

Women and Ministry at IBC

At IBC we recognize that God created both man and woman in His image, that He offers the same Holy Spirit to both men and women at salvation, and that the same spiritual gifts are available to both men and women for service. While the New Testament seems to imply that eldership is reserved for men, the elders of IBC affirm that women in all other roles are scripturally qualified, spiritually blessed, and directly called to use their spiritual gifts to build Christ's Kingdom.

Introduction: embracing a biblical understanding of women and ministry in the local church. . .

The role of women in ministry is a significant issue. It concerns God's will for more than half of His people and how they may serve Him in the church. Since one of the core values of Irving Bible Church is that we are Bible centered as well as Jesus centered (II Timothy 3:16,17), our approach to women's role in ministry must be grounded in the Scriptures. How does God want to use women to fulfill the Great Commission? Does the Bible encourage women in ways we do not in the church? Does the Bible limit women in how they may serve? And if so, what are the specific Scriptural limitations? Are any of the limitations grounded in traditionalism rather than sound interpretation of Bible passages? In focusing on a few passages, have we missed what God has said on the broad canvas of the entire scripture? Have we considered what Christ's actions imply as well as what Paul's writings tell us?

Slave owners argued for slavery on the basis of interpreting Paul's writings in ways we now acknowledge were abhorrent to God. It is imperative today that the church not repeat the same mistake regarding women. On the other hand, it is equally important that our view be Biblically based rather than a by-product of our secular culture. It is often the fear of being accused of acquiescing to culture or forsaking scripture that causes church leaders to entrench themselves in unexamined dogmas that remain safe because they are widely accepted. We must strive to make the issue the accurate application of scripture, not the potential criticism that might accrue to leadership for taking an unpopular scriptural position.

Many Protestant denominations are now ordaining women and positioning them in the key ministry leadership roles. Have they acquiesced to radical feminism, abandoning their Biblical roots? Even among Bible-believing evangelicals there are differing opinions on specific roles. Can a woman teach a Sunday School class? Can she preach on Sunday morning? Should she be ordained? Can she serve as an elder? Answers to these questions are often based on differing interpretations and applications of key passages. Volumes of literature have been generated on the issue, and it is possible to support virtually any preconceived view. The subject generates strong emotions in both men and women, and we must base our arguments not on what we want the Bible to say, but rather on what it actually promotes.

We acknowledge that there are respected evangelical Bible scholars who hold to the inerrancy of Scripture and yet come to different positions on the biblical role of women in ministry. Due to the difficult complexity of this issue in the scriptures and the broad range of positions taken on it by good and godly people within the evangelical spectrum, we have ceased using terms like “right and wrong” to describe them. Rather, in the spirit of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, we at IBC are seeking to do “what seems good to us” in light of the teaching of scripture, the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and the state of the culture we are attempting to reach for Christ and His Kingdom.

As we proceeded, the elders of Irving Bible Church asked the Holy Spirit to “guide us into all truth” as we sought God’s will on this matter humbly and prayerfully through multiple means: through the study of scripture, through reading several evangelical and scholarly books on the subject, through sitting under the teaching of three separate seminary professors with differing views of the issue, through listening to various audio messages on the subject, through meeting on two occasions with several godly women from both inside and outside IBC who gave us their personal perspectives and experiences in the church, and through deliberating carefully amongst ourselves. This process took over a year, and yielded the following major findings:

- 1. The accounts of creation and the fall (Genesis 1-3) reveal a fundamental equality between men and women.**
- 2. Women exercised significant ministry roles of teaching and leading with God’s blessing in both Old and New Testaments.**
- 3. Though the role of women was historically limited, the progress of revelation indicates an ethic in progress leading to full freedom for women to exercise their giftedness in the local church.**
- 4. Key New Testament passages restricting women’s roles were culturally and historically specific, not universal principles for all time and places.**
- 5. Though women are free to use all of their giftedness in teaching and leading in the church, the role of elder seems to be biblically relegated to men.**

The remainder of this document elucidates these five findings.

1. The accounts of creation and the fall (Genesis 1-3) reveal a fundamental equality between men and women

The first two chapters of Genesis reveal two foundational truths concerning men and women. Genesis 1 speaks of equality and Genesis 2 speaks of differentiation.

A. On Equality (Genesis 1)

1:26 “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.’”

1:27 “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

1:28 “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.’”

The word “man” is used in a universal sense. It is generic including both men and women. They are given the shared responsibility, a mission and commission, of joint dominion over the earth. They are called to fill the earth, subdue the earth and rule it together.

But as the human race comes from the hand of the Creator, it comes divided into male and female. Both are made in the image of God. One is not superior and the other inferior. But they are different.

B. On Differentiation (Genesis 2)

Genesis 2 gives us a play by play, detailed account of what God did in Genesis 1. God made man first.

2:7 “And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”

God put the man in a beautiful place and instructed him to “work it and take care of it.” (2:15) God gave man instructions on life in the garden which he later passed on to woman who was not present when the instructions were given. God warned the man concerning the forbidden tree, and God directed man to name the animals. Each of these animals had a counterpart, but there was no counterpart for man. In this exercise, God showed man his desire and need for a companion.

God gives us his motivation for creating woman in 2:18.

2:18 “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Then God created woman out of man.

2:21 “So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of his ribs and closed up the place with flesh.

2:22 “Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of man...”

In order for man to accomplish God’s mandate of filling, subduing and ruling the earth, he needed a helper. It was God’s idea that he not take on this challenge alone. So God gave him a counterpart, a correspondent, his other half. Neither superiority on his part nor inferiority on hers is implied, although, clearly, she is sourced in him. (2:23 “...she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man.”) She is the same nature, the same flesh and blood, as he is.

Bible commentator Matthew Henry expresses this equality when he writes, “The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

The word “helper” is used often in the Old Testament of God who helps the needy (Psalm 33:20, I Samuel 7:12). There is no hint of subordination in this term. They work side by side. Woman is man’s equal. Woman was made for man in Genesis 2, but even when Paul makes that point in I Corinthians 11:9, he immediately adds:

“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.”

Although she stands by his side, she is different from Adam. Otherwise God would simply have been content with a race of men only. She is his complement and completion. Their differences—expressed in different perspectives, roles and responsibilities— would bring about God’s ideal plan.

Also, Genesis 2 shows us that the union of man and woman was to become the basic life unit on earth.

2:23 “The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...’

2:24 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

The author of Genesis lived in a patriarchal society in which the woman was expected to leave her family and join her husband’s clan. The verse makes it clear that the husband is to leave his family also, not just the wife. They are both to make this new union the most significant human relationship in their lives. Together they are to populate the earth and oversee it.

C. On the Fall (Genesis 3)

Genesis 3 shows how sin entered the world. The serpent approached the woman first, although 3:6 makes it clear the man was present. (“...She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”) Why did the serpent approach the woman first? Not because she was more gullible, but probably because she had only heard the mandate from God secondhand. The man was the beneficiary of the direct revelation from God at a time when the woman had not yet been

created. The man's personal experience of the prohibition made him more competent to withstand the serpent's onslaught. This made the woman a more likely target. Both the man and woman sinned and so both are equally fallen. But there was a difference in the way they sinned. When God confronted the man, the man shirked responsibility and blamed the woman.

3:12 "The man said, 'The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.'"

When God confronted the woman, she realized she had been deceived and admitted it.

3:13 "...The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Regardless of the way they sinned, both are equally guilty and both are recipients of the curse of death—the ultimate punishment for sin. (3:19b) Yet in Romans 5:12 the man is held responsible because in being created first, he is the representative head of the race.

Romans 5:12 "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..."

Nevertheless, both man and woman were cursed, although the curses are different, again reflecting the differences between men and women.

Struggle and suffering would now infiltrate every aspect of life. God had commissioned them to "be fruitful and multiply," but now woman's childbearing would be accompanied with great pain. God had commanded them to "subdue the earth," but now man's work would be accompanied by painful toil, thorns and thistles. Now everyday survival for both would require sweat, struggle and suffering.

And part of that struggle would involve alienation between men and women.

3:16 "...Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

The tenderness of a woman, her desire for the intimacy enjoyed before the fall, would empower her husband to make and keep her subordinate. Throughout the centuries, especially in non Christian countries, world history has documented the accuracy of this statement. But note that this "ruling" of men over women in Genesis 3:16 is not part of God's original plan. Rather, it is part of the curse and therefore not prescriptive of ideal male female relationships, just descriptive of the mess that sin's entrance occasioned.

Dr. A.T. Pierson in his book *The Bible and Spiritual Life* writes:

The practical inference, too often gathered from the record in Genesis, is that man was created as woman's lord and master...And under the sanction of this perverted notion, woman has been degraded for centuries and millenniums into a slave of man's despotism, a victim of his tyranny, and even a tool of his passions, when God meant her to be his companion and equal, his helper and counselor. This historic outcome of such perversion has been a long history of social wrong—polygamy with its harem and seraglio; domestic and social seclusion and exclusion, with its zenana; capricious divorce with its companion and consequence—adulterous unions, and a whole brood of kindred curses and crimes.

Summary: Genesis 1-3 reveals a fundamental equality between men and women. It also reveals a differentiation hinted at now and more clearly defined in subsequent passages. Both the man and woman sin and are an equally depraved pair, although man, created first and representative head of the race, is held responsible for the entrance of sin. After the fall, man and woman are given punishments that uniquely reflect their differences. And, the entrance of sin perverts and distorts the relationship between man and woman so that cooperation tends to be replaced by competition.

2. Women exercised significant ministry roles of teaching and leading with God's blessing in both Old and New Testaments.

One of the key indicators of what women may do in ministry today is what women actually did do on the pages of scripture. Logic protests that it would be inconsistent of God to gift, call, and effectively use women in vital ministries throughout both testaments while simultaneously forbidding them to use their gifts in ministry.

A. Women in the Old Testament

The prophetic ministry was the highest religious function in the old covenant. The priest entered the presence of God on behalf of the people, but the prophet went forth from the presence of God to the people. Only a prophet could stand and declare, "thus saith the Lord . . ." Although the majority of the old Testament prophets were male, the Bible mentions several female prophets and describes them as exercising the same kind of authority in the religious sphere as their male counterparts.

- A. Miriam is called a prophet in Exodus 15:20, and in Numbers 12, she is called "one to whom the Lord spoke".
- B. Deborah - (Judges 4 & 5) - was a prophet and a judge. She is introduced in Judges 4:4 this way, "Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth was LEADING Israel at that time." Judges were the authoritative figures in Israel at that time. She became disturbed by the unchallenged domination of her people by their enemies and felt called to take the matter in her own hands. The commander in chief of the army, Barak, was too afraid to consider military action, so Deborah summoned him to meet with her. She told the general that he should fight a battle at a specific location and promised that God would grant victory. He refused to move unless Deborah accompanied him. She agreed, and on the day of battle, she gave a pep talk Barak and signaled for the engagement to begin. Deborah was the highest leader in Israel at the time even though she was married. And she rather than her husband was chosen by God to lead his people. So the question has to be asked - if God is opposed to women in roles of leadership, then why would he do that?
- C. Huldah - (2 Kings 22:11-23:25) Desiring to anticipate the fate of his nation, King Josiah commanded the high priest and several of his notables to inquire of the Lord on his behalf. They could have gone to either Jeremiah or Zephaniah, both contemporaries of King

Josiah. Instead they went to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of a lower-rank temple officer. She delivered a scathing critique of the religious corruption of the nation and her prediction of doom motivated Josiah to effect profound changes in the religious life of the people. Thus, God used the spiritual leadership of a woman to convey his will to the king, to the high priest, and to her contemporaries so that she influenced the history of the whole nation.

In the Old Testament there are numerous other examples of women in ministry:

- A. Women served in the doorway of the Tabernacle. (Exodus 38:8, I Samuel 2:22)
- B. A woman's words are recorded in Proverbs 31. ("the words of King Lemuel that his mother taught him")
- C. Women sang in the Temple choirs. (Nehemiah 7:66-67)
- D. Women played an important part in proclaiming God's Word: "The Lord gives the command; the women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host." Psalm 68:11 ASV
- E. The prophet Joel predicted that the time would come when, "your sons and your daughters will prophesy...Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (Joel 2:28,29)

The Bible also records exemplary women whose character and decisions were respected and honored by men. Rebekah's wishes were respected when she was asked to become Isaac's wife. Jacob sought the counsel of his wives Rachel and Leah before moving back home. Abigail was a noble woman who risked her husband's anger by secretly sending a peace offering to appease David. She saved her own life and that of her household with her wisdom. Esther, by her heroic patriotism, delivered her people from annihilation. Hannah's prayer and prophecy is recorded for men and women throughout the ages to enjoy.

Summary: Woman in the Old Testament served as prophetesses, civic leaders and judges. Their wisdom, spiritual insight, leadership, and courage are illustrated in Scripture as examples of the way God uses women to carry out his purposes and plans.

B. Women in the New Testament

Again, women were active participants in proclaiming Christ and building his kingdom here on earth. Jesus Himself was deeply counter-cultural in the ways that he honored and included women in and through His own earthly ministries. In a culture where women were generally viewed as being responsible for the evil in the world and were strictly segregated from the social and religious life of the communities as inferior and unteachable, Jesus treated women with dignity and honor and included them in his ministry. Examples of both include:

In the Gospels:

- A. Mary, the mother of Jesus, announced to the world that Christ had come. (Luke 1:46-55)

- B. Anna was a prophetess and evangelist in the Temple who continually and publicly spoke about Jesus. (Luke 2:36-38)
 - C. Loyal women accompanied Jesus on his ministry tours. (Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:41, Luke 8:1-3). Luke 8:1, "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases; Mary (called Magdalene) from whom the seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means."
- Mary Magdalene became a close friend of Jesus. Her loyalty to him took her to the foot of the cross when the male disciples had abandoned him and then to the tomb where he was buried. She became the first of his followers to see the empty tomb (Luke 24:10), to speak to the risen Christ (John 20:16) and to proclaim the message of the resurrection (Luke 24:10)
- D. Jesus spoke publicly with a Samaritan woman and in contrast to rabbinic standards, treated her with respect. (John 4:4-26)
 - E. Jesus had women friends in contrast to custom. (Luke 10:38-42)
 - F. Jesus ministered to the physical ailments of women. (Mark 1:29-31, Luke 8:40-56; 13:10-13)
 - G. Jesus defended women in a male-dominated culture. (Matthew 19:3-10; Mark 10:11, Luke 7:11-17; 20:47)
 - H. Jesus publicly affirmed women in front of men. (Luke 7:44-50)
 - I. Jesus drew attention to the devotion of a poor widow to teach a lesson on money. (Mark 12:41-44)
 - J. Jesus lauded Mary's action of sitting at His feet to learn—a privilege culturally reserved for men only. (Luke 10:42)
 - K. Women praised Jesus publicly in the synagogue. (Luke 13:13)
 - L. Mary of Bethany was the only person among Jesus' disciples to grasp the significance of His repeated declarations that he would soon die and be resurrected. (Matthew 26:10-13)
 - M. Influential women supported Jesus financially. (Luke 8:2,3)
 - N. Women stood by Jesus at the cross (John 19:25) and some lingered and watched his burial when most of the male disciples had already fled. (Mark 15:47)
 - O. Jesus first appeared to women after His resurrection. He commissioned them as the first witnesses of the good news in a culture where women were traditionally prohibited from being witnesses in a court setting. (Mark 16:9, John 20:10-18)

In the early church:

- A. Women prayed with the apostles in the upper room; men and women prayed together. (Acts 1:14, 12:12)
- B. The Holy Spirit fell on both men and women at Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)
- C. Peter related the Pentecostal outpouring to Joel's prophecy "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy..." (Acts 2:17,18)
- D. Women in the early church were persecuted and suffered for their faith because their activity in ministry and proclamation made them targets of persecution. (Acts 22:4)
- E. Dorcas was a disciple well known and respected for her service to the church. (Acts 9:36-42)
- F. Mary, the mother of Mark, was active in hospitality and good works for the Lord. (Acts 12:12)
- G. Lydia was a successful business woman and charter member of the church at Philippi; the gospel entered Europe through her open heart and open home. (Acts 16:11-15, 40)
- H. Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3) Paul calls on them to agree in the Lord, and goes on to say that they struggled together with him in the gospel along with Clement and the rest of the fellow-workers. Again implying that they were "fellow - workers". By the way, a few other people called that by Paul were Timothy, Apollos, and Mark, and Luke. The importance of this title is illustrated in I Cor 16:16 where Paul exhorts the Corinthians to be subject to the house of Stephanas and to "every fellow worker" and laborer.
- I. Philip's four daughters were prophetesses. (audible public ministry) (Acts 21:8,9). They all prophesied in Acts 21:19, and Paul encourages women to prophesy.
- J. Priscilla and Aquilla took Apollos aside and "explained to him the way of God more adequately." (Acts 18:24-26). Paul called them "fellow workers" who "risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them." (Romans 16:3,4). Priscilla is consistently named first, indicating that she was the primary teacher of the duo. Apollos was a learned man who spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately - but scripture says that he only knew about the baptism of John. They instructed him - even through he was "well-versed" in scripture, and he received instruction from a woman. In Romans 16:3, Paul calls Priscilla a "fellow worker".
- K. Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Rome. (Romans 16:1,2). The same word diakonos, translated "servant" when referring to Phoebe, is rendered "minister" when applied to Paul and Apollos (I Corinthians 3:5) and "deacon" when used of other male officers of the church (I Timothy 3:10, 12,13). Paul commanded the church (men and women) to "help her in whatever matter she may have need" (verse 2).
- L. Tryphena and Tryphosa were hailed as "women who work hard in the Lord." (Romans 16:12)
- M. Persis was a dear friend of Paul's who also worked incessantly for the Lord. (Romans 16:12)
- N. Rufus' mother was so precious to Paul that he honored her by calling her his mother too. (Romans 16:13)

- O. Junia (Romans 16:7) Paul says, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles.” Andronicus is a male name, but Junia is thought by many scholars to be a female. And if that’s the case, then we could conclude that women functioned as apostles.

In Romans 16, 10 of the 29 people greeted and commended were women. Surely the women listed were active and significant in Gospel ministry to receive such greetings. There is no distinction in status or service. However, although there were many women disciples, there were no women apostles.

In the teachings of Paul and Peter

- A. Women and men obtain salvation in the same way. They are both co-heirs of the grace of God. (Ephesians 2:8,9; I Peter 1:18,19; 3:7)
- B. Women are given spiritual gifts just as men are. These gifts include teaching, pastoring and leadership. (Romans 12:3-8, I Corinthians 12:7-11 and 27-31, I Peter 4:10-12)
- C. Women are included in the priesthood of believers. (I Peter 2:5,9)
- D. Older women are responsible to teach and train the younger women. (Titus 2:3-5)
- E. Women prophesied in the early church. (Audible public ministry) (I Corinthians 11:5)

Summary: Jesus made a point of valuing women and took a stand against his male-dominated culture. He worked with women, taught women and honored them. Furthermore, women participated in significant ministry in the early church. When Godly men and women linked arms and worked together within the parameters of Scripture, Christianity spread rapidly.

3. Though the role of women was historically limited, the progress of revelation indicates an ethic in progress leading to full freedom for women to exercise their giftedness in the local church.

From the patriarchal norm of the Old Testament, the New Covenant constitutes radical changes with regard to women and their ministry roles among the people of God. A definite “ethic in progress” seems to be at work restoring the pre-fall equality of the sexes and indicating a trajectory of freedom for women that transcends even the time framework in which New Testament documents were inscribed.

For example, all believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and gifted in prophetic ministry without respect to age, gender or social status (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18). Whenever a believer has received a ministry gift from the Holy Spirit, that person should use that gift (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Every believer has the responsibility to exercise his or her ministry gifts, and no believer has biblical warrant to deny or restrict other believers’ Christlike use of their gifts in ministry.

In the new covenant in Christ there is no longer any distinction in spiritual privilege or status between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female (Gal. 3:26-28). Husband and wife are equal heirs of God's gift of life (1 Peter 3:7). Every believer is an adopted child of God, an heir of God and co-heir with Christ (Romans 8:15-17). Male and female—without distinction—were both given authority over all the earth (Gen. 1:26-28), and all believers are destined to rule together with Christ in the world to come (Dan. 7:18, 27; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 2:5).

Thus there is no socially or biologically based inequity in spiritual status or authority. Women and men share equally in creational authority, personal agency and responsibility, and spiritual rights and privileges. Every believer is a recipient of the Spirit's power and is called to exercise authority in God's kingdom, both in this life and in the life to come. All believers are equal inheritors of the rights of spiritual "sonship" (Eph. 1:5). Since we are all equally heirs of God, every believer has an equal right—and responsibility—to represent the Father, and to hear from, obey, and stand directly accountable to God apart from any merely human mediator.

All believers are priests unto God (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10), and all are representatives of God to the church and the world (2 Cor. 5:20). There is only one mediator between God and humans, our high priest Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5). With Christ as high priest, every believer can come directly before God in prayer and worship (Heb. 4:14-16; 13:15-16). Every believer has been given the priestly ministry of representing Christ to the world and the church, and of ministering to, hearing from, and standing accountable directly to God. Thus no believer has been given the ministry of mediating another believer's relationship with God; this ministry belongs to Christ alone.¹

The seeds of freedom for women to use their gifts in leading and teaching that were sown by these principles of equality introduced in the New Covenant continued to sprout and flourish in the centuries that followed. Through the positive influences of the Christian faith, the history of Western civilization has been a story of the gradual overthrow of oppressive political structures, the creation of more democratic alternatives, and the emergence of greater freedoms for all. The distinctive theology of the Protestant Reformation, particularly its liberating and exultant celebration of the priesthood of all believers, was a major stimulant to these impulses in Europe and beyond. Most Christians see God's providence in these liberating developments. They regard freedom as a central theme of the gospel, because Christ came to set captives free (Luke 4:18), and whom the Son sets free will be free indeed (John 8:36).²

A central New Testament passage that establishes equality with implications that transcend even the context in which it was written is Galatians 3:26-28:

Galatians 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."

This text shows that something has changed with the coming of the new covenant. Under the old covenant, free Jewish men were granted a number of religious privileges that women, slaves, and

1 Biblical data adapted from Rebecca Merrill Groothuis in *Good News for Women* and chapter six in *Discovering Biblical Equality*.

2 Historical summary adapted from Glen G. Scorgie, *The Journey Back to Eden*. Zondervan:2005, 23. He also writes: "Yet progress has been slow. As late as 1775, there was still no truly democratic government in the United States. In Britain the right to a university education was restricted to Anglicans until near the end of the nineteenth century. The practice of human slavery was tolerated in the United States until the 1860s. The many residual inequities after Emancipation in America required a civil rights movement in the 1960s, and that struggle continues today. Alongside these developments have risen female expectations for a voice, greater personal dignity, equal opportunity, and individual autonomy. Certain gains for American women stand out as landmarks, such as the legal right to own property, to attend university, and, with women's suffrage in 1920, to vote. Yet vestiges of gender inequality still survive in our culture."

Gentiles were denied; for example, only men received the sign of the covenant, i.e., circumcision, and the priesthood was reserved for male descendants of Aaron. It is precisely this old-covenant inequality in religious status that has been rendered obsolete in the new covenant. Now, all are one body in Christ. Male circumcision has been replaced with baptism, and the priesthood of all believers has no gender (or ethnic) restrictions.³

I. Howard Marshall writes: “The typical conservative evangelical method of dealing with Scripture, particularly its ethical injunctions, is to derive from any specific passage the underlying, ‘timeless’ principles or injunctions that are expressed in the cultural, specific setting of the time, and then to ask how these are to be re-expressed in a manner appropriate to a modern setting. . . a further principle recognizes that growth and development are possible both in doctrine and in ethical requirements beyond the explicit letter of the scriptural revelation. The recognition that slavery is incompatible with Christian faith goes beyond the explicit teaching of Scripture while being fully scriptural: we now recognize (as the biblical writers were as yet unable to do) that slavery is inconsistent with the biblical understanding of humanity in creation and redemption . . . we must go beyond the letter of scripture when the trajectory of scriptural teaching takes us further than what scripture explicitly states and requires us to recognize that some culturally specific scriptural teachings and commands are no longer mandatory” (I. Howard Marshall, “Mutual Love and Submission in Marriage”, in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, editors Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis: IVP, 2005, pp. 201-202).

With that in mind, we must acknowledge that the cultural subordination of women was part and parcel of the patriarchal societies of biblical times. Women were thus expected, even legally required, to occupy a largely subordinate status with respect to social functions such as public leadership and teaching, property inheritance and ownership, and household governance.⁴ The New Testament epistles exhorted believers to comply with the cultural customs of the day to the extent that compliance would not require disobedience to God’s commands. But that does not mean that such compliance was permanent, especially with regard to issues such as slavery and women’s roles that New Covenant revelations had already begun to undermine.⁵ In fact, history shows that, when

3 Rebecca Merrill Groothuis continues this thought: “The idea of a religious pecking order along lines of race, class, or gender is alien to the new creation in Christ. No particular ethnic, sexual, or social class of believers has the intrinsic right to exercise spiritual authority over or assume spiritual responsibility for believers outside the privileged class. All are equal members and full participants of the religious community. Anyone can enter the Holy of Holies and minister before the Lord as a priest. Free Jewish male believers no longer have cause to recite the ancient Jewish prayer in which they gave thanks to God that they were not born a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. The Christian community is rid of the religious restrictions that were placed on non-free, non-Jewish, non-male believers under Old Testament law. This is the difference grace has wrought” (See chapter ten in *Discovering Biblical Equality* and chapter one in *Good News for Women*.)

4 One of the most widely cited rabbinic sayings from the early Mishnaic period that reflects an inferior position of women was included in a threefold daily prayer: “Praised be God that he has not created me a gentile! Praised be God that he has not created me a woman! Praised be God that he has not created me an ignoramus! (Tosephta Berakoth 7:18). This subordination of women continued to be practiced through church tradition in the early church. For example, note the attitude toward women of one of our most famous church fathers: “Augustine believed that God did not create the woman for any reason other than procreation. Explicitly he said: “If it were not the case that the woman was created to be man’s helper specifically for the production of children, then why should she have been created as “helper” (Gen. 2:18)? Was it so that she might work the land with him? No because there did not yet exist any such labor for which he needed a helper, and even if such work had been required, a male would have made a better assistant. One can only posit that the reason for her creation as a helper had to do with the companionship she could provide for the man, if perhaps he got bored with his solitude. Yet for company and conversation, how much more agreeable it is for two male friends to dwell together than for a man and a woman!...I cannot think of any reason for woman’s being made as man’s helper, if we dismiss the reason of procreation.” Sarah Sumner: *Men and Women in the Church*, Pg. 43-44. Also,

5 In *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, William J. Webb has argued for what he terms a “redemptive-movement hermeneutic” in interpreting the New Testament. He writes:

“For our purposes the expression cultural component and its various equivalents may be defined as ‘those aspects of the biblical text that ‘we leave behind’ as opposed to ‘take with us’ due to cultural differences between the text’s world and the interpreter’s world as we apply the text to subsequent generations.” Pg. 24

unleashed to use the full range of their giftedness, women can be powerfully used by God to build His church.⁶

4. Key New Testament passages restricting women's roles were culturally and historically specific, not universal principles for all time and places.

Three classic “problem” passages are I Corinthians 11:3-12, I Corinthians 14:32-36 and I Timothy 2:8-11. When interpreting these passages, following settled hermeneutical principles is essential:

- We must always consider the context.
- We must look behind local situations to find universal, timeless principles (“meat offered to idols” not relevant to 20th century, but principle applies).
- We must realize that Paul sometimes accommodated the culture he was trying to reach in or-

“The term “redemptive-movement hermeneutic” captures the most crucial component of the application process as it relates to cultural analysis, namely, the need to engage the redemptive spirit of the text in a way that moves the contemporary appropriation of the text beyond its original-application framing. A sense of the biblical or redemptive spirit can be obtained by listening to how texts compare to the broader cultural milieu and how they sound within the development of the canon.” Pg 30

The Christian seeking to apply Scripture today should examine the movement between the biblical text and its surrounding social text. Once that movement has been discovered, there needs to be an assessment of whether the movement is preliminary or absolute. Pg 36

6 “Marcella was...known for her keen mind and understanding of the Bible. She was a close associate of Jerome (who translated the Vulgate Bible), and when he was away from Rome, he referred those who sought his counsel to her. “If an argument arose about some evidence from Scripture,” he wrote, “the question was pursued with her as the judge.”

Argula von Stauffer (1492-1554) was Luther's most outspoken defender in the public arena, gaining her label of “insolent daughter of Eve” from her catholic opponents. For more than forty years she risked her life and the well-being of her family for the cause of the Protestant Reformation. In a letter to Catholic authorities she asked, “What have Luther and Melanchthon taught save the Word of God?” She taunted them for condemning Luther but not refuting him. In 1523, as a young mother, she boldly defended her views in a debate before the diet of the Empire Nurnberg. Stauffer...was persecuted not only by state officials but also by her husband, whose very livelihood was in jeopardy because of her activities. Luther recognized her sacrificial work in a letter to a friend...Stauffer's boldness was rooted in her conviction that she was following in a long line of ordinary people uniquely designated to serve God. “The extraordinarily militant roles of Deborah, Jael, Esther, Judith become archetypal,” writes Peter Matheson. “Womanly ‘shamefacedness’ like all human shame, is thus overcome by the imperative of grace which makes them leaders and thinkers...This perception then unlocks for Argula the reluctance of all true prophets to speak...All normal categories have been turned upside down.”

In the Bay Colony Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) found a welcome acceptance among women, and she quickly established herself as a leader of them-especially...her greatest influence was in the spiritual arena. A student of the Bible, she began holding weekly meetings in her home for the express purpose of elucidating-and often challenging-the Sunday sermons. John Cotton, her minister, initially praised her ministry for encouraging “many of women (and their husbands)...to inquire more seriously after the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles (and seventeen other children), is perhaps rightly regarded as “the mother of Methodism”-not because she was an active Methodist herself but because of her enormous influence over her two sons. A strong and spirited woman, she challenged her husband's efforts to control her political views, and when he later abandoned her and the children, she preached sermons to his Anglican parishioners. Indeed, she preached so well that there was standing room only for those who came to hear her expound the Scriptures.

Major evangelical schools such as Nyack, Gordon, and Northwestern provided women with the training to preach, enter the pastorate and teach the Bible while committed to a high view of scriptural authority. Leading the pack was Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, opened by Dwight L. Moody in 1889 as the Bible Institute of the Chicago Evangelization Society. MBI women openly served as pastors, evangelists, pulpit supply preachers, Bible teachers and even in ordained ministry. *Discovering Biblical Equality*: Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Groothuis, edited by Gordon D. Fee, Pp. 31-41.

der not to be a stumbling block to their salvation. For example, Paul instructed Timothy to be circumcised in I Corinthians 9:19-22. This was unnecessary but prudent to reach the people for Christ. Timothy limited his freedom in order to expand the ministry. Also, circumcision and Slavery (Slaves: “be obedient to masters” not advocating slavery!)

- We must always interpret unclear passages in light of clear passages.

A. I Corinthians 11:3-12

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

4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head.

5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—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.

8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man;

9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on 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.

The passage seems to say that women are a disgrace if they come into the church without a covering— and they might as well be bald or go home and shave their heads! (11:6) That might occur in some countries today, but few American women come into the church service in a veil or scarf or with a shawl over their heads. Either IBC is in direct violation of scripture, or we have recognized that what those things meant in first century Corinth, they do not mean today in Dallas, Texas. What was Paul's point? We must first look at the meaning for the original audience before we attempt to glean a message for today.

Pagan and Jewish women who became Christians were assigned value and dignity unprecedented in their former lives. Jesus and Paul liberated women. They had women friends. Women served in the church and worshiped along side men. In Judaism, women were segregated in the synagogue and resigned to the women's court in the Temple. They couldn't even learn the Torah. The ritual for entry into Judaism was circumcision. What a radically social statement was the ritual for entrance into Christianity—baptism for both men and women!

However, in this letter to the Corinthian church, Paul doesn't sound like he is liberating women. Instead, he sounds like he is reprimanding them. It seems that they don't know how to act in church! In chapters 11 through 14, Paul admonishes the whole church--both men and women--on what they should wear, on how they should act at the Lord's table, and how they should and should not use spiritual gifts in the service. The thread running through this whole segment is ORDER. The Corinthians were wild, unruly and disorderly in church, and Paul is correcting them.

The first group he addresses are the women. They had been given greater freedom than ever before. Were some of them taking their freedom to extremes? Were they unnecessarily flaunting their freedom by throwing off the veil that in their culture represented propriety, modesty and graciousness?

A timeless principle we glean from this passage is that believers are to be orderly in the worship service. A key way a Christian women today "cover their heads" when they behave appropriately with modesty, graciousness and (if married) marital fidelity. This is the cultural equivalent for today and expresses Paul's intent far better than women literally covering their heads. In our culture, women covering their heads would be confusing and meaningless.

It is important to note that in verse 5, Paul makes it clear that women are praying and prophesying in the public assembly. Prophecy is an audible spoken message that comes from God. Paul made it clear that when a woman prophesied "with her head covered"—recognizing the order of creation and the male leadership God set over the church, then she was within the bounds of His pleasure.

One reason we label I Corinthians 11:3-12 a "problem" passage is because it seems to contradict what Paul says a few chapters later in the letter.

B. I Corinthians 14:32-36

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 remain 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?

At first reading, it sounds like Paul is telling women they cannot open their mouths in church. That is ridiculous, because women were praying and even prophesying in the public assembly, as Paul said several chapters earlier.

Paul is still reprimanding the Corinthian church because their services are chaotic and disorderly. One reason is that they are enraptured by the sign gifts and are using them inappropriately. They have forgotten the priority of love (Ch 13) in the way they act in the worship service. They have elevated the gift of tongues above all gifts, and they are speaking in tongues during the service in a manner that breeds bedlam. In chapters 13 and 14, Paul admonishes the Corinthians to control

themselves in the service so that everyone may be edified. He corrects specific errors and gives specific guidelines for the way they are to conduct their assemblies in the future. He even limits the number of people who can speak in tongues during a service to “two--or at the most three.” (14:27)

One of the groups Paul targets is the married women who were also disrupting the assembly. They obviously need corralling too. Many were probably taking their newfound freedom to an extreme. Was Paul’s comment directed at their speaking in tongues? That certainly fits with the context. Or was his mandate broader? We don’t know for sure. What we do know is that “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (see verse 33). Thus in verse 40 Paul concludes: “But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.” Part of what is “proper” and “orderly,” according to Paul, is women “praying or prophesying” in church with an attitude of submission (see 1 Cor. 11:5-16).

G. Campbell Morgan in his commentary on Corinthians writes that the word for “speak” in verse 34 is “laleo.” It was used to mean many things—talking, questioning, arguing, protesting and chattering. Could it be that their inquiry was of a personal nature more appropriately discussed privately? He says, “Evidently there were women in Corinth given to careless and contentious talk, and that is what Paul was prohibiting. Certainly he was not saying that a woman had no right to pray or prophesy in the church, because he had already given instruction as to how, and under what circumstances she was to do it. No, something else had crept in--an attitude by women who were contentious.”

If Paul was reprimanding women who were babbling tongues, prattling, or hogging the service with outbursts and foolish chatter, then his meaning is something quite different from limiting a woman from any kind of speech whatsoever, which has often been the traditional interpretation. Again, Paul is calling women to reverence, graciousness, and an attitude which does not call attention to ones self.

C. I Timothy 2:8-14

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 childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This is the passage most often quoted to deny women teaching and leading ministries in the church. That is unfortunate because it is generally regarded as one of the most difficult New Testament texts to interpret and thereby not one upon which we would want to base major church policy.

In the same paragraph of scripture, men are commanded to raise their hands when praying, women are forbidden to braid their hair, wear jewelry or expensive clothes, it is asserted that women will be saved through childbirth, and Paul forbids women to teach and commands their silence. Yet in an amazing display of hermeneutical inconsistency, many traditionalists insist that the command that women be silent is to be followed to the letter in the twenty-first century, while the other troublesome commands in the exact same context are culturally conditioned and therefore not for today. This appears to be a “picking and choosing” of convenience, when the text requires a more consistent interpretive approach.

Let's dissect the passage verse by verse:

Verses 8-10

This letter was written by Paul to Timothy who was overseeing the church at Ephesus. In verse 8 men are instructed to pray fervently. In fact, Paul begins the segment by writing, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers and intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone...” (2:1) Then in 2:8, Paul instructs the men to pray “without anger or disputing.” Had some men been displaying “anger and disputing” during the prayer meeting? That would explain Paul's correction.

In verse 9 Paul instructs the Ephesian women. A better translation of Verse 9 begins with “in like manner.” This draws a parallel between what has gone before and what follows. Could Paul have been speaking in verse 9 about the way he wanted women to pray publicly? The “I want men” in verse 8 and the “I want women” in verse 9 could express this parallel concept. If so, then this passage is teaching both men and women how to pray publicly. A.J. Gordon writes, “It may surprise some to find that this portion of Scripture really contains an exhortation to the orderly and decorous participation of women in public prayer. Yet this is the conclusion of some of the best exegetes.”

Whatever Paul's intent, we know that he again specifically instructs women concerning their demeanor, behavior and appearance. Women are not to braid their hair, wear gold or pearl jewelry, or wear expensive clothes. If we were to apply this passage literally for today, then Godly women would not wear gold rings or pearl earrings. Little girls could not wear their hair in braids. And no Christian woman could shop at Neiman Marcus! Yet, most married women have gold in their wedding band and some wear strings of pearls around their neck when they dress up. Why do we allow such ghastly behavior? Because in our culture, these things do not speak of impropriety. Obviously in Ephesus they did. We allow the culture to impact our interpretation. We do so with the intent of understanding Paul's true meaning.⁷

⁷ Ruth Tucker writes in her book *Women in the Maze*, “Most evangelicals today regard the fashion directives in this passage as cultural, and they do not expect women to conform. That was not true when I was growing up in a rural fundamentalist church in the 1950's. A truly spiritual woman was not to wear jewelry—whether gold, pearls, or even costume jewelry. Braided hair was not taboo—I'm not sure why. None of the men in that little church adhered to Paul's command to “lift up holy hands” in prayer. Only Pentecostals did that, and we were not Pentecostal. Besides, it was reasoned that what Paul meant when he wrote “holy hands” was actually “holy hearts,” and anyone who was lifting a “holy heart” to the Lord was properly carrying out Paul's instructions.”

She continues, “In the 1990's, evangelicals more freely lift their hands in worship, but we laugh at the old-fashioned rules about make-up and jewelry. It is important, however, that we do not too casually argue that Paul's directives on these issues are inconsequential, while his directives in the two short verses that immediately follow are consequential enough to deny women ministry in the church.”

Understanding the historical background of Paul's letter to Timothy is crucial for making application of verses 8 through 10 as well as the verses which follow. Two sources are key to our understanding of the situation in Ephesus: first, the historians of ancient Ephesus who can give us a portrait of life in the city at that time; and second, clues from this letter and other Scripture that hint at the kinds of problems Timothy encountered.⁸

Historians tell us that Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and was the greatest commercial center in Western Asia Minor. In this rich, cosmopolitan city, Greek and Asian cultures were inextricably mixed. Under the Roman emperors it became the local center for the imperial cult--but far more important to the life of the city was the temple of Artemis. It was the largest structure in the Hellenistic world and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This temple and its cult affected every aspect of the society and was the focus of fierce civic pride. For a whole month each year the city stopped work and devoted itself to the Artemis cult. (Acts 19:23-41)

The goddess herself was depicted with many breasts, a symbol of fertility. Her worship was overseen by eunuch priests. Under them were male and female priests who were attended by thousands of young women. The church Timothy was pastoring was in the shadow of this great temple and was certainly affected by its cultic worship in which women and eunuchs played the major role.⁹

What clues do we have in Paul's letter to Ephesus that define the difficulties Timothy faced pastoring this church? We observe many references that suggest that Timothy's major job was to resist and refute false teaching and irresponsible behavior which was prevalent inside the church. Paul begins his letter with these words, "As I urged you ..., stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies...They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm." (1:3-7) Over and over in the letter Paul exhorts Timothy to focus on sound doctrine and beware of false teaching. (1:19,20; 4:1-3, 11-16; 5:20; 6:3-5, 20,21) Timothy's major problem was unqualified teachers. If men were teaching in error, we can surely suspect that women reared in Artemis worship would also be causing problems. Their lack of scriptural education was exacerbating the problem.

Verses 11 and 12

Paul addresses women's lack of education in verse 11. He says that a "women should learn!" His admonition is both astounding and counter cultural. Verses 11 and 12 contain three instructions for women and two descriptions of a Godly woman's attitude. The one positive instruction is, "let her learn." The two negative instructions are that she is "not to teach" and "not to have authority" over a man. The two descriptive words are "quietness" and "submission." Let's examine each facet separately.

"Let her learn": Women who were allowed participation in Artemis worship may have been overly eager to do the same in the church—a role for which they were ignorant and unprepared. Paul's answer to them is not only to prohibit them from teaching at that time, but also to offer them the opportunity to learn. R.T. France writes in her book *Women in the Church's Ministry*, "Those who

8 An excellent historical reference is *Power and Magic, The Concept of Power in Ephesians* by Clinton Arnold.

9 Kenneth Bailey writes in his book *Anvil*, "The focus of all this was a goddess whose worship was controlled by virgins who shared leadership with males only if they were castrated. In such an atmosphere what kind of female-male relations would have developed? What kind of female attitudes prevailed in such a city? Castration being the ultimate violence against the male, would not anti-male sexism in various forms have been inevitable?"

must not teach are those who have yet to learn. The question of what their role will be when they have had the opportunity to learn does not yet arise at the time of Paul's writing, and so is not mentioned in the text."

"Not to teach": Paul does not tell us what kind of teaching he had in mind nor to what audience. In the context of the letter, it is likely false teaching in the church, but there is no indication that this is referring to a formal pulpit situation. Christians in Ephesus met in small house churches and false teaching spread easily in these settings. Paul's admonition to widows in 5:13 may speak to this setting: "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." Paul counseled these widows to marry as a means of curbing this foolish behavior. These silly women would not have made good teachers for children, other women or for men. It is also important to note that the verb tense in verse 12 is the present tense. The phrase is better translated, "I am presently permitting no woman to teach..." They needed to learn before they could teach.

Some have taken this statement out of context and flatly denied women the freedom to teach men. Such an interpretation forgets that there is a difference between teaching "over" a man and teaching "with, to, or under the authority" of a man, and that if women can never teach men then we have some major contradictions in the Scriptures (and in the home where wives teach, correct, and challenge their husbands). In the church at Corinth women both prayed and prophesied (proclaimed) the Word of God. It was not a question of whether they should be free to teach men, but how (see next).

"Not to have authority over a man": The word Paul uses for authority in this verse is *authentein*. This word is not found anywhere else in the Bible and is even uncommon in Greek literature. Where it is used in Greek literature, it usually has a negative connotation and means "to thrust oneself" or to domineer, says Alvera Mickelsen in her book *Women in Ministry*. The King James renders the phrase "to usurp authority" rather than "to have authority." Paul does not employ the usual Greek word for authority, "exousia", which is common in the New Testament when referring to authority in the home and church. Instead he chooses a negative word meaning "to dictate or domineer." In light of the Greek words chosen, verse 12 is better interpreted, "I am presently permitting no woman to teach in a manner of domineering men. . ."

"Quietness and Submission": The two words which Paul uses to describe a Godly woman are consistent with his instructions concerning women in the Corinthian passages. "Quiet" is a better translation than "silent." Paul does not use the word that refers to the absence of speech or noise but instead one that refers to "quietness of temperament." He is asking women to take on a restful, irenic attitude.¹⁰

¹⁰ The word cannot be "silent." Scripture never contradicts itself and so we are faced with a problem. The author Paul is the same man who wrote the Corinthian letter. In that letter Paul made it clear that women were praying and prophesying in the church assembly, and he showed no disapproval. In addition, we have many examples of women who were not silent in the early church. The word *hesychia* translated "quietness" in verse 11 and "silence" in verse 12 does not mean complete silence or no talking at all. In other passages such as Acts 22:2 and II Thessalonians 3:12, it clearly means "settled down" and "not unruly." The word *sigao* means complete silence or to say nothing.

J.H. Robinson writes, "the teaching therefore which is forbidden by the Apostle is not every kind of teaching any more than, in the previous instance (I Corinthians 14:34), his prohibition of speaking applied to every kind of speaking in the church. But it is such teaching as is domineering, and as involves the usurpation of authority over the man. This is the only teaching forbidden by St. Paul." The implication is that a woman may teach after she has learned provided her teaching is not dictatorial nor domineering. Paul may be saying in verse 12 that he does not permit a woman to teach "over a man" or to "have authority over a man." If so, then Paul does not mean absolute silence, but the kind of teaching in which a woman disregards male leadership which is evident for the home and church throughout Scripture.

Verses 13 and 14

In these verses Paul refers back to Adam and Eve, pointing out that Adam was on the planet before Eve. As a result, just like the women at Ephesus, Eve lacked instruction. She heard what God told Adam concerning the forbidden tree secondhand, and that made her more easily deceived. The women at Ephesus were also lagging behind the men in education. They needed time to learn, and Paul commanded them to learn. Until they did, they also were easily deceived. Eve is an excellent illustration of the Ephesian women who took the initiative and asserted their independence with disastrous results.¹¹

Verse 15

Of all Paul's statements in this passage, the last verse is the most baffling. Is Paul suggesting that a woman will actually be saved by giving birth? Salvation is by grace and not by works, and any woman who has given birth knows why they call it "labor." Moreover, what would this verse mean to single women and to married women unable to bear children?

Is Paul promising that women will be kept physically safe in childbearing, if they continue in the faith? Such a promise has certainly not proved correct. Many faithful Christian women have died in childbirth--women like Maria Taylor, Hudson Taylor's first wife, who was serving faithfully as a missionary with him in China. Is Paul referring to the childbearing of Mary and the birth he refers to the birth of Christ through whom all women would be saved? If so, it is odd that women should be singled out as being saved by the birth of Christ when everyone who desires can be the recipient of this great blessing.

R.T. France offers another explanation. In 4:3 Paul explains that false teachers were forbidding people to marry in the church. In verse 15, Paul may be speaking in response to this heresy. France argues that women will be "saved" from the ungodliness Paul is attempting to curb if they return to the "wholesome normalcy of a Christian marriage relationship, within which quietness and submission replace the premature grasp for a role of authority in the church." In light of the context of the letter, this explanation seems more plausible, although not entirely satisfactory.

Conclusion: The problem passages cited are called "problem" passages for a reason. They are difficult to interpret and require careful, consistent work to decipher. Great minds conclude different results. Unclear Scripture is to be interpreted in light of clear Scripture—and there is a plethora of clear Scripture to guide us. It is true that certain timeless principles can be gleaned from these passages. Clearly, women are to exhibit gracious, godly and orderly behavior in the assembly. They, like men, are never to be teachers until they are trained, equipped and qualified. However, there seems to be no reason why a qualified woman should be prevented from the whole range of

¹¹ There have been men like Robert Culver, author of *Women in Ministry*, who have insisted that "there is something about woman's nature—something different about woman as woman from man as man" that forever makes her "more susceptible to temptation through deceit than was the man." Or Walter Martin, renowned expert on cults, who tried to show that women's nature has led to heresy throughout history. He wrote in *The Kingdom of the Cults*, "From Johanna Southcott to Mary Baker Eddy to Helena Blavatsky and the Fox sisters, all are living proof of the validity of the Lord's declaration that 'If the blind lead the blind, they shall both fall into a pit.' Matthew 15:14" Martin, however, was incorrect. History has shown that women have not been the most prominent in the founding and leading of cults.

J.C. Ryle in *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* wrote, "It was not a woman who sold the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. They were not women who forsook the Lord in the garden and fled. It was not a woman who denied Him three times in the high priest's house. But they were women who wailed and lamented when Jesus was led forth to be crucified. They were women who stood to the last by the cross. And they were women who were first to visit the grave."

pastoral, didactic or sacramental ministry under the male leadership. She has a meaningful place beside the men in ministry in the church. She too is called to be a worker in the harvest.

5. Though women are free to use all of their giftedness in teaching and leading in the church, the role of elder seems biblically to be relegated to men.

The New Testament appears to leave with men the responsibility and burden of giving leadership as elders of a local church. The Old Testament hints that this would be the case in that it contains no account of a woman holding the office of priest or king. Later, Jesus' own pattern of choosing 12 men to be his disciples and later apostles seems to argue for all male elders, especially in light of Christ's unique regard for women as described (under #1) above. If Christ, who was willing to break the cultural taboo's of his day in conversing with, teaching, respecting, and including women yet built an all-male group of apostles, then His exclusion of women in His inner circle appears to be one of choice rather than cultural accommodation.

In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul writes, "If any man aspires to the office of overseer (elder), it is a fine work he desired to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife..." Paul's implication here seems to be that he expects elders to men. Limiting the office of elder to men does not speak to a woman's ability to do the job as well as or better than a man. Simply, it appears that it is God's determination that men will carry this particular load. It should be remembered, however, that an elder board's leadership in the church will be enriched by the wisdom, insights, and contributions of women. Male leadership seeking female input is a practice modeled by many in the early church, including Jerome (who in the fifth century translated the Vulgate, the Latin version of the Old Testament).

Within the framework of personal equality, God has ordained differing roles and responsibilities within the church and home. Men are called to loving leadership and headship while women are called to voluntarily recognize and honor men's loving leadership and headship. Both however are to submit to one another which is the calling on all believers--both men and women (Ephesians 5:21-6:9; I Corinthians 11:3,8,9; I Timothy 2:11,12; I Peter 3:1-7).

Male headship means that a man has a holy obligation before God to lay down his life for his wife, his children, his family, friends, and for the people of his own congregation. For a husband, it means that he has his wife's best interests at heart, that he sacrifices his own desires for hers, that he puts her first always in his affections. For an elder in the local church, it means that he leads first, last and always by serving others. For a wife, it means trusting God to work through her husband in protecting her interests and meeting her deepest needs.

Conclusion

Frederik Franson, great missionary leader and founder of The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM), searched both the Old and New Testaments for every reference to any kind of speaking ministry or leadership position carried out by women. He came up with nearly 100 references. "This is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that there are but two or three references which seem to be

against women's audible ministry. Yet these few references have been made the basis for muzzling women in spite of the fact that the main thrust of Scripture is against such silencing." (L.E. Maxwell, *Women in Ministry*, p.97)

The preponderance of biblical evidence indicates not only that God allows women to use their gifts without restriction in the local church, but that He actively calls them to do so. Therefore though the office of elder seems to be reserved for men, it seems good to us that, under the elders' authority and with their blessing, all other members of the Body, men and women included, can function in any role according to their giftedness. We understand the few other texts that are traditionally brought forward to restrict women from using teaching and leadership gifts in the church are addressing specific cultural issues of the first century, and are not therefore appropriately used to restrict women from teaching and leading in the church today. At IBC therefore, we are pleased to invite women to use all their God-given gifts in ministry to our Body. Since God has given women all the spiritual gifts that come to the church and because we believe that God distributes these gifts to be used for the health and effectiveness of the church, we conclude that we not only desire for women to be unleashed in ministry, but we need for them to be unleashed in ministry. It is time for the whole people of God at IBC to use their full spiritual arsenal for the advancement of Christ's Kingdom.

In closing, we acknowledge once again the difficulties associated with any scriptural study of the role of women in the New Testament church. It is a complex subject with great scholarship and godliness on both sides of the issue, and all who undertake to draw conclusions and set policy with regard to it must, in our view, do so with humility and openness to continued learning. This indeed is our commitment—never to conclude our perusal of God's word on this subject as if we have determined God's mind on the matter definitively for all times and peoples. Rather, we will continue to study God's word and seek to be led by His Spirit in this and all other matters, praying always for the courage and integrity to implement whatever He shows us through that process.

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