, because (i) the First Century gift had to be tested (pages 91-100), noting 1 Cor. 14:29 (interpreting "weigh" as evaluate) and 1 Thess. 5:19-21); (ii) Paul treated New Testament prophets as inferior to the apostles (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:37-38); (iii) the latest epistles, rather than encouraging reliance on the prophets who survived the apostles, urged reliance on apostolic teaching ("Guard the deposit!" "Keep the faith once delivered to the saints!" "Return to what was from the beginning!" 2 Tim.; Jude; 1 John,

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### F. Conclusions.

These considerations aren't true in the United States today. It is not at all uncommon for me to teach classes having women with more formal Bible education than I have or who have published more Bible-based literature than I have. We have blessedly advanced far beyond the First Century in educating women, and only the worst of bigots would bar women from asking questions on the basis of this passage, which is why our tradition permits such questions. We *already* let women ask questions—so long as it is in Sunday School class and not in the worship service, when no one asks questions anyway.

When Paul tells women to be “in submission” in verse 34, he is not telling them to be in submission to their husbands or to men in general. Rather, they are to be in submission to the requirement of decency and orderliness. In the Greek, “as the Law says” does not modify “not allowed to speak” but “submit yourselves.” There is, of course, no command in Genesis or the Law of Moses compelling women to be silent. Rather, the Law (Genesis 2) requires submission, but this is little different from the submission that Paul later commands in 1 Corinthians 16:16: “submit yourselves to one another.”<sup>114</sup> And this submission ultimately flows from the fact that we are all, men and women, created in God's image, as discussed earlier.

This reasoning, rooted deeply in Paul's own words, tells us that the command to be silent in 1 Corinthians 14 is no longer binding today in American culture. We have yet to study 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and many advocates of the silence rule would concede that 1 Corinthians is not a sound basis for commanding female silence, but they instead rely on the commands in 1 Timothy.

I am not the first within the Church to reach this conclusion. David Lipscomb, a co-founder of the *Gospel Advocate* and the Nashville Bible School (now David Lipscomb University) and long-time editor of the *Gospel Advocate* stated,

Yet, women have the right to teach those who know less than themselves; Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). So, I am sure that a woman may teach the Bible to young and old, male and female, at the meeting house, at home, at a neighbor's house, on Sunday or Monday or any other day of the

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respectively); (iv) in some cases, Paul specifically refused to follow the counsel of an acknowledged prophet (Acts 21:4) and another prophet inaccurately prophesied Paul's fate (Acts 21:10-11—the Jews didn't bind Paul, the Romans did; the Jews didn't turn Paul over to the Romans but attempted to lynch him). Accordingly, Carson suggests that in vv. 33-35, Paul directs that while women may prophesy, they may not engage in the questioning of prophets in order to test them. Without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with Carson's theory, it is not inconsistent with the above theory. After all, Paul's reason for so limiting women may well have been cultural, as a woman's testing of a male prophet by interrogation certainly would have been seen as highly disrespectful, even immoral, in Corinthian society.

<sup>114</sup> See Osburn, *Women in the Church 1*, pages 108-109.

week, if they know less than she does, if she will do it in a quiet, modest, womanly way.<sup>115</sup>

Lipscomb's long tenure as editor of the *Gospel Advocate* made him the leading thinker within the Churches of Christ at the time they split from the instrumental churches and for many years thereafter.

Burton Coffman, the author of a series of commentaries on the entire New Testament and long-time minister of the Manhattan Church of Christ, concludes,

[T]o blow this up to a universal law that no woman might open her mouth in a church service is simply contrary to all reason.<sup>116</sup>

The late George W. DeHoff, a well-respected preacher, leader, evangelist, educator, publisher, and scholar, states,

No verse in the Bible teaches that women must teach God's *word at home*, or *in private*, those limitations having been added by false teachers. Any teaching that does not usurp authority over a man does not violate this passage.<sup>117</sup>

The traditional view is also disputed by J. W. McGarvey, who is certainly the most respected of the late 19th Century Restoration leaders and second only to Alexander Campbell in the quality of his scholarship among the 19th Century Church leaders:

The powers of woman have become so developed, and her privileges have been so extended in gospel lands, that it is no longer shameful for her to speak in public; but the failing of one reason is not the cessation of both. The Christian conscience has therefore interpreted Paul's rule rightly when it applies it generally and admits of exceptions. ...

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<sup>115</sup> M. C. Kurfees, ed., *Questions Answered by David Lipscomb and E. G. Sewell* (McQuiddy 1921), page 736, quoted by Rowland, page 140. Rather inconsistently, another book quotes Lipscomb as saying in the same text, "I cannot write it in simpler words, plainer, or put in a connection that would make it easier to be understood. 'Let your women keep silence in the churches ...' I do not know how to add a word that can make it clearer, more direct, or more forcible. One who can explain that away can explain away anything I can write." p. 729, quoted by *Osburn, Women in the Church 2*, p. 189. Perhaps Lipscomb made a distinction between the formal assembly and other speaking opportunities.

<sup>116</sup> Coffman, page 240.

<sup>117</sup> *Sermons on First Corinthians* (The Christian Press, Murfreesboro, Tenn. 1947) page 99, quoted with approval by Coffman, page 243.

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The gift of prophecy no longer exists; but, by the law of analogy, *those women who have a marked ability, either for exhortation or instruction, are permitted to speak in the churches.* ... The law is permanent, but the application of it may vary. If man universally gives woman permission to speak, she is free from the law in this respect.<sup>118</sup>

More recently, Carroll D. Osburn, Professor of New Testament at Abilene Christian University, and among the Church's foremost living Bible scholars, concluded,

Far from being intolerant, Paul neither teaches nor suggests in this text anything regarding hierarchicalism or female subjection. ... Paul's corrective does not ban women from speaking in worship. ...

Referring, as it does, to a very specific problem of disruptive questions by these women, 1 Cor. 14:34-35 teaches that these particular wives, like the uncontrolled tongue-speakers and prophets at Corinth, must defer to the assembly by voluntarily yielding to orderliness. The general principle that is to be applied to contemporary church life is that decorum is mandatory for all in the public assembly, without regard for gender.<sup>119</sup>

Thus, we see from writings from 1916, 1947, 1977, and 1994 that well-respected and prominent commentators within the Churches of Christ have rejected the notion that women may only speak in private gatherings. The commentaries vary in the details of the conclusions that they draw, but they each disagree with conventional thinking within the Church today. Coffman goes so far as to say, with respect to the requirement that women not ask questions but be silent,

What about the woman whose husband is an ignoramus, an unbeliever, or an open enemy of God and all religion; should *she* comply with this rule? Until it is affirmed that she should, it is a sin to make this rule universal.

But of course we *do* make this rule universal. Isn't it amazing that anyone who supposes that a woman may speak in an assembly will be condemned and "marked" as a heretic while many of our best scholars do not agree with the traditional view now being insisted on by so many? Moreover, isn't it also amazing that we are so intimidated by the right wing of the Church that only the rarest of congregations would actually engage in the practices approved by Lipscomb, McGarvey, DeHoff, Coffman, and Osburn (among

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<sup>118</sup> *Commentary on First Corinthians* (The Standard Publishing Co., Cincinnati, Ohio 1916) page 143, quoted approvingly by Coffman, *ibid*, and DeHoff, *ibid*. McGarvey's commentary on 1 Corinthians has also been republished as part of the Gospel Advocate commentary series.

<sup>119</sup> Osburn, *Women in the Church 1*, pages 110-111.

## 1 Corinthians 14—Silence in the Churches

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very many others)? In fact, precious few of our members are even aware that many of our best scholars have taken these positions. Instead, the current thinking of many is that anyone allowing women to speak in assembly is *per se* a liberal and not one of us.

The assembly should be a reflection of our seven-day a week relationship with God. We aren't held to higher standards Sunday morning than the rest of the week! We can't put on show for God—He won't be fooled! Whatever submission is required Sunday morning is required all the time.

Isn't it very implausible that God invented an eternal rule for women in the assembly that applies nowhere else? If women are inferior or subordinate in the assembly due to the curse of Eve, then they are inferior or subordinate in private worship, during church committee meetings, at Sunday School class, in the work place, and in the home. God did not curse Eve only between 10:30 and 11:30 on Sunday mornings! We are left with the conclusion that the command to be silent was a temporary expedient and is not binding in current American society.

I started by pointing out that this passage must be read in light of the overriding principles of love and grace. Have we done that? I think so. Why were women to refrain from certain speech? Because to do so would have subjected them to accusations of immorality, bringing shame to their husbands and to Christ. Paul's command was far from arbitrary—it is simply one of many examples of Christians yielding their freedom for a greater cause.

### CHAPTER XII 1 TIMOTHY 2—USURPING AUTHORITY

Now we get to the most challenging of the passages. We have shown that the interpretation of Genesis 3 as a curse, and not as a command, results in a sensible, consistent interpretation of many other verses. It all fits together as a logical, unitary whole. Our understanding of even familiar passages is deepened as we see how our marriages fit into God eternal plan for mankind.

But 1 Timothy 2 seems to run contrary to this pattern. Or have we missed the point entirely?

1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and *quiet* lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. 7 And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

11 A woman should learn in *quietness* and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be *silent*. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

**The immediate context.** Before embarking on the study of the last paragraph, let's first observe something of the first three quoted paragraphs.

First, all Christians are urged to live peaceful and quiet lives, men and women. The word translated “quiet” in verse 2 is *hesuchios*, the same word translated “quietness” in 1 Timothy 2:11 and “silent” in verse 12. “*Hesuchios*” does not mean silent—it means peaceable or tranquil.

Second, Paul instructs men to “lift up holy hands in prayer” (v. 8). This sentence is written as a command in the plainest of terms. Its broad scope is emphasized by the use of “everywhere.” We know from history that the custom of the Jews in those days was to pray looking toward the heavens, with hands raised and palms opened toward the sky. This is very different from our modern custom. Ironically, I know of instances where people have complained about the lifting of hands during services, it being perceived as “denominational” or Pentecostal. We learn something about ourselves when we observe our members protesting obedience to a direct command!

And yet I agree that Paul does not *require* the lifting of holy hands today. The eternal, universal command is to pray. The lifting of hands is the manner of complying with the command dictated by the customs of the day.

Third, Paul instructs women to dress modestly and not with costly apparel, gold, or braided hair. And yet we readily accept women in church in fine, expensive clothes, with gold or pearl jewelry, and with braided hair. In fact, expensive clothes are standard for most congregations. Who repealed this law?

Once again, we understand that the eternal command is modesty and simplicity. What constitutes modesty and simplicity varies from culture to culture (although I think that many of our churches are very far from obeying this command even by today’s standards).

This brings us to the fourth paragraph. Paul states that women may not teach or have authority over a man, but rather must be in submission and in quietness. But unlike the two preceding paragraphs, we have chosen to bind this command as an eternal command. We overrule the lifting of holy hands and prohibition of braided hair as based on culture, but we decide that the requirement for women to neither teach nor exercise authority is eternal. Why? Certainly not based on the context! The immediate context suggests that the universal rule, that women are to be submissive, is to be applied in the First Century cultural context by not teaching or exercising authority over men.

We need to be very cautious in dealing with a passage that is colored in our minds by our own culture (past and present) as well as being colored by First Century culture. Rather, we must try to read 1 Timothy as Timothy himself would have. Scholars present us with three possible interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:11-15:

1. Paul prohibits women from teaching a man in public.
2. Paul prohibits women in Ephesus from teaching or exercising authority because certain false teachers were taking advantage of the ignorance of the Grecian women of the day to spread false doctrines.
3. Paul prohibits any teaching by a wife of her husband that is domineering or that otherwise contradicts her role as his complement.

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### A. Teaching Men in Public

The traditional interpretation of this passage is that women may not teach in public. Of course, nothing in the passage mentions teaching in public—rather it appears that all teaching by women is prohibited. But such an interpretation is contradicted by Priscilla’s teaching of Apollos.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, there are several difficulties with this interpretation. First, we don’t allow women to teach men in Sunday School, even though when we consider 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, we declare that women can ask questions in Sunday School, since it is a private setting. How it can be that Sunday School is public in the context of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and private in the context of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 is beyond me!

Second, there is no obvious reason in current culture that a woman teaching in Sunday School would be unsubmitive while teaching at home would not be. After all, outside of the church setting, we are all routinely willing to be taught or lectured by a woman in a public setting. It only seems wrong to us at church, and then only because of our interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Third, nothing in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 limits the scope of its prohibition to the assembly or even to church affairs. Rather, we add this limitation by cobbling “in the churches” from 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 into this passage. But Paul did not write Timothy expecting him to pull out his pocket copy of 1 Corinthians and then read the two passages together to find Paul’s meaning. No, Paul meant 1 Timothy to be understood from 1 Timothy.

Finally, there is no basis in the Creation accounts to prohibit a woman from teaching a man. The only arguable basis is that a woman can’t exercise authority over a man due to her role as suitable complement—but only a wife is a suitable complement and then only to her husband. Women are not, as a class, suitable complements to each and every man.

Thus, we are well justified in searching for a fresh interpretation.

### B. False Teachers and Unlearned Women

**The Ephesian background.** Paul wrote 1 Timothy to Timothy while Timothy was in Ephesus,<sup>121</sup> and so the letter deals with the situation in Ephesus. Unlike 1 Corinthians 14, Paul does not say that he does not allow women to teach or have authority “as in all the congregations.” Thus, his command may well be localized to Ephesus. Moreover, the fact that Paul takes personal credit for the command—“*I* do not

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<sup>120</sup> Acts 18:26.

<sup>121</sup> 1 Timothy 1:3.

permit ...”—indicates that Paul was making a rule to meet the needs of the particular time and place, much as he prohibited the Corinthians from eating together to prevent the abuse of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.<sup>122</sup>

The earliest New Testament books often deal with the problem of Judaizing teachers, arising from the efforts of certain Jews to mix Christianity with the Law of Moses. Later books (including 1 Timothy), however, begin to deal with Gnosticism,<sup>123</sup> arising from the efforts of certain Greeks to blend Christianity with the Gentile mystery religions.

The mystery religions were Gentile cults that had many elements in common with Christianity. They often promised salvation, unity with a god, and sonship. In many cults, the god being worshipped was believed to have died and been resurrected. These cults preceded Christianity and doubtlessly helped pave the way for the pagan world to accept Jesus. However, the cults also contained many elements utterly foreign to Christianity. It is not surprising that the Greeks tried to combine their old religions into Christianity, much as the Jews tried to combine Judaism into Christianity.

**Evidence of Gnosticism in the Pastorals.** And indeed there is ample evidence in 1 Timothy of Paul’s concern regarding Gnostic teachings. Moreover, it appears that much of the problem centered on the women in the congregation.

(4:1-7) The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and

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<sup>122</sup> 1 Cor. 11:34 declares, “If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.” Most Churches of Christ interpret this command as being limited to the Corinthian situation, because the common meal was being abused to the point of sin. 1 Cor. 11:20-21. A significant number of Churches insist that this verse prohibits eating the church building—at all times and places. But this view fails to acknowledge that there were no church buildings until the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. In fact, until Constantine legalized Christianity, most assemblies were conducted in private homes, where there were kitchens and much eating. Moreover, Jude 7 specifically condones the “love feast,” or common meal of Christians, often combined with the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>123</sup> Many scholars dispute that Gnosticism was a First Century phenomenon, and certainly history tells us that Gnosticism was not formalized until the Second Century. On the other hand, the mystery religions and pagan philosophies that gave rise to Gnosticism had been around for centuries, and we see in the Pastoral Letters and many other books of the New Testament the troubles these false ideas were causing very early in the history of the church.

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prayer. If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

Have nothing to do with *godless myths and old wives' tales*; rather, train yourself to be godly.

One characteristic of Gnosticism is asceticism. Some Greeks taught that material things are evil and must be given up to be truly spiritual. Thus, the enjoyment of the pleasures of this world must be forsaken. This false teaching was eventually accepted into Christianity, resulting in the monastic movement, Lent, and similar efforts to escape the world that typify medieval Catholicism. But Paul says that there is nothing wrong with enjoying God's Creation and that there is no merit in giving up some pleasure just for the sake of suffering.

We should also understand that Paul meant "old wives' tales" to be taken literally. We use it as a figure of speech, but Paul was referring to tales told by old wives! As was also true in Corinth, in Ephesus the women were uneducated and did not work outside the home. Once a woman had raised her children, she often became idle and was subject to becoming a gossip, as Paul states later. But these same women were the foundation of many of the Ephesian religions. Unscrupulous men found the opportunity in this to raise themselves to positions of influence and to make money at the expense of naive women. And we should not underestimate the naiveté of certain classes of First Century women. Imagine growing up with no formal education, no opportunity to associate with better-educated people, no television, no magazines, no periodicals, and no radio. "Ignorant" understates the situation. Such women, through no fault of their own, would doubtlessly be easily duped by whatever cult was fashionable.

(1 Tim. 5:11-15) As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of *being idle* and *going about from house to house*. And not only do they become *idlers*, but also *gossips* and *busybodies*, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

The Ephesian women formed a class that was subject to the sins of gossip and slander. But the danger was perhaps much worse than the translators indicate. The word translated "busybodies" can also be translated "practitioners of magic arts," which is how the same word is translated in Acts 19:19. The Ephesian religions were often characterized by the practice of "magic" cults.

We see in the final quoted sentence that Paul was very concerned for the reputation of the women in the Ephesian church. The command to have children and to marry is to protect their reputation in a world where an unmarried woman frequently became a temple prostitute for lack of any other means of employment.

We see the same problem with many of women members of the church at Ephesus reflected in 2 Timothy as well.

(2 Tim. 3:6-7) They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over *weak-willed women*, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

It's important to realize that Paul is not being critical of women as such but rather is criticizing what was going on in Ephesus at the time due to the local culture's bias against women.

**Summary.** Commentators are essentially unanimous in recognizing that 1 Timothy was written in part to combat the evils of Gnosticism. Male false teachers created the problem, but the problem spread and infected the church in large part due to the ignorance and naiveté of the women. Thus, in a society where women were unspeakably uneducated and ignorant, and where false teachers were spreading anti-Christian traditions by taking advantage of women, Paul had very good reason to place limitations on the authority that women should have.

### C. Wives May Not Seek Dominion Through Teaching

**Women or wives?** An alternative translation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is to take *gune* to mean wife and *aner* to mean husband. As discussed earlier, the words are completely ambiguous in the Greek, and the distinction can only be found from the context. Therefore, let's see if we get a better result by translating *gune* as wife and *aner* as husband:<sup>124</sup>

A *wife* should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a *wife* to teach or to have authority over a *husband*; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the *wife* who was deceived and became a sinner. But *wives* will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Translated in this manner, the verse becomes a prohibition of a wife's usurping authority over her husband, not women having authority over men. And notice the

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<sup>124</sup> As noted earlier with regard to the meaning of *gune*, translatable as either woman or wife, in 1 Corinthians 11, because the Greek language uses the same word for woman and wife, Paul uses the word in both senses in the same context, assuming, as the language assumes, that adult women are married, as was typically—but certainly not always—the case. This leaves the translation of *gune* in many contexts very difficult, since in our culture such an assumption is not permitted.

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appropriateness of the translation. Only wives should be saved through childbearing. Paul would hardly expect unmarried women to seek this route to salvation!

While this translation does not resolve all difficulties with the verse, it has much appeal. After all, Adam and Eve were husband and wife. Wives are to be complements for their husbands. And nowhere does the Old Testament require women in general to be subject to men in general.

**“Silent.”** The King James Version mistranslates *hesuchios* in verses 11 and 12 as “silence.” The NIV makes the same mistake in verse 12. In fact, as noted previously, the word means “quietness” or “tranquility.” *Strong’s Dictionary* defines the word—

keeping one’s seat (sedentary), i.e. (by impl.) still (undisturbed, undisturbing):—peaceable, quiet.

Vine’s *Expository of New Testament Words* states that while *eremos* means tranquility arising from without, *hesuchios*—

indicates tranquility arising from within, causing no disturbance to others.

This is a different word from *sigao*, translated “silent” in 1 Corinthians 14:35. In fact, it is the same word translated “quiet” in 1 Timothy 2:2 describing how all Christians should live all the time! Hence, our translation now becomes—

A wife should learn in *peaceableness* and full submission. I do not permit a wife to teach or to have authority over a husband; she must be in *peaceableness*. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the wife who was deceived and became a sinner. But wives will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

**The meaning of “exercise authority.”** We must next consider the meaning of “exercise authority,” which is a translation of *authenteo*. Commentators disagree as to the meaning of *authenteo*. This is the only time the word is used as a verb in the New Testament. *Authenteo* means to dominate or “usurp authority.”<sup>125</sup> It would hardly be consistent with submission to dominate.

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<sup>125</sup> Vine, *ibid*, page 89.

While “exercise authority” is a possible translation (as in the NIV<sup>126</sup>), Paul always uses other words for “exercise authority,” and so his selection of this unusual term must be intended to carry some special meaning. If he just wanted to say “exercise authority,” why vary from his normal vocabulary? Moreover, *authenteo* is phrased in contrast to “be in quietness” (mistranslated “be silent” by the NIV). “Domineer” best suits the evident contrast. Thus, the King James Version is better than the NIV in translating “usurp authority.”

Standard Greek dictionaries confirm this conclusion. *Strong’s Dictionary* defines *authenteo*—

to act of oneself, i.e. (fig.) dominate:—usurp authority over.

Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines the word—

to exercise authority on one’s own account, to domineer over, is used in 1 Tim. 2:12, A.V., “to usurp authority,” R.V. “to have dominion.” In the earlier usage of the word it signified one who with his own hand killed either others or himself. Later it came to denote one who acts on his own authority; hence, to exercise authority, dominion.

Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*<sup>127</sup> translates,

one who acts on his own authority, autocratic, ... an absolute master ... to exercise dominion over one ... 1 Tim. ii.12.

Spiros Zodhiates<sup>128</sup> translates—

to use or exercise authority or power over as an autocrat, to domineer (1 Tim. 2:12).

The Revised Standard Version translates “have dominion.” Many other translations are similar: New English Bible: “domineer over”; American Standard Version: “have dominion over”; Living Bible: “lording over.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> The NIV has much to commend it, especially its readability. But it is often biased in its translations, sometimes toward Baptist doctrine, other times more generally toward the traditional views of fundamentalists. It is not surprising that a passage as sensitive to conservative Bible students as this one reflects some of this bias.

<sup>127</sup> (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996).

<sup>128</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary—New Testament* (AMG International, Inc.: 1992).

<sup>129</sup> Of course, many other translations, including the NIV, translate “authority over.”

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Quite clearly, “exercise authority” in the NIV is mistranslated, and should instead be rendered “domineer.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, Paul does not prohibit women from having authority—in the church or elsewhere. He simply reminds them that self-willed rule is unchristian. Indeed, the New Testament is clear that no one may domineer, including men in general and elders in particular.<sup>131</sup>

This leaves the question, then, of what Paul intends by prohibiting a woman from teaching. If a woman may exercise authority, so long as she doesn’t domineer, then may she teach in a non-domineering manner? Certainly, Priscilla was allowed to teach Apollos.

In his *Women in the Church 1*, Osburn states,

For reasons that must be explained in detail elsewhere, I am of the opinion that the “teaching” in v. 12 is not “teaching” per se, but specifically “domineering teaching.” The *authentein* is taken by complementarians [hierarchicalists] to mean “exercise authority,” but stronger arguments exist for taking it to mean “domineer,” paired with “submissive” in v. 11 and in contrast to “peaceable/quietness.” Both “teach” and “domineer” have “man” as a direct object (here in the Greek genitive case because “domineer” takes that case). When, in Greek, two verbs are joined in this way, the nearer qualifies the farther. Hence, the lack of quietude/peacefulness that is stressed both before and after this admonition is countered by “not to teach in a domineering way.”<sup>132</sup>

And so our translation becomes—

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<sup>130</sup> Osburn, *Women in the Church 2*, p. 82, comments, “Both from the first century BC, a papyrus in Berlin clearly has the meaning ‘to domineer,’ as does Philodemus, who mentions ‘dominating masters.’” Osburn points out further examples of the meaning domineer in the writings of early Christians, pp. 217-219, John Chrysostum (4<sup>th</sup> Century) and Hippolytus (3<sup>rd</sup> Century).

<sup>131</sup> 1 Pet. 5:1-3: “To the elders ... Be shepherds of God’s flock ... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” 1 Pet. 5:5-6: “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another .... Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

<sup>132</sup> Page 112, relying in part on Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (rev. G. Messing; Cambridge, Harvard University Press 1956), pages 364-365. Ferguson points out that the new edition of the *Bauer-Amdt-Gingrich-Danker* lexicon shows that this construction is often parallel, so that the second phrase does not necessarily modify the first. At best, Ferguson has shown that Osburn’s construction is not necessarily right, leaving us to find the correct result based on historical and literary context. On the other hand, in *Women in the Church 2*, Osburn provides several New Testament examples in this construction where the second clause (“domineer” in this case) defines and limits the first clause (“teach”), p. 221, including Acts 4:18, Gal. 1:16-17; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; and Acts 16:21. Greek scholars call this construction *hendiadys*. Of course, the distinction between a *hendiadys* and parallel construction must be made in the context of the entire Bible. Which translation is most consistent with Gen. 1-2?

A *wife* should learn in *peaceableness* and full submission. I do not permit a *wife* to teach her *husband in a domineering way*; she must be in *peaceableness*. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the *wife* who was deceived and became a sinner. But *wives* will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Thus, Paul prohibits wives from teaching or otherwise exercising authority so as to dominate their husbands. Certainly, this would violate the command to be submissive. (We could point out that it would be just as wrong for men to refuse submission but to insist on dominance.)

**Adam and Eve.** I believe that there would be much less controversy over this passage but for the references Paul makes to Adam being made before Eve and Eve being the first to sin. While these are true statements, they hardly argue for all women to be subordinate to all men. After all, although Adam was made first, he was made incomplete (and hence imperfect)—without Eve. And while Eve sinned first, Adam sinned as well. Moreover, in Romans 5 Paul gives Adam the blame for the Fall of Man (Rom. 5:12).<sup>133</sup> The world was condemned through the one man, Adam, according to Paul. And God gave the command to not eat of the tree of knowledge to Adam before Eve was even made (Gen. 2:16-17). Adam can hardly claim the moral high ground over Eve. Why does Paul seem to blame Eve here and Adam in Romans? Why has Paul seemingly interpreted Genesis 2 and 3 inconsistently?

I suggest outlining the passage as follows:

- a** women should learn in quietness
- b** do not teach or exercise authority (in a domineering way), but be in full submission
- b'** Adam was formed first
- a'** Eve was deceived

a. The reference to Eve being deceived makes the point that women should learn so as to avoid following Eve's bad example in being deceived. When women do not study, they allow themselves to become victims of false teaching, and they can't count on their husbands' learning to protect themselves, any more than Eve was protected by Adam from the serpent's lies. This is exactly what was going on in Ephesus at the time,

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<sup>133</sup> “sin entered the world through one man . . . .”

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and it continues to be sound advice. Paul's first command is that the women "should learn." Only by learning can the women avoid following in Eve's footsteps.<sup>134</sup>

b. The argument from the Creation order does not indicate subordination. After all, in Genesis 1, man—male and female—was made last, but that hardly argues for subordination of the man to the animals! Moreover, we've already seen that the subordination of women begins with God's curse of the Creation. Thus, the point must be found in the purpose behind the order of creating men and women. Man was not good alone. He needed a suitable complement. God made women to complement their husbands. Therefore, if a wife domineers, she fails to be the complement that God intended. The order of creation argument therefore supports the command to submission that we are already well familiar with.

Thus, Paul says that women should learn because Eve was deceived (and women should not follow her bad example) and that wives should not usurp authority over their husbands, because they were created to be suitable complements, not dominators.

We learn from this passage:

1. Women are required to learn in quietness. The command to quietness is the logical conclusion of Paul's command that all Christians should live quiet and peaceful lives, found in 1 Timothy 2:2.

2. Wives are to be in submission to and complements for their husbands, and this is always true.

3. Wives may not teach in a domineering way.

4. Women should learn God's word to protect themselves from deception (which is always true but was a particularly critical need in Ephesus when Paul wrote 1 Timothy).

5. Nothing in this passage teaches that women are gullible or more gullible than men.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Paul uses the account of Eve's deception to apply essentially the same point to all Christians in 2 Corinthians 11:1-3. "But I'm afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." As in 1 Timothy, Paul sees Eve's sin as a warning to Christians, men or women, against being led astray by false teachers.

<sup>135</sup> Indeed, if being compared to Eve's sin makes a gender gullible in God's eyes, then both genders are gullible because both men and women are compared to Eve's deception in 2 Corinthians 11:3.

#### D. Additional Points

**Is the assembly under consideration?** There is nothing in this passage limiting its impact to the assembly, to Sunday School class, or even to church affairs. Even if we accept the NIV's translation, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man," we have no basis for limiting the command to church. The relationship between men and women established in the Garden of Eden surely is not limited to church affairs or to an hour of church assembly. How can we preach on one Sunday that Christianity is a seven-day a week, 24-hour a day religion affecting our entire lives, and then willy nilly limit God's laws to Sunday a.m.?

**Is the prohibition of teaching and exercising authority eternal?** This leaves for consideration the prohibition against teaching and exercising authority. There are numerous examples of godly women teaching men and exercising authority over men, Deborah, the judge, leader, and prophetess being the most prominent but hardly the only example. If God has made an eternal rule that women may not exercise authority over or teach men, why did He make Deborah a judge? Surely God could have found a man in all of Israel whom He could have inspired to fulfill the same role. Why violate His own rule and raise up a woman as judge over all Israel? Likewise, why condone Anna's teaching in the temple's highly public courts?

Priscilla taught Apollos. Some distinguish Priscilla's teaching by pointing out that her teaching was private while Paul is addressing public teaching in 1 Timothy 2. But where does the Bible say that Priscilla taught in private or that 1 Timothy is addressing public teaching only? And why are our Sunday School classes "public" when making this argument and "private" when we authorize women to ask questions in class but during the worship hour?

**Saved through childbirth.** What did Paul mean when he said that women will be saved through childbirth? I know three theories that make sense:

1. The Kroegers<sup>136</sup> suggest that many Ephesian cults considered childbearing to be a sin and condemned women who gave birth. Perhaps Paul is dealing with this strange teaching here.

2. In the Greek, "childbearing" is preceded by "the." Perhaps Paul has a particular birth in mind, that is, the birth of Jesus prophesied in Genesis 3:15. The curse that imposes such limitations on even Christian women (because of the importance of

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<sup>136</sup> Richard Clark Kroeger & Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1992).

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adhering to society's notions of propriety, which notions are influenced by male domination) will ultimately fail because of the birth of Jesus.<sup>137</sup>

3. Paul may be saying simply that virtuous Christian women will be saved. Possibly Paul is saying that women may be saved despite the curse of Eve in whatever role society assigns to them by living the Christian life in that role. If the role of women is to bear children and not teach or have authority in a given culture, then the women will be saved by their faith, love, and holiness in that role. Submission may require Christians to live as strangers in a strange land and not fully enjoy the freedom that Christ bought.

I've never heard a preacher preach or seen an author write that women who can't bear children will be damned. If this were so, then it would be better for a single woman to bear children out of wedlock than to die childless! What an absurd conclusion. Therefore, we very properly and consistently limit this teaching to its cultural time and place, just as the preceding verses must be so limited.

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<sup>137</sup> Greek does not follow English in the use of definite articles. A Greek "the" often does not refer to a single or particular object and thus often doesn't mean "the" as we use the word in English.

CHAPTER XIII  
TITUS 2:3-5—“BUSY AT HOME”

Paul wrote his letter to Titus at about the same time and under similar circumstances as his letters to Timothy. Titus was a missionary to Crete. Paul also addresses the role of women in this letter:

3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, *to be busy at home*, to be kind, and *to be subject to their husbands*, so that no one will malign the word of God.

We first note that the King James Version translates “busy at home” as “keepers at home,” which sounds very much like a command for women to be housekeepers. But even the NIV’s “busy at home” is not entirely accurate. The term really means “to manage the home.”<sup>138</sup>

We should also note that “be subject to” mistranslates the word better translated as “submit” in Ephesians 5 and 6. The command for wives to be submissive to their husbands is no different from the teachings that we’ve already studied in other passages.

Moreover, we can’t help but notice the contrast between the translation “busy at home” with Proverbs 31’s teachings of the ideal woman. The ideal woman is not only busy at home but she also buys land and plants a vineyard, produces and sells goods in the marketplace, and is noted for her instruction. Does Paul intend to overrule Proverbs 31? Is he condemning Lydia, the dealer in purple dye whom he converted in Acts 16:14-15?

As is always true in interpreting the scriptures, we must look not only at the commands, but the reasons for the commands. Sometimes these reasons are either not stated or are incompletely stated. In this case, however, the reason is clear—women are to be busy at home “so that no one will malign the word of God.” Plainly, Paul’s concern is not for an eternal rule that women may only be housewives—rather Paul’s concern is for the reputation of the Christian community in First Century Crete. Crete was predominantly Grecian in culture, and as we studied earlier, it would have been

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<sup>138</sup> “The word denotes, then, a position of some authority and responsibility. In neither 1 Tim. 5:14 nor Tit. 2:5 are women urged to stay at home, but to supervise their households with discretion and responsibility.” Stanley N. Helton, “Titus 2:5—Must Women Stay At Home?” Osburn, *Essays on Women I*, p. 376.

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considered outlandishly immoral for a married woman in a Grecian community to take on any role other than being busy at home.

We should also note that Paul is concerned for the reputation of such women to those *outside* the church. Paul was not counseling Titus to satisfy the scruples of the church's membership. How ironic it is that today we are often more concerned with the attitudes of those *within* the church than those that we should be seeking to convert. Given a choice between making our members comfortable and making visitors comfortable, we too often consider only the members' feelings. But Paul places emphasis on living so that *outsiders* will not "malign the word of God."

Today, unconverted people (and many of those converted!) consider our traditional treatment of our women members immoral—even wicked. Potential converts are often offended at the notion that some of our churches have men's business meetings—at which women not only cannot vote, they cannot attend! Similarly, while our refusal to allow women to teach or speak to the congregation may please those within the church, it deeply offends those outside the church, who consider such traditions to be sexist and insulting to women.

We had better be sure that the Bible truly requires us to limit women's roles, because we deeply injure our appeal to the unconverted by such practices. We will be accountable for the souls we fail to reach, and I suspect that God will be much more concerned with lost souls than with our obedience to commands never intended to apply to 21st Century America.

**CHAPTER XIV  
GALATIANS 3:28—  
THERE IS NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE.**

**A. The big picture.**

The New Testament's most explicit statement of the new relationship of men and women is found in Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,  
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Not surprisingly, there are widely varying views on how to interpret this passage. Paternalists and hierarchalists typically limit this truth to the requirements for being saved—men and women have the same right to salvation. Egalitarians, however, see this truth as applying more generally—it applies after men and women are saved as well as when they are saved.

The truth of the matter is best determined by understanding the lessons of Galatians gleaned from the entire book. Indeed, this verse shows up well into Paul's argument and must flow logically within Paul's overall lesson.

(Gal. 1:6-9) I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Paul begins Galatians with a rare condemnation. Here Paul, the apostle of grace, pronounces condemnation on all who preach a different gospel.

(Gal. 2:1-6) Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. *This matter arose* because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.

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We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. As for those who seemed to be important—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance—those men added nothing to my message.

We now learn that the false gospel—which is no gospel at all—is the addition of the command to be circumcised. The false teachers did not deny the basics of the gospel plan of salvation—but they concluded that it wasn’t enough. Following the practice that God had established with Abraham, Jews within the early church were requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised as an additional step. Paul declares that adding to the plan of salvation nullifies it! Indeed, adding a single step to plan of salvation turns the freedom of Christianity into slavery.

Intriguingly, Paul further declares the familiar truth: “God does not judge by external appearance,” but Paul says so with respect to the apostles themselves! Paul’s point is that God’s truth is far greater than the strengths or weaknesses of any individuals—even apostles. Of course, he is also implying that if God does not judge by appearances with respect to the leadership of the apostles, then He surely doesn’t judge by appearances when it comes to something like circumcision.

Next Paul recounts how Peter was found to be discriminating against Gentile converts, by not eating with them, for fear of criticism from those Jewish converts who insisted on circumcision:

(Gal. 2:11-13) When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

Paul then undertook to rebuke Peter publicly for his discrimination:

(Gal. 2:14) When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

Paul ironically points out Peter’s inconsistency in condoning insistence on some of the Law of Moses while not insisting on it all! Paul then explains how Peter’s behavior contradicts the gospel itself:

(Gal. 2:15-16) “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by

observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

Now here is one of the key passages in the book. Paul points out to Peter that Christians are saved by faith in Jesus, not by observing the law. And this means that we must judge one another based on faith, not on the observance of law. Thus, Paul declares that the basis on which we are first saved is the basis on which we are to be judged thereafter. The fact that the Gentiles were saved without regard to circumcision means that we must accept them as in full fellowship without regard to circumcision. We may impose no higher doctrinal standard on the saved than we impose on converts!<sup>139</sup>

Paul then responds to the concern that this argument might suggest that converts, who were sinners when converted, may remain sinners:

(Gal. 2:17-21) “If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Paul argues that a convert cannot remain a sinner, because “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” There are a couple of valid ways of looking at this. First, as stated in Acts 2:38, converts are to repent—turn away from their former lives of sin. Second, as also stated in Acts 2:38, converts receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. How does Christ live in me? Through His Holy Spirit. What impact does this have? Paul answers the question in Galatians 5: it bears fruit—the Holy Spirit helps my repentance by changing me to a person “led” by the Spirit, a person who bears fruits “against which there is no law.”

Paul next makes his point regarding the Spirit explicit.

(Gal. 3:1-5) You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you

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<sup>139</sup> Obviously, the scriptures fully expect new converts to mature and grow in their faith over time. But it is not our place to judge a fellow Christian as lost for failing to mature at the pace we’d like. See Rom. 15:7.

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now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

Paul says that, because we received the Spirit (at baptism) (Acts 2:38) by faith, we must seek to attain our goal (heaven) by faith—not human effort. In other words, we began with faith in the gospel—the story of the cross—and we will finish, if at all, the same way.

(Gal. 3:6-9) Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

This is another key passage. Paul defines the “gospel” as faith being credited as righteousness. Paul then begins referring to salvation by faith as the “promise” (v. 17). Paul argues that the promise preceded the Law of Moses by hundreds of years. Thus, salvation could not hinge on obedience to the Law of Moses. The Law wasn’t even around when the promise was made! Moreover, promises don’t hinge on laws (vv. 15-18). Paul further describes the promise as an “inheritance” (v. 18).

Paul then explains the role of law:

(Gal. 3:23-25) Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

At this point, we need to pause for a moment to dispel some possible misunderstandings. What does Paul mean by “law”? Some contend that this refers to the ceremonial part of the Law of Moses, that is, the sacrifices, the priests, circumcision, the Sabbath, and such, but does not refer to the moral elements of the Law of Moses, such as, “Thou shalt not kill.” And certainly we have to agree that Christians aren’t supposed to be murderers.

However, we have to let Paul speak for himself on this one. Follow the flow of his logic carefully. First, Paul sees the gospel as beginning with Abraham—“He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Thus, faith provides deemed righteousness. That is, under the gospel, God treats the faithful unrighteous as though they were righteous. This has nothing to do with ceremonies and ritual not invented for another 400 years—it’s all about righteous living and the fact the none of can live a life sufficiently righteous to merit salvation.

**Galatians 3:28—  
There is Neither Male nor Female.**

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And why is it that Paul says that we were held prisoners by the law? Clearly, because we couldn't meet its requirements! The requirements we can't meet are the requirements for righteous living—don't lie, don't envy, don't commit adultery (even in our hearts!) Jesus came to rescue us from sin—not from the Sabbath. And the “law” that Paul has in mind is the will of God for how we should live—the requirements of righteous and holy living.

This is precisely why Paul felt compelled at the end of chapter 2 to explain why the gospel does not “promote sin.” It was because, properly understood, the gospel frees us from “supervision of the law,” including its moral precepts. If the gospel frees us from ceremonies and not the moral code, then why would Paul need to defend himself from the charge that the gospel promotes sin? Now this is a hard teaching that Paul will deal with in more detail later—so stick with me.

(Gal. 3:26-28) You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Now recall that circumcision is no abstraction. It's a painful surgical procedure performed on males—during an age that had no anesthesia or antibiotics.<sup>140</sup> Thus, the alleged requirement to be circumcised applied only to men—the false teachers placed a greater burden on men than on women. Paul says this can't be true because we Christians are all “sons of God.” Not “children” but sons. The reason we are all sons is because Jesus is God's son and, through baptism, we have “clothed” ourselves with Christ. Thus, we are metaphorically inside of Christ and when God looks at us, He sees not us but Jesus, His sinless Son.

Being “in Christ Jesus” means many things to us. It means that we share in His inheritance, the promise of being considered righteous due to our faith. But it also means that we are part of a single person—we are “one.” Recall Paul's lesson in 1 Corinthians 12, where he explains that we are each a part of a single body, each with different functions.

But the meaning is also that “God does not judge by external appearances.” Indeed, He doesn't even see our external appearances—He sees Jesus. Thus, God cares not at all whether we are circumcised. But neither does He care whether we are Jewish or

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<sup>140</sup> Some societies even today practice something called female circumcision, but the Jews only circumcised males.

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free or enslaved or male or female. These are all earthly, external matters that matter not to God. Those distinctions are all hidden by the clothing of Christ Jesus.

(Gal. 4:1-3) What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.

So what is the role of law? Paul says before Jesus came, we were enslaved under the basic principles of the world. The “basic principles” are how things were before Christ—that is, when mankind had fallen due to the sins of Adam and Eve and was without grace. In other words, the basic principles are the curse of Genesis 3 that was lifted by Christ.<sup>141</sup> But Paul said in 3:24 that the role of the law was to lead us to Christ, that is, to show us that we need a savior. Thus, Paul calls the law a guardian or trustee, which kept us from receiving our inheritance until the right time.

(Gal. 4:4-5) But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

But God rescued us from the condemnation brought on by the basic principles by sending His Son. Why does Paul point out that Jesus was born of a woman? Isn't everybody? I believe that it is to emphasize two things. First, that Jesus has an earthly ancestry that traces back to Abraham, and thus He is a legitimate heir to the inheritance of righteousness by faith. Second, Paul declares that God honors women—He chose a woman to bring His Son into the world! How, then, can the false teachers insist on a male-centered command?

By treating Mary abstractly as “a woman,” Paul is surely implying more than that Mary was Jesus' mother. His point must be to contradict the notion that men are greater than women in God's scheme since circumcision brings them into a relationship that women cannot share. Thus, his point is that God has honored women by bringing the Savior to the world through a woman—clearly offsetting any claim to superiority that the Judaizing teachers could make.

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<sup>141</sup> “Basic principles” is more literally translated “elements,” that is, the very fundamental nature of things. Without Christ, the basic nature of things is that the world is fallen due to the Fall of Man in Genesis 3. “Basic principles” cannot refer to the Law of Moses as the “law” from which we are saved is the moral law of God, which is certainly found in the Law of Moses but is found in the hearts of men as well. Rom. 2:1-16. Indeed, Galatians is written to Gentiles as well as Jews, and for the argument to apply to Gentiles, Paul could certainly not have referred to his readers as having been “in slavery under the basic principles of the world” if he meant only the Law of Moses. Moreover, Paul would never have referred to the Law of Moses as being “of the world,” as the Law of Moses was given by God.

**Galatians 3:28—  
There is Neither Male nor Female.**

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And so, thanks to the Son, we—both male and female—have “full rights of sons.”<sup>142</sup> Is this just the right to be saved? Hardly. After all, we weren’t even clothed with Christ until we’d been saved, and being clothed with Christ is what gets us full rights! Being clothed with Christ is not about admission to salvation—it’s a result of salvation, and therefore our new status as sons of God affects how we live and relate to one another as Christians.

Also, recall that Paul confronted Peter over the rights granted by Peter to Gentile Christians after they’d been saved. Peter wasn’t denying the Gentiles salvation—he was just treating them as lesser Christians. Paul rebuked him, reasoning that God’s acceptance of the Gentiles as Christians entitles them to the same rights and treatment as Jews—long after they were saved. “Full rights of sons” and “God does not judge by external appearance” are fundamental truths of Christianity that ban discrimination based on externalities of race, social class, and gender. Many other verses are to the same effect.<sup>143</sup> It must be true.

(Gal. 4:6-7) Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “*Abba*, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Another of our rights as sons is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit in us makes God truly our Heavenly Father, gives us an intimate, personal relationship with the Creator, and assures us of our inheritance of grace.

In chapter 5, Paul teaches the scariest lesson in the New Testament. This is the passage that speaks of “falling from grace.” Clearly, this is a fate we should all flee.

(Gal. 5:1-3) It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be

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<sup>142</sup> Here the NIV is not entirely literal. As literally translated in the KJV, the Greek really states “the adoption of sons,” rather than “full rights of sons.” However, in conjunction with verses 1 and 3, Paul’s point is not literally adoption, but emancipation, that is, becoming an adult no longer subject to guardians and trustees and thus fully entitled to the right to enjoy one’s inheritance. Thus, we have “full rights” rather than the limited rights previously enjoyed.

<sup>143</sup> (Acts 10:34) “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism”; (Rom. 2:11) “For God does not show favoritism”; (Deut. 10:17) “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.”

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justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

Come again? How can it be that being circumcised makes Christ of no value—“at all”? After all, most American men are circumcised. And Paul had Timothy circumcised so that he would be accepted by the Jews well enough to preach the gospel. So what is it about circumcision that damns?

Plainly, the danger in circumcision is in trying to be justified (saved) by circumcision. And why is this so dangerous? Because if you seek justification by any part of the law, then you must “obey the whole law.” And none of us can do so. Thus, we must entirely rely either on grace or on the law for salvation. Either can, in theory, work, but we are all too frail, too weak to actually meet the righteous requirements of the law, and thus seeking salvation through law keeping is futile.

Moreover, there is no in-between position. You can’t seek to insist on some law and some grace. It’s grace or law. And law enslaves and kills, because we cannot satisfy its requirements.

(Gal. 5:5-6) But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts<sup>144</sup> is faith expressing itself through love.

Law keeping—even moral law keeping—cannot win us our salvation. Rather, the righteousness we need to be saved will be given to us—we anticipate it through faith. This gives hope. And the Spirit gives assurance that hope will not be disappointed.

Externalities, such as circumcision, have no value in Christ. What does have value, however, is faith—expressing itself through love. Thus, faith comes first, but faith is stillborn unless it produces love. Love coming from faith is another way of saying “repentance.” Repentance is a change of lifestyle, and love is the lifestyle we adopt. And, of course, love must be an active, effective love—resulting in service, as Paul says,<sup>145</sup>

(Gal. 5:13-18) You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the

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<sup>144</sup> Verse 6 reads literally, “neither circumcision anything avails nor uncircumcision, but on the contrary, faith through love operating.” The New English Bible translates, “the only thing that counts is faith active in love.” Today’s English Version translates, “What matters is faith that works through love.”

<sup>145</sup> This point is what makes Paul’s view of grace consistent with James’ famous statement: “Faith without works is dead.”

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desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

Understand this passage and you understand Galatians, indeed, nearly all the New Testament. Paul declares that we “are not under law.” Well, we must surely ask, why shouldn’t we indulge the sinful nature? Because, Paul says, we are to be led by the Spirit. Only if we are so led are we not under law.

But being led by the Spirit has a practical effect, as does being led by the sinful nature:

(Gal. 5:19-26) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Thus, we begin with faith. Faith produces salvation, and salvation the Spirit. The Spirit changes our heart so that we produce fruit of the Spirit—in other words, a life of love. And there is no law against living a life of love.

(Gal. 6:15) Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

Moreover, a life of love fulfills the law—there is no other command binding on Christians. But, in reality, even love is not a command—it is a fruit of the Spirit—it is simply being true to our new spiritual natures. Thus, love is not a burden but freedom—freedom to act as we now *want* to act!

Not that we can’t fall away. Indeed, we can lose our salvation by three means:

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We can lose our faith.<sup>146</sup>

We can return to our sinful natures, frustrating the work of the Spirit and ultimately losing the Spirit. Those who live like this will lose their salvation.<sup>147</sup>

We can elect to seek to be saved by the law—any part or all of it. And if we seek salvation by law keeping, to be saved, we must keep all the law. This is the fearsome lesson of Galatians.

Thus, we must accept Jesus as the Son of God, and as our Lord, and as our Savior. Or else we must live sinless lives. There is no in between.

Why do I say that the third point is “fearsome”? Because most of my life I’ve insisted on law keeping as a condition to salvation, and so have many others. For example, if I insist that only those who worship on Sundays without an instrument are going to heaven, I’ve added a command to the plan of salvation. I’ve said that there is a law—no instruments in worship—that must be added to faith for one to be saved. *A cappella* singing is not a consequence of “love your neighbor,” and therefore is not part of the only thing that counts, and therefore doesn’t count—in terms of whether you go to heaven.

Thus, we have been given the perfect tool to distinguish eternal commands from temporary, culturally limited commands: love.

Paul discusses this understanding of obedience in Romans:

(13:8-10) Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for *he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law*. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Therefore, if I love my fellowman, I have fulfilled the law. Therefore, I do not need to be circumcised to fulfill the law, since I can perfectly well love and love well without having been circumcised.

Just so, a woman can love her fellows and love well without wearing a veil while praying—in today’s society. She could not do so in First Century Corinthian society. A woman may exercise authority over a man without in any way being unloving in today’s society—but not in First Century Ephesus. Certainly, if a woman were to teach a man

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<sup>146</sup> John 4:1 and following verses.

<sup>147</sup> Heb. 10:26 and following verses.

more about Christ, that would be an act of love in modern culture. But teaching a man in a domineering way would not be—even more so in the First Century.

And so we see that Paul declares an end to arbitrary rules and regulations. There are no rules for the sake of having rules. The only rules that are eternal—not culture based—are those rules that are dictated by the obligation to love. As Paul states in Romans 13, adultery will always be wrong because it always contradicts the pledge of love made by spouses. Similarly, murder cannot be an act of love, nor can stealing.

The command to love not only imposes eternal duties such as these—it may impose some temporary duties, such as the command to wear a veil while praying, or to greet one another with the Holy Kiss, or to wash one another’s feet. These commands were simply commands to love as applied under First Century circumstances. Our circumstances are quite different now. The command to love still applies, but the command has different practical results.

Some will misunderstand this line of reasoning by thinking that it contradicts baptism, but Paul is only addressing the saved. He is not discussing how to become saved!<sup>148</sup> It is only after one has been saved and is in Christ that one is freed from all “law” other than the perfect law of love. Thus, the law of love does not argue against the need to be baptized.

Others will misunderstand and think that this interpretation undermines much of what the Church of Christ has stood for many years. And yet we’ve always taught that salvation comes by repenting and being baptized (Acts 2:38). What is repenting? It is a decision to change and live a life of obedience to Christ. And what does Christ command? “Love one another.”

(Matt. 7:12) So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

(Matt. 22:35-40) One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘*Love your neighbor as yourself.*’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

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<sup>148</sup> Gal. 3:26-27: “You are *all* sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were *baptized* into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

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(John 13:34-35) “A new command I give you: *Love one another*. As I have loved you, so you must *love one another*. By this all *men will know that you are my disciples*, if you *love one another*.”

(John 15:9-14) “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you*. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”

(1 John 3:21-23) Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us*.

(James 2:8-9) If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*,” *you are doing right*. But if you show *favoritism*, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

The recurring theme of these verses is that Jesus’ “commands” are but one command—love one another. Matthew 7:12, the Golden Rule, makes clear that love must be an active love—a love that prompts actual doing for others. Moreover, we are taught that this is both a light and a heavy command. It is light because we are freed from arbitrary rules for the sake of rules. Rather, we who are in Christ are subject to but one rule: “love one another.” But it is heavy because this rule requires us to lay down our lives for our friends. Jesus is the perfect example of how to live a loving life.

In the minds of some of my more legalistically inclined brothers, this sort of reasoning is nothing but so much liberal, mumbo-jumbo mush. It is too vague and uncertain—even dangerous—to appeal to many within the Church. Indeed, sermons have been preached warning against “liberals” who speak too much of love! And yet Paul—an apostle of my Lord Jesus Christ—said that the *only thing* that matters is faith expressing itself through love! Jesus Himself said that *all* the law hangs on the command to love.

Many readers would perhaps provisionally accept these ideas—but would wonder just how their favorite doctrines are affected. But the New Testament is filled with examples of how to apply this command in countless situations. And so we are not saying that there are no absolute commands or conclusions. Jesus and Paul condemn adultery, stealing, murder, and covetousness as violating the command to love. Numerous other corollary or derivative commands are announced throughout the scriptures. But I do not

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intend to understate the significance of the words of Jesus, Paul, James, and John. There is much that we must reconsider if we are to take them at their word.<sup>149</sup>

Ultimately, the eternal rule that we may not discriminate on the basis of gender is true, not because Paul said “neither male nor female,” but because we are saved by faith—expressing itself through love—and nothing else counts. Thus, any arbitrary distinction between Christians must be a product of the burden of living in an evil society—not God’s eternal will.

Indeed, the result would be the same had Paul never said that there is neither male nor female—the fact the God does not show favoritism and the fact that the only commands that matter are those commands derived from “love your neighbor” make the point quite well enough.<sup>150</sup>

**The fearsome part.** We need to spend a little more time pondering Paul’s teachings about falling from grace. Paul didn’t say that the Galatians would fall from grace by sinning—being circumcised is not a sin. Rather, they risked a fall from grace by

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<sup>149</sup> Perhaps for another book some day in the future, the command to love has a few wrinkles. For example, when the New Testament instructs us on marriage, sex, divorce, or the role of women, we are called back to the Genesis 1 and 2 ideal marriage of Adam and Eve. But that’s because the way spouses best love is in such a relationship, and because any sexual relationship outside the relationship described in Eden produces evil results—some results affect society at large more than the individuals involved—but God in His wisdom knows that the destruction of marriage, for example, will harm children in particular and society as a whole, and thus our failure to uphold marriage is an unloving thing. Premarital sex, therefore, is wrong as destructive of marriage even if the participants aren’t themselves harmed in any obvious way.

Just so, obeying seemingly arbitrary rules such as the command to take the Lord’s Supper or to assemble weekly certainly isn’t the only way we might express our love to one another and to God, and yet God, in His wisdom, knows that these practices are necessary to building up the church (as proven by nearly 2,000 years of experience).

Thus, we can’t be naïve and argue that anything that seems loving is okay. As Christians we have to look to God’s word as a source of wisdom much greater than our own, and realize that God has a much bigger picture of the world and the impact of our actions than we do. But we must also resist the temptation to take any pet doctrine and declare it to be the product of the command to love, even when it clearly is not. Demeaning half the world’s population is not loving.

<sup>150</sup> Some contend that Gal. 6:2 disproves this argument: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” “Aha!” they say, “Christ really is a lawmaker because there is a ‘law of Christ!’” But this argument fails by utterly ignoring all that Paul has said before. The “law of Christ” is “love your neighbor,” of course. And Paul doesn’t say this is the way to salvation. He says this is how you do what the Spirit prompts you to do as a new creation. He is instructing, not commanding. Even if I’m wrong, showing that there is *a* law of Christ hardly shows that every rule and regulation that another wishes to impose is the law of Christ. We must find this law of Christ in Galatians—and there is only the one candidate—love. Finally, I might add that Paul was as capable as any good writer of using irony.

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insisting on a practice as a condition to salvation and full fellowship that is not a part of the gospel.

Now Paul defines the gospel as righteousness coming from faith by means of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.<sup>151</sup> Thus, "gospel" is about how to become saved, not such issues as divorce and remarriage or even women's role. The gospel is what people "hear" when they hear, believe, repent, confess, and are baptized. This is very important information, but it is also fairly narrowly defined information.

Thus, if I require you to have the right position on, say, divorce, to be saved, then I've added to the plan of salvation and I'm very truly in jeopardy of falling from grace. If you are counting on being right on one doctrine (other than the gospel) to be saved, then you must be right on *all* doctrines to be saved. Either you earn it yourself or you count on grace. No half measures.

This is not to say that having the right doctrine of divorce is unimportant—it is quite important because God's teaching on divorce tells us how best to love and how to avoid sin—sin that hurts other people. But being right is not a condition to being baptized, nor is it a condition to going to heaven. And if we teach otherwise, we've fallen from grace. Truly a fearsome thought.

Sorry for getting on my soapbox again. I know this doesn't directly deal with what you bought the book for—but I'm in agony of spirit for many of my brothers who seem, to me, to be in the deepest jeopardy of losing their souls.

**B. Cottrell's objection.** Of all the authors that I've chosen to disagree with, Cottrell is my favorite—because he's the most honest. He admits that weak arguments are weak. He doesn't accuse his opponents of bad faith or question their salvation.

Cottrell spends considerable effort dealing with 3:28. Ultimately his argument is based on Jewish laws of inheritance. He points out that under the Law of Moses daughters did not inherit, unless there was no son. Thus, for a female Christian to inherit the "promise," that is, the promise of salvation by faith rather than works that God gave to Abraham, some mechanism must be found to get around this rule.

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<sup>151</sup> (Rom. 1:2-5) "the *gospel* he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."

(Col. 1:21-23) "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the *gospel* that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

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Paul deals with this by declaring that at baptism Christians “put on Christ” (3:27 KJV) and so God only sees Jesus when He looks at us, thereby allowing us to claim the inheritance of the promise.

Cottrell also points out that Gentiles and slaves don’t qualify to inherit from Abraham either—only male, free Jews. Thus, the commonality of the three pairs is the contrast in ability to inherit.

I’m inclined to agree with Cottrell to this point. But then he concludes that therefore inheritance only applies to a Christian’s initial salvation—not to other aspects of our relationship with God. Thus, while men and women have equal access to salvation—clearly the subject at hand—they don’t necessarily have equal access to other elements of the Christian life. And here I must disagree.

Yes, it’s true that salvation is the issue. But among the many points Paul makes in Galatians is that whatever gets you into Christ is the same as what keeps you in Christ. Thus, not only do I not have to be circumcised to become saved, I don’t need to be circumcised to stay saved.

Take, for example, 3:3:

After beginning with the Spirit are you now trying to attain your goal with human effort?

and 3:5

Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

In verse 3 Paul declares that because we were saved by grace and faith at the outset that we must understand that we remain saved by the same means. In verse 5 Paul speaks in the present tense, saying that the Galatians presently have the Spirit because they presently believe (not because they believed when they were first saved).

The point is that the faith and repentance that allow us to become saved are the very things that allow us to stay saved. There is not one doctrine of how to become saved and another of how to stay saved. It’s all salvation and it’s all faith. Countless other passages are to the same effect.

And this is why Paul declares in Galatians that the gospel—salvation by faith—affects how we deal with our fellow Christians. For example, at the end of chapter 2, Paul rebukes Peter for refusing to associate with the Gentiles. Why? Because discrimination contradicts how we are saved. Paul reminds Peter,

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We ... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

In short, Paul declares that the process by which we are saved tells us how we are to treat one another. God accepts Jews and Gentiles both based on faith. Therefore, we may not discriminate between the two. Of course, the same argument addresses how men and women are to relate to one another in Christ. Indeed, if God only sees Jesus when he looks at a woman, then who are we to see anything less?

**CHAPTER XV**  
**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

I studied and even taught this material for many years before arriving at my present position. I'm confident that many readers will struggle to get comfortable with these ideas that are so far removed from what many of us have been taught. If I were teaching in person, I'd look forward to a question and answer period to allow those with questions to clarify their thinking. In lieu of such a session, the following are the hardest questions that I could think of to ask myself:

*Q. The argument for men to have dominion over women seems so simple and your position seems very complicated, with references to Greek and commentators and all. Isn't the simplicity of the dominion position strong evidence that it is the right position?*

A. Not at all. The simplest interpretations of scripture are sometimes right but sometimes very wrong. After all, it is very easy to point out that the New Testament frequently, plainly, and unambiguously commands us to greet one another with the Holy Kiss.

(Rom. 16:16) Greet one another with a holy kiss.

(1 Cor. 16:20) Greet one another with a holy kiss.

(2 Cor. 13:12) Greet one another with a holy kiss.

(1 Thess. 5:26) Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

(1 Pet. 5:14) Greet one another with a kiss of love.

These are all direct commands. The commands are plain. We don't preach, teach, or practice them, even though the argument in support of adopting this practice is very simple indeed. What's not to understand?

The only reason we don't struggle with the Holy Kiss (or for that matter, prohibitions on braided hair and gold jewelry or the requirement to wear a veil) is that such commands run contrary to our culture today and would not serve their original purpose today. We do struggle with the role of women because, until very recently, our culture has refused to allow women to have the same opportunities and recognition as men. Our older members grew up in that culture and many (including the women) came

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to approve and accept unequal rights for women. Therefore, they find the traditionalist arguments comfortable—and therefore “simple.”<sup>152</sup>

Moreover, the argument that I’ve spent more than 100 pages on can be stated just as simply as any other argument dealing with the role of women:

The Bible says that in God’s eyes there is neither male nor female. It means what it says. Passages that apparently limit women’s role are written for a temporary cultural situation that no longer exists (much like the command of the Holy Kiss). Genesis 3 is a curse not a command. Genesis 1 and 2 define how men and women should relate in Christ, who came to undo the Fall of Man—they are both made in God’s image and husbands and wives should be one flesh, much as Jesus and God are one.

It’s not really complicated.

*Q. I just can’t accept that men and women are equal.*

*A. Me neither. God made us different. While God did not set up a hierarchy of men over women, Genesis 2 plainly teaches that Adam was inadequate (not good) without Eve. God did not make another man—He made a woman, who was wondrously different.*

The inherent, God-created differences between men and women mean that certain gifts and talents will be unequally distributed among them. It is hardly a shock to anyone that more women teach the cradle roll class than men. There is no deep theological reason that men shouldn’t do this. They just, on the whole, don’t care to and, on the whole, wouldn’t be very good at it. But many women have this talent. This obvious gender distinction does not mean that men cannot teach cradle roll. Just so, it is conceivable that more men than women are gifted to teach adult Sunday School classes (although we really have no way of knowing this at this time). If this proves to be a fact, nonetheless, as J. W. McGarvey suggested nearly 100 years ago, capable women should be allowed to teach.

Finally, the differences between men and women relate foremost to marriage, not church organization. God gave Eve to Adam as a wife—not as a pre-school Sunday School class teacher and communion preparer. As we will discuss in the next chapter, when the Bible speaks of any Christian’s role in the church, it speaks in terms of talents. And while talents may be unequally distributed, all the talents that God has given must be used to His glory, no matter to whom God has given them. It is, after all, God’s choice.

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<sup>152</sup> We might analogize to the Stockholm Syndrome and principles of cognitive dissonance.

*Q. Regardless of what you write or teach, nothing's going to change. Why rock the boat?*

A. I am not that cynical. Besides, the boat needs rocking.

Flavil Yeakley, of Harding University, recently published statistics for the growth of the Churches of Christ in the United States during the 1980's.<sup>153</sup> We grew 5.2%—not per year—but per *decade*. This works out to an annual rate of growth of only 0.51%. At the same time, the general population grew over 11%. We didn't even keep up with the growth of the general population! More precisely, we aren't even converting enough new members to replace those of our children who leave the church! If we converted no one during the 1980's, then we lost over half our children during that time. Something has to change.

I'd never suggest adopting a new doctrine just to grow. But I would never condone accepting a tradition not found in the Bible if that tradition kept anyone from finding Jesus. Those outside the Church look at us and see a very peculiar people. They wonder: how can these people know about how to live and be moral when they don't even grant their women the same rights that the godless do?

One advantage that the Churches of Christ have over many other religious groups is our appeal to rational thought in a scientific age. If we really believe that our religion is Bible-based and not man-made, then we should be more than willing to change when we are convinced that we've misunderstood the Bible—without regard to the criticism that will follow any major course correction.

*Q. But wouldn't it be safer to require women to be silent and to not teach? After all, consider the eternal consequences of being wrong!*

A. It is just as sinful to impose a command not made by God as to ignore a command made by God. Binding what God doesn't bind is just as sinful as loosing what God doesn't loose (*Cf.* Matt. 16:19; 18:18). Notice that we only feel compelled to find safety in obedience to those doubtful rules that happen to suit our traditions. If this is not so, then our women members would be wearing veils, long hair, and no jewelry, and our men would be raising their hands in prayer and greeting one another with a kiss. We'd all be washing each other's feet!

There will always be another "command" for someone to find and make us feel guilty about. We can never keep enough rules to be safe. This is, in fact, precisely the

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<sup>153</sup> Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., *Separating Fact from Fiction: A Realistic Assessment of the Churches of Christ in the United States* (The Harding University Center for Church Growth Studies, Searcy, Arkansas 1995), as summarized by Yeakley in vol. 10, no. 2 *Church Growth* (Center for Church Growth, Houston, Tex., April-June, 1995).

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approach to God that sent the Pharisees to hell, and I don't care to join them. Thank God for His grace! The one thing I know for sure is that I'm saved, and my confidence is not based on my intellect or my education but on Jesus Christ and Him crucified. If anyone teaches you otherwise, run for your eternal salvation. We need to flee the temptation toward a new Pharisaism and we should rather return to the Old Paths—being the Bible's paths.<sup>154</sup>

*Q. Wouldn't I be a liberal if I accepted your arguments?*

A. There are those who would call you a liberal, but they would be liars and slanderers for having done so. Jesus speaks plainly to our tendency to pin false labels on those with whom we disagree:

(Matt. 5:22) "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Jesus is not saying that "fool" and "Raca" are especially wicked words. Rather, he is condemning the sin of contemptuous name-calling. Whether we use "fool," "Raca," "nigger," or "liberal," the sin is the same.<sup>155</sup> No matter how strongly one feels that I am wrong, such feelings do not justify making false or exaggerated claims in opposition to what I say.

In one of the best books ever written on the history of the Restoration Movement, *Christians Only*,<sup>156</sup> James DeForest Murch describes actual liberalism, which developed in the late 19th Century:

The schools of theological thought which grew out of this religious revolution were many and varied but they might all be grouped under the banner or *liberalism* or *modernism*. No two liberals thought exactly alike, but the general principles were the same. The Bible was to them merely a historical record of the developing religious consciousness of the Jewish people. Liberals

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<sup>154</sup> See the author's *The Holy Spirit and Revolutionary Grace* for a more thorough discussion of this critical issue.

<sup>155</sup> Matt. 15:19-20; Col. 3:8-10; James 4:11-12: "Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?"

<sup>156</sup> (Standard Publishing, Cincinnati, 1962). This is an excellent reference, although written from the perspective of the conservative, instrumental churches within the Restoration Movement. Murch's telling of the history of true liberalism should be required reading for elderships and college trustees everywhere.

did not accept Jesus as one to be worshipped but as an example, a prophet, a teacher, and a moral pioneer.<sup>157</sup>

The Churches of Christ were largely spared from liberalism by their separation from the northern Churches over the instrumental and missionary societies. The then much smaller Churches of Christ had few colleges or other institutions within their ranks, most schools and publishing houses having been controlled by the instrumental churches. However, within the Restoration Movement's instrumental churches, liberalism came to be a serious problem.

Murch then describes the deceits and manipulations practiced by the liberal camp within the instrumental churches to take over many of the missionary societies, colleges, and publishing houses, with the liberals frequently deceiving the supporters of these institutions regarding their true intentions until control was gained. Soon former Restoration Movement schools were teaching their preaching students to reject the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and divinity of Jesus. The liberal takeover of church institutions was so thorough that new colleges had to be founded for the benefit of those within the instrumental churches who rejected liberalism. Ultimately, the liberal churches joined to form a nationally governed denomination, the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ). Certainly, not all members of the Christian Churches denomination are liberals, but the denomination freely includes liberals within its governing ranks and the faculties of its schools.

The remaining churches within the instrumental churches rejected liberalism and are organized very much like the Churches of Christ, except for accepting instrumental music and, in some cases, supporting missionary societies.

Now, of course, true liberalism is rife with sin, and we must be vigilant to rid our camp of its wickedness. But liberalism rejects the inspiration of scripture and denies the divinity of Jesus. Obviously, nothing in this book even remotely encourages these sins.

So, why be concerned about being labeled a liberal? Because some within our brotherhood have developed a mindset whereby they conclude that anyone who disagrees with them must question the inspiration of scripture! And since those who doubt the scriptures are liberals, then those who doubt what these brothers teach must be liberals, too. What a wicked thought! If I were so arrogant as to suppose that the only reason someone might dare disagree with me is that he doubts the inspiration of scripture, then I must consider my opinions inspired! But it is quite obvious that I can form a different opinion from yours about any number of issues—the role of women in the church, divorce and remarriage, how many children an elder must have—and do so while still having a very strong belief indeed in inspiration and Jesus our Lord.

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<sup>157</sup> Pages 224-225.

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Those of us who seek to bully the rest of us into submitting to their teachings through name calling, lies, and slander will be judged very harshly. I am not a liberal, and those who happen to agree with all or some of what I believe are not liberals for having so agreed.

*Q. Can't a woman be required to be subordinate without being made inferior?*

A. The paternalist and hierarchalist positions are often justified by the argument that the leadership or presumed “headship” of man makes woman subordinate—but not inferior. Indeed, hierarchalists and many paternalists would insist that women have the same “value” as men, arguing that this is the true meaning of such passages as Galatians 3:28: “There is ... neither male nor female.”<sup>158</sup> And it is certainly true that in certain circumstances one may take a subordinate role to another and be in no wise inferior to that person. For example, I am an equal partner in my law practice with the other senior lawyers. I’m in no way inferior to them in terms of legal rights or ownership. And yet, I often work under another attorney in the firm on a case or project. A given project may require more than one experienced lawyer, and yet we recognize that a project should have only one boss. Thus, the other lawyers take a subordinate role—voluntarily. Indeed, this is a word that pops up frequently in hierarchalist literature. It is repeatedly stated that women should “voluntarily” subordinate themselves to men, and yet no effort is made to explain how one can voluntarily subordinate oneself if one has no choice!

The underlying problem here is that truly voluntary subordination is based on reasons other than a rule. For example, the choice of which lawyer will take the lead on a case is made based on talent, experience, relationship with client, or the like. It is made based on the needs of the client, not the needs of a lawyer who wants to be boss! In biblical terms, the choice is made based on gifts and talents.

Just so, on a basketball team some players are asked to be “role players.” They take subordinate roles as substitutes, rebounders, defenders, or the like. In fact, all players are role players in the sense that each has a distinct job and assignment. All five players cannot be the playmaker, and all five can’t stand behind the three-point line setting up for a long-range basket. And clearly being the playmaker versus being the center does not make one player inferior to the other. Magic Johnson was just as valuable as a point guard as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was as a center.

But if the coach chooses to designate roles arbitrarily, based on skin color, family status, or the car driven by the player, the players would quite properly protest the unfairness of the decision. There is nothing unfair in taking different roles or even in

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<sup>158</sup> See, for example, Black, *ibid*, page 212-213; Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Goebel Music Publications, Colleyville, Texas 1991) page 530; Ferguson (“A common mistake is to confuse equal worth with equal rank”).

being subordinate—or even in sitting on the bench—so long as the choice is made based on the abilities of each individual and what is best for the team.

In the not-too-distant past, we required black men and women to take subordinate positions to whites. Today, we see that this was wrong—not because no black person should ever be subordinate to a white person—but because the practice evaluated the black men and women as a race and not as individuals. Indeed, the requirement of subordination plainly indicated inferiority, and for this reason it was immoral. Accordingly, whether we mean to or not, we patronize women when we argue that requiring them to be subordinate to men regardless of their respective talents, experiences, or accomplishments and regardless of what is best for the work of the church has no implication of inferiority.

The paternalist responds to such arguments by reasoning in a circle. God plainly values women the same as men. God plainly requires women to be subordinate to men. Therefore, subordination does not imply inferiority. But such reasoning “solves” the problem by denying the problem. The reality is that limiting what women can do purely because of their gender indicates inferiority.

### CHAPTER XVI THE GIFT-OCRACY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

**The Parable of the Talents.** We will next study the qualifications for elders and deacons. But before we approach this topic, we need to return to the Gospels. Jesus had much to say that relates to these issues. Most significant is His Parable of the Talents:

(Matt. 25:14-30) “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

“His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

“Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant

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outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

There are powerful lessons in this parable. Note these points.

A “talent” is literally a standard weight of silver or gold, while we understand that figuratively it refers to anything that allows us to serve God—an ability, a resource, even an opportunity.

Jesus praised the servants who provided a 100% return on the master’s money. Where do you get this kind of return risk free? Nowhere. In fact, the master condemned the one-talent servant saying, in effect, that he should have at least earned interest on the money. Even investing with the bankers was very risky in the First Century, when there was no FDIC insurance, no Federal Reserve Board, and no other protection for investors. If investing with the bankers was risky, imagine the risks the other two servants must have taken to yield such a high return for the master!

Thus, Jesus pronounces damnation on those who would take no risks. Those who pass by opportunities and who fail to give the Master a return on what he did for us will receive hellfire for having been too afraid of the Master. Safety is not found in doing nothing. Quite the opposite. Safety is found in Jesus. In grace. In the cross. When we look to rules and our works for safety, we understandably feel unworthy (we are!) and will be afraid to make mistakes (we will!) But Jesus condemns those who think this way. Do something for Jesus. Doing nothing is sure damnation.

Therefore, imagine the frustration of a Christian woman with the gift to teach, who must endure classes taught less well than she could teach and see students not reach their potentials as Christians for lack of instruction. Imagine the frustration of a Christian woman with the gift of administration, who could run a benevolence or mission program far better than the best man available. Imagine the frustration of a Christian women with the gift to speak in public, who cannot provide her Master with any return on His investment. Imagine the frustration of the Holy Spirit who generously gives these gifts to men and women and finds the leadership of His Church too afraid of being wrong to allow the gifts to be used. Imagine the anger of God when He sees His children unfed, His people lost, and His churches understaffed because over half of its members are severely limited in the service that they can perform.

Of course, women can teach ladies classes and pray among women, but such limited service no more fully utilizes their talents than limiting men to speaking to entirely male audiences or leading prayer among purely male groups would fully utilize their talents. How many adult education programs have enough teachers among the men? How many benevolence or evangelism programs have failed for lack of leadership? How many women have dropped out, frustrated by their second-class citizen status?

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The foremost objection voiced by those opposing full membership for women is that it is not safe to rely on an interpretation of these “ambiguous” passages. They argue that the safe thing to do is to not let women exercise their talents. But Jesus Christ Himself tells us what happens to those who think like this. The sin of the one-talent man is that he imagined that his master would be angry if he lost the money. He was wrong. His Master had more than enough money to lose. The Master wanted a return on his investment.

**The Doctrine of Gifts.** In the New Testament, the leadership of the church is to be based on the gifts given by God to His children. This is only a logical extension of Jesus’ Parable of the Talents. We often ignore the implications of the passages dealing with the use of gifts for church governance.

(Rom. 12:4-8) Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is *teaching*, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is *leadership*, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

What if a woman is given the gift of teaching? or of leadership? What does this passage tell her to do? God tells women that He gave them the gifts they have to be used in His service, and that refusal to do so is a sin.

(1 Cor. 12:7,11,18-21) Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is *given for the common good*. ... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines. ... But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, *just as he wanted them to be*. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. *The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”*

Paul tells us that all gifts come from God, and that God gives each of us the gifts he wants us to have to serve the entire church—the common good. Women have the gifts they have so they can be “just as he wanted them to be.” And it is sin to prevent the use of God-given gifts. We can’t tell the women, “We don’t need your gifts!” God says that if we didn’t need their gifts, He wouldn’t have given the gifts to them! And we can’t limit women to serving only other women. The gifts are for the *common good*—that is, the good of the total body.

(1 Cor. 12:27-31) Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. *And in the church God has*

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*appointed* first of all apostles, *second prophets*, third *teachers*, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, *those with gifts of administration*, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Once again we see teaching and administering (governing) as highly valued gifts that are to be used. And it is expressly a sin to prevent their use by those whom God has chosen to have them.

When we consider who should have any position within the church, these lessons must be kept in mind. They are true whether or not they fit neatly within our traditions. If a woman has the gift to fill any of these roles, how can we deny her the use of her gift to serve the God who gave her the gift and, by so doing, called her to that service?

Would it be “safe” to violate the clear commands of these passages in order to obey a questionable interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15? Why is it considered safer to violate 1 Corinthians 12 and all these other passages and not safe to violate 1 Corinthians 14:34-35? What makes one passage more dangerous than the other? Wouldn't it be “safer” to obey the Parable of the Talents (with its very express threat of condemnation for those who ignore the lesson) and those passages that follow its teachings than two very difficult passages that even our foremost scholars cannot agree on? Are we interpreting the Bible or are we doing what is most comfortable? Are we obeying God or are we running from a fight?

The Master's anger burns against those Pharisees among us who fear Him too much, who refuse to cling to His grace, and who insist on trusting in their ability to find ways to be “safe.” There is no safety but in the love of God. And for the love of God, I would rather face my Creator having the best teachers that God gave us teaching, the best leaders leading, the best song leaders leading, the best prayer leaders leading prayers, and the best speakers speaking. God chose whom to give the gifts to. He will not complain if His gifts are used in His service.

### CHAPTER XVII DEACONS—DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

I refer the reader to the excellent book *Deacons: Male and Female?* by J. Stephen Sandifer. Sandifer explains in great detail the history of deacons in the synagogues, the early church, and throughout history. The research on which this section is based (but not the arguments made) is a very brief condensation of his work.

What does a deacon do? There are only two sources of information: the word for deacon and Acts 6. “Deacon” or *diakonos* is an untranslated word when used as a church official. It actually means “servant” or “minister.” It does not mean minister in the sense of “preacher.” The same word was used by the ancients to refer to any servant, such as a waiter or busboy.

In Gentile religions, deacons were frequently appointed, and the term normally referred to the persons handling the organization’s funds or the persons responsible for distributions of food to the needy. The Gentile deacons were not rulers, but simply trusted men or women who conducted a congregation’s benevolent program.

The citizens of the first century composed a broad economic spectrum, making philanthropy very significant. Finance became a central focus of many [pagan] associations. The funds were brought to one man, the *episkopos*,<sup>159</sup> and he then gave them to servants known as *oikonomoi* (managers, stewards) or *diakonoi* (servants, deacons) to distribute. The benevolent need was even greater in Christianity because perpetual virginity and perpetual widowhood were encouraged, thus increasing the proportion of single women requiring financial assistance.

The *diakonoi* were those who commonly served tables, especially in distributing the meat of sacrifice among the festival company in pagan religious associations.

The same word refers to either a male or female deacon. The Jewish synagogues had many officials, including elders, but only rarely was a Jewish official referred to as a deacon.<sup>160</sup>

Commentators are split as to whether the seven men appointed in Acts 6 were deacons, elders, or just men appointed to a task. Certainly, it would seem that Acts was written late enough that Luke would have called them the first deacons if they were. On the other hand, their duties closely correspond to the pagan religious use of the word.

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<sup>159</sup> Overseer or bishop.

<sup>160</sup> Sandifer, pages 11-13.

(Acts 6:1-6) In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

These men were appointed to handle the feeding of certain widows. Their duties are contrasted to the apostles' prayer and ministry of the word. This service is so close to the meaning of *diakonos* in the pagan congregations that preceded Christianity that this passage surely describes the role of deacons. If it does not, then nothing in the Bible tells us what deacons are to do!

This conclusion is reinforced by the writings of uninspired Christians from the early years of the church. It is evident from scripture and early church history that many congregations served the Lord's Supper at a common meal, known as the love feast, or simply the *agape*.<sup>161</sup> These common meals also served as a means of dispensing food to the poor. Thus, the deacons who were charged with the distribution of food soon were also charged with handling the elements of the Lord's Supper.

In *Trallians 2*, Ignatius (c.<sup>162</sup> AD 107), the bishop of Antioch, states,

[D]eacons, who are ministers of the mysteries of Christ Jesus; for they are not [just] ministers of meat and drink, but servants of the Church of God.<sup>163</sup>

The reference to "mysteries" is probably to the Lord's Supper. "Meat and drink" would be a reference to the love feast.

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<sup>161</sup> See, for example, Jude 12.

<sup>162</sup> The "c." is short for *circa*, or approximately.

<sup>163</sup> Sandifer at page 69.

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According to the *Shepherd* of Hermas 3:9:26 (c. AD 120), the job of a deacon included care for widows and orphans, and bad deacons are those guilty of misappropriating benevolent funds.<sup>164</sup>

Justin Martyr (c. AD 155) states that deacons took the Lord's Supper to the sick who could not attend the assembly (*First Apology* 67; *Symonds* 410). Deacons were also charged with handling the elements of the Lord's Supper (*First Apology* 67).<sup>165</sup>

Interestingly, the only other role found for deacons in the Second Century is as teachers. This association goes back to the Syrian *Didache* 15 (c. AD 100), where elders and deacons are identified with the prophets and teachers in Antioch, evidently in an effort to conform Antioch's historical practices (Acts 13:1-3) with the increasingly standard pattern of elders and deacons.<sup>166</sup> However, the *Shepherd* (3:9:26) lists deacons as church officers of lower rank than the office of teacher. And yet the same book associates deacons with the instruction of converts.

We must be careful not to place too much emphasis on these uninspired writings. After all, it was during this same period that the notion of a single bishop above the elders, among many other heresies, evolved. And yet we clearly see that the deacons began with a charge to handle the distribution of food for the care of a church's widows. This role expanded to include the congregation's love feast (where such distributions often occurred), and then expanded again to include the Lord's Supper (which was often combined with the love feast). In the Third Century, the role of deacons expanded further into a formal clergy.

This bit of history is entirely inconsistent with the notion that deacons are to each head a different church ministry or program. Indeed, all deacons were charged with the same ministry in the New Testament and the Second Century. It is certainly inconsistent with the notion that the deacons meet as a body to make financial or "non-spiritual" decisions.

Deacons are charged with benevolent functions for the benefit of the poor of the congregation. The only example of the role of deacons is the distribution of food to widows, and this is exactly the use of the word we find in pre-New Testament times and post-New Testament times. In fact, the apostles ironically refer to their job as "waiting on tables." This hardly indicates a position of great authority, but perhaps one involving responsibility for a great deal of money. There is no support in the Bible, pre-New Testament history, or post-New Testament history for giving deacons any greater or broader role. In Acts 6, we see that a committee of seven men headed the food

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<sup>164</sup> Sandifer at page 69.

<sup>165</sup> Sandifer at page 70.

<sup>166</sup> Sandifer at page 68.

distribution program. They didn't head seven programs. They were charged with a common task as a group.

If this is the pattern for deacons, we also have their qualifications—"full of the Spirit and wisdom." Moreover, we have their selection process—"Brothers, choose seven men from among you." The membership did the selecting.

**Were deacons universal during New Testament times?** Deacons do not appear to have been universal even in New Testament times. Why did Paul give Timothy instructions on the appointment of deacons but not Titus? Paul told Titus whom to ordain as elders. Why didn't Paul tell him about deacons too? Was Titus supposed to ask Timothy (who was many days away in Ephesus while Titus was an evangelist to the island of Crete)? If Titus had access to the book of 1 Timothy, why tell him whom to pick for elders?

I don't know the answers, but it may have depended on the sizes or ages of the congregations. Ephesus was presumably a fairly large church, being an older congregation in a very large city. But this is sheer speculation. Antioch apparently had "prophets and teachers" rather than elders and deacons.<sup>167</sup> Jerusalem had apostles and elders (Acts 15:4).

We can only *prove* that the church at Philippi had deacons (Phil. 1:1) and that Timothy was supposed to ordain deacons in Ephesus. We can deduce that Jerusalem may have had deacons. If Phoebe was a deacon, then the church at Cenchrea had deacons (Rom. 16:1). There is no other mention of the office.

**What can only deacons do?** If we were to conclude that women cannot be deacons—other than wear the title—what is it that women could not do? In a congregation with no deacons, what is it that the men cannot do because they are unqualified to be deacons? In a congregation with no men qualified to be deacons, can any man handle the treasury and the giving of alms to the poor? It hardly makes sense to argue that only certain Christians can be deacons but to then allow anyone to do what deacons do. Or could it be that those who have the gifts to do these things should do them?

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<sup>167</sup> Prophets and teachers evidently led the church at Antioch. Acts 13:1-3. Some within the Churches of Christ have argued that prophets = elders and teachers = deacons, seeking to demonstrate that elders and deacons form the universal, eternal form of church governance. If so, then the references to prophets and teachers should be so understood. But since we know that women prophesied, what are we to conclude about women elders? If the elder and deacon pattern is not eternal and universal, are we now bound by the qualifications requirements? Thus, others argue that the form of government changed until it reached its final form in elders and deacons. Others do not consider Acts 13 as saying the prophets and teachers governed the church, leaving room for unmentioned elders and deacons. Sometimes I am amazed how sometimes we know the least about what we are the most sure about.

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We conclude that the notion that deacons are men who head church programs is a late 20th Century addition to the Bible. Quite frankly, since we felt compelled to have deacons because some of the First Century churches had deacons, we had to come up with a job description for qualified men. It was not practical to require that all church work be done by a deacon, and so the notion developed that deacons are to be program heads.

And yet we've never *really* insisted that deacons head all programs. After all, the youth minister, who often isn't considered qualified due to being unmarried or childless, runs most youth programs. Campus ministers, who are often unmarried or childless, run campus works. The Ladies Bible Class, or the elders' wives, or another group of women sometimes handle the distribution of meals to the bereaved. The older women in the church handle the giving of showers for the engaged and expecting. Sometimes we become concerned when we have a program not headed by a deacon, and so we put a deacon "in charge" of a program that runs quite well without him.

When we debate whether women can be deacons, we are really only debating whether a woman can be responsible for the distribution of food to widows, an area that our women members have been handling quite well for many years and with no titles. The real issue that troubles us is whether a woman can have authority in a church, and certainly she can. The only scriptural question is whether a woman can have authority *over a man*, and the only passage dealing with this is 1 Timothy 2:11-15, discussed previously.

**Can a woman satisfy the qualifications to be a deacon?** It is something of an academic exercise to consider the arguments suggesting that women may be deacons, since there is no church function that can only be performed by a deacon. After all, we've never denied our women members the right to wait on tables, to organize meals for our members, or to distribute food to the needy. Nonetheless, it appears highly probable that there were women deacons in the First Century and we find no prohibition of their appointment as deacons in this century.

1 Timothy 3:8-15 provides the qualifications of a deacon:

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. Although I hope to come to you soon, I

am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

It is, of course, hard to imagine a woman being the husband of one wife, and yet many leaders within the Restoration Movement and the Churches of Christ have taught that women may be deacons.<sup>168</sup> Sandifer quotes Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, Robert Richardson, W. K. Pendleton, Robert Milligan, Tolbert Fanning, Isaac Errett, Moses Lard, J. M. Barnes, Philip Y. Pendleton, J. C. McQuiddy, C. R. Nichol, G. C. Brewer, J. Ridley Stroop, J. D. Thomas, and James Bales (among many others) all in support of women deacons. The effort to prevent women deacons did not begin until about the same time the Churches of Christ split from the rest of the Restoration Movement, that is, the turn of the century. Accordingly, if we are to “return to the Old Paths,” we should appoint women deacons. No one could put together a list of men more representative of the “mainline” Churches of Christ.

The scriptural argument normally centers on 1 Timothy 3:11.

11 In the same way, *their* wives are to be *women* worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

As indicated by italics in the KJV, “their” is not found in the Greek. Moreover, “women,” as translated in the NIV, is not in the Greek. Thus, a more literal translation would be—

11 In the same way, wives are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

The word translated “wives” in the NIV is *gune*. It can mean “women” or “wives” depending on the context, and it is perfectly ambiguous.<sup>169</sup> The same word is translated “wife” in verse 12, but could be translated “woman” just as well (“husband of one wife” is better translated “one-woman man”). Thus, our translation becomes—

11 In the same way, *the women* are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

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<sup>168</sup> Summarized by Sandifer at pages 146 - 180.

<sup>169</sup> To this point, I've consistently suggested that *gune* be translated as “wives,” and so my suggestion that it be translated “women” in this context may appear inconsistent. It is not. I uniformly urge the translation “wives” when submission to men is the context, because this is how I understand Genesis and the rest of the Bible. Here, the question is not submission and other contextual factors, discussed later, argue for “women.”

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The *arguments in favor* of verse 11 referring to female deacons are as follows:

First, notice these parallels:

<i>men—verse 8</i>	<i>gune—verse 11</i>
worthy of respect	worthy of respect
sincere	not malicious talkers
not indulging in much wine	temperate
not pursuing dishonest gain	trustworthy in everything

These striking parallels between verses 8 and 11 demonstrate that the verses are both talking about deacons, first the men and then the women. The requirements are virtually identical.

Second, if verse 11 refers to wives, you have the peculiar requirement that Paul imposes a standard for deacons' wives and none for elders' wives. Anyone who has spent much time in church knows how much more important the wives of elders are, due to the far greater responsibilities the elders have.

Third, Phoebe was a deacon (not "deaconess"). Romans 16:1 refers to her using the same masculine Greek word that is found in 1 Timothy 3.<sup>170</sup> More precisely, she is referred to as a "deacon of the church in Cenchrea." It is not natural to translate the phrase as "servant of the church in Cenchrea." "Of the church in Cenchrea" certainly seems to belong with a title.

She is also called a *prostatis*, which means patron or protector. It is a title given to men and to women and reflects great honor. Cities built monuments to celebrate both men and women who were a *prostatis* to the city. To translate "great help" as in the NIV is unjustified. To take the traditionalist view, she would be called a servant and a helper, which would be redundant.

Fourth, early church history makes clear that deaconesses were common.<sup>171</sup> The earliest reference to female deacons comes from a report, written in Latin, from Pliny, Roman governor of Bithynia, to the Emperor Trajan, in AD 112. Pliny describes having tortured two female *ministrae* to learn about the Christian religion. *Ministrae* is the Latin

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<sup>170</sup> First Century Greek had no word for "deaconess," the masculine word *diakonos* being used both for men and women. By the Third Century, the Church had invented the word deaconess to indicate what had become distinct offices.

<sup>171</sup> See Sandifer at pages 85-98.

word that translates “deacon” in Romans 16:1 with respect to Phoebe in Latin translations of the Bible.<sup>172</sup>

*The Shepherd* of Hermas 1:2:4 (c. AD 120) refers to a female “deacon” named Grapte, whose work was to admonish widows and orphans.<sup>173</sup>

Clement of Alexandria (AD 180-220) states that “we know what the honorable Paul in one of his letters to Timothy prescribed regarding female deacons.” *Stromata* 3:6:53.

*Didascalia Apostolorum* (AD 220-240) refers to women deacons who assisted in the baptism of women, ministered to those in need, visited the sick, and distributed communion to women and children.<sup>174</sup> No First or Second Century Christian source refers to “deaconesses,” but many refer to deacons who are female. “Deaconess” was not coined as a word until the Third Century.

During the same period of history there were also a number of references to a church office for enrolled widows, evidently following the command of 1 Timothy 5:9-10.

Clement of Alexandria refers to a list of “chosen persons,” being presbyters, bishops, deacons, and widows. *Instructor* 3:12:97. Tertullian (AD 208-217) criticizes a church for appointing a 20-year old virgin to the “order of widows.” *On the Veiling of Virgins* 9:2-3.<sup>175</sup> The *Didascalia Apostolorum* clearly states that the order of widows and female deacons are two different offices.<sup>176</sup>

Fifth, there is no good reason that women could not be deacons. Even if women cannot have authority over men, they can perform many of the duties we normally charge deacons with: handling the money, dispensing it to the poor, maintaining the building, etc. In the modern interpretation, they can head programs (which primary department is *not* headed by a woman?), lock the doors, be responsible for the building and grounds, make bank deposits, count the money, etc. If we deny women the role of deacon, what responsibilities are we making exclusively male, other than ruling over others?

Sixth, even if verse 11 deals with the wives of deacons, in the same book where Paul said that women cannot teach or usurp authority, we would not expect that women

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<sup>172</sup> See Sandifer at page 85.

<sup>173</sup> See Sandifer at page 86.

<sup>174</sup> See Sandifer at page 87.

<sup>175</sup> See Sandifer at page 86.

<sup>176</sup> See Sandifer at page 87.

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would be allowed to be elders or deacons—not necessarily for any eternal reason, but due to the same temporary cultural limitations that kept women from becoming teachers. Therefore, while at best 1 Timothy 3’s listing of deacon qualifications may specifically approve women deacons, at worst the list merely indicates that women could not be deacons at that time and place.

But there are *arguments against* this interpretation [followed by rebuttal in brackets].

First, there are further qualifications for deacons that are not in parallel. [But notice that the deacon list in 1 Timothy begins with two parallel lists, one for male deacons, the other for female deacons. After the two parallel lists, Paul adds additional requirements, including that the deacon be the husband of one wife.<sup>177</sup> However, we understand that Paul often speaks of men, husbands, sons, or brothers when he means men or women, husbands or wives, sons or daughters, or brothers or sisters. He often uses male references while meaning an indefinite gender. For example, in 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul says that it is good for a “man not to touch a woman.” Certainly, he also meant for us to understand that it is good for a woman not to touch a man. It would make good sense to interpret Paul’s reference to deacons’ wives accordingly, and impose the same guidelines as to male deacons as female. It would be very inelegant to expect Paul to say “the spouse of one spouse.” And we shouldn’t expect him to say everything twice, once for men and once for women, in an informal letter to a fellow missionary. Moreover, there is no requirement that the qualifications be absolutely parallel. After all the requirements for elders in Titus 2 are not exactly parallel with the requirements for elders in 1 Timothy 2.]

Second, if verse 11 does not refer to wives, then there is no requirement for wives to meet as to elders or deacons. We all know how important the wives are. [But isn’t it really odd to imagine Paul imposing requirements on wives of deacons and not elders?]

Third, it is argued that Phoebe is not a deacon but a servant. *Prostatis* should be translated as “helper.” [This is, of course, circular reasoning. Whether *diakonos* is used as “servant” or as “deacon” must be gleaned from the context. It is not enough just to say that Phoebe was not a deacon because women can’t be deacons.]

Fourth, the early church missed the boat. At the time deaconesses were being appointed, single bishops were beginning to rule the elderships. [It is true that we cannot rely on post-biblical sources to clinch this or any other argument. However, we can test an interpretation of the scriptures against early church practices. Early church practices often vary from the biblical pattern, as the church became increasingly corrupted. Nonetheless, it is hard to defend a supposed New Testament practice that has nothing in common with Second Century practice. Thus, we clearly see that deacons as program heads or as a legislative board was never the early church’s practice. We further find that early deacons

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<sup>177</sup> Literally, a “one-woman man.”

did much the same thing as the seven men appointed in Acts 6, with their role expanding over time to include the Lord's Supper and the love feast, and in some areas, teaching. We also clearly see that women deacons were an ancient practice—remarkably so given the extreme prejudice against women that was common in First and Second Century society. There is no rational explanation of the Second Century church's appointment of women as deacons other than as a continuation of First Century practice.]

Fifth, women shouldn't be greedy for a title. The fact that they want the title of deacon proves their lack of merit. [Yes, the argument really is made.]

Sixth, God's listing of qualifications is eternal. It just looks and feels like an eternal law. [But doesn't 1 Timothy 5:9-10 have the same look and feel?

No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband [literally, a one-man woman], and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

[Here we have a "list" of widows who only qualify for the list if they were the wife of one husband, along with many other requirements remarkably similar to the qualifications for elders or deacons. And we rarely study this in church and we make no effort to apply its teachings. I doubt that one out of 20 church members is even aware of the requirement for a list of widows over age 60.

[Here we have an easily understood list of qualifications for a list of widows, and we do not maintain such lists and, to my knowledge, never have in the history of the Restoration Movement. Why is it that we've never put this list of qualifications for women into place? Doesn't this passage have the same look and feel of the elder and deacon passages? Why do we feel comfortable ignoring this inspired list of qualifications and feel uncomfortable at the thought of a woman being called a deacon?]

In conclusion:

1. In the only possible scriptural description of the role of a deacon, Acts 6:1-6, the apostles themselves described the deacons' jobs, perhaps ironically, as waiting on tables. There is no justification for our expanding the role of the deacon any farther than specified in Acts 6, that is, handling the benevolent program. The Second Century church also saw the job of a deacon similarly. This is in accord with the views of such notable Restoration commentators as Robert Richardson,<sup>178</sup> Tolbert Fanning,<sup>179</sup> W. K. Pendleton,<sup>180</sup> and E. G. Sewell.<sup>181</sup> We must be silent where the Bible is silent.

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<sup>178</sup> Sandifer page 123.

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2. The only possible example that we have of how deacons served is that the seven were appointed to a single task, very much as a committee.

3. Romans 16:1 states that Phoebe was a deacon (not “deaconess”). 1 Timothy 3:11 probably describes women deacons.

4. There is nothing that a male church member cannot do without being appointed a deacon—other than wear the title. Some would require that deacons handle all church funds, but there is no basis in scripture for making this a rule. Some would put all “worldly” matters in the hands of the deacons, leaving the elders to handle spiritual matters. But this rule is also missing from the Bible. Some would make the deacons into a cabinet of department heads, but there is no scripture for this interpretation. And some would make the deacons into a House of Representatives, voting on matters that must also pass the Senate—the elders. This is not only unsupported by scripture, it directly challenges the authority actually given by scripture to the elders.

5. In the First Century, a major work of the church was to support widows during a time of short male life expectancies and no pensions. 1 Timothy 5:3-16 deals with this problem at length. It is not surprising that 1 Timothy 3 deals with the qualifications of those charged with administering the church’s care for such widows. But we no longer maintain a list of supported widows, and the need for a special class of members to handle this job is over. If a church were to take on such a noble work, the work should certainly be entrusted to members who meet high standards of behavior.

6. But even if we find in the scriptures a broader role for deacons, women can do anything that deacons can do, because there is no scripture denying them the right to use whatever gifts they have in God’s service. Giving them the title is amply justified by Romans 16:1 as well as 1 Timothy 3:11. Indeed, the Bible unambiguously commands those who have gifts to use them in God’s service and condemns those who refuse to do so and those who refuse to permit others to use their gifts. We should make the fullest use of our gifts possible.

We speak of direct commands, necessary inference, and binding examples as providing authority for church practices. The lessons taught by Jesus and Paul regarding talents and gifts are plain authority for putting gifts into practice. They are indeed direct commands. There are many women with unused gifts given by God for use in His service. There is no safety in burying those talents. There is grave danger for those who fear to allow others to serve God!

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<sup>179</sup> Sandifer page 125.

<sup>180</sup> Sandifer page 127.

<sup>181</sup> Sandifer page 130.

**CHAPTER XVIII**  
**ELDERS—WIVES OF ONE HUSBAND?**

When I first taught this material, I passed out a survey on questions involving the role of women. After the class had finished with the survey, I asked, “Which question was the hardest?” A godly woman said, “Whether a woman can be an elder.” A number of other women, good, submissive, dedicated, hard-working lovers of the Lord, nodded their heads. I was surprised, but they were right, and they were well ahead of me in their understanding of scripture.

The issue arises because the lists of elder qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus require an elder to be the “husband of one wife.” Admittedly, it would be hard for a woman to meet this standard. The question, however, is whether the reference to an elder being male is intended to be an eternal requirement or whether it is limited to the culture and time in which Paul wrote. Plainly, in First Century Grecian and Jewish society, a woman would not have been accepted in such a position—and very few women would have been suitable for the role in any event. And so, did Paul refer to elders as male because all First Century elders were male, or because male elders were God’s eternal plan?

Before we delve into the lists of elder qualifications found in 1 Timothy and Titus, some other key verses should be considered:

**Elders and Deborah.** Deborah ruled the nation of Israel as spiritual and civil leader. She was a prophetess and a judge. Thus, Deborah’s position was far more authoritative than our elders today. Therefore, the notion that there is an eternal law that prevents women from having spiritual leadership is plainly false. God called Deborah, and God cannot sin.

Also, it’s clear from numerous Old Testament passages that, going back to the Egyptian captivity, men called elders governed the ancient Israelite cities. Plainly, then Deborah was over the elders of Israel. While we don’t know that much about the exact role or authority of the Old Testament elders, they evidently served a role in the ancient cities comparable to the role of elders in the modern church. If not, why did the New Testament writers choose to use this term for certain church leaders?

There are numerous other examples of female leaders in the Old Testament, which we’ve discussed previously. If Miriam was a “leader” of Israel, then she had a higher position than the elders of the day. If the king was answerable to Huldah, then the elders of the day were that much more so.

Plainly, there is no eternal law of male headship that prevents a woman from having authority over a man. God would not have set these examples for us otherwise.

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**New Testament prophets and elders.** A similar argument is apparent in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4, Paul lists the church offices in order of rank, listing apostles first, prophets second, and elders (pastors) beneath both (neither list includes deacons). But we have seen Junias, a woman, counted among the apostles in Romans 16:7. We see many women counted as prophets in the New Testament. In fact, Paul's discussion of prophets in 1 Corinthians 12 follows closely after his discussion of women prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11. Surely he still had women in mind. We have seen the evidence for women deacons. And so what eternal principle decrees that women may be above and below the elders in rank but not be an elder?

We must also take note of what prophets do. They are not soothsayers, predicting the future as a curiosity. They foretell the future as a warning. Prophets foretell and forth-tell. The forth-telling involves warning, instructing, exhorting, and rebuking. When the New Testament calls a woman a prophet it does so with 1,500 years of history of prophecy, and the New Testament does not make a distinction between the First Century prophets and the Old Testament prophets. Read a few books of Old Testament prophecy and imagine a woman uttering those words. It will expand your horizons.

Note also Joel's prophecy of the coming of the Christian Dispensation that was quoted by Peter in Acts 2:17-18—

(Joel 2:28) And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your *sons and daughters* will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both *men and women*, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

God spoke through Joel to declare that both sons and daughters would be prophets. Twice He emphasizes that the gift will fall on both men and women. Since the coming of the Spirit on women in the Old Testament was less common than for men, a sign of the coming of the Messiah would be the equality of the sexes in terms of gifts of the Spirit. Therefore, there can be no argument whatsoever that the female prophets of the New Testament were in any sense inferior to the prophets of the Old Testament. And, of course, it is the New Testament itself that places prophets above elders.

Now one might dispute this by arguing that the gift of prophecy is a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, and only due to the special inspiration given women prophets are they higher than elders. But this argument fails to consider that 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and other passages tell us that even non-miraculous gifts, like the gifts of leadership and administration, are gifts of the Holy Spirit. In other words, if a woman has the gift of leadership or pastoring, it's because God gave her that gift, and she is just as entitled to use it in God's service as the gift of prophecy.

**Can a woman be an elder?** The questions thus presented are:

1. Is the apparent prohibition of an woman being an elder evidenced in 1 Timothy and Titus, as well as early church history, a temporary cultural matter only or an eternal ordinance of God?

2. Are the qualifications described in 1 Timothy and Titus intended as laws or as wise counsel, with the true test being to whom God has given the gift of leadership?

An affirmative answer to *either* question would permit many women gifted to lead to serve as elders.

**1. Is the apparent prohibition of a woman being an elder evidenced in 1 Timothy and Titus, as well as early church history, a temporary cultural matter only or an eternal ordinance of God?**

We have covered the ground surrounding culture versus an eternal command at length. The case has already been made, and there is no reason to go through the motions of restating it. Certainly, for the same reasons that women were not allowed to teach men in Ephesus, no women were going to be appointed elder by Timothy or Titus. The possibility is eliminated by the commands in 1 Timothy 2. But we have shown that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is culturally limited (just like most of the rest of the chapter). It is certainly reasonable to conclude that the qualifications listed in the Pastoral Letters<sup>182</sup> are also limited based on cultural conditions insofar as they relate to the gender of the elders.

This cannot be proved or disproved by reference to the qualifications themselves. Rather, with the justification for the discrimination against women no longer applicable today, we must look to God's eternal principles as they apply to men and women and husbands and wives. When in doubt, go with the larger, eternal principles. In the absence of the qualification lists in 1 Timothy and Titus, what principle would deny a congregation the right to appoint as elder a woman with the talent to serve as elder?

Some would argue that allowing a woman to serve as elder would prevent her from being submissive to her husband, if her husband were a member of the congregation—as he surely would be. But this argument represents a worldly view of the eldership that is all too common. Jesus explains things very differently:

(Mark 9:33-10:45) They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

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<sup>182</sup> 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, which are personal letters written at about the same time and under similar circumstances by Paul.

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Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. “Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

They replied, “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, *and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Men, if we are called to leadership, then we are plainly taught that we may not “lord it over” the women and must instead become their “slaves.” Women elders would also become the slaves of all members, men and women alike. (The word translated “slave” really means slave, not servant.) An elder follows the example of Christ by becoming slave to all. This is much the same lesson that Paul taught husbands in Ephesians 5. And when women ask to serve in any office, any office at all, they are not asking for power to exercise authority. They are asking for the opportunity to serve, using the gifts God gave them. They are asking to be suitable complements.

This is the spiritual understanding of being an elder or deacon. We must learn to think in spiritual terms—that is, in terms of service and gifts, not authority and laws.<sup>183</sup>

**2. Are the qualifications described in 1 Timothy and Titus intended as laws or wise counsel, with the true test being to whom God has given the gift of leadership?**

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<sup>183</sup> This argument is made in greater detail later.

Objectively viewed, it is hard to argue that the qualification lists in 1 Timothy and Titus are “laws.” As we have discussed in the context of Galatians, Paul has very principled reasons for not making himself into the next Moses. Moreover, there is internal evidence that these are not laws.

First, why are the lists in Titus and 1 Timothy different? Is God’s eternal law of who can be an elder different in Crete (the destination of Titus) than in Ephesus (the destination of 1 Timothy)? It would appear so. While the lists are similar, Titus and Timothy were working out of two different rulebooks, if rulebooks they are.

(Titus 1:6-9) An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

(1 Tim. 3:1-7) Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.

The following chart compares the two qualification lists:

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<i>Titus</i>	<i>1 Timothy</i>
blameless	above reproach
husband of one wife	husband of one wife
	temperate
self-controlled	self-controlled
upright	respectable
hospitable	hospitable
hold firmly to sound doctrine	able to teach
not given to much wine	not given to drunkenness
	not violent
	gentle
not quick-tempered	not quarrelsome
not pursuing dishonest gain	not a lover of money
	manage own family well
children not wild and disobedient	children obey with proper respect
	not a recent convert
	good reputation with outsiders
children believe	
not overbearing	
loves what is good	
holy	
disciplined	

As the table demonstrates, the two lists are very similar, but different. For example, we in the Churches of Christ have customarily held that an elder must have at least one (some say two) Christian children. That limitation is from Titus. But Paul told Timothy that it is enough if an elder has children who obey with proper respect, a very different thing indeed. A child may be obedient and yet be too young to be a Christian. And Paul told Timothy to ordain no recent converts, and yet Titus was given no such instruction. Do these inconsistencies threaten the inspiration of the passages? Not at all, but they tell us much about their nature.

Second, the test for who could be a deacon in Acts 6 is simply “full of the Spirit and wisdom.” Why is this rule different from the rules laid out by Paul regarding deacons

and elders? Indeed, Paul told the elders in Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had “made them overseers.”<sup>184</sup> The most natural interpretation of this statement is that the elders were made overseers by the Spirit by being filled with the Spirit—that is, by receiving the gifts of the Spirit associated with being an elder, such as the gifts of administration and leadership. Could it be that the rules are not different at all? Maybe what Paul is saying in the Pastorals is, “Timothy and Titus, these are the characteristics that you look for to determine who has wisdom and is filled with the Spirit.”

As numerous commentators have pointed out, the characteristics of an elder or deacon are characteristics that *all* Christians *should* have. The exceptions to this rule are the apparent requirements that elders and deacons be married and fertile (and have fertile wives).<sup>185</sup>

But Paul and most (if not all) the apostles were single.<sup>186</sup> Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:

1 Now for the matters you wrote about: *It is good for a man not to marry. ... 7 I wish that all men were as I am.* But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. ... 32 *I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—34 and his interests are divided. ... 35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.*

If Paul believes that marriage is required for a man to be a deacon (so he can lock doors, keep the building maintained, handle the treasury) or an elder, then he certainly changed his tune from 1 Corinthians 7. But I have too much respect for inspiration to believe that Paul changed his mind or exaggerated his recommendation of celibacy. He was quite sincere when he wrote 1 Corinthians 7, and he never changed his mind. There is no imaginable reason why a man must be married and have children in order to be a deacon. Paul would agree. He says that a man is a *better* servant of God if he is single! And he truly wishes that *all* men were single so they could better serve God!

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<sup>184</sup> (Acts 20:28) “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”

<sup>185</sup> Adoption is a theoretical solution for the infertile man with the gift to become an elder (although this is denied by some), but adoption is a far from automatic process, and many a couple has been left childless by even the adoption agencies.

<sup>186</sup> Peter had a mother-in-law and so either was married or had been married. Matt. 8:14.

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Does Paul wish that there were no elders or deacons? And if an apostle is a better apostle for being single, how can we conclude that the man locking the building (or waiting on tables) must be held to some supposedly *higher* standard?

The only conclusion we can reach and still take Paul at his word is that the lists in 1 Timothy and Titus are not laws but wise counsel on how to tell who is full of wisdom and the Spirit—at the time and place the letter was written. In fact, Paul characterizes his own statements as “a trustworthy saying” (1 Tim. 3:1), hardly the language of a lawgiver. Any other interpretation causes Paul to contradict himself—and requires a man to be married and fertile in order to wait on tables!

Third, there are other verses that specify the qualifications of elders, and they speak in terms of gifts, not sex, marital status, or fertility.

(1 Cor. 12:28-30) And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, *those with gifts of administration*, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

The Greek word translated “administration” literally means “(a) steering, pilotage; (b) metaphorically, governments or governings, said of those who act as guides in a local church.”<sup>187</sup> This is certainly an apt description of the eldership. And yet Paul’s discussion is in terms of spiritual gifts. Paul points out—

(1 Cor. 12:18-21) But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”

The gift of administration is from God, and it is a sin to tell anyone with the gift that the church does not (or cannot) use that gift.

(Eph. 4:7, 11-13) But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ... It was he who *gave* some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be *pastors* and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of

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<sup>187</sup> Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

We next see that being a pastor (elder) is a gift from God. The only qualification mentioned is whether a Christian has been so gifted.

(Rom. 12:6-8) We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; *if it is leadership, let him govern diligently*; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

“Govern” is defined in *Strong's Dictionary* as “to stand before, i.e. (in rank) to preside, or (by impl.) to practise:—maintain, be over, rule.” It is the same verb used by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:4 and 12 with respect to elders and deacons “ruling” their households well. And yet, in Romans, the only requirement for leadership is having the gift to lead. Moreover, the language is a command. If one has the gift to lead, one *must* lead and lead diligently. The command applies to women as well as to men.

Realize that 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Romans were all written well before 1 Timothy or Titus. How were the Christians who received these letters to understand them? Surely, each Christian had to understand that he or she should humbly determine his or her gifts and then use those gifts in God's service. Paul did not tell the Corinthians, Ephesians, or Romans that his teaching only applied to men! It would have been the rarest of women in the First Century world who had the ability to lead. This is just not so today. If a woman has the gift, we are commanded to let her use the gift.

### A. Conclusion

Galatians 3:28 (“neither male nor female”) states the general rule. The same principle is found in 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Romans 12, along with the Parable of the Talents. When Paul is speaking of the church and the Spirit's gifts in general terms, he makes no distinction based on sex.

Paul, however, wrote Titus and 1 Timothy, at a time and place when women could not exercise their gifts freely. It was unthinkable in First Century society that a woman would assume authority over a man, and women were rarely educated or even literate. It would have been the rarest of women who had the gift to be an elder. For the same reason that Paul denies women the role of teacher in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul could not allow women to be elders. But Paul no more makes this a rule for all eternity than he approves slavery for all eternity by his commands to slaves to obey their masters.

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To determine the more general rule, we must look to God's plan for men and women as revealed in other scriptures. We quickly find that there is no eternal rule denying women authority over men. Deborah, Miriam, Huldah, and countless First Century prophetesses make any such an argument frivolous. Moreover, nowhere in the Law of Moses do we find any prohibition on women having authority over men.

Genesis 3 states that husbands will rule over their wives—but this is sin allowed into the world by God's curse on Creation. It is hardly a command or even good advice (no more commendable than pain in childbearing or weeds in a garden).

Genesis 1 and 2 tell us that wives are to be suitable complements to their husbands, but we see from numerous other Old Testament verses, that “help meet” is not a term of submission or subjection. Women fill up that which is incomplete or lacking in their husbands, and all married men know it.

The fact that women are “complements” no more disqualifies them from the eldership than the fact that men without women are “not good” and incomplete without women disqualifies them from the eldership. Indeed, the most logical conclusion from the Creation accounts is that an eldership without both men and women will be incomplete. “It is not good for man to be alone.”

**CHAPTER XIX**  
**HOW DO WE DECIDE?**

What is the rule in this case? Do we presume a rule or do we presume freedom? What does the Bible say?

(Gal. 3:25) Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Why do we insist on replacing the law that Christ died to free us from with a new, equally strict law? Can you tell any difference between our debates over whether a man must resign as elder if his wife dies or if his only child (or one of his two children) dies or is divorced and the debates the Pharisees had as to whether it is right to heal on the Sabbath? I can't. They thought they were honoring God by strictly construing His commands to be "safe." They built fences around the law to be doubly safe. They are burning in hell. Let's not follow their example.

In fact, I well remember attending many a Sunday School class where we were advised that the Pharisees were condemned because they built fences around the laws of God, imposing rules that God did not. And yet I also have attended many a class where I was taught that we need to be safe, and that to be safe, we need to impose rules that aren't necessarily in the Bible. These rules would be imposed by the church to protect us from what violating these rules "might lead to." These rules would also protect us from any accusation by other congregations or the most traditional members of our own congregations. I've even been in classes that described this process of being doubly safe as "building fences." I can be very dense at times, but I eventually concluded that there is a very serious problem with this kind of thinking.

(2 Cor. 3:3-6,17) You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such *confidence* as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. ... Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

(Rom. 7:6) But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.

If we turn the freedom that is in Christ into a new Law of Moses, replacing one law with another, we will receive our reward—death. Law brings death. The Spirit gives

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life. The New Testament is not a new Deuteronomy. Paul doesn't replace the old letters with better letters. The Law of Moses is not replaced. It is abolished. We don't have better, more modern rules—we have salvation and an indwelling, and we have freedom.

(Col. 2:8) See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on *human tradition and the basic principles of this world* rather than on Christ.

Recall that the “basic principles of this world” are the results of God's curse on Creation—man's sinfulness, the reign of death, and the domination of women by men. Galatians 4:6-9. Hebrews says much the same thing, drawing a contrast between the new order and the old:

(Heb. 9:1,10) Now the first covenant *had regulations for worship* and also an earthly sanctuary. ... They are only a matter of food and drink and various external washings—*external regulations applying until the time of the new order*.

The writer's point is not that the new order will have new regulations. Rather, he is saying that external regulations for worship are characteristic of the Old Covenant, but in the new order, God will regulate us, not through rules, but internally, through His Spirit.

(Heb 8:10-13) “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.

I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

The Hebrews writer quotes from Jeremiah's prophecy of the Messiah to make his point. In the Christian Dispensation, God's relationship to His people will be fundamentally different. We will not be saved through better scholarship, but because God Himself will write His laws on our hearts through His Spirit. See also Romans 8:1-15.<sup>188</sup>

(Rom. 4:14-16) For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings

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<sup>188</sup> The author's *The Holy Spirit and Revolutionary Grace* explains these ideas in much greater detail.

*wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*

Paul says that the only way that we can be sin-free is to be law-free. Our salvation is by faith because making our salvation by works—even a little bit—will make us sinners and we will be damned. To allow us to be saved, God had to put into place a system where “there is no law.”

Thus, those who find arbitrary, external rules in the New Testament must be misunderstanding the scriptures. In the new order, the “rules” will come from our relationship with the Spirit. We are to become Spirit-filled people who are ruled from the heart, not from a “written code” or “external regulations,” which can only bring spiritual death. Thus, the “gifts” or “talents” view of church order makes perfect sense and is exactly what the writers say is the new nature of things. The idea that we are bound by a host of elaborate rules regarding how many children deacons and elders must have and whether a man must be married to lock the building or whether a woman can head the primary department is, pure and simple, Old Testament thinking. If we instead look at each person’s God-given talents, we are thinking spiritually and relying on God’s internal regulations.

Despite knowing that we are Christians freed from law and regulations, we think we are under very strict regulations on which our very salvation depends but which we frankly cannot interpret with any consistency! I don’t doubt for a moment the inspiration of these passages. I seriously doubt that we’ve understood why the passages were written.

Because we don’t really know what role is exclusively the role of deacons, we try to structure our works and programs in whatever way will work, and then we put the best face on it so that our more traditional members don’t protest too vigorously about the expanded role of women. Thus, we are glad for the Ladies Bible Class to take on providing food for the sick, but we’d never name the woman in charge of this very vital program a “deacon.” We are glad for our youth minister to run the program for the teenagers, even if he has no children. But because he is (1) male and (2) has a title (“minister,” which is from the Latin word that translates “deacon”) we invite him to our elders and deacons meetings and give him a voice and authority equal if not superior to any deacon.

We cannot effectively run a church and simultaneously limit every job that carries any authority at all to married men with children. Therefore, we rationalize our way around the rules while simultaneously insisting that we are obeying the rules and that all who disagree with us are going to hell. The solution is not stricter or even more consistent legalism. It is an end to legalism and an acceptance of the work of God’s Holy Spirit.

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The Bible plainly teaches that it is the Creator of the Universe who works in us to give us the gifts and talents needed to serve Him. We need to honor God's work in us. We need to put aside our assumption that the New Testament is a law book. We need to admit that we've always ignored passages such as 1 Timothy 5:11 that is as much a list of qualifications as those dealing with elders and deacons and confess that we only try to enforce those passages that happen to be consistent with our own biases and presuppositions. And we need to read the Bible with spiritual eyes.

(1 Cor. 2:14-16) The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

I don't have all the answers, and certainly don't pretend to be able to plumb all the depths of these passages. But neither am I willing to ignore their plain teachings. Over and over again, the Bible tells us that we are freed from laws, rules, regulations, and written codes, and over and over again my brothers insist on imposing laws, rules, regulations, and written codes. Is it safer to take a doubtful passage and assume that there is a rule? Or is it wiser and more Christ-like to interpret passages to be consistent with the plain teachings of the Bible regarding the Spirit's gifts?

**CHAPTER XX**  
**MORE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

*Q. Doesn't the fact that there were women deacons and not women elders in the early church tell us that God did not mean for women to be elders?*

A. No, for two reasons. First, deacons were servants of the congregation and women could easily fill the role of deacon without violating cultural norms. But elders were foremost teachers and leaders. First Century Christians would never have accepted women as elders. Indeed, few women would have been qualified to be elders, due to lack of education or exposure to the world. The same cultural conditions that dictated that women not teach and that women not ask questions in the assemblies made eldership an impossibility.

Second, there is no reasonable basis to be found in the scriptures to subject women to men. If women can't be elders, then that would be the only place where women are subjected to men purely due to their sex. If this is fundamentally, eternally wrong, why did God make Deborah a judge over Israel?

*Q. But the Bible plainly says that elders are to be the husbands of one wife. How do we safely distinguish a temporary local command from an eternal command?*

A. The requirement that an elder be a husband is a special case, not any more binding today than the five commands that Christians greet one another with the Holy Kiss or the command of Christ that we wash one another's feet. We began a discussion on hermeneutics back in chapter III. This is a good place to expand on the lesson.

*General and specific commands.* First, one of the oldest and most-often mentioned rules of biblical interpretation is that the more specific overrides the more general. Thus, a specific command overrides a general principle. However, this rule is itself not found in scripture and is, I believe, entirely wrong.

As a practicing attorney I know where the "rule" comes from—law. It is a rule of statutory interpretation. We wrongly apply it to scripture by assuming that scripture is a book of law. It is not (some of it is, but not the New Testament). Rather, the real rule is that our God cannot lie and is unchanging. Therefore, broad, general principles, such as love, grace, and the nature of God, override specific cases. There are no exceptions from these principles. Apparent exceptions are due to the need to give up freedom due to local and often temporary conditions. Hence, a supposed "law" mandating discrimination against women plainly is not a law but may be an application of the real law—love your neighbor—in a situation where love calls for Christian women to yield to local society's standards.

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*Commands contrary to local culture.* Another useful guideline for distinguishing temporary from permanent commands is this: a command that was contrary to the culture in which the command was given is probably an eternal command—not a culturally limited command. After all, to be a culturally limited command, the command had to be a result of, or modified by, the then current culture. For example, Paul condemns homosexuality in Romans 2, at a time and place where many within Roman society accepted homosexuality. His rejection of homosexuality is therefore not culturally limited.

*The purpose behind a command.* When a command is consistent with local culture, the eternal nature of the command can normally only be determined by looking at the purpose or reason behind the command. If we simply declare, “God said it; that decides it,” then we need to all start kissing and selling our pearls and gold!

Christians are required to live up to at least two standards. We must live up to God’s standards, and we also must live up to society’s standards. While God’s standards are normally higher than society’s, there will often be “rules” imposed by society that we must obey or else appear to be immoral. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 11, women are commanded to have long hair—literally, hair that hangs down as a covering. This would ban numerous hairstyles worn by women today, including the teased hair preferred by most older women. But Paul had to require the congregation to meet the standards of hair and dress then adopted by moral Corinthians in society at large to protect the reputation of his women members outside the church. The eternal principle is for Christians to dress and wear hair modestly and not to appear immoral. The local application will change from time to time and place to place.

Thus, when we approach the question of women—as speaking in the assembly, teaching, having authority, or even serving as elders—we must recognize that any limitation on women found in the New Testament was consistent with the then local culture. Therefore, we must look at what eternal principles may require the command in any situation. Since a number of passages refer back to the Genesis accounts, we must especially look at these accounts to see what they say for all time—not as colored by First Century culture—but letting Genesis speak for Genesis.

By approaching the Genesis accounts with an open mind, we quickly realize that the eternal principles are that both men and women are made in God’s image, that man is “not good” without woman, and that woman was made as a “suitable complement” for man. We see that husbands and wives are to be “one flesh” and that this requires that husbands give up something—since it is men who are to leave mother and father to become one flesh.

We don’t see women in an inferior role until sin enters the world as the result of the sins of Eve and Adam. This role of women is a part of the corruption of Creation that Jesus came to earth to rescue us from. It is not God’s will, any more than any sin is God’s will.

We then look at the Law of Moses and find no command that women may have no authority over men. We look at such accounts in the Old Testament as the accounts of Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah, all of which make it clear that God calls women to be leaders—even over nations! We see how Jesus treated women, with respect that was far beyond the respect that any other First Century Jew would have shown. We look at the New Testament female prophets, the women who traveled with Paul, and Priscilla, and we see no evidence of an eternal plan that women be subject to men. Indeed, all the evidence is clearly to the contrary. In fact, it is far easier to make out a case for a woman's equality than for the abolition of slavery, because there are so many verses that suggest that "there is neither ... male nor female." We easily see the wickedness of slavery today—it is counter to today's culture—and we would see the error in limiting the use of the gifts that God has given women if we didn't still have some very old and very wrong attitudes about women in our hearts.

This approach to interpreting the scriptures comes from Jesus Himself—

(Mark 2:23-28) One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Now the Ten Commandments delivered by God Himself to the Children of Israel on Mt. Sinai plainly state that it is a sin to work on the Sabbath.<sup>189</sup> Even the animals were not permitted to work! And yet Jesus healed on the Sabbath.

Jesus' principle of interpreting the scriptures is plain. First, he looked at the underlying purpose of the command. Why did God command Sabbath observance? Is it just a rule, or is there a divine reason behind the rule? We know Jesus' answer: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."<sup>190</sup>

The reason Jesus approved caring for people on the Sabbath is that the Sabbath was made to benefit man—not as a burden—and certainly not a burden purely for the sake of imposing a burden.

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<sup>189</sup> Exo. 20:8-11.

<sup>190</sup> Mark 2:27.

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A similar account will also help demonstrate Jesus' approach to rules:

(Luke 13:10-17) On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

There is no passage in the Law of Moses that says that there is no sin in watering a donkey or ox on a Saturday. In a similar passage, Jesus asks the Pharisees whether they would rescue an ox caught in a pit on a Saturday.<sup>191</sup> The Pharisees were ashamed to answer, because without any specific scriptural authorization, they certainly would have. Sometimes we have to have dollar signs attached to the truth to see it! Jesus concludes that if it is proper to do work to help farm animals on a Saturday, then it is proper to do work to help people.

Jesus then limits the scope of the Sabbath command to those applications that actually fulfill the command's underlying purpose. Since the Sabbath was made to benefit man, we can heal on the Sabbath. Jesus persuades His listeners by pointing out that they instinctively understood that the Sabbath was not meant to allow an animal to suffer or for a farmer to lose his herd. Their instincts were right, because they intuitively knew that some things are just more important than Sabbath observance. The Pharisees' sin was in not seeing that people are important, too. The same principle applies as to women. We don't blindly follow any command—even one of the Ten Commandments—to the point of frustrating God's purpose in giving the command.

Moreover, we must also remember that even the command of Sabbath observance has disappeared. It ceased to apply when its purpose ceased. The principle is, therefore,

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<sup>191</sup> Luke 14:5

that no command can be understood until we determine the purpose behind the command. Eternal purposes result in eternal commands. Cultural or temporary purposes result in temporary commands. And we can't always tell the difference by looking just at the language of the command!

*Q. If there truly is neither male nor female in Christ, why did Jesus only appoint male apostles?*

A. The respect shown by Jesus toward women cannot be overstated. Indeed, C. F. D. Moule states that in light of First Century patriarchal culture, Jesus' behavior toward women is so extraordinary as to prove scripture's supernatural authenticity.<sup>192</sup> There are numerous examples, ably catalogued by many authors. Perhaps the most telling is Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, a conversation that violated numerous social conventions of the day. It was unimaginable for a Jewish Rabbi to discuss deep matters of religion with any woman—but to speak at length with a Samaritan woman—and alone! It was unheard of. Clearly, Jesus behaved toward women in a manner inconsistent with then current culture. And yet even His behavior was limited by culture. After all, Jesus could not take on the task of educating all the women in the Roman Empire. He could only educate those women that He came into contact with; and He did so.

But Jesus could not prudently appoint women as apostles.<sup>193</sup> The same cultural limitations that dictated against female elders even more so dictated against female apostles. The apostles were destined to lead the first church formed in Jerusalem. This church struggled with accepting Gentiles, and it continued Jewish ritual practices for many decades—even under apostolic leadership.<sup>194</sup> The Jews of First Century Jerusalem would never have accepted women apostles and many would have rejected the faith and been lost rather than submit to a woman overseer. The fact that the apostles were to lead the first congregation also explains why Jesus could have female disciples (e.g., Luke 8:1-3) but not apostles. Only the apostles were destined to lead the Jerusalem church.

Just so, Jesus did not travel Palestine freeing slaves from their masters. Rather, Jesus freed both the slaves and their masters from sin and taught them to treat everyone with respect. Jesus went far beyond the culture of the day, and yet even Jesus was to some

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<sup>192</sup> *The Phenomenon of the New Testament* (Napierson, IL: Allenson, 1967), page 65.

<sup>193</sup> Osburn, *Women in the Church 2*, p. 126, comments, "True, Jesus did not include women among the twelve, but the logistics of women being in that role were simply impractical and would have scandalized and obscured Jesus' true mission." Ferguson argues that although "Jesus transcended society's conventions in this treatment of women, it is notable that the Twelve and the Seventy were only men." But Ferguson fails to consider alternative explanations for Jesus' preference for male missionaries, such as the nature of Jewish society.

<sup>194</sup> Acts 21:17-26.

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extent limited by the culture in which He lived. We should not allow those cultural limitations to become a part of our 21st Century doctrine.

*Q. If there really is “neither male nor female,” then doesn’t your position approve homosexual “marriages”?*

A. Paul is calling for a return to ways things were before the Fall of Man, that is, to Genesis 2. God made man and woman, but He made them differently, to complement one another and to complete what was lacking in one another. Thus, “neither male nor female” contradicts the domination of women by men that began in Genesis 3,<sup>195</sup> but not the original design of God that the two become one flesh, be fruitful, and multiply. God never meant for two men to become one flesh, and Paul certainly does not teach otherwise in Galatians.

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<sup>195</sup> (Gal. 1:4) “[Jesus] gave himself to rescue us from the present evil age ... .” The “evil age” began in Genesis 3, with the Fall of Man.

## CHAPTER XXI CONCLUSION

### A. Egalitarian or Hierarchalist?

We earlier considered Osburn's suggestion that there are four schools of thought as to the role of women: paternalism, hierarchalism, egalitarianism, and radical feminism. We rejected radical feminism because this view does not accept the inerrancy of scripture. We rejected paternalism because it is based on shallow methods of interpreting the scriptures and insists on adding rules that admittedly are not found in the Bible.

Hierarchalism has a strong appeal to those within the Churches of Christ. This view supports the inerrancy of scripture and makes a serious effort at careful Bible study in textual and historical context while retaining the comfortable idea that there is a principle of male leadership. And yet the egalitarian view also has much appeal. While distinctly non-traditional, it also supports the inerrancy of scripture. It appeals to our innate sense of justice and fair play and certainly has much support in the doctrine of gifts and talents. Accordingly, it is appropriate to consider how far apart the schools of thought really are.

### B. The Marriage Relationship

Our difficulty in understanding the verses dealing with marriage can be largely resolved by a deeper understanding of the nature of Christ. While the verses compel wives to be submissive to their husbands, husbands are commanded to emulate Christ's example of giving himself up for the church. Both schools of thought concede that husbands must give themselves up—even to the point of death—for their wives.

(Phil. 2:5-8) Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but *made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant*, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he *humbled himself and became obedient to death*—even death on a cross!

(Heb. 5:8-9) Although he was a son, *he learned obedience from what he suffered* and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

We cannot interpret the role of husbands with a blind eye toward what it means to be like Christ. As tempting as it is to us males to claim the throne of Jesus and insist on having all authority, our lot as husbands is not nearly so grand. There is a price to be paid to claim this throne, and the price is becoming nothing, a servant, humble, obedient, and suffering. It is giving oneself up. And after we've learned this lesson, and *only* after

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learning this lesson, can we claim to be heads of our wives “as Christ is head of the church.” Only after learning these lessons can we claim to love our wives “just as” Christ loves the church. Mere maleness does not a lord make. If men would truly obey this portion of the passages—on which all schools of thought agree—the distinction between the egalitarian and hierarchalist views would become nearly one of semantics.

Thus, the key to reconciling the egalitarian and hierarchalist views of marriage is for the hierarchalist to acknowledge that the headship of the husband is *conditioned* on the husband’s having the sacrificial, servant heart of Christ. Few women would struggle to submit to such a man. That the husband’s headship is conditioned is amply demonstrated by the fact that Christ’s headship was conditioned on His obedience:

(Heb. 5:8-10) Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus did not become high priest until he’d first learned obedience.

(Phil. 2:8-11) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! *Therefore* God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God only exalted Christ and called on every knee to bow to Him *as a consequence of* Christ’s death on the cross.

(Heb. 2:9) But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor *because* he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Plainly, even Jesus’ Lordship is conditioned on His humility, His service, and His giving up of Himself. We men can hardly claim a greater right to headship than Jesus has, and so our headship must be considered conditional on having the heart of Christ.

Any other interpretation of the passages referring to husbands as heads of their wives would subject women to the headship of the abusive, the selfish, and the domineering. We’d be hopelessly naive to believe that there are no such husbands within our churches, and we’d be hopelessly irresponsible to teach these men that they are entitled to have their way.

Thus, properly understood, the hierarchalist view of husbands is nearly indistinguishable from the egalitarian view in the context of marriage. It is hard to

imagine a real-life situation where the headship of a truly Christ-like husband would reach a different practical result from the sharing or partnership that egalitarians find as the pattern for Christian marriages. Certainly, either approach to marriage would be a vast improvement over what many of our wives are subjected to.

### C. Church Affairs

This brings us to the passages that deal more particularly with church affairs. In 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 paternalists find ample basis to conclude that women must be silent in the assembly. But many hierarchalists agree with egalitarians that this passage must be limited to its historical and cultural circumstance. Many hierarchalists would permit women to speak in the assembly, so long as such speaking is not authoritative over men.<sup>196</sup> Thus, 1 Timothy 2:11-15 becomes the central text of hierarchalist thought. Hierarchalists see in this passage a denial to women of the right to exercise authority over men.

The egalitarian view and hierarchalist view of men and women in church organization and practice are not nearly as close as the two views as they relate to marriage. In fact, the differences are quite large. A hierarchalist might allow women roles that have been traditionally denied them—so long as these roles do not threaten the essence of male leadership and authority. Thus, women might pass out bulletins, pass out communion, and according to many, even read scripture in the assembly, since these practices do not involve any exercise of authority. But egalitarians would consider the limitation on the exercise of authority as a vestige of a culture that is dying out.

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<sup>196</sup> Rubel Shelly is a noteworthy hierarchalist. Shelly writes,

“The Bible is not against women ministering, using their God-given talents, standing up and speaking, administering church programs, singing (congregationally, small groups, or solo), reading Scripture, sharing information about church projects, testifying, teaching sub-groups of the church’s membership (whether female, male, or mixed), writing articles or poems, or otherwise participating fully in the life of local churches. ...”

The difference between females preaching and leading prayers for the assembly and these service roles is the difference between directing the group on one’s own initiative and ministering to it in a predetermined way. In the former, one chooses the course for the group and genuinely leads/guides it; in the latter, one follows a text and interprets it to the group.

“A Responsible Challenge to Our Traditions,” published in *In Search of Wonder* (Howard Publishing Co. 1995), Lynn Anderson, ed., p. 91, quoting Shelly, “A Woman’s Place Is ...,” *Wineskins* (May 1993), p. 5.

Of course, nothing better illustrates the implication of gullibility or inferiority inherent in limiting a woman’s role than this highly progressive (by Church of Christ standards) teaching. If a woman can speak by reading a book but cannot interpret the book, then why not? Is any answer available other than distrust of women? Certainly this position would be a vast improvement over our traditional position, but it still belittles women.

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Thus, reconciliation of the two views appears to be impossible. And yet, I believe that the two views *could* be seen as being very close indeed.

First, there should be no hierarchy in a congregation—not in the sense that we think of worldly hierarchies. Every member must serve his church through works of service (which, of course, are ultimately for Christ). Elders, therefore, are not properly seen as bosses, employers, a board of directors, despots, or rulers. They are organizers and managers. They *serve* the other members by providing a service—organizing and caring for the congregation.

(Mark 10:41-45) When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, *and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The true meaning of leadership is not authority—it is service.

(1 Pet. 5:2-3) Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Thus, Peter also denies elders the right to act as lords. Their ministry is one of service and of example. Nonetheless, many would find in Hebrews 13:17 authority for elders to act as rulers.

(KJV) Obey them that have the *rule* over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

(NIV) Obey your leaders and submit to their *authority*. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

In the King James Version, which has shaped much of our doctrine, “leaders” is translated “them that have the rule over you,” suggesting a hierarchic eldership. The NIV translators prefer “leaders,” but speak of “authority.” Both translations command the members to “obey.”

A closer study of *hegeomai*, the word translated “leaders” or, in the KJV, “rule,” bears out the NIV translation of “leaders” rather than “those that have the rule over you.”

W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* translates, "primarily, to lead the way,"<sup>197</sup> and "to lead."<sup>198</sup> Vine comments that while the word is translated "to rule" in the KJV, the marginal notes written by the original translators of the original King James Version (now omitted in most editions) offer "guide" as an alternative translation.<sup>199</sup> Vine explicitly criticizes the translation "rule," stating that Hebrews 13:7 more literally refers to "leaders" or "guides,"<sup>200</sup>

A deeper sense of the word can be gathered by considering that in other contexts it is translated "count," "think," "esteem," and "judge."<sup>201</sup> Indeed, the one English word that would come closest to fitting all contexts is "judge." The sense of the word in Hebrews 13:7 is thus of a guide, that is, one who judges or considers the best path to follow and, hence, a leader.

"Obey" is also mistranslated. As Vine says, *peitho*, the word translated "obey," means—

to persuade, to win over, in the Passive and Middle Voices, to be persuaded, to listen to, to obey, is so used with this meaning, the Middle Voice, e.g., in ... Heb. 13:17 ... . The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion.<sup>202</sup>

The same word is used in numerous verses to mean "persuade" or "be persuaded" or synonymous words. See, for example, Acts 5:36, 37, 40; Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7; Jas. 3:3. The passive voice refers to action by a third party. The middle voice is action upon oneself. Thus, in the passive voice, *peitho* would be translated "be persuaded," but in the middle voice, we should translate "be persuadable" or, more precisely, "allow yourselves to be persuaded."

But the NIV translates, "Obey your leaders and submit to their *authority*." Even if we accept a milder meaning of "leaders," surely we must still recognize their authority, one might argue. And yet "their authority" are words not found in the Greek but are added by the translators. The KJV more correctly translates "submit yourselves." "Authority" was not written by the Hebrews writer!

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<sup>197</sup> Page 246 regarding "count."

<sup>198</sup> Page 307 regarding "rule."

<sup>199</sup> Page 307 regarding "rule."

<sup>200</sup> Page 185 regarding "guide."

<sup>201</sup> Vine, page 246 regarding "count." See, e.g., Phil. 2:3 (KJV "esteem"); Phil. 2:25 (KJV "supposed"); Heb. 11:11 (KJV "judged").

<sup>202</sup> Page 124 regarding "obey."

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Finally, “submit” translates *hupeiko*, found nowhere else in the New Testament. Vine translates, “to retire, withdraw ... hence to yield, submit, is used metaphorically in Heb. 13:17 of submitting to spiritual guides in the churches.” The parallel structure and order of “be open to persuasion” and “submit” indicates that the writer’s thought is “allow yourselves to be persuaded, and as a consequence of being persuaded, yield to the church’s guides.”

Accordingly, we translate Hebrews 13:17:

*Be open to persuasion by those who guide you and so submit to them. They keep watch over you as having to<sup>203</sup> give an account. Be open to persuasion<sup>204</sup> by them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Therefore, we see that this verse has much the same thought as 1 Peter 5:2. Peter warns the leaders not to “lord it over” the flock but to be examples. The Hebrews writer speaks from the perspective of the flock, telling them to be open to the example and teaching of the leaders. From the King James Version in 1611 to the NIV, translators have inserted an authoritarian bias into the Hebrews 13:17 that is simply not present in the Greek.

The leaders of the church are not overlords, dictators, despots, or even bosses. They are not even rulers. They are leaders and guides, who teach, judge the correct path, persuade, and set examples. This hardly means that all within the church have identical authority, but neither are we to create a hierarchy based on worldly corporate or governmental patterns. The biblical pattern is not egalitarian—rather the pattern is gift based.

(Rom. 12:6-8) We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s<sup>205</sup> gift is ... leadership, let him<sup>206</sup> govern diligently ....

The KJV translates “rule” while the NIV translates “govern.” Vine translates “‘to stand before,’ hence, to lead.” Titus 3:8 and :14 use the same word to mean “maintain” as in “maintain good works.” The NIV translates “*devote themselves to* good works.” Thus, the word has the flavor of a steward “keeping up” or “caring for” someone else’s property

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<sup>203</sup> “Men” is not in the Greek. Rather, the noun is implied and has no sexual connotation. Accordingly, our re-translation omits “men” to follow the Greek more closely.

<sup>204</sup> “Obey” or “be open to persuasion” does not appear here in the Greek either. The NIV translators have simplified the verse by breaking one sentence in the Greek into two English sentences and repeating the verb.

<sup>205</sup> “Man” is not present in the Greek but is implied. Thus, the command is gender neutral.

<sup>206</sup> “Him” is also absent in the Greek, but is implied. Again, the command is gender neutral.

rather than an owner exercising dominion over his own property. Thus, even those with the gift of leadership have no dominion over the church, only the burden of devoting themselves to its management.

Elders are not dictators. The managing partner of my law firm has authority and we must submit to her or we will have anarchy in our law practice. But her authority is by our consent and she can be fired by the other partners. Thus, our “hierarchy” is that the partners are over the managing partner (setting her salary and having power to remove her) while the managing partner is over the partners (having control of the management of the law firm). It is, of course, a circle, and one that works quite well. The structure is really not imaginable in terms of one partner being over or below others. Rather, we each have a role to play. Some manage. Some generate business. Some produce billable hours. Some train others. Some are in training. Therefore, we don’t see management—despite its considerable authority—as subordinating any partner to another.

Not surprisingly, many within the Churches of Christ have reviewed these same scriptures and concluded that the eldership is not so much an office as an attainment, more precisely, a gift from God. For example, Tolbert Fanning (who founded the first Church of Christ congregation in countless Southern communities), David Lipscomb (a founder of the *Gospel Advocate* and Nashville Bible School—later David Lipscomb University), William Lipscomb (brother of David Lipscomb and a co-founder of the *Gospel Advocate*), E. G. Sewell (an early editor of the *Gospel Advocate*), and J. M. Barnes (an early contributor to the *Gospel Advocate*) all argued that there is no such thing as an “office” of elder. Indeed, Sewell wrote in 1872 that “elder” refers only to the greater age of certain men of the congregation, and that the “elder women” in 1 Timothy 5:2 “are just as much officers as the older men are.” He argued that neither are officers, but rather “senior members” who lead the congregation by example and teaching. These men took great pains to distinguish the organization of the church from corporate hierarchies. David Lipscomb contended, “So far as we have observed, the electing and setting apart of officers has been a complete farce in the churches.”<sup>207</sup>

Most southern Church of Christ traditional practices can be traced to the teachings and writings of precisely these men—who dominated Church of Christ thought when the Churches were separating from many northern Churches over instrumental music and missionary societies and for many years thereafter. And yet they also taught views that did not gain wide acceptance. These views have been largely forgotten by the Church, doubtlessly due to the difficulty of organizing a church without someone put into a sanctioned leadership or management position. And yet these men were quite right in warning us not to view elders as rulers but as servants and teachers, as leaders by example and by Christian character—rather than chief executive officers, bosses, or rulers.

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<sup>207</sup> Sandifer, pages 125-134; C. Leonard Allen, *Distant Voices* (ACU Press, Abilene, Tex. 1993), pages 100-107.

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This view would not only take much of the politics out of Church affairs, but it would make the acceptance of women in “official” capacities much easier for many to accept. Many of our members blanch at the thought of female elders, but these same members often see elders as virtual dictators. If they saw elders foremost as examples and servants, their resistance would not be so great. After all, who could protest recognizing a woman as an example to or servant of the congregation?

And so we can conclude our meanderings with a fairly firm conclusion. In anyone’s view of scripture, many older women will be leaders by virtue of their examples and Christian character. Many women teach men quite effectively by their participation in classes and by their private rebukes and exhortations. Such women form the backbone of any church and all would acknowledge their value.

The question is whether such women can be granted recognition in any formal sense or whether such women can be placed in a position to organize and manage the church—as servants of the membership, not as lords. The question of exercising authority, thus, has little to do with the matter. Properly understood, women can undertake leadership, management, and organizational responsibilities as servants—even slaves—of the church without violating 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

This approach would bring hierarchalists and egalitarians much closer to agreement. Even if the hierarchalist school of thought will not accept women as elders, they should be willing to allow women to exercise their talents of leadership at other levels. After all, women do not “usurp” authority when they are working under the oversight of a male eldership, even if men work “under” the women’s leadership. If the men are unhappy with the decisions being made by the women, they can always appeal to the elders. Even allowing women leadership in only non-elder roles would be a vast improvement—not only in doctrine, but also in the quality and quantity of the work of the Church. We desperately need more leaders.

And so, the hierarchalist and egalitarian views of men and women in marriage and in church should be considered very similar, with the primary distinction being whether women can be elders. Both views are very respectful of the inspiration of scriptures, and both views attempt to avoid adding rules to the Bible or subtracting rules from the Bible. Both views attempt to apply scriptures only to the extent that the historical and textual context permits. Therefore, neither view can be made into a test of fellowship.

### **D. The Practicalities of Our Conclusions**

We now have to contemplate the unpleasant task of deciding what to do with all these new ideas. Do we run out and appoint women teachers, deacons, elders, and preachers? Do we cower in fear of being seen as “liberal” and ignore what the Bible says? What if our congregation would split? What if the churches in your community would

disfellowship you?<sup>208</sup> What if your elders don't even allow material such as this to be considered by the membership? There are many lessons taught by the Bible that bear on these points.

**Divisiveness is a sin.** Being very often a divisive people, as amply evidenced by our history of countless divisions, we have conveniently ignored a dirty little secret: divisiveness is a sin. It is among the worst of all sins.

(Rom. 16:17) I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

(1 Cor. 3:16-17) Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

(Titus 3:10) Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

This is not ambiguous. Not only is divisiveness a sin, but also we are told that such a person must be disfellowshipped.

Now notice carefully that the sin is not that the divisive person is teaching falsely. The lesson in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 comes in the context of the division described in chapter 1, where some members claimed to be of Christ, or of Cephas, or of Apollos, or of Paul. Paul first makes the point that the congregation ("you" is plural in the Greek) is God's temple and that divisions within the congregation destroy the temple. He then pronounces a curse on those who cause such divisions, saying that God will destroy such people. Divisiveness is dividing over our disagreements. It is judging as damned or not worthy of our fellowship those who have been saved but who disagree with us on some point of non-salvation doctrine.

Thus, we cannot allow those who are divisive to set the agenda for the rest of us. We must teach the truth—the whole truth—even if those steeped in the sin of divisiveness don't like it.

**Condoning sin.** One of the more ridiculous ideas held by some within the Church is the notion that by worshipping with a known sinner I somehow "condone" his sin. But, of course, we are all sinners. That's why we need Jesus! The idea that somehow my sins aren't very bad and so don't taint those who worship with me, while the sins of someone who disagrees with me are really bad and so taint the congregation, is an extraordinarily

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<sup>208</sup> Contrary to all-too-common practice, there is no scriptural authority for one congregation to disfellowship another.

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arrogant and wicked notion. When I worship with a sinner, I should be thankful that he is also willing to worship with a sinner, or else I would be all alone in church!

**Romans 14 - 15.** We will begin with Paul's conclusion, so that there will be no doubt as to Paul's point.

(Rom. 15:1-3) We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

Paul criticizes selfishness among Christians. Thank God that Jesus wasn't as selfish as we are! When Christians complain to the elders that some practice makes them uncomfortable or is not what they want, the complaint is essentially self-centered, and therefore, un-Christian. We should always think (and learn to care about) what is best for the community of Christians, not ourselves. More importantly, we must learn to be comfortable with what helps bring the lost to Christ or strengthen our weaker members (often our youngest members). The Christ did not die to create a church that serves the strong. Rather, the strong are to serve the weak and the lost. Indeed, as we will see, Paul uses "weak" to refer to those in doctrinal error, and yet he commands us to bear with their failings.

(Rom. 15:5-7) May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Unity is a gift from God. Thus, it is not based on our own efforts so much as on what God has given us. We will never all agree on every point of doctrine or practice. We've proven that over the last 2,000 years beyond argument. We must therefore learn to honor the unity that God has already given us, by acknowledging as saved and honorable all whom God has saved. Unity is not based on a seven-part lesson on the marks of the Church. It is based on our accepting one another as Christ accepted us. Christ accepted us while we were sinners and long before we took a position on the role of women, creation/evolution, or what have you. If Christ accepted you, I must accept you. The burden is not on you. It is on me.

Notice especially that we are to accept (present tense—continuously) others just as Christ accepted (past tense—at a single point in time) us. Just how did Christ accept us? Through our hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized. So how are we to accept those with whom we disagree? By their faith and repentance—that is, their hearts.

Some have tried to turn this argument on its head by claiming to be the weaker brother! They argue that since they are weaker, the rest of us must yield to their peculiarities. This takes a lot of nerve, but it happens. But to claim to be weaker is to claim to be wrong, as we will see in chapter 14.

(Rom. 14:1-2) Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

Lesson 1: We are not to pass judgment on disputable matters. "Judgment" in this context refers to taking a condemning attitude, as will become plain.

Lesson 2: The weaker brother is the wrong brother. As Paul will say later, eating meat is not a sin. The weaker brother does not understand the scope of grace and thus imposes a rule that God does not, but does so in good conscience. He is analogous to the modern legalist.

3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

This is as plain as language can be. Neither the man who finds a rule nor the man who does not may condemn the other. God has forgiven them both of all their sins, continuously. We must respect God's decision. We can't judge more harshly than the Creator.

4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

God's forgiveness is promised, even to the brother with weak faith who sins by adding a law to the word of God. We are reminded most plainly that it is wrong to judge other Christians. That is just not our job. Only God forgives and only God damns. We are told that the Christian in error *will* stand, not that he *might* or *probably* will stand. Can a Christian lose his soul? Yes, but he will no longer be God's servant, that is, he will no longer be a Christian. This is the meaning of the continuous forgiveness taught in 1 John 1:7:

(1 John 1:7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

We all know by now that the verb tense for "purifies" is present (not aorist) and thus indicates continuous action, not periodic or point-in-time action. We are continually forgiven if we are forgiven at all.

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(Rom. 14:5-6a) One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord.

We still argue about this one today. Should we celebrate Christmas as having religious significance? Easter? Is Sunday an especially holy day? Or are days equally holy? Some say yes and some say no. Paul never answers the question in Romans!

Paul never tells us which Christian is right or which has the strong faith. He pointedly states that even though these two Christians disagree on a point of practice or doctrine, God judges their hearts and they are both trying to honor God. Thus, both take the position that they take "to the Lord." If it really mattered who was right, Paul would have told the Romans. His point is that, in terms of who is saved or in fellowship, it just doesn't matter!

6b He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Similarly, the Christian who abstains from meat because he believes in a rule that God did not make honors God in his heart, because he is obeying God as he understands obedience.

(Rom. 14:10-13a) You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.*

Even though Paul has said that God does permit the eating of meats, and thus the vegetarian is wrong as stated by an inspired apostle, those of us who know better may not pass judgment on him. We may not look down on him. God has forgiven him, just as we have been forgiven of other sins.

(Rom 14:13b-14) Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.

Here we have an important but often misunderstood limitation on Christian freedom. While our brother will be saved by his pure conscience, he can also be made to sin by an impure conscience. If we lure him into conduct that he believes is sin, to him it is sin, even though it may not be sin to anyone else.

(Rom. 14:15-20) If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

We should not make our brother sin (stumble) by tempting him to eat while he believes that such eating is a sin. We should not ask a teenager to engage in mixed swimming if he believes mixed swimming to be wrong. But we can certainly engage in mixed swimming even though the publisher of some church bulletin thinks that we sin in so doing. After all, we did not invite that publisher to our party! He was hardly tempted to sin against his conscience.

Anyone with much experience in these matters knows that we will be criticized by our brothers (contrary to Paul's instructions) for just about anything we do, other than nothing. Some churches not many miles from my home congregation think that Sunday School classes are sin. Some churches think that college ministries are sin. Some churches think that women must wear hats to church.

But Paul did not say that we have to bow to every whim of every preacher with a printing press. He said don't tempt your brother into sinning against his conscience. If you think that it's a sin to clap in church, don't clap, and those who disagree should not insist that you do or look down on you for heeding your own scruples. Just so, you should not look down on those who think that they honor God by so celebrating His victories.

(Rom. 14:21-23) It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Verse 22 tells us that it is sometimes better to be silent on some disputable point than to tempt our brother into sinning against his conscience. Paul does not say that we should never teach on a subject that is controversial. Paul wrote almost exclusively on controversial subjects, and he was roundly criticized for it. His reputation suffered, and he was beaten and imprisoned for what he said, but he taught the truth anyway.

**Courage in taking a stand.** Neither Paul nor Jesus ever allowed fear of criticism (or even death) to prevent them from speaking out. Peter and John told the Jews that it is

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better to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). We should seek to have a good reputation, but not at the expense of failing to serve God as well as we know how.

(Matt. 12:1-14) At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven’t you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! *Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.*”

Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. *But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.*

Jesus could have easily avoided these confrontations. He could have waited until Sunday to heal. He could have instructed His disciples to avoid preparing food on Saturday. But He didn’t. Rather, He provoked the Pharisees into a confrontation, which allowed Him to show others that the religion of the Pharisees was a false religion and that their rules were contrary to God’s will. Moreover, Jesus wanted to teach the standard by which His disciples would be judged. “It is lawful to do good” (and so, of course, Jesus would not make rules that make doing good unlawful).

Jesus’ reputation among the Pharisees was as a blasphemer and lawbreaker. He chose to suffer their condemnation (and ultimately death) in order to teach His disciples the truth and to lure the Pharisees into showing their true wickedness.

(Matt. 15:1-20) Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “*Why do your*

*disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"*

Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; *their teachings are but rules taught by men.*"

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'"

Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"

He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18 But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, *false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean';* but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'"

Once again, we see Jesus going out of His way to provoke a confrontation with the Pharisees. Certainly He could have told His disciples to wash their hands to avoid a confrontation. Surely, their reputations suffered among the religious leaders of the day for their violation of the traditions. Moreover, the tradition certainly seems to us to be a good one. We all believe in washing our hands before we eat! And yet Jesus chose to challenge the rule. Moreover, He "offended" the Pharisees and didn't care.

Some of us argue that we must not "offend" our weaker brothers and that we must preserve our reputations as good Church of Christ Christians among the Churches. And yet Jesus was willing to be known as a sinner and a blasphemer rather than keep certain

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traditions that He could have easily followed. Why? Because to have done so would be to have condoned the false religion that produced these traditions.

Jesus wanted to make a radical change in what the people considered to be religious, and a radical change in thought required confrontation with the leaders of the opposition. He had to make clear not only what He stood for, but what He *didn't* stand for. Anything less would have risked perpetuating the false teachings of the Pharisees that were contradictory to the grace that was to come.

Jesus concludes with the point that the sin is not in rejecting even morally neutral traditions. The sin is in slandering and speaking ill of those who do.

**Conclusions.** Given the controversial nature of the doctrine of the role of women, how do we apply biblical principles to make our conclusions a reality in the Church of Christ today?

1. As pointed out earlier in this book, the biggest problem in the Church today is a profound misunderstanding of the nature of grace and the workings of the Holy Spirit. So long as legalism is mistaken for the gospel of Christ, division will always follow change. Therefore, we must work diligently to spread the Good News within the Church. **We must explicitly point out the errors of legalism** and plainly speak the truth of God's good grace.

2. While many will consider such teaching "liberal," in fact such teaching is simply a repetition of the work of Paul. Paul worked most of his career to rebuke Judaizing teachers, who sought a return to the Law of Moses. We should **follow Paul in rebuking those who seek a return to Old Testament theology**. But we should speak the truth in love. And I don't mean a condescending, arrogant "love" that takes pleasure in purifying the Church. Rather, we must hurt for those who have never felt the joy of God's forgiveness.

3. We must recognize that **divisiveness is a sin** that requires excommunication. Too often we take our most divisive members and make them preachers and elders when they ought to be expelled from the church altogether. We can tolerate those who teach falsely. We will never all agree. But we should not tolerate those who divide (or who threaten division to get their own way).

4. If we become **committed to one another**, and not to having our way, then we will be in a position to deal with difficult issues without fear of division or splits. Division is not caused by discussing controversial issues, but by selfishness and an Old Testament understanding of grace. Love is not an abstraction, but a commitment that is built on shared experiences and on working side by side toward common goals.

5. We **cannot grant the legalists a monopoly** in the pulpit or the press. If the most grace-filled preacher refuses to teach grace for fear of the legalists, then we have a legalist preacher, as a practical matter.

6. And yet we must understand that **it takes time** for people to accept new ideas. Even for an open-minded person, a radical change in thought can take many years to feel comfortable. When I get a new eyeglass prescription, the new, better lenses actually seem worse than the old, out-of-focus lenses until I've worn them a few days. We must be patient. Practice may have to follow a new understanding of doctrine by very many years. The participation of women in church affairs must increase in gradual steps. We were once uncomfortable with women attending a church business meeting. We later became comfortable with women being present but silent. We are now comfortable with women being present and speaking, so long as they do not vote. Then we became comfortable with women voting so long as they do not chair the meeting. The process must continue.<sup>209</sup>

7. **Each church will follow its own pace**, and some churches will lag decades behind. The urban churches will often change faster than the rural churches, because the urban churches tend to be younger and more highly educated. Education helps people to be open minded by exposing people to many new ideas, broadening horizons, and humbling those who think they know everything. Younger Christians have had less time to get used to a way of doing things or of thinking. Not that this excuses older Christians from being tradition bound. Older Christians ought to be an example of humility and sacrificial love to the younger Christians. We ought to hold our older Christians to this standard in our preaching.

8. **Division is not inevitable**, but the danger is very great. Unless the Churches of Christ reject legalism and turn to the cross, division and splits will occur. The only other "solution" is to not change. And as pointed out earlier, we are not even keeping our own children in the Church. The status quo is flatly unacceptable.

9. **Change is necessary and inevitable**. We cannot deny well over half our members the right to participate as full-fledged Christians forever. This is not because of their "rights" or "civil liberties." Rather, God needs workers. The hungry must be fed, the children educated, the world saved. If we deny so many of our members the right to participate in church decision making or leadership, we are unilaterally disarming in the face of Satan's army. Imagine facing an enemy army and then turning around and decommissioning a majority of our own best officers for fear of violating the army's book of regulations. We need to worry about defeating Satan and let God worry about His choice of leaders, teachers, speakers, and administrators.

One example should suffice. Many traditional Church of Christ missionaries in Russia have struggled to convert Russians who are desperate for the Word, because they refuse to use female translators when they teach, fearing a violation of the command that

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<sup>209</sup> This is not to condone the practice of running a church through a "business" meeting at which votes are taken. But that's a topic for another day.

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women not be permitted to teach. And yet there aren't enough male translators at times. Therefore, many souls in Russia are being lost due to this very restrictive view of the role of women. Our doctrine of women matters!

10. We must carefully, **prayerfully weigh these truths against the division and discord that moving too fast will inevitably cause.** We should not be naive. Changing our practices regarding women would be a very emotional matter for many members. We must go slowly. By being over-anxious, we can easily do more harm than good. And yet, in the long run, **the work of the church is hurt severely by the limitations we place on ourselves and by the legalism that such limitations encourage.**

The test of how to proceed is whether the chosen course will be best for the Lord's work. We know that there will be problems associated with giving women greater influence in the Church. And we have never done this before, and so we don't know how richly the Lord's work will be blessed by a change in this direction. It seems, therefore, hard to calculate whether the risk is worth the benefit.

For guidance I turn to Bill Tilden's advice on how to play tennis: "Never change a winning strategy; always change a losing strategy." Are we winning or losing? The only honest answer is "losing." The Churches of Christ have not grown appreciably in 30 years. We have split over Pentecostalism, grace, the Holy Spirit, the unity movement,<sup>210</sup> whether to be a "mainstream" Church of Christ, and many other issues, but we haven't grown. Nor have we founded very many new orphans homes (none, to my knowledge, in the U.S.), colleges, hospitals, shelters for the homeless, shelters for battered spouses, or low-income housing. We have certainly done much good in the last 30 years in absolute terms, but the world and the evil in it are growing far faster than we are.<sup>211</sup>

How do organizations change? Become more effective? More dynamic? Clearly, the answer is leadership. And just as clearly the Churches of Christ are lacking in leadership (we have some fabulous leaders, but not nearly enough). Do we have enough qualified male leaders? Teachers? Missionaries? Mission organizers? Evangelists? Fund raisers? Bible scholars? Elders?

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<sup>210</sup> The on-going effort of many within the instrumental and non-instrumental branches of our Restoration Movement to re-unite the Movement's two branches.

<sup>211</sup> Again, one of the great tragedies of the Churches of Christ in recent years is how we've handled mission efforts in Russia. In this fledging mission field, we've divided over whether a translator must be a man, whether we can have kitchens in the building, and all the other minutiae of doctrine that we divide over in the U.S. One missionary was actually heard to ask a fairly new Russian convert whether he was pro-Jubilee—that is, in favor of a meeting of certain Christians in Nashville, Tennessee—about as far from Moscow as is possible on this planet. Are we happy with who we are at the turn of the century?

If you don't like my proposal, make a better one. How do we get off dead center? What haven't we tried that we should have tried? How can we be content to let "well enough" alone?

11. **The only way to never offend is to never do anything.** To hold up the feelings of these brothers as our standard of conduct is to make the most legalistic brothers the rulemakers for the Church of Christ. Jesus would not approve. **We should call on the legalists to repent**, rather than kowtowing to their whims.

12. **Education, therefore, is critical.** This is accomplished through books, classes, word of mouth (especially), and preacher seminars and lectureships. Unfortunately, as is true for all controversial topics, some of our preachers and elders play mind control games and refuse to allow their members to hear from those who disagree with the party line. This is closer to a cult than Christianity, but it is far too commonplace.

13. **Our women must be ready** to prove themselves worthy. As churches slowly move women into positions of greater influence and leadership, they will be severely tested. Each mistake will be greatly exaggerated.

15. Ultimately, we can only do so much, and **the rest is up to God.** Even Jesus did not change the hearts of most of the Pharisees, but He changed enough hearts to rewrite the history of the world. We can only plant. God must give the increase.

### APPENDIX 1. SLAVES, WOMEN & HOMOSEXUALS

William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*<sup>212</sup> is a monumental work in support of the egalitarian position. Webb brings an incredible level of detail and extraordinarily wide scope of scriptural evidence to his arguments. Webb points out that there are numerous factors that ought to be considered in determining whether a doctrine is cultural or transcultural. By "transcultural" Webb means a scriptural approval or condemnation that applies at all times and places rather than being culturally limited.

Webb considers that the foremost test of cultural versus transcultural is the direction of the redemptive movement. Thus, Webb tests the treatment of slaves, women, and homosexuals in the surrounding, pagan cultures, under the Law of Moses, and under the New Testament. He finds that women and slaves are treated much better under the Law than under the surrounding cultures, and even better under the New Testament. Thus, the movement is strongly toward an increasingly improved, "redemptive" state.

Thus, just as the general direction of the scriptural treatment of slavery is toward emancipation of slaves—although not fully realized until after New Testament time—the trend of scripture also points toward the need to fully emancipate women—even though women may not have been fully freed during the First Century.

On the other hand, Webb finds that homosexuality is largely approved in the cultures surrounding both the Old Testament Jews and the New Testament Christians, and that the Law of Moses and the New Testament both strongly condemn homosexual practices. Thus, there is no tendency to redeem homosexuality—indeed, quite plainly, the scripture seek to change culture from acceptance to condemnation.

Webb reinforces these conclusions by comparing these three controversial issues with numerous other practices and issues.

In addition, Webb considers 17 other indicators of the transcultural nature (or cultural nature) of the Bible's teachings on women, slaves, and homosexuals:<sup>213</sup>

1. Preliminary movement
2. Seed ideas
3. Breakouts
4. Purpose/intent statements

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<sup>212</sup> (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL: 2001)

<sup>213</sup> Summarized at pp. 69-70.

5. Basis in Fall and/or Curse
6. Original Creation, I: Patterns
7. Original Creation, II: Primogeniture
8. New creation
9. Competing options
10. Opposition to original culture
11. Closely related issues
12. Penal code
13. Specific versus general
14. Basis in theological analogy
15. Contextual comparisons
16. Appeal to Old Testament
17. Pragmatics between two cultures
18. Scientific evidence

This book is extraordinary and very helpful scholarship. I have only a few quibbles worth mentioning:

- Webb’s approach to hermeneutics is more inductive than deductive, in that he starts with countless details and seeks to find conclusions in them. I would prefer to start with the larger principles. Thus, to me it is far more important what the gospel, “love your neighbor,” or Genesis 2 teaches than an 18-step analysis. Of course, the two approaches should reach the same conclusion. I just hate leaving the impression that finding scriptural truth has to be so hard. If we’ll be guided by matters of first importance, we’ll know the truth long before we do the detailed work. On the other hand, it is wonderful that we have scholars who do the detailed work, as we can take considerable comfort in seeing our conclusions confirmed from an entirely different direction.
- Webb’s work has to be taken as reinforcing arguments such as those made in the main text, rather than making a complete case, as Webb does not even confront such keys texts as 1 Corinthians 11 and 14:33-35, or for that

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matter, Galatians 3:28, in any detail. Rather, he seeks to dispense with hierarchical arguments by reference to his 18-step analysis. Of course, at some point you have to wrestle the texts themselves to the ground.

- Webb seeks to show the cultural nature of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 by reference to the outdated practice of primogeniture. “Primogeniture” is the legal preference for the first born, going back to very ancient times. Thus, a king is normally succeeded by his oldest son, land is usually inherited by the oldest son, etc. The Bible reflects these practices in the Law of Moses, in references to Christ as the firstborn, and so on. Webb’s argument is that when Paul declares that women should have no authority because Adam was made before Eve, Paul is referring to primogeniture, a then-familiar part of ancient life that was clearly cultural. Webb may be right, but I am persuaded that the argument in the main text, that Paul is referring to Eve’s role as Adam’s suitable complement, is truer to the text and to Paul’s thought.
- In Webb’s reading of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, he treats Paul’s references to the Creation accounts as mere analogies, and thus cultural. Thus, he would take the passage to mean something like “women should not teach because, like Eve, they are gullible.” He then argues that women were indeed gullible when the passage was written, but no longer, and thus the passage is cultural. This is an attractive argument, and may be right, but the passage just doesn’t read like an analogy to me. Rather, Paul follows his commands with “for” (Greek *gar*) meaning “because” and not “like” or “as.” Therefore, as argued in the main text, I prefer to argue that the reference to Eve’s gullibility justifies the command that women should learn, rather than the command that women not usurp authority or teach. Of course, even if Paul’s reference to Eve is intended to be a justification for women having no authority, we still have to add an explanation to the text. Either women can have no authority because all women are gullible like Eve—or because the women at Ephesus (the destination of 1 Timothy) are gullible like Eve. The text could be read consistently with either interpretation, and only the second fits the facts. To be fair, Webb later offers an alternative argument, that I consider much stronger than his first:<sup>214</sup>

Assuming that God intended Eden’s creative order to have transcultural implications, that does not necessarily mean that women should be restricted from having a pastoral teaching ministry today. Genesis does not say that women cannot teach men. If one accepts a transcultural dimension to the garden’s patriarchy, the

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<sup>214</sup> p. 237.

most that can be said is that man should have some kind of greater honor or prominence than woman. Paul applied the principle within his day and culture. But Paul's use of the Genesis text in restricting women from teaching is an application of the principle, not the principle itself.