

Women in



Ministry



CHRISTIAN FAMILY
FELLOWSHIP MINISTRY

Women in Ministry

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WOMEN IN MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

Biblically, we know that there is no difference between men and women in Christian ministry, but in practice, the role of ordained clergy and leadership in The Church has been primarily limited to men. Have you ever asked yourself the question, “*Why is this so?*”

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, only about 3% of all ordained clergy are women¹ (or about one-in-thirty). Even today, whenever women rise up to serve in leadership roles, the general tendency is to view them with a negative bias. Why then is there such a disparity between what we know and what is practiced?

The negative bias toward ordaining women, or even allowing women to serve in leadership roles, has historically been supported by only a few passages in God’s Word. In this consideration, we will see that when we allow scripture to interpret itself, God makes no *real* distinction between men and women in leadership roles in The Church.

Our Common Responsibility

When we are taught or when we read something concerning God’s Word, it is our personal responsibility to search the Scriptures to see if it is in agreement with the Word of God as a *whole*.

II Timothy 2:15:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

If we do as we have been instructed here, we will see that God sets us free from the mental bondage related to the negative bias toward women in ministry. Do not be deceived; this is mental bondage in that it causes us to belittle that which we should be celebrating.

John 8:32:

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

In this, we need to understand that if it is not “*the truth*,” it will not make us free but, rather, will keep us in bondage. To be set free, our minds need to be renewed to that *truth* and none other.

¹ U. S. Census Bureau, Table 598, Employed Civilians by Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2006 <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/08s0598.pdf>, (416k Total/12.8k Women), Accessed May 2008

It is important, when we come to God's Word, that we take care not to have personal agendas that would impede us from rightly dividing the Truth. We cannot go to the Word of God to prove what *we* think or what *we* believe.

II Corinthians 4:2:

But [*we*] have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

We must let The Word interpret itself by comparing scripture with scripture. We work it from the inside out, and do not impose our private interpretation upon it. The whole Word must fit together as a hand in a glove must fit, without contradiction, because God does not contradict Himself.

Our Physical and Psychological Differences

Are there differences between men and women? You bet there are! I will be the first to admit there are, and with a lovely wife like mine, I am very thankful for those differences. We would be unwise not to recognize the differences. While we are different *physically* and *psychologically*, we are not different *spiritually*. We should be careful that we do not let the physical and psychological differences override, trump, or become more important than our spiritual abilities. Women are just as capable *spiritually* as men.

Women have the *right* to choose to lead and participate as fully as men do. We, as a functioning Body of Christ, must encourage and facilitate everyone (male and female) who desires to serve and lead, so they get the opportunity to do so. Women are not second-rate and less able. We should never find ourselves giving opportunities to women only when there are no men around to do the job. As far as I can tell, there are no gender-specific leadership roles. As we will see, women have always been recognized in the Bible in the same roles as men.

Genesis 1:27:

So God created **man** in his own image in the image of God created he **him**; male and female created he *them*.

Please note that, as used here, the words "*man*," "*him*," and "*them*" are understood to be in a generic sense, addressing *women*, also. It is the same throughout God's Word. Often the words "*man*" or "*men*" are not limited to the literal meanings but, rather, refer to the "*human race*" as a whole. For example, let us look at a foundational section in Romans.

Romans 10:9,10:

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart **man** believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

“*That if thou...*”? We obviously recognize that this is for anyone—male or female. Now, let us consider verse 10. “*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness....*” Does the use of the word “*man*” here exclude women? Of course, not; it is understood that it *also* includes women.

When we read God’s Word, we need to be aware of our cultural biases. We need to make sure that we understand that when certain terms are used, they are true of both *men* and *women*. Let us look at another passage from the Book of Romans.

Romans 3:4a:

God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every **man** a liar; ...

Now, I am sorry, ladies, but you are included in this verse, too. The word “*man*,” as used here, is all-inclusive, referring to the “*human race*” as a whole. This is a figure of speech known as *synecdoche*. This is where a part is given in representation of the whole.

Our Spiritual A likeness

There is so much written on the subject of women in ministry that it may be bewildering. There are numerous books approaching this subject from all sorts of angles. Why are there so many differing positions? The reason is simple—isolated scriptures have been used to teach a wide spectrum of *personal* or *denominational* points of view.

Different passages, taken independently by themselves, may seem to not cohere or to point in different directions. However, all of God’s Word must fit together into a coherent whole. God cannot contradict Himself; apparent discrepancies can and must be resolved. Our challenge is to accept and understand all scripture regarding women in ministry and develop an entire-Bible based approach that fosters the growth of all individuals male and female.

It is not a matter of deception but, rather, a matter of very sincere people believing what they have been taught. How do we know which point of view is the rightly divided Truth? It is simple; we must allow scripture to interpret itself by applying the Biblical research and study principle of *understanding difficult passages in light of clear passages*.

Galatians 3:27-28:

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are **all** one in Christ Jesus.

We are all heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.² Verse 28 is marked out by the figure of speech *paradiastole*, in two major repetitions. We know that God marks out things in His Word using figures of speech to draw our attention to what is being said. Repetition is one of the major ways He emphasizes things.

The first repetition is the words “*there is.*” “***There is*** *neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female....*” The second repetition employs the connective use of the words “*neither*” and “*nor.*” “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female....*”

Because of this figure of speech, we know God wants us to take our time and see the importance of what is being said. The point is, if I were speaking to any general group of believers, would I be able to say that there is “*neither male nor female, bond nor free, Jew nor Greek*”? Sure, I could; that is what the scripture says. You may, however, think that I was crazy, because I would be speaking to some very wonderful men, along with some very wonderful women.

It is not that God is denying there are different kinds of people but, rather, He is showing us a greater and more comprehensive reality. This important reality does not deny all the obvious facts that are used by man to distinguish, divide, and separate but, rather, emphasizes the presence of the power of the *holy spirit* that unites, enables, and qualifies us as heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

The Hope of Glory

Colossians 1:27:

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

It is the Christ in us, “*...the hope of glory*”! We are all changed from *natural* men and women of only soul and body to wonderful men and women of *spirit*, *soul*, and *body*.

I Thessalonians 5:23:

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every born again man or woman has the God-given ability to operate the nine characteristics of the manifestation of *holy spirit*. For example, as it is written, *men* and *women* will prophesy because of God’s gift of *holy spirit*.

² See Romans 8:17.

Acts 2:17,18:³

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

It is important that we be able to allow God's Word to interpret itself. God will not contradict Himself, therefore, when He says women should keep silent in The Church⁴ and, then, says women will prophesy, it must be available for both to be correct. The question becomes, "*How are these apparently opposite positions reconciled?*" As we will see, God meant what He said both times, and by applying the principle of *understanding difficult passages in light of clear passages*, we will see just how beautifully they are woven together.

First, we will begin by examining women in positions of leadership in both the Old and New Testaments. Our challenge is to accept and to understand all scripture regarding women in ministry. By doing so, we will see that God allows everyone to become all that He created them to be, without regard to gender.

³ See Joel 2:28-29.

⁴ See I Corinthians 14:34-35.

WHAT DOES THE WORD SAY?

Women in the Old Testament

Sovereignty of Eve

When you think of Adam and Eve, do you think of Eve as being in a leadership role? Let us see what is written

Genesis 1:26-28:

And God said, Let us make man [*referring to the whole genus*] in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him [*referring to the whole genus*]; male and female created he them.

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

In the beginning, *Adam* and *Eve* shared the responsibility of having dominion over the Earth; *they* were to work together as a team. Now, let us move ahead and take a brief look at other women leaders in Israel's history.

Miriam, the Prophetess

Exodus 15:20,21:

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

Moses had just declared the Word of God, and *Miriam* went out praising God with other women, just like today, when our women minister The Word in song. This is an important ministry. *Miriam* is not only called a *prophetess*, but she is shown *leading* other women. Later, God lists her along with Moses and Aaron as those specifically called of God.

Micah 6:4:

For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

Here, *Miriam* is marked out as being a part of the *leadership* team that led the Children of Israel out of Egypt. She is one of the stalwarts who contributed to their deliverance.

Deborah, the Prophetess

Judges 4:4:

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

God tells us a number of very important details here. Not only was Deborah a *prophetess* and *judge*, but she was also married. She was the wife of Lapidoth. Yes, married women can serve in ministry, too! It is not just for single women.

The Mother of Isaiah's Son

In Isaiah 8:3 God instructed Isaiah to marry a prophetess and have children whose names would convey a message from the Lord.

Isaiah 8:3:

And I [*Isaiah*] went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, call his name Mahershalalhashbaz.

In the case of Isaiah, he went “...*unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son.*” It is not uncommon or unusual for people with service ministries to marry.

Please do not misunderstand me. I am aware that scripture speaks of the gifting of remaining single (for men and women), but both categories (those who are single and those who are married) are important.⁵ God works in both categories, but there is a great gifting associated with the ministry of those who are single. Not everybody has to get married. It is not required anyplace. You can get *holy spirit* without getting married. Praise the Lord for that!

Huldah, the Prophetess

II Kings 22:14:

So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her.

These men were sent to Huldah to inquire of the Lord. She must have had a reputation, and she must have proven herself.

II Kings 22:15-17:

And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Tell the man that sent you to me,

16 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read:

⁵ See I Corinthians 7:1ff.

17 Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched.

She had a prophecy to speak here, and she delivered it with boldness and precision. You have to know who you are to speak the words of God like that.

II Kings 22:18-20:

But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard;

19 Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD.

20 Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again.

She confirmed that, yes, what was written was going to happen. She told them, however, that God was going to be gracious and wait until after the end of King Josiah's life before it did. This was a functioning ministry, and the words she spoke made a difference.

Wise Woman of Abel

Besides the many great women who served God's people as *prophets*, we have examples of others who rose up, and stepped into *lead* at critical moments. Let us go to II Samuel 20 and look at one of them.

II Samuel 20:15:

And they came and besieged him [*Sheba*] in Abel of Bethmaachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down.

After revolting against King David, Sheba was on the run, and trying to get away from Joab, who was hot on his trail. At this point, Sheba hid out in the city of Abel. Then, Joab and all the people who were with him began to besiege the city.

II Samuel 20:16,17:

Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.

17 And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear.

The word “*handmaid*” here is rendered from the Hebrew root word ‘amah, and corresponds to the Greek root words *doulos* (masculine form) and *doulē* (feminine form).⁶ It has a basic meaning of “*one who is a servant*.”

II Samuel 20:18,19:

Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter.

19 I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?

She is saying, “*Look, our city is known for giving counsel that ends disagreements. People come here from all over to have matters judged, and to have disputes settled. We are known for this. We have ended and settled matters.*” She declares herself as one of the people that help settle disputes. She wants to know why Joab wants to kill her and her children.

II Samuel 20:20:

And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy.

Here, Joab is saying, “*I really don’t want to hurt anyone,*” however, the underlying message is, “*If you want to protect Sheba, then you will suffer his fate.*”

II Samuel 20:21:

The matter is not so: but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall.

Joab explains that his goal is not to destroy the city but, rather, to apprehend Sheba. Do you see how she made a decision for the entire city?

II Samuel 20:22:

Then the woman went unto all the people in **her wisdom**. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.

Because of “*her wisdom*,” she convinced everyone that it was the right thing to do. This included many leaders and elders of the city. According to our understanding of the culture of that time, the majority of these, if not all of them, would have been men.

From the beginning, *God has placed* women into various positions of authority in ministry. Do you think we will find anything less in the New Testament?

⁶ See Romans 1:1, “*servant*” (*doulos*), and Luke 1:38, “*handmaid*” (*doulē*).

As we will see, the New Testament also records that women functioned in almost every leadership role in which men did.

Women in the Gospels

Anna, the Prophetess

Luke 2:36-37:

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

We are not told why, but her husband had been dead for about “...*fourscore and four years...*,” or 84 years. Now, added to the seven years she was a wife, we get 91 years. If we use 16 as her age when she got married, that would make her about 107 years old at the time of this record. WOW!

Luke 2:38:

And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

She had been single, then married, and was now a widow. She was a *prophetess* who served God with fasting and prayers, both day and night. She was doing what God wanted her to do. She was where she was supposed to be. Moreover, because of her obedience, she became a witness “...*to all them that looked for redemption....*” What a woman!

Women in Acts and the Letters

The Teacher, Priscilla

Acts 18:25-26:

This man [*Apollos*] was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and **Priscilla** had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Here is a woman who was part of a team that taught Apollos—a man who was mighty in the Scriptures and fervent in the spirit. He was still lacking in his knowledge, however, and Priscilla was part of the team that expounded unto him “...*the way of God more perfectly.*”

Aquila and Priscilla were both teaching this wonderful and great man, Apollos. They had been with Paul, and they knew something Apollos did not. It

matters not whether you are a man or a woman; as you learn the truth, it becomes your responsibility to share it. That is exactly what they did.

Romans 16:3,4:⁷

Greet **Priscilla** and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Again, Priscilla and Aquila are specifically called out as Paul's *fellow laborers*. One of the things I would like to point out here is that Priscilla is mentioned *before* Aquila. In verse 4, we are told of the great degree that they both were willing to go to in service for the work of the ministry. Together, Priscilla and Aquila were tremendous leaders in the early Church. Not only did they serve Paul and the churches of the Gentiles, but they also were overseers of the church that met in their home.⁸

The Apostle Junia

Romans 16:7:

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note [outstanding] among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Paul, by inspiration, says to *welcome kindly* these two apostles. One is a man (Andronicus), and one is a woman (Junia). Both are noted as being Paul's kinsmen, fellow prisoners, and *outstanding* among those who were apostles before him.

Occasionally, some have questioned the feminine gender of the Greek word translated as "*Junia*." There is, however, no objective reason for anything other than a feminine rendering. A great many of the older and newer versions (i.e., the Latin Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic, Wycliffe, Tyndale, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, Bishops Bible, Douay-Reams, the King James, Webster, the New Revised Version, the New King James, etc.) recognize and translate this word in the feminine form—"*Junia*."

The masculine form of this name, *Junius*, does not appear in any inscription, tombstone, letters, or literary work contemporary with the New Testament. In fact, *Junius* does not even exist in any extant Greek or Latin document in the entire Greco-Roman period. On the other hand, the feminine name, *Junia*, is well attested to in both Latin and Greek. It is simply because of cultural and

⁷ The first 16 verses of Romans 16 list 29 people, both men and women, Romans Greeks and Judeans, people of privilege, slaves and freed slaves — all one in Christ. Of the 29 people, ten are women. The only one of the ten mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament is Priscilla. Paul held all these women who stood with him and served with him in the gospel in high regard.

⁸ See Acts 18:2-26, I Corinthians 16:9, and II Timothy 4:19.

personal bias that some have found it so hard to accept that a woman could have been an apostle.

The Deaconess, Phebe

Let us go back to verse 1 of chapter 16, and we will see yet another example of translational bias.

Romans 16:1,2:

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a **servant** of the church which is at Cenchrea:

2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

As we do in our ministry today, we recommend others. That is what Paul is doing here with Phebe; he is recommending her. If you were to look at the New International Version, you would find a text note on the word “*servant*,” which says, “*deaconess*.”⁹ I would like to point out something to you that I find intriguing. It is from the same Greek root word that is used in I Timothy,¹⁰ where it is translated “*deacon*.”

It is my opinion that, because of cultural bias against women, the translators did not want to say “*deacon*,” so, they said, “*servant*.” No matter how you render it in English, she was still being *commended* as a “*deacon*,” which is a *leadership* role.

It is because of this that we can see that there are translational biases in many Bible versions.

As we continue our consideration and look at the difficult sections in I Timothy and I Corinthians, we will see more of the translational biases that have engendered a tremendous amount of difficulties in our understanding of the roles of women in ministry.

Women Evangelists

Philippians 4:3:

And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

The word for “*gospel*” is drawn from the Greek word *euaggelion*, meaning, “*good news*.” To labor “*...in the gospel...*” is to do the work of an evangelist.

⁹ However, the Greek word translated “servant” is not in the feminine. Men and women are “deacons;” just like men and women are “prophets.” The “ess” suffix used to distinguish gender may be culturally appropriate, but it is not necessary.

¹⁰ See I Timothy 3:10-13.

They helped Paul move The Word; they were out holding forth The Word; and they were getting people born again and bringing them into the Family of God.

Aged Women

Titus 2:2-5:

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.

3 The aged women likewise, that *they be* in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,

5 *To be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Here, we have aged women teaching the young women important things. While it does not implicitly say they are to teach men, it can be understood that men, young and old, *heard* their instruction.

Women Are Able

We have looked at some of the many clear scriptures that demonstrate that women have the same enablements *spiritually* as men. We have seen women who were situational leaders, prophets, judges, deacons, evangelists, teachers, and apostles.

It is clear that women have and can minister effectually according to the purposes of God. As we have considered in some detail, there is no more clear scripture relating to this topic than Galatians 3:28.

Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

It is critical that we remember what we have considered as we begin to look at difficult sections commonly used to deny women leadership roles within The Church.

THE CONFLICT OF CULTURE

The first difficult section is in I Timothy.

I Timothy 2:11-15:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

Reading this at face value it would seem that there is a definite difference between how women and men are to function in The Church. We will see, however, that these scriptures actually communicate the exact opposite of what many seem to think. Let us work through them methodically in light of the clear scripture, and we will see what they really have to say.

Let the Women Learn...

It says, “*Let the woman learn....*” This is an imperative, a command. The Apostle Paul by the inspiration of God is charging Timothy to make sure the women have the opportunity to learn. The distinction God makes between men and women is for a purpose. It was not to prohibit women’s participation, but to *guarantee it*.

In the culture and the times in which the Apostle Paul was writing, the women *did not learn in public teaching situations*. Both the Roman and the Hebrew cultures reserved public education for men. Only the richest patrons in the Roman culture ever educated their daughters, and that was almost exclusively by private tutors.

Women did not get the education that men did, and Paul is saying, by revelation, “*Let the woman learn....*” It is a command; women should learn. Make sure they do.

Learning with Quietness

Now, let us handle the next phrase that deals with how they are to learn. It says, “*...in silence with all subjection.*” In the book, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, the phrase “*...in silence with all subjection...*” is understood as, “*indicating a readiness to hear the will of God and to obey it.*”¹¹

¹¹ Kroeger, Richard and Catherine, *I Suffer Not A Woman*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992, p. 32

I do not personally like the translation, “*silence*.” One thing I have noticed when working the scriptures dealing with women is that a bias occurs when it comes to the way things are translated. This word “*silence*” is from the Greek root word *hēsuchia*. The Greek word *hēsuchia* means, “*to be quiet, tranquil, or still*.”

This word (or a form of this word) is used four times in the New Testament. It can refer to *verbal silence*, but it does not have to. The context will determine whether or not it does; you have to read the context. Primarily, it refers to *quietness* or *tranquility*. It can also refer to one’s *deportment*, “*a quiet acquiescence*.” A good example of this can be found in II Thessalonians, where Paul is writing to both *men* and *women*.

II Thessalonians 3:11,12:

For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness [*hēsuchia*] they work, and eat their own bread.

Here, referring to men and women, it is translated “*quietness*,” instead of “*silence*.” They are allowed to talk while they work; they just have to keep it down. The New International Version translates the King James Version phrase “...that with *quietness*...” as, “...to *settle down*....” The New Living Translation also translates it as, “...*settle down*....”

As we can see, *hēsuchia* means, “*to be tranquil, to stop causing a disturbance*.” Is Paul telling the Thessalonians *not to speak*? No, of course he is not. He is telling them, “*Do not cause problems. Be tranquil; settle down*.” This word is used again in I Timothy. The same root word, *hēsuchia*, is used in both verse 11 and 12.

I Timothy 2:11:

Let the woman **learn** in **silence** [*hēsuchia*] with all subjection.

In the Greek, the word rendered as “*learn*” is given in a present imperative, which directs one to continue in an action already begun. This was *already* a standard of The Church. Paul charges Timothy to continue it, even though there had been some opportunities that had arisen because of it. In verse 12, he begins to address one of the problems.

Again, we should understand *hēsuchia* to mean that they should “*settle down*,” and not cause a disturbance continuously. That is exactly how the men are supposed to learn! You see, God is *not* making a distinction between men and women. God is coming against the culture, which already has made a distinction between men and women. He is saying, “*I want it done the same way for both men and women. Stop **not** educating the women*.” The women should

learn just as the men do, *in quietness and full submission*. Now, that is quite the opposite of what I initially thought.

I Timothy 2:12:

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in **silence** [*hēsuchia*].

This verse is usually taught to *put down* women in The Church, and it should not be taught that way. This is a complete *misunderstanding* in light of the culture of the time. Because verse numbers and punctuation are without Divine authority, let us re-read this verse, along with the next verse, without any breaks or punctuation.

I Timothy 2:12,13:

but I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man but to be in silence for Adam was first formed then Eve

I trust that you can see that there is a problem. The reason given is that, “...Adam was first formed, then Eve.” I cannot even begin to cover all the crazy stuff that has been taught about this particular verse. A common explanation given is *women should be in silence* because Adam listened to Eve once, and look what happened. Men, therefore, should never listen to women again. In many churches, if a woman got up to teach, the men would get up and leave, or stand with their backs to her.

Regardless of all the points of view on this, if we back up a little in the context, the reason given will be clearly understood.

The Ephesian Culture

I Timothy 1:3-6:

As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

4 Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: *so do*.

5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:

6 From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling;

Timothy was ministering in Ephesus when he received this letter. Paul left this charge with Timothy when he moved on to Macedonia. Timothy was to stay in Ephesus, and *charge* those teaching other doctrines, fables, and endless genealogies to focus on more godly things. Verse 6 also warns that some would turn aside “...unto vain jangling...” (i.e., “empty, senseless talking”).

We know the city of Ephesus was in the Roman province of *Asia*. Just as the United States has states, so Rome was broken up into provinces. Asia was a province on the western end of what we know today as Turkey. When Paul

wrote that all *Asia* heard of the Lord Jesus in two years and three months, he was speaking of this province. That is like me saying all Ohio, or all Connecticut, or all Alabama heard of the Lord Jesus in two years and three months.

By many accounts, Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the world at this time. Scholars estimate its population to be between two hundred and five hundred thousand people. In other words, as many as half a million people could have been in Ephesus when Paul wrote to Timothy. It was an extremely large trading city, with a good harbor. Not only did it have access to the sea routes, but it was also one of the chief cities along a number of major land routes.

We know from Acts 19 that the great temple of Diana was in Ephesus. This temple was renowned as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World¹² (*Diana* was the Roman name, and *Artemis* was the Greek name.). It was in Ephesus where they did the big book burning,¹³ with the people publicly renouncing this false god.

From the uproar surrounding Paul's preaching, we know how prevalent the worship of this *mother-goddess* was. Do you remember the problem Demetrius had with Paul in Ephesus?

Acts 19:24-28:

For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;

25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:

27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

28 And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians.

We can see clearly here that Paul had persuaded many people to turn away from the worship of Diana. Paul's instruction to Timothy was addressing this very point. Let us look at the verses under study again.

I Timothy 2:12,13:

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

¹² *The Temple of Ephesus*, <http://www.unmuseum.org/ephesus.htm>, Accessed May 2009.

¹³ See Acts 19:19.

The teachings associated with the worship of Diana are what Paul was dealing with in Ephesus, and he knew that Timothy would also have to face the same problem.

As we know from the verses following this section in Acts 19, the craftsmen caused an uproar, and took hold of some of the companions of Paul. It was a real *mob mentality*. In the end, the town clerk addressed this “*assembly*,” and pointed out that, in fact, it was they who were acting unlawfully.

Acts 19:37:

For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

Paul did not speak blasphemies directly against Diana but, rather, spoke against the concept of a *mother-goddess* as the *source of all life* (which directly opposes the teachings in Genesis). What Paul addressed was her magnificence as the *mother-goddess*, and the influence it had on the culture in Ephesus.

Later, in Acts 20, when Paul returned to Ephesus, he warned against those who would attempt to turn people from the faith.

Acts 20:28-31:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men [*This is that all-inclusive usage allowing for women, too.*] arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

In I Corinthians, Paul, speaking about his time in Ephesus, noted the intense opposition he faced.

I Corinthians 16:8,9:

But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.

9 For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and *there are* many adversaries.

I Timothy 2:12 is specific instruction from Paul to Timothy, in order to implement the very charge he gave him in chapter 1, verses 3-4. Part of the ancient mythology that Timothy was dealing with was that the original creator was female.

It was believed that the Earth was a *mother-goddess*, that this goddess was the supreme god, and all deities were underneath her. This belief was so deeply embedded, that it was an inseparable part of the Ephesians' culture.

In Anatolia (which is modern Turkey, and where Ephesus was), all life was thought to stem from the *great mother*. Timothy had been witnessing to people, bringing them into the home churches, and when they came, they already had preconceived ideas, which they learned from their culture.

When we witness to folks and first bring them into our home churches, what do they usually believe about the dead? They usually believe that when you die, you go directly to Heaven or to Hell. Why? That is what our culture teaches them; it is part of the folklore and fables that make up the culture that surrounds us.

Old Women Who Tell Tales

Well, what did those first coming to home churches in Ephesus bring with them? Part of what they brought was the belief in the great goddess Diana as the creator and sustainer of life.

Not only did they believe that she created and sustained life but, also, that she created an “*Eve*” before she created an “*Adam*,” and that all life proceeded from this “*Eve*.” We can see this same mythology reflected in the world in which Timothy lived. Let us look at I Timothy 4.

I Timothy 4:7:

But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise [*train*] thyself *rather* unto godliness.

Timothy was to have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, he was to “*train*” himself to be godly. Even the translation of this verse seems like a slap at women: “...*old wives' fables*.”

In our culture today, if there is anything that seems superstitious, behind the times, or maybe does not quite make sense, we might hear someone say, “*Oh, that is just an old wives' tale*.” While we can see the origin of this saying, we should understand something else.

At first glance, it may seem that this verse is talking about superstitious old tales, but it is, in fact, speaking of “*old women who told tales*.” In antiquity, old women had a reputation for storytelling. From the earliest times in Anatolia, female religious officials, known as “*old women*,” kept alive the ancient myths.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ibid., Kroeger, p. 64

The translation, “...*old wives’ fables*...,” gives the general impression that the tales were harmless, simply superstitious. Paul’s instruction to Timothy, however, was to take these as a serious threat, and oppose them. The persistence and power of these old wives’ tales opposed the truth and power of the Gospel.

The problem posed by the stories was not the gender of the tellers but, rather, that these tales opposed the Word of God, and were a devilish and devious attempt to divert hearers from the truth. As we have seen, not only was Timothy charged with not giving heed to these fables, but he was also told to refuse or have nothing to do with them.

II Timothy 4:2-4:

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Timothy was charged with preaching The Word, because these fables posed a serious threat. In fact, there are over 20 references to false doctrines or myths in both epistles to Timothy.

It is clear that one of the major reasons for writing these Pastoral Epistles was to clarify sound doctrine from the encroaching, erroneous, and damaging myths, teachings, and practices that were infiltrating The Church.

The False Claim of Authorship

Having now considered the impact of the culture of the Ephesians, we may now turn our attention to the phrase, “...*usurp authority over*....”

I Timothy 2:12:

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

These three words are rendered from one Greek root word, *authentēō*. *Authenteō* is translated, in every version I have looked at, something like, “*have authority over, dominion over, not to usurp authority from.*”

It is very intriguing that this whole doctrine (that is, forbidding women to teach) is based upon the translation of one verb, which occurs only one time in the entire Bible. Do you know of any other Christian doctrine that is based on only one verse, let alone only one verb in one verse, and used only one time? I do not know of any.

According to many references, *authentēō* is usually translated, “*have authority over, dominion over, or not to usurp authority from.*” Until recently, that is ex-

actly how I understood it. Every time I tried to study these verses, I was limited to the lexical information I could find. That made it very hard to get to the *truth*.

You see, lexicographers, people who build lexicons (i.e., Bullinger, Vine, and others), do not include *all* the definitions of a given word. They only include definitions of the word that *they* think are used in the Bible.

Understanding this becomes very important concerning the word *authentēō*. For example, the entry on “*authority*”¹⁵ (*authentēō*), in *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, gives three meanings or usages.

- To usurp authority or have dominion,
- In the earlier usage of the word, it signified one who, with his own hand, killed others or killed himself, or
- Later, it came to denote one who acts on his own authority, hence, to exercise authority or dominion.

Dr. E. W. Bullinger’s lexicon and concordance lists the same three meanings or usages. These are all good, but there is more.

Richard and Catherine Kroeger, in *I Suffer Not a Woman*, expanded the definition of *authentēō* to include a fourth option. They not only listed the same basic meanings or usages as above, but they also added one more.

From *I Suffer Not a Woman*:

- To begin something, to be primarily responsible for a condition or action (especially murder),
- To rule, to dominate,
- To usurp power or right of another, or
- **To claim ownership, sovereignty, or authorship.**¹⁶

I am skeptical, and do not usually just accept any definition someone gives. I like to see it from more than one reliable source before I give it much credence.

As I continued to search, I found that Thayer’s lexicon also has a fourth usage: “*one who does a thing himself, the author.*”¹⁷ Thayer includes the same understanding of “*being the author of.*” This is similar to the Kroegers’ definition of,

¹⁵ Vine, W. E., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., p. 46

¹⁶ Ibid., Kroeger, p. 84

¹⁷ Thayer, Joseph H., *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002, p. 84

“to claim ownership, sovereignty, or authorship.” Now, I have another source that gives this usage, and I am able to feel more comfortable in its consideration.

Next, I considered Liddel and Scott’s lexicon. This lexicon was not designed exclusively for Biblical words and meanings, but also for extra-Biblical words and meanings (at times, referred to as *profane* sources). In it, we also find the fourth usage, “to be the author of.”¹⁸ Now, let us read verses 12 and 13 again.

I Timothy 2:12-13:

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to **usurp authority over** the man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

Now, I have a fourth meaning to consider. Since *authentēō* does not appear anywhere else in the Bible, I have to rely upon the context to determine which meaning fits. While it is true that one meaning of *authentēō* is, “to have dominion over,” I now know that it can also mean, “to claim authorship of.” The question really becomes, “Which one of these two meanings fits the context?”

If I am going to use the definition “to have dominion over,” then something in the context ought to validate that decision. The problem is that I do not see anything present in the context to validate that decision. The reason given that a woman should not “have dominion over” a man, that “...Adam was first formed...,” does not make sense.

On the other hand, how will the definition, “to claim authorship of,” fit into this context? What if I understand it to say that I do not permit a woman to “teach” or “claim authorship of” man? Rather, she must be tranquil; she must not cause a fight, “...for Adam was first formed...” Now, I have something that fits both the immediate and remote contexts.

What were the women that were brought into the Christian Church at Ephesus teaching? They were teaching that a woman was the creator of man. They taught that a mother-goddess created the whole world, and then, in many cases (both in Gnostic and ancient mythology), they believed and taught that Adam was created by Eve.

This is easily documented in the Gnostic writings. The Gnostic writings became known for their contradictory content, opposing many true Biblical doctrines. Do you see where the problem was? The problem was that many pagans and Gnostics were being converted into the Christian Church, and they believed that Adam was created by Eve. It is because of this that Paul says, “Look, I want the women to learn just like men do, but I do not permit a woman to claim authorship of man, for Adam was first formed, then Eve.”

¹⁸ Liddel, H. G. and Scott, R., *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1940, p. 275

Adam was First Formed

Now, do you see where this is flowing? Before we continue, let us see the relationship of the Greek root word *authentēō* to the English word “teach.”

I Timothy 2:12a:

I do not permit a woman to teach nor to claim authorship of man...

The word “*nor*” is the Greek conjunction *oude*, and it can be disjunctive or connective. As a disjunctive, the items would be separated into two requests, and as a connective, the items would be combined into one request.

Here, *oude* has become conjunctive, in the sense that it connects “teach” and “claim authorship of ” into *one idea*. Since both activities are derived from speech, they form one concept. That is what is happening here. When Paul says, “I do not permit a woman to teach, *oude authentane...*,” what he is saying is, “*I do not permit a woman to teach or claim the authorship of man.*” They could teach the new birth; they could teach the operation of the manifestations; they could teach spirit, soul, and body, but they were not to be allowed to teach or claim the authorship of man, that woman was created first, and that all life flows through her from the great *mother-goddess*.

Do you see how teaching that *man* came from *woman* would cause a disturbance for anyone who knew the Genesis account? That would further divide the Judean and Gentile portions of The Church. That is why the next phrase repeats: “...*but to be in silence.*” This is our word, *hēsuchia*, again. Remember, it means, to “settle down,” or not cause problems. She is not to teach or claim that woman authored life but, in contrast to promoting this false doctrine, she is to settle down, and not cause problems. This teaching would be disruptive to the believers and oppose the truth, so, she must be silent, and refrain from promoting it.

Do you see how naturally it flows into the next verse? They are not to go around teaching that Eve created Adam. Why is that? “*For Adam was first formed, then Eve.*” That is very clear in the biblical account.

Eve was Deceived, Not Adam

I Timothy 2:14:

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

The Gnostics were also teaching that it was *Adam* who was deceived by this wicked, mean, horrible Creator-God of the Old Testament. They taught that *Eve* was not deceived, because she believed the serpent, the emissary of the True God. Verse 15 continues to address the teachings of the Gnostics.

I Timothy 2:15:

Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

The Gnostics were teaching that if you have a child, you *could not* be saved, because the “*child anchors your soul to the Earth and creates a serious spiritual impediment.*”¹⁹ This is part of the reasoning and origin behind monasteries and convents. Gnostic teaching was making inroads into The Church. In the closing of the first epistle to Timothy, Paul, by inspiration, repeats the instruction to resist the Gnostic teachings.

I Timothy 6:20,21:

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science [*gnōseōs*] falsely so called:

21 Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace *be* with thee. Amen.

This phrase, “...*oppositions of science falsely so called*...,” is rendered from the Greek words *antitheseis tēs pseudōnumou gnōseōs*. It literally means, the “*opposition of the falsely-named knowledge,*” and, it refers specifically to Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was pseudo-knowledge, false knowledge. Paul also warns Timothy of those *forbidding to marry*,²⁰ and he encourages women of child-bearing years to marry *and* have children.²¹

The Real Message

I Timothy 2:11-13:

Let the woman learn in silence [*hēsuchia*] with all subjection.

12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

At this point, we should have a completely different understanding of these verses, and a completely different understanding of what God is trying to do.

Now, we can see that this section should not be used to prevent women from having an active role in The Church. God gave every Christian, regardless of gender, a ministry.²² The Scriptures are clear. There is neither male nor female in *Christ Jesus*, yet in Christendom, women are put down by men, put down by other women, and, in many cases, feel badly about a God Who would make

¹⁹ Ibid., Kroeger, pp. 174-176

²⁰ See I Timothy 4:3.

²¹ See I Timothy 5:14.

²² See Ephesians 4:1ff and Romans 12:1ff.

them inferior. Well, they are not inferior. We all have the same gift of *holy spirit*, and we should all operate it for the benefit of the entire Church.

One part of the problem here is due to *misunderstanding*. It is just like the misunderstanding surrounding, “*women should learn in quietness and full submission.*” We have seen that this statement is part of the instruction to ensure that women have the right to learn, and that it elevates the situation of women (because women were generally not allowed that opportunity in the culture).

Instead, this section of scripture has been used to put down women. It has been used to support the position that women should be treated and forced to learn differently than men. At this point, we should understand that women were to be given the opportunity to learn in the *same way* as men, but they were not to teach that *Eve* created *Adam*.

As we have also considered, part of the problem was due to translation (i.e., the various choices that the translators had for *authentēō*; they chose, “*have authority over,*” instead of, “*claim authorship of.*”). Yet, I think the context of 1 Timothy, and the culture from which Timothy came, would dictate that “*claim authorship of*” is a much better translation of *authentēō* than “*...to usurp authority over....*”

When reading the Pastoral Epistles, we must acknowledge that Paul is instructing Timothy and other Church leaders in how to handle the false teachings encountered by The Church from both pagan mythology and Gnosticism. As Helmut Koester wrote, “*In their fight against heresies, the Pastoral Epistles are designed to be a handbook, a manual for the Church leader.*”²³

I want to take one final look at this section. It is important that anyone, male or female, who thinks women cannot or should not teach, keeping women from positions of authority in The Church, takes the time to re-think their position, and to take a good look at this section. Here is a suggested translation of this section.

I Timothy 2:11-15: (literal translation)

Let the women learn [*just like men do*] without causing a disturbance [*in the church*] and in submission [*to their teachers*].

12 I do not allow a woman to teach or claim that women authored man, but [*in contrast to promoting this false doctrine, she is*] to settle down and not cause problems.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

²³ Koester, Helmut, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 2, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1982, p. 304

15 But she will be saved even if she bears children if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.

How beautiful it is when we can see the truth of God's Word! We can now, in fact, understand that I Timothy 2:11-15 *does not contradict* the other clear scriptures, where women are called to commitment and service in the Body of Christ.

Let us now turn our attention to another difficult section used to deny women the opportunity to teach, minister, and serve in leadership roles within The Church.

WIVES OF THE PROPHETS

I Corinthians 14:34,35:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

These passages are also used to deny women the right to teach and minister. If we are to allow scripture to interpret itself, then these passages must fit and be understood in light of the immediate context, and what we have already considered. As we will see, the problem here is more related to misunderstanding rather than mistranslation. To help us begin to look at this, let us consider the opening and closing portions of the immediate context related to these two passages.

I Corinthians 14:26b, 40:

...Let all things be done unto edifying.

40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Using the themes of *edification*, *decently*, and *in order* as our guides, we can now consider what lies between these two points.

I Corinthians 14:26b-40:

...Let all things be done unto edifying.

27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

33 For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him

acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

This section deals specifically with maintaining order in the church assemblies. There are those who take offence to verses 34 and 35; they want to get rid of them. For example, one of the most ingenious ways I have seen is to interpret verses 34 and 35, not as instruction but, rather, as Paul repeating the questions the Corinthians wrote. The problem with this approach is twofold: (1) neither of these passages is in the form of a question, and, (2) when Paul quoted other people, he generally identified whom he was quoting. Let us look at a couple examples, starting with Acts 17.

Acts 17:28:

For in him [*God*] we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own [*Athenians*'] poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Titus 1:12:

One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are all-way liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.

While claiming verses 34-35 are merely a repeating of the questions written by the Corinthians is a clever way to approach these verses, I do not think this is the case. Part of the reasoning is that Paul does, in fact, respond to questions from the Corinthians at other places in the epistle, but each time he does, he points it out.²⁴

I think we just need to deal with these passages in the context. I think the context is clear, and as we get into it, we will see that what Paul is instructing the women to do here is no different than what he instructed the men to do.

Subjection and Silence

Chapter 12 of I Corinthians, where it is written, “*Now concerning spiritual matters...*,” begins the correction of the misunderstanding, or the understanding in practice, of the manifestation of the spirit. Continuing on, the section under study from chapter 14 is part of the instructions on how the worship manifestations (prophecy and tongues with interpretation) are to be operated in The Church. We, therefore, cannot throw out two verses in God’s Word just because we do not like them, especially two verses that fit so well in the context. It is God’s Word, and it must fit together. Let us read what is written, beginning in verse 29.

²⁴ See I Corinthians 7:1 and 8:1-4.

I Corinthians 14:29-32:

Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

30 If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

The word “*subject*,” in verse 32, is rendered from the Greek root word *hupo-tassō*. It is this same root word that “*subjection*” was rendered from in I Timothy 2:11.

I Timothy 2:11:

Let the woman learn in silence with all **subjection**.

The words “*silence*” and “*subjection*,” from I Timothy, are the standard given for the women. Here, in I Corinthians, that same standard is applied to the “*prophets*” (who could be men or women).

God tells us why in verse 33.

I Corinthians 14:33:

For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

Without *subjection*, there will be *confusion*. If we do not defer and subject ourselves to one another, there will be nothing but confusion.

The focus of this chapter is to encourage edification, and to eliminate confusion. If you go back to verses 29-30, we are instructed that if the first prophet who speaks wants to learn from the next prophet who is going to speak, he is to “...*hold his peace*.” He is supposed to be quiet. Is that not what the ladies were asked to do? Well, that is exactly what the prophets are being asked to do.

In verse 30, the words “*hold his peace*” are rendered from one Greek word, *sigato*, which means, “*to be silent or still*.” That is exactly how the women are to learn. They are to “*settle down*,” and submit themselves. This word literally means, “*to be silent; not to say anything*.” If a prophet who is speaking wants to learn from the next prophet to whom something is revealed, he must be silent, and submit or subject himself to the next speaker. If I as a prophet want to learn, I must defer to the next one, be quiet, and submit myself to the next teacher. That is what we are all supposed to do.

God is not making any difference between men and women; He is not setting up a different standard for the women. He is just guaranteeing that the women get the same right that the men have: to learn by properly *subjecting* or *submitting* themselves.

In this section of I Corinthians, the context is speaking of the ministries of the prophets (That includes both men and women.). The standard given is that we are to *subject* ourselves to the speaker. The purpose of learning in *silence* is to keep confusion out of The Church. As it is written, every church ought to learn the same way.

I Corinthians 14:33:

For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in **all** churches of the saints.

Submitting One to Another

Being in *subjection*, or *submitting* one to another, should not be a new thing; neither should it be something restricted to women only. The entire Body of Christ submits to one another at appropriate times. Both men and women are required to do so.

Ephesians 5:21,22:

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

It should be noted here that it says *wives* are to *submit* to their *own* husbands. It *does not* say they are to *submit* to every man.

Because we reverence God and want His will to come to pass, we should do as He requests. Here, that is submitting one to another. We must all submit to each other at appropriate times. Submission is not demeaning or negative. It is required to keep order, and provide a basis for godly service.

Learning in Silence

I Corinthians 14:34a:

Let your **women** keep silence...

We must understand that God is ensuring that women have the same right as men to learn, and they are to learn in the same way. Let us go back to I Corinthians 14 and examine verse 34 more closely.

The Greek word for “*women*” here is *gunaikes*, and the majority of the time it is translated as “*wives*” in the letters of the New Testament. It is always the context that determines whether it is translated as “*women*” or “*wives*.”²⁵ From the immediate context, it is clear that this word should be rendered as “*wives*.” Let us continue.

I Corinthians 14:34a:

Let your women [wives] keep **silence** in the churches...

²⁵ The Greek word *gunaikes* is most often rendered as “*women*” in the Gospels.

The Greek word for “*silence*” here is *sigatōnsan*. It also means a *literal silence*. It has the same root word as *sigatō*, which was translated as “...*hold his peace*...” in verse 30. It is the same standard of behavior that is prescribed for the prophets.

Certainly, if the prophets differ from one another and learn in silence, women should have no problem doing the same. That is how order is maintained in the assemblies. When someone else is speaking, we are to remain silent. The issue is not really speaking, but interrupting and causing confusion, or making a disturbance.

I Corinthians 14:34:

Let your women [wives] keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them [the wives] to speak; but *they are commanded to be under obedience*, as also saith the law.

Just as the *prophets* are commanded, in verse 30, to be *silent* by holding their peace, the women are given the same instruction here. They are now commanded to be obedient in this behavior, also. The obedience here is not to their husbands, but to the *Word of God*.

Verse 34 ends by saying, “...*as also saith the law*.” This could be understood to say, “*This is nothing new. This is the way God has always wanted it done*.” (We will come back to this in a moment.) For now, let us continue on with verse 35.

I Corinthians 14:35:

And if they [the wives] will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands [the prophets] at home: for it is a shame for women [these wives of the prophets] to speak in the church.

The word “*women*” does not refer to *all* women but, rather, to *particular* women: those who are the “*wives*” of the “*prophets*.” Consider: why would such instruction be necessary if the wives of the prophets were not interrupting, and asking questions inappropriately?

The instruction given is not any different for the wives than it is for the husbands. It is just that men had been used to doing this for a long time, and had learned the appropriate behavior, while the women had not. As discussed earlier, the public teaching of women was a relatively new thing and, of course, some instruction was required.

As Also Saith the Law

I Corinthians 14:34b:
...as also saith the law.

Many times, when Paul refers to the Old Testament, he typically has a specific passage in mind. In many places, he says, “*it is written*,” and then the related passage is quoted or paraphrased.²⁶ It is important to note that this is not done here. Nevertheless, my Bible has a center reference of Genesis 3:16 for the last phrase, “*...as also saith the law*.”

Genesis 3:16:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Many commentators hold to the argument that the obedience spoken of in verse 34 stems from Genesis 3:16, while others argue that verse 34 is a vague reference to an oral tradition or the Talmud itself. The strong language Paul is using, however, in the context, supports that the obedience of which he speaks is obedience to the *Word of God* that he has been entrusted to present to them.

As to being a reference to Genesis 3:16, we have to remember that Genesis 3:16 does not represent God’s will but, rather, is a consequence of man’s fall. Adam and Eve had just disobeyed God. It should also be noted here that in the beginning God gave both Adam and Eve dominion, equally, over all the Earth.

Genesis 1:26,27:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Man was created male and female. Nevertheless, when God formed man, he was made a little bigger and stronger than woman. Historically, we know men have taken advantage of that fact, however, that does not make it God’s will. He did not make us physically different so that would be the outcome.

I think the biggest reason for Paul not giving us a specific verse is that he is referring to a general principal of obedience, which exists throughout the law. Perhaps the center reference for “*...as also saith the law...*” could more properly be Numbers 27:18-20 or Deuteronomy 17:11-13.

²⁶ See Romans 1:17, Habakkuk 2:4, I Corinthians 1:19, and Isaiah 28:14, etc.

Numbers 27:18-20:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom *is* the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;

19 And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.

20 And thou shalt put *some* of thine honour upon him, that **all** the congregation of the children of Israel **may be obedient**.

Moses is ordaining Joshua to lead after him, and he is telling the congregation, *“Okay, you’ve been following me. You’ve been listening to me, and now, Joshua is going to be the one, and you will have to be obedient to him.”* Moses set Joshua apart before the people, and he was ordained to lead God’s people. Just as the Children of Israel had obeyed Moses, they were now supposed to obey Joshua. Because he had the spirit upon him, all the congregation of the Children of Israel was to defer to him, and be obedient when he was speaking. To the best of my understanding, the essence of that phrase in I Corinthians, *“...as also saith the law...,”* is to substantiate the need for the Corinthians to do what Paul is telling them to do.

The other possibility I mentioned is in Deuteronomy 17. This section refers to times when difficult decisions needed to be made, and people sought a priest or a judge to make the final, unchallengeable decision.

Deuteronomy 17:11-13:

According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

12 And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the LORD thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.

13 And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously.

Since the Corinthians had come to Paul to ask for his help, he is saying, *“This is my decision and the commandment of the Lord* (which he mentions at the end of the chapter). *I will stand by it.”*

If I had to make a choice, I would choose these passages as my center references. These are two references, among many, that would support Paul’s request for obedience to his instruction. He is telling them what to do. He is setting a standard for behavior, and he expects their obedience. Both of these references show how the *Word of God* spoken by God’s *spokesmen* ought to be obeyed.

The standard was simple. They were instructed that if they had a matter and they went to somebody to handle a subject or make a decision, when he made the decision, they were to abide by that decision. They were not to continue to

rebel against the decision. So, when the Corinthians came to Paul and asked him, “*How should we handle these worship manifestations? How should our services be going?*” He told them. He said, “*You are to be obedient to my instruction so order is maintained in your churches.*” The wives of the prophets were particularly instructed to be obedient in order to keep the assembly decent and in order. What was required of them is no different than what was required of the prophets, or anyone else in the congregation. The remaining verses in I Corinthians 14 continue the theme.

I Corinthians 14:36:

What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?

The *Word of God* did not come from the Corinthians; it came from Paul. God told Paul, and Paul told them.

I Corinthians 14:37:

If any man [This includes both men and women.] think himself [or herself] to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him [or her] acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

He is just saying that this should end your problems in Corinth, if you do what I ask you to do—both men and women were supposed to obey this instruction.

I Corinthians 14:38:

But if any man [*male or female*] be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

They can choose, by their own free will decision, to hear the truth or be ignorant. Paul had done his part to instruct them.

Covet to Prophecy

I Corinthians 14:39,40:

Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid [*them: men and women*] not to speak with tongues.

40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Just as the term “*sons of God*” does not exclude women; neither does the term “*brethren.*” Women, who are born again, are part of the Body of Christ, too! Women should also “*...covet to prophesy....*” They should look forward to opportunities to prophesy. How is it possible for this to be true and, yet, at the same time, have the instruction of not speaking *at all* in The Church?

I Corinthians 14:34:

Let your women [wives] **keep silence** in the churches: for it is **not** permitted unto them [the wives] to **speak**; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

It says, “*keep silence,*” and “*not....speak.*” How can this be? Paul just finished telling them to “*...covet to prophesy...and forbid not to speak with tongues....*”

Either Paul cannot remember what he just told them, or it has to mean something different. He not only gives them permission to speak; he directs them to. Let us go back a few chapters, and consider the earlier context a bit further.

Earlier in I Corinthians 11 Paul instructed the believers as to how a married woman ought to pray and prophesy. In chapter 11 we do see particulars addressed to men and women separately, but the difference is only in whether one prays and prophesies with a covered or uncovered head.

I Corinthians 11:5a:

But every **woman** that **prayeth** or **prophesieth** with *her* head uncovered dishonoureth her head....

Both husbands and wives were allowed to pray and prophesy; women just had to cover their heads when doing it. However this direction was not to be allowed to be a point of contention because the custom was cultural not divinely ordained.

I Corinthians 11:16:

But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

If The Church had no such custom, why bring it up at all? While the physical covering of the head is not spiritually significant what it symbolized is significant. Covering the head symbolized the husband's loving protection and headship of the wife. God intends the husband and wife to be "one flesh" as it says in Genesis. They should act in concert, moving together on the things of God. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian women to remember to pray and prophesy with their head covered, it was so they would remember that their husband covered them. It wasn't the symbol of the marriage he was concerned with, it was marriage itself.

The wife should not ignore her responsibility to her husband. Her believing and ministry life should in no way run contrary to her role as a wife. Neither responsibility — the ministry nor the marriage — conflicts with the other. The godly arrangement set forth in the word allows her to fulfill both.

So how can divinely inspired scripture allow women to pray and prophesy, and then later tell them they cannot? If we allow scripture to interpret itself, it must be addressing two different things. Thankfully, the immediate context of chapter 14 helps us to understand this.

I Corinthians 14:1:

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but rather that **ye** may prophesy.

The word "ye" must refer to all believers, both men and women. So, how can the women *prophesy* and, at the same time, *be silent*? The instruction being

given is not that women cannot open their mouths in The Church but, rather, the “wives” of the “prophets” are not to speak at inappropriate times, or speak out of order. It is clear that Paul was addressing some type of speech (which was not praying or prophesying) that was causing problems in the church of Corinth. It is clear that specific behavior is being addressed. This behavior has caused such a disturbance that the church leaders had written Paul for help with the situation.

Some commentators say these verses apply to all women. If this were so, then women would be excluded from operating worship manifestations, and we know from other related passages that we have just considered, and the Old Testament that this cannot be true. For example, Acts 2:17 would no longer be true.

Acts 2:17:²⁷

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and **your sons and your daughters shall prophesy**, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Another example of this is found later on in Acts 21:9.

Acts 21:9:

And the same man [Phillip] had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

Here, Phillip, the evangelist, had four daughters who prophesied. The *Word of God* is clear that women can operate the nine manifestations of the spirit just as men do.

Two Underlying Themes

I Corinthians 14:5:

I would that ye all [*male and female*] spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater *is* he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the **church** may **receive edifying**.

Now, how can women do that if they cannot speak in The Church? Again, it has to refer to two different things. Furthermore, Paul wants everyone (men and women) to *seek to excel* to the edifying of The Church, as it says later in verse 12.

I Corinthians 14:12:

Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

I Corinthians 14:26:

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, **every one of you** hath a

²⁷ See Joel 2:28.

psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

These are the two underlying themes in this chapter. We should act so that The Church is *edified*, and so things are done *decently and in order*. It is not wrong for everyone to want to share something; it is just that the principle of edification would require limiting the number who do so. Although everyone who assembled could do each of the things Paul listed, they would not because the meeting would be much too long, and people would cease to be edified.

If we gave each of you a chance and everybody had a psalm, shared how God had blessed them, or had something to teach, we would be here for days. It has to be not only *decent* but also *in order*. It has to be limited. It is, however, the responsibility of the leader to see that The Church is edified, and that all things are done decently and in order.

I Corinthians 14:31a:

For ye may all prophesy one by one...

Addressing a Particular Situation

As we can see, I Corinthians 14:34-35 is not intended to be a blanket statement, applying to **all** women at **all** times in **all** churches. Here, Paul is speaking to specific women in a specific situation. His tone is clearly corrective. All of chapter 14 is spoken by way of bringing correction to specific challenges facing the church in Corinth. The church meetings are not being run properly. They are not decent and in order, therefore, Paul is correcting a specific situation. Paul is not banning women from speaking, but intends only to halt the verbal misconduct of certain wives who were disrupting the assembly.

Earlier, Paul told people who had been operating manifestations improperly to be quiet and not speak. He addressed both men and women when he said in verse 28, *“But if there be no interpreter...”* or, more literally, *“But if he lacks the will to interpret, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.”* In this situation, they were speaking improperly; they were speaking in tongues out loud and not interpreting. Paul told them that this is improper, and they were to be quiet, speak to themselves, and to God.

Speaking in tongues quietly to yourself does not disrupt anybody. You can still worship God; you can still praise God; you can still give God thanks well, while you are sitting in the meeting. Just do it to yourself, and not out loud; that would be out of order.

The Real Message

Paul corrected an imbalance by instructing them, both men and women, to be quiet in certain situations. This instruction was addressed to men and women who were improperly operating the worship manifestations. Paul instructed the

wives of the prophets, who were causing a disturbance by blurting out questions that would be more appropriately asked of their husbands at home, to be quiet. Why is this so? That is what is written. Paul prescribed the proper behavior for those women who were learning along with the men: *learn in silence with all subjection*.

While some use these verses to teach that no women should speak or teach in church, this cannot be technically correct. What is true is that the Greek word *gunaikes* can mean either “wife” or “woman,” and the context clearly shows that the women being addressed are married. These women were unaccustomed to public protocol, and were being instructed by Paul as to the appropriate public behavior.

As has already been shown, it is improper for a woman to speak in church cannot apply to all women at all times in all churches, for the whole of scripture demands an interpretation that applies only to a specific group of women who were at a specific place in a specific situation.

I believe Eugene Peterson has captured the essence of God’s intended meaning in the following paraphrase of I Corinthians 14:34-36.

I Corinthians 14:34-36: (The Message Bible)

Wives must not disrupt worship, talking when they should be listening, asking questions that could more appropriately be asked of their husbands at home. God’s Book of the law guides our manners and customs here. Wives have no license to use the time of worship for unwarranted speaking. Do you—both women and men—imagine that you are a sacred oracle determining what is right and wrong? Do you think everything revolves around you?

GOD CALLS WHOM HE WILLS

Logically, had God intended to limit public ministry to only men, He would have never recorded and emphasized the equal contributions and roles of women in scripture.

In this consideration, we were easily able to reconcile the few unclear passages, which have been used to exclude women from leadership roles, with clear passages. We were easily able to peel away problems in translation and basic misunderstandings so we may know for a surety that it is God's will for women to have the same opportunity as men to serve in leadership roles.

We know that the God of the Bible has no respect of persons, and His calling upon a person's life is without repentance.²⁸ He calls whom He wills, and gives gifts and ministries as He chooses. Man must not put limitations on Divine prerogatives by elevating or demeaning according to race, social standing, or gender.

We must treat all people with dignity and respect, whether they come with Armani suits or cut-off jeans, whether they are male or female, whether they have all their teeth or not. Everyone is afforded the opportunity to walk by the spirit.

When you are around people who have answered God's call on their lives, you know it because of the way they minister to you. It is always a Divine calling, confirmed by the spirit, with special gifting. Whether they are men or women does not matter. They speak for God, and they touch your heart. We need to fight for everyone's right to do that—both *men* and *women*.

²⁸ See Romans 2:11 and 11:29.

Biblically, there is no difference between men and women in Christian ministry. However, the role of ordained clergy and leadership in The Church has been primarily limited to men. Have you ever asked yourself the question, “*Why is this so?*”

According to the U. S. Census Bureau, only about 3% of all ordained clergy are women. Even today, whenever women rise up to serve in leadership roles, the general tendency is to view them with a negative bias. The negative bias toward ordaining women, or even allowing women to serve in leadership roles, has historically been supported by only a few passages in God’s Word. Had God intended to limit public ministry to only men, He would have never recorded and emphasized the equal contributions and roles of women in scripture.

There are only two major sections of scripture that have been used to exclude women from leadership roles, (I Timothy 2:11-15 and II Corinthians 14:34-35). In this consideration, you will see that when we allow scripture to interpret itself, God makes no *real* distinction between men and women in leadership roles in The Church. The difficult scriptures are easily understood in light of the many clear ones. Once we peel away the problems in translation and basic misunderstandings we will know that it is God’s will for women to have the same opportunity as men to serve in the Body of Christ.

We know that the God of the Bible has no respect of persons, and His calling upon a person’s life is without repentance. He calls whom He wills, and gives gifts and ministries as He chooses. Man must not put limitations on Divine prerogatives by elevating or demeaning according to race, social standing, or gender.

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